

# Formal Approaches to Variation in Syntax

Call for papers

The Kings Manor, York, England, May 10-13, 2007

Within the last few years, syntacticians have begun to take an interest in intra-speaker variation to a degree that was hitherto unknown. Previously, only those syntacticians interested in diachronic variation--led by Kroch and colleagues--devoted much attention to the issue of how variation can be dealt with formally (Kroch 1989, 1994, 2001, Kroch and Taylor 1995, 2000, Pintzuk 1991). Formal syntax has otherwise largely ignored the type of data that sociolinguistic variationists attach so much importance to quantifying, either because they had nothing to say about it or because they felt that in the grammar of the idealised speaker-hearer there would (or even could) be no variation. The advent of minimalism, which generally eschews the possibility of optionality in grammar, has prompted some syntacticians to take a greater interest in variability, in order to explain it without reference to "free variation." Recent literature, then, has seen several promising new formal approaches to intra-speaker variation in syntax (Adger 2006, Yang 2000, Henry 1995, Clark 2004, Asudeh 2001).

The goal of this conference is to bring together current researchers in this area in an effort to stimulate debate on issues such as the following:

- Is variability in child language at the root of syntactic change or is variation in the adult grammar a necessary impetus?
- What is the relationship between intra-speaker and inter-speaker variation in syntax?
- What formal and syntactic mechanisms best explain the existence of intra-speaker variation?
- Are frequencies of variants (partially) predictable from the formal properties (e.g. features) involved?
- What if any is the role of parameters in intra-speaker variation?

## **Invited Speakers:**

David Adger  
Sjef Barbiers  
Tony Kroch  
Charles Yang

The conference will run from Thursday evening to Saturday evening. Researchers in this area are invited to submit abstracts for presentations of 35 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes allotted for questions. (Invited speaker presentations will be 45 minutes in length with an additional 15 minutes for questions.) We intend to approach publishers with a view to publishing an edited volume of selected papers following the conference. Preference will be given to papers which address the issues outlined above and related formal issues rather than merely providing detailed analysis of a piece of variation. We encourage syntacticians of all theoretical persuasions to apply.

Abstracts of no more than 2 pages (A4 or 8.5" x 11") should be sent to [lang6@york.ac.uk](mailto:lang6@york.ac.uk) by March 1, 2007. Please send two copies of each abstract, one in camera ready form for inclusion in the abstract booklet with speakers' names, affiliation and email addresses, and another anonymised, both in pdf format. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by March 15<sup>th</sup> 2007.

## **Organisers:**

Bernadette Plunkett and Bill Haddican (University of York Linguistics)