
Etymology and Linguistic Historiography

Abstract

Etymology is one of the oldest subfields of linguistics, with a tradition going back to classical times. And, while it had been neglected for years, it has been enjoying something of a resurgence of late. Traditional methodologies, including some that go back to the very beginnings of scientific historical/ comparative linguistics, are being challenged (consider here the recent proposals by Robert Mailhammer about the role of language contact in etymology); well-established etymologies are being reconsidered (as in the ongoing debate over the etymology of the Germanic word for ‘rune’); new handbooks are appearing (e.g. the Leiden series of etymological dictionaries); and etymologies are being taken in entirely new directions by some scholars (e.g. etymologizing various Indo-European words as survivals from a pre-Indo-European substratum, as done by Theo Vennemann and members of the Leiden School).

There is a correspondingly long tradition of historiographical approaches to etymology. A good deal of work in this area has focused on classical or medieval etymology (e.g. Mark Amsler’s 1989 book; or perhaps most recently, Daniel Taylor’s paper on Varro’s etymologies, in the latest issue of *Historiographia Linguistica*). Another recent historiographical thread has attempted to contextualize the history of etymology within the history of ideas, and thus within the more general field of intellectual history (cf. e.g. Joshua Katz’s overview of this approach).

The goal of this proposed workshop is therefore to tap into both of these veins of research, by drawing together scholars interested in both etymology and linguistic historiography, and by providing them with an opportunity to consider relevant topics in a conference setting. The goals of the workshop are the following: (1) to allow several scholars to report on their current research projects involving etymology from a historiographical perspective; (2) to draw increased attention to historiographical etymological research in the setting of ICHoLS, through the papers presented formally, the more general discussion in the workshop, and conversations about etymology and linguistic historiography in more informal settings over the course of the conference; and (3) to increase research on etymology and historiography, as the papers presented will hopefully set attendees’ thoughts in motion on various related topics.

The workshop is intended to be an open workshop.

Keywords: etymology