

**The cross-linguistic application of grammatical categories and its mechanisms
from antiquity to modern times**

How justified and adequate is it to describe two comparable linguistic features in different languages by means of one and the same grammatical category? This thorny issue is a persistent theme in current linguistic debates (e.g. Haspelmath 2010a; 2010b vs. Newmeyer 2010), but it is not restricted to modern institutionalized linguistics and has been around at least since antiquity, when the Romans adopted and adapted the Ancient Greek grammatical model. For instance, as a result of an incomplete adaptation, categories like ‘article’ slumbered for centuries in Latin grammars, well into the Middle Ages, when Romance languages started to develop actual articles. In the early modern period, the linguistic horizon of Europe expanded, stimulating scholars’ interest in linguistic diversity. This development was fostered by the Renaissance rehabilitation of long-lost languages such as Greek and Hebrew, by the invention of the printing press, and by the explorations of the world. In this context, the vernacular languages of Europe and non-European languages came into the picture too. The widening linguistic horizon often caused great difficulties, especially to scholars wanting to provide a description of languages which were (initially) unfamiliar to them and/or lacked an established grammatical tradition before the early modern period (e.g. Quechua/French). In their attempts at grammatically describing such languages, they generally borrowed terms and categories from an established tradition, often that of Latin grammar.

Against this historical background, the proposed **open thematic workshop** aims to address the cross-linguistic application of grammatical categories and its mechanisms from antiquity to modern times. The main questions to be discussed are:

- (1) How, why, and in which context does a scholar decide to apply a grammatical category tailored to one language to others?
- (2) What underlying mechanisms ensure whether the cross-linguistic conceptual transfer is successful?

Contributors are encouraged to focus on (1) grammars in which this phenomenon is particularly striking (e.g. grammars with unusual models, missionary grammars) or (2) specific concepts which have repeatedly been applied cross-linguistically in various ways and senses (e.g. aorist, particle).

References

- Haspelmath, Martin. 2010a. “Comparative Concepts and Descriptive Categories in Crosslinguistic Studies.” *Language* 86 (3): 663–87.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2010b. “The Interplay between Comparative Concepts and Descriptive Categories (Reply to Newmeyer).” *Language* 86 (3): 696–99.
- Newmeyer, Frederick J. 2010. “On Comparative Concepts and Descriptive Categories: A Reply to Haspelmath.” *Language* 86 (3): 688–95.