

Title of the workshop:

Non-linguistic causes of linguistic diversity

Convenors:

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Description of the workshop topic and research questions

The goal of this workshop is to shed light on the non-linguistic causes of linguistic diversity.

Traditionally, language diversity has been claimed to result from random, internally-motivated changes in language structure. Ongoing research suggests instead that different factors that are external to language can promote language change and ultimately account for aspects of linguistic diversity. Accordingly, linguistic complexity correlates with aspects of social complexity, to the extent that big exoteric communities (involved in regular cross-cultural exchanges with other groups and having more non-native speakers) typically speak languages that show simpler and more regular morphologies and more complex syntaxes (Bolender 2007, Wray and Grace 2007, Lupyan and Dale 2010). Likewise, core properties of human languages (like duality of patterning) have been claimed to result from iterate learning and cultural evolution, as research in village sign languages illustrates (Sandler et al. 2011). Ultimately, some aspects of language structure have been suggested to have an adaptive value (Lupyan and Dale 2016). It has been hypothesised that certain gene alleles, provided that they bias language acquisition or processing, may affect language change through iterated cultural transmission (Dediu 2011). Consequently, the focus of this workshop is not put on microvariation within languages, but on macrovariation across languages from a typological perspective. Specific research questions to be addressed include (but are not limited to):

- Patterns of global linguistic diversity
- Ecological factors accounting for language diversity
- Socio-cultural factors accounting for language diversity
- Adaptive value of language diversity
- Gene-culture co-evolution and language diversity
- Emergent properties of languages

References

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