

Why historical linguistics and cognitive linguistics need each other

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At first glance historical linguistics and cognitive linguistics seem to be doing just fine without each other. After all, research in both fields has been advancing steadily for decades despite the nearly inherent ahistoricism of the latter and the strong focus of the former on purely linguistic aspects of historical texts. The role of extra-linguistic factors in language change has not gone unnoticed, though, and historical sociolinguistics has grown into a well-established and flourishing field of study since its emergence nearly 40 years ago (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2012; Säily et al. 2017). However, less attention has been paid to cognition and perception as drivers of language production and change. While work in cognitive psychology has found new ways to analyse linguistic data, and has led to new insights about language as a cognitive process (Rosch & Lloyd 1978; Lakoff 1987; Bolognesi 2020), there has been much less urgency about the need to give cognitive linguistic studies a historical grounding, though there are some notable exceptions (including Winters et al. 2010; Allan & Robinson 2012; Winters 2020).

The title of the proposed theme session stems from a conviction that, when combined, the two disciplines can bring to the table solutions beneficial to both. Historical analyses with a cognitive bent can help establish whether and when certain conceptualizations shifted, to what extent they were culturally determined, and the cognitive perspective has given a fresh impetus to work in historical semantics, for example considering the way in which particular metaphorical mappings have changed through time. Conversely, using historical data for cognitive linguistic research is crucial for testing the validity and applicability of hypotheses and for the longer perspective it offers. Calls for more historically-orientated work have been voiced by a number of influential scholars in recent years (Geeraerts & Grondelaers 1995; Diller 1996; Geeraerts & Gevaert 2008).

This session will present research related to the interplay between language and mind viewed from a historical perspective, considering topics including metaphor, embodiment, phraseological change, the role of prototypes and the process of subjectification. The session will conclude with a round table discussion, which will collect together the key strands of the papers, and consider the priorities for future research.

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