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PhD student appointment (60%)

As part of the Third-Party funded project
Prepositions in English Argument Structure across Time and Space: A Corpus-based Evolutionary Construction Grammar Approach
(SNF Project 100015_175987, 48 months, Prof. Marianne Hundt, University of Zurich)

The project is concerned with the development of prepositional constructions functioning as complements of verbs from Middle English to Present-Day English. The prospective PhD student will work on **prepositional complements in World Englishes** (in part jointly with the PI).

Requirements

- MA in English linguistics or a related subject (e.g. General linguistics)
- Experience with corpus-based research

Job description

This 60% job offers the opportunity to write a PhD dissertation on the topic of the project in the course of four years. The successful applicant ideally also has a background in statistical modelling of linguistic variation and an interest in syntax and syntactic theory. The UZH offers the opportunity to connect with other researchers in linguistics over and beyond the project (see e.g. http://www.linguistik.uzh.ch; and the joint doctoral program in linguistics http://www.linguistics-phd.uzh.ch).

Salary
CHF 47.000 p/a, increasing by CHF 1.500 in each of the following two years

Starting date
September 1st 2018

Application
The following documents should be submitted as an integrated PDF-file to the email-address below:

- Cover letter
- CV
- excerpt of MA thesis
- two academic referees (names and contact details)

Deadline for applications April 6th, 2018

Contact
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Project summary

Prepositions and prepositional constructions constitute an integral part of Present Day English and play a fundamental role in its system of verbal complementation: Not only are they used to express adverbials of instrument, location or time (*John wrote the letter with a pencil in Rome on Monday*), but PPs also frequently mark the direct or indirect objects of verbs (*John relied on his mother to give the book to Mary*). Accordingly, their semantic and syntactic features have received much attention in the literature. Nevertheless, there is still considerable disagreement as to the precise analysis and classification of the range of prepositional patterns available today.

The historical development of prepositions in verbal complementation is particularly interesting: they have dramatically increased in frequency from the twelfth century onwards and they are coming to fulfil more and more functions. In some World Englishes prepositional patterns are particularly frequent making them an ideal object to study changes in progress. In short, the English language appears to have become ever more 'preposition-friendly'.

Although the diachrony of prepositional structures has been dealt with extensively in previous research, a systematic, comprehensive and unified account of their development and spread is still lacking. Instead of focussing on individual aspects connected to the diachronic development of PPs, or single periods in time, as existing studies have typically done, the project aims to provide a comprehensive treatment of the history of English verb complementation from the perspective of prepositions. It combines the range of sub-developments which took place at different points in time, and reaches a new historical depth by including data from Middle English to Present Day English. Crucially, the project also relates the study of historical English linguistics to the field of World Englishes, comparing and contrasting changes in earlier stages of the language with recent and ongoing change, thus providing a novel link and perspective. By doing so, we seek to offer a fuller picture of prepositional complementation in English and to find diachronic explanations for synchronic, contemporary phenomena. Specific issues to be investigated include grammatical and lexical constructionalisation in the case of prepositional complementation, system dependency, as well as competition with nominal patterns.

In addition to being much broader in scope than earlier work, the project overcomes the limitations of previous studies which were based on very small datasets by using data from large and syntactically annotated corpora. The corpus-based approach is furthermore supplemented by evidence from mathematical modelling, specifically agent-based models. On a theoretical level, our approach is grounded in the state-of-the-art frameworks of (diachronic) construction grammar and evolutionary linguistics. By readdressing long-standing questions in English diachronic and synchronic syntax from a novel and original perspective, the project will contribute greatly to the field of language variation and change in and beyond English.