

## IS SYNTACTIC VARIATION SPECIAL?

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While variationist linguistics has been primarily focussed on phonetics/phonology since its inception, syntactic variation is slowly but increasingly coming into the focus of research. The research on syntactic variation requires modifications and expansions of theoretical and methodological approaches of variationist linguistics (cf. Lavandera 1978; Cheshire 2005). Over the last years a broad spectrum of innovative studies on the variation of syntax has emerged (e.g., Kortmann 2010, SAND or SyHD). This research on syntactic variation has broadened the empirical basis of modern linguistics in general and has shown that syntactic variation provides very fruitful insights for different linguistic disciplines. The panel aims to discuss results and problems of current research on the variation of syntax. This discussion will explore the status quo of research on syntactic variation within variationist linguistics and at the same time will uncover peculiarities of syntactic variation. The panel will provide answers to the following questions:

### 1. Syntactic variation ‘versus’ variation on other linguistic levels:

To what extent is syntactic variation different from variation on other linguistic levels (e.g., phonology)? What are the socio-pragmatic functions of syntactic variation? What can variationist linguistics learn from research on syntactic variation? Which ‘traditional’ concepts of variationist linguistics would need to be adapted or expanded in the context of syntactic research? What, for example, is a ‘syntactic’ variable in comparison to a phonetic or lexical one? How can empirical evidence for a syntactic variable be provided?

### 2. Theoretical ‘versus’ empirical approaches:

What is the relation between (more) empirically and (more) theoretically oriented research on syntactic variation? What can both approaches (empirical ‘versus’ theoretical ones) learn from each other? What are the potential difficulties in bringing these approaches together? How can syntactic variation be modelled within structural or cognitive theories? What is the consequence for the concept of competence? Where is the locus of variation (lexicon, morphology, syntactic structures)?

### 3. Syntactic variation within nonstandard ‘versus’ standard varieties:

To what extent does the syntax of nonstandard varieties differ from the syntax of standard varieties? Does the syntactic level provide evidence for different varieties on the ‘vertical’ dialect/standard axis (cf. Auer 2005) or is there a syntactic continuum from the base dialects up to the standard varieties? How do syntactic structures vary along the vertical axis of nonstandard spectra of varieties? What does the syntax of ‘intermediate’ varieties between dialects and standard varieties look like?

### 4. On the survey and analysis of syntactic variation:

Which special challenges are evoked by the elicitation and analysis of syntactic variation (in comparison with the variation on other linguistic levels)? Which methods are most suitable for the elicitation and the analysis of which syntactic phenomena? Which advantages and disadvantages do elicited versus non-elicited (spontaneous) data have?

### 5. Syntactic variation from the perspective of linguists ‘versus’ laymen:

How do speakers perceive syntactic variants, and how do they cognitively structure and evaluate them? Which attitudinal-affective values are ascribed to syntactic features? What about the salience of syntactic variants in comparison to variants of other linguistic levels? How do laymen’s concepts of syntactic variants correspond to linguistic findings?

## References

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SyHD = „Syntax Hessischer Dialekte“ ‚Syntax of Hessian Dialects‘. URL: [www.syhd.info](http://www.syhd.info)