

Workshop proposal
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Linguistics of Weather:
neglected phenomena, neglected languages, neglected constructions

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The interest of studying weather encoding no longer needs to be justified or promoted. The era of addressing the linguistic expression of atmospheric phenomena on the margin of general theoretical studies, such as in works of Jackendoff (1983) or Talmy (2000) on conceptual structure of motion verbs, of Fernández-Soriano (1999), Bauer (2000) or Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) on impersonal constructions or of Gerritsen (1990) on reflexives, is long bygone. The linguistics of natural phenomena has become a subject in and of itself.

According to Ruwet (1986, 1988, 1990), one of the first linguists to specifically address meteorological expressions, the linguistic encoding of weather is particular due to the fact that atmospheric phenomena are independent from human involvement and control, and impossible to decompose into actual processes and participants. As such, they putatively form a “homogeneous semantic class pertaining to a rather well-defined domain of experience [...] almost entirely escaping human control” (Ruwet 1990: 44). Recent studies allowed to reevaluate some fundamental claims put forth in Ruwet’s seminal papers : to delve into the homogeneity-of-the-class question (*cf.* Paykin 2002, Meulleman & Paykin forthcoming, Eriksen *et al.* 2012, *etc.*), to explore various possible constructions depending on language typologies (*cf.* Eriksen *et al.* 2010, Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2010, *etc.*), and to nuance and deepen the analysis of weather verbs (*cf.* Paykin 2010, Meulleman & Stockman 2013, Meulleman & Paykin 2016, Kienpointner 2016, Levin & Krejci 2019, *etc.*).

The heterogeneity and great syntactic particularity of the class of weather phenomena is presently well-established. However, not all phenomena, not all languages and not all types of constructions have received equal attention. The majority of research so far has mostly privileged precipitations and temperatures, impersonal weather verbs and language typologies combined with some glimpses into non-Indo-European languages. The aim of our workshop is to bring justice to neglected aspects of the weather domain study.

Considering that the term *meteorological* itself stems from Greek *μετέωρος* ‘raised from the ground, hanging, lofty’, derived from the combination of *μετά* ‘in the midst of, among, between’ and *αείρω* ‘to lift, to heave, to raise up’, metonyms denote natural non-cyclic phenomena taking place in the atmosphere, defined by Aristotle in *Meteorologica* as having fleeing existence and destructing themselves as they form. Based on this definition, there is no justifiable reason why the encoding of precipitation should be more representative of the weather expression than that of the (temporary or evolving) presence of sunshine, wind, thunderstorms, or fog.

In fact, while in Indo-European languages the preferred construction for rain might be a weather verb, the most frequent or unmarked construction for other phenomena varies greatly across Indo-European languages (*cf.* Kienpointner 2016). The majority of Germanic languages possess impersonal verbs for phenomena like storms or fog (*cf.* for example, *onweren* ‘to storm’ or *misten* ‘to fog’ in Dutch), Slavic languages hardly use weather verbs (inexistent or considered archaic), while Romance languages occupy an intermediary position (for example, French contains numerous impersonal verbs for precipitations, such as *pleuvoir* ‘to rain’, *bruiner* ‘to drizzle’ or *grêler* ‘to hail’ but hardly any for other phenomena). To make up for the absence of specific

weather verbs, Indo-European languages massively employ existential constructions (eg. *There is fog* in English), impersonal, like French *Il y a / Il fait (du) brouillard* ‘There is fog’, or personal, like French *Le soleil brille* ‘The sun is shining’¹. We can argue, therefore, that the analysis of weather verbs as motion verbs (cf. Langacker 1991, Talmy 2000) has been overgeneralized and overexploited. It could have been more reasonable to consider weather verbs as non-causal or spontaneous event verbs and existential verbs, both static (*there be*) or dynamic (apparition verbs).

Detailed comparative data should also allow questioning the existence of a possible iconic link between morpho-syntactic encoding and relative dynamicity of weather phenomena (cf. Glynn 2007 for Germanic languages). Although, as has been argued in Paykin (2002, 2003), most weather phenomena in general can be viewed as complex and capable of referring to events, states and sometimes physical substances, some phenomena, such as storms, appear as intrinsically more dynamic than others, such as dew or hoarfrost. However, the distribution of specific weather predicates does not seem to correspond to a dynamicity scale. Indeed, French, for example, contains weather verbs denoting rather static phenomena like *geler* ‘to freeze’, while entirely lacking verbs for some dynamic phenomena like storm (**orager*).

Even if too often aligned with motion verbs, impersonal weather verbs have been relatively well studied, while constructions containing weather nouns or adjectives have been for the most part left out. For instance, in French, the prototypical action verb *faire* ‘to do / make’ can combine with both weather state adjectives (eg., *Il fait humide / chaud* ‘It is humid / hot’) and weather nouns denoting non-dynamic phenomena (eg., French *Il fait soleil / brouillard* ‘There is sun / fog’). According to Maillard (1985 : 77), the *il-fait*-construction is available since Latin under the influence of colloquial *Belle facit* ‘This does well, It is nice’, while Bauer (2000) argues that this construction is meant to compensate the progressive decrease in frequency of impersonal intransitive weather verbs of the *Il vente* ‘It winds’ type in Latin, influenced by the transitivity spread oriented toward SVO constructions of the *Il fait vent* ‘It makes wind’ type. Thus, the question of diachronic evolution between impersonal and personal constructions in the weather domain acquires much importance, as well as the study of old classical texts and languages.

Other possible neglected aspects in the weather domain include the study of languages using different modalities, such as Sign Languages, weather expressions in language acquisition, specialized uses of the natural phenomena lexicon and specific constructions in weather forecasts or in dictionaries, and finally their metaphorical use.

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¹ In such personal constructions, rather marginal in Romance languages in comparison to other language families (cf. Eriksen et al. 2010), the verb usually denotes a typical activity of the weather noun referent, or, more rarely, its movement, like in Spanish *Cae niebla* ‘Fog is falling’, orienting them toward existential constructions (Meullemann & Paykin 2017).

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