
Integrating the methods of Experimental Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience to address central issues in Linguistics

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After more than a century of heated theoretical debate, the past 15 years have seen a surge of empirical research on the hypothesis that the language we speak affects the way we think. Arguably, this surge of interest was kick-started by integrating methods used in experimental psychology with insights from anthropological and cognitive linguistics, and more recently by breakthroughs in the field of cognitive neuroscience (the science of how the brain works when we think). Scholars such as John Lucy, Steven Levinson, Debi Roberson and Dan Slobin have placed the experimental approach at the heart of the language and thought debate. This workshop will familiarise participants with a range of interdisciplinary research methods, and equip researchers with awareness of some of the key methodological practices, both in the laboratory and out in the field. We will first discuss what researchers consider to be basic requirements for sound empirical research in this area, which can be summarised as follows:

- a. The research should identify specific lexical or grammatical categories that exhibit cross-linguistic variation.
- b. The research should be comparative, i.e. comparing two different populations who speak languages with contrasting ways of cutting up reality and the world.
- c. The research should measure both linguistic and non-linguistic performance, in a range of tasks.
- d. The research should place bilingualism and the dynamic nature of language learning at centre stage.

We will then consider specific methodological issues related to each of the requirements above, while reviewing a wide range of linguistic tasks such as narrative elicitation, grammaticality judgements, verbal descriptions, lexical access, semantic prototype elicitation, as well as non-linguistic tasks such as free-sorting, similarity judgements, visual search, triads matching, and oddball detection. We will place particular emphasis on (d), highlighting the role of bilingualism/language learning as a dynamic tool in the investigation of the effects of language on thought, revealing important interactions and patterns which are often masked by studying monolingual populations in isolation.