

Workshop

Kristine Horner (University of Sheffield), Analysing metalinguistic discourse: Historical and critical sociolinguistic approaches

The investigation of language policies and practices ‘from below’ constitutes a means of challenging mythological aspects of language history that have masked certain aspects of linguistic variation and diversity in the past. Historical sociolinguistic research productively questions monolithic views of language history, in particular by extending the scope of research to comprise diverse segments of populations and the analysis of a broad range of text sources. This speaker/writer-centred approach is similar to work in contemporary sociolinguistics. They both also share a growing interest in the study of language attitudes and ideologies in relation to questions of identity, power and group dynamics. The analysis of metalinguistic discourse provides a window on the role of language in social and political life in the past and allows us to gain a deeper understanding of language history.

In this workshop, we will explore how discourse analytical approaches can be applied to diverse historical metalinguistic text types. The workshop will begin by introducing key concepts such as discourse, attitudes and ideologies, as well as providing an overview of discourse analytical approaches to metalanguage. We will then put this into practice by examining historical source texts from a variety of officially monolingual and multilingual geo-political sites. We will also critically engage with the notion of uniformitarianism and discuss how to avoid the pitfall of projecting social categories of the present on to the past.

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Benedikt Szmrecsanyi (KU Leuven), Modeling sociolinguistic and historical variation

This workshop will familiarize students with techniques designed to analyze variation between “alternate ways of saying ‘the same’ thing” (Labov 1972:188), subject to language-internal and language-external constraints (e.g. real time, social characteristics of the speakers). Analysis techniques that we will explore include binary logistic regression analysis, conditional inference trees, and conditional random forest analysis. Datasets will be made available by the instructor. Please install the R software environment (<https://www.r-project.org/>) on your computer prior to attending this workshop.

Masterclass

Lieselotte Anderwald (University of Kiel, Germany), The effects of prescriptivism

Prescriptivism has been postulated to have effects ranging from all-encompassing (traditional historical linguistics) to none (modern sociolinguistics). However, surprisingly little actual work has been done in this field. This masterclass will introduce participants to the main approaches to studying prescriptive sources and their effects on actual language (on a micro- or macro scale, starting from frequent pronouncements in the grammar, or from documented features undergoing language change), and look critically at how to even begin on an enterprise that attempts to study this correlation more than anecdotally. What is needed is (at least) a reliable selection of prescriptive sources, and a representative collection of language data (both unfortunately sometimes called corpus). In addition, we need methods of determining what to look for, and where, and finally of correlating the results. If time permits, we will also look at the more intangible effects prescriptivism has had, or might have: on the perception of speakers, on speakers' self-images, and on society more generally.

Most examples and case studies will be taken from the history of English, although participants' own studies or areas of interest will be very welcome.

The Bad Data Lecture

Stephan Elspaß (University of Salzburg), What's the use of looking at bad data in bad language?

Historical sociolinguistics is concerned with all sorts of written data from the past, not just literary or religious texts, not just the language of print, not just the language use of the elites. What is so interesting about more 'mundane data', about handwritten texts, about language from members of the middle and lower ranks of the society? How can historical linguistics benefit from linguistic data, which in the past have often been ignored, derided or bluntly dismissed as the habitat and breeding-ground of 'bad language'? These are some of the more fundamental questions in historical sociolinguistics which will be discussed in this lecture. On a more practical note, the problems and difficulties of designing and working with corpora which reflect the whole breadth of written language production in the past will be addressed.