



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia



Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici
e Culturali Comparati

Research Webinar in Linguistics

<https://meet.google.com/sjy-gkdk-rwg>

Dear friends and colleagues,
I hope this mail finds you well, in high spirits and good health.

We are all experiencing hard times at the four corners of the World. Research (reading and writing) may be even supported by the current restrictions to movements. But research also needs meeting and talking, personal contact and sharing of speeches. I think that we may use the technology that is being used for our classes to keep our weekly research seminar alive. This could even be an opportunity to meet those of you (the majority, indeed!) who are no more in the Venice area and could not have participated in person. We will start **next Tuesday, March 24, at the usual time 14:00-15:30 (Rome time)**. I thank Chiara Gianollo to have accepted to be the first to test the tool.

To participate you need to use **Chrome** as your browser. Click on the [link](#) above (or copy the link if you do not have Chrome as your default browser), consent the use of your camera (if you want to be seen by the others) and microphone (if you want to ask a question).

The webinar will be recorded, your acceptance of the invitation includes the consensus to be recorded as a participant (silent or interacting, as you wish).

For some reason, even if the event is set as public, some user need to be accepted manually. This may take some time if the audience is numerous (as I hope). I will be in the room from 13:45 to accept participants until 14:14. The talk will start at 14:15 sharp.

The room should allow for 200 participants, so we should not have a problem of number and feel free to share the link to colleagues and students who may have an interest in it. It is however my first trial with a large group. Thus, I beg your pardon in advance for any inconvenience. Feel free to contact me by mail for any clarification.

If the experiment works well and the restrictive measures continue (as it seems to be the case), you will receive the calendar of the next month(s). If you have a google calendar, you may add the [Venice Research Webinar in Linguistics](#) to your personal calendar.

Hope to see you soon on the web. Stay well and have all my best wishes.

Giuliana Giusti (giusti@unive.it)

March 24, 2020 h. 14:00-15:30

Chiara Gianollo

Indefinites and cyclical change

Epistemic indefinites, such as e.g. English *some* or French *quelque*, signal ignorance on the part of the speaker with respect to the identity of the intended witness to the existential claim (cf. the volume edited by Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2015 for a crosslinguistic overview). Epistemic indefinites have the function of blocking undesired inferences on the part of the hearer (avoidance of a false claim, avoidance of an exhaustivity inference). Given their semantic characterization, they are rarely found in assertive contexts. For this reason, they can be the starting point of a cyclical process of change, known as Argument Cycle (Ladusaw 1993) or Quantifier Cycle (Willis 2011), whereby an indefinite item goes from a 'positive' to a more 'negative' meaning. In this paper I show how the cycle applies to Latin *aliquis* 'some (or other)' and to its Romance descendants (Italian *alcuno*, French *aucun*, Spanish *algún*, etc.) (Gianollo 2018: ch. 2 and 3). By means of this case study I reach a more precise semantic and syntactic characterization of the starting point of the cycle, and I discuss similarities and differences with respect to similar diachronic developments within Germanic (English *any*, Dutch *enig*). Moreover, I show how the further development of this cycle is influenced by pragmatic pressures that are analogous to those motivating Jespersen's Cycle and result in the emphatic expression of negation. Emphasis, which I analyze as a form of scalar focus, has important effects both on the semantics of the indefinite item and on its DP-internal syntax, as will be shown by means of a comparative study of the Romance descendants.



Chiara Gianollo is Associate Professor of General Linguistics at the University of Bologna. She obtained her MA and PhD from the University of Pisa and has held appointments as lecturer and researcher at the Universities of Trieste, Konstanz, Stuttgart, and Cologne. Her main research areas are diachronic syntax and semantics, with specific focus on the use of formal theoretical linguistics to investigate the history of Greek, Latin, and Old Romance. She has recently published the monograph *Indefinites between Latin and Romance*. OUP, 2018.

March 31, 2020 h. 14:00-15:30.

Federica Cognola

On the licensing of null subjects across main clauses in Old High German and Old Italian (joint work with George Walkden)

While there has been a substantial body of research on the asymmetry between main and subordinate clauses in terms of the licensing of *pro*-drop, potential differences between types of unembedded clause have received much less attention – despite the fact that competing theories of *pro*-drop make strong, clear predictions about the distribution of null subjects across clause types, especially with regard to interrogatives. This paper presents the first in-depth comparative study of *pro*-drop in both declaratives and interrogatives in two asymmetric *pro*-drop languages: Old High German and Old Italian. Based on a parallel corpus study using two translations of Tatian's *Diatessaron*, we show that there is a clear difference in distribution between interrogatives and declaratives: null subjects are more frequent in declarative clauses than in interrogatives, and these also differ in terms of the persons in which *pro*-drop is licensed. Our results speak against the V-in-C licensing theory of asymmetric *pro*-drop (Benincà 1984, Adams 1987 and Axel 2007), and in favour of an account based on an Agree relation with left-peripheral operators in the sense of Frascarelli (2007, 2018).



Federica Cognola is a Senior Lecturer in German Linguistics at Ca' Foscari University in Venice.

Her research interests include verb second, OV/VO word orders, overt and null referential and expletive subjects, scrambling, contact linguistics, monolingual and bilingual language acquisition, language variation and change, and diachronic syntax

April 7, 2020 h. 14:00-15:30.

Virginia Valian

How abstract is children's early grammar?

Do very young children – two-year-olds – already have a grammar with the same abstract syntactic categories as adults? Or do they gradually acquire those categories, starting with something more rudimentary and word-based? I will argue that the patterning of words like *a* and *the* in English and other languages shows that two-year-olds and their parents have the same basic grammar. With respect to basic grammar, I argue that nothing develops. As soon as children put words together, they appear to have abstract categories. What develops are vocabulary, knowledge of particular facts, and cognitive functions.



Virginia Valian is Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Linguistics, and Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She works on first language acquisition, bilingualism, and gender. She is currently a visiting scholar at the DSLCC, Ca' Foscari University of Venice in the frame of the development project of a department of excellence.