

CCLS Lecture Series: David Goldstein (UCLA)

9th December 2019

Hauptgebäude, Hörsaal XXI

2 p.m.

Dependent grammaticalization in the history of Indo-European

One of the central empirical goals of historical linguistics is to distinguish probable from improbable linguistic changes. This includes not only individual changes, but also interactions among changes. Until recently, there was no method for testing hypotheses of dependence among linguistic changes. With the advent of Bayesian phylogenetics, however, it is now possible to do precisely this. In this talk, I take up the question of whether definite and indefinite articles developed independently in the history of Indo-European. Irslinger (2013:46) maintains that their development was independent – that is, that the rise of one had no effect on the rise of the other. I demonstrate that there is in fact a dependence in the rates at which the two types of articles develop. Indefinite articles developed at a faster rate among languages that had already developed a definite article. The predominant diachronic trajectory in the history of Indo-European was accordingly for definite articles to precede indefinite. Dryer's Reference Hierarchy (Dryer 2014), which thus far has been understood exclusively as a synchronic hierarchy, motivates the diachronic trajectory that I argue for.