

Workshop Proposal
59th Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea* (SLE)
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Maps and visualisations.

Modelling functional networks in usage-based approaches to language

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Keywords

1. semantic maps
2. polysemy and functional networks
3. qualitative and quantitative analysis
4. language change and grammaticisation
5. interaction and interactional linguistics

Semantic maps have been around for over 40 years (Anderson, 1982) and have proved to be a useful tool for understanding similarities and differences in the pairing of forms and functions across languages, typological trends, and pathways of language change (Haspelmath, 1997; Georgakopoulos/Polis, 2018; Narrog/van der Auwera 2011). During that period, other methods for exploring and visualising complex relationships of meanings in language and across languages have entered the picture, often involving statistical methods – such as multi-dimensional scaling (Croft 2022, Croft/Poole 2008; van der Klij/Tellings 2022; Wälchli/Cysouw 2012) or network and cluster analyses (Lanwer 2020) – in order to reflect the quantitative distribution of the association of forms with selected functions.

This workshop provides a dedicated arena for taking stock of such methodological advances and discussing ways forward in the use of (various kinds of) semantic maps for exploring and visualising functional networks. The focus will be on approaches to the study of language that prioritise language use in their theorising, such as interactional or usage-based approaches to language, cognition and change.

These approaches have accumulated rich bodies of empirical descriptions of language structures and practices. Their empirical descriptions come with challenges and potentials that make a mapping of semantic concepts or discursive functions attractive (Zinken/Küttner 2022). (1) Within a field, semantic maps can play a role similar to that of meta-analyses in the social sciences, making it possible to assess convergences across accumulated studies; (2) across fields, semantic maps can enhance the accessibility of analyses, and work as a meta-language (or even work as a “nonverbal tool for describing and comparing meaning”, Wälchli/Cysouw 2012: 679) bringing together different descriptive endeavours in our relatively fragmented and terminologically heterogeneous/diverse field; (3) regarding semantic change, they can help to explore complex pathways in diachrony instead of assuming a purely linear progression; (4) last but not least, the rich and detailed analyses provided by descriptive linguists can become an asset for the very methodology of semantic maps, for example, by providing converging or corrective evidence on the nodes of a map.

To date, lots of questions remain open in the process of realising the analytic potential of semantic maps and visualizations for usage-based approaches to language. These include (1) a better understanding of the relative use of ‘implicational’ or ‘probabilistic’ semantic maps and other quantitative data explorations and visualisations; (2) the viability of maps for studies including relatively small sample sizes and/or numbers of languages, as is usually the case in detailed descriptive work; (3) adapting mapping procedures, for example, the discovery of nodes, to the strengths and difficulties of usage-based approaches. To this end, the workshop provides a forum for discussing these and other methodological challenges and sharing work that attempts to bring maps and other visualisations to bear on usage data.

We welcome submissions that

- offer a methodological reflection of the potentials and challenges that arise in visualising functional networks as they emerge from qualitative and/or quantitative data-driven analyses of usage data;
- employ a range of methodological and theoretical frameworks, including but not limited to Interactional Linguistics, Construction Grammar, usage-based linguistics, grammaticalisation and semantic change, linguistic/pragmatic typology.

We are particularly interested in studies that

- cross-connect their findings and reflections to different fields of linguistics, emphasising the potential role of semantic maps for connecting different subdisciplines;
- reflect on the epistemological potential for both, ‘implicational’ and ‘probabilistic’ forms of mapping and visualising functional networks.

Roadmap

- 06.11.2025 feedback if you are interested in joining the workshop
- 17.11.2025 send a short abstract of max. 300 words (including examples but excluding references) to one of the workshop organizers
- 20.11.2025 submission of workshop proposal by us
- 15.12.2025 notification of acceptance/rejection of workshop
- 15.01.2026 deadline for submitting a full abstract of your workshop contributions via EasyChair, see the SLE webpage for more details (note that first authors have to be SLE members, annual fee of approx. 30€)
- 31.03.2026 notification of acceptance/rejection of abstracts

Conference webpage

<https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2026/first-call-for-papers/>

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