

## **SEM55. Human mediation and linguistic knowledge across centuries: Multilingualism, metalanguage, and multimodal teaching practices**

**13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S5 Moro**

### **Convenors**

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This panel invites contributions that investigate the forms and functions of human mediation in the transmission of linguistic knowledge from the early modern period to the twentieth century. We are particularly interested in how multilingualism (Bennett-Cattaneo 2022), metalinguistic discourse, (McGillivray 2020) and multimodal strategies (Kress 2010; Sindoni 2023) shaped the development, teaching, (Gallagher 2019) and theorization of the English language across different historical and cultural contexts. While early vernaculars—including English—underwent processes of standardization and codification, polyglossia persisted as a vital mode of linguistic and cultural exchange. Translation (both interlingual and intersemiotic), translingual communication, and visual mediation played central roles in the production and dissemination of language knowledge. At the same time, the evolution of linguistic metalanguage (Alston, 1965–2011; Walmsley 2022.)—both as a terminological system and as a reflective discourse—offers insights into how language was conceptualized, taught, and discussed in educational and scholarly contexts from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. We welcome proposals that engage with the following (non-exhaustive) topics:

- Interlingual and intersemiotic translation in pedagogical and specialized texts.
- The development and variation of English linguistic metalanguage over time.
- Multilingual and multimodal strategies in language teaching materials.
- The epistemic role of grammars, dictionaries, conversation manuals, parallel texts, and scientific discourse.
- Metalinguistic awareness and its cultural implications across time periods.
- Methodologies for the digital and philological analysis of historical language sources.
- The role of language in shaping human and humane values in scholarly and didactic texts.

We encourage contributions that focus on non-literary, didactic, or specialized texts and that integrate theoretical, historical, and methodological perspectives—including those grounded in digital humanities.

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## **SEM55. Papers**

**13 September h. 8:30-11:00, S5 Moro**

- *Early Modern linguistic terminology in the MetaLing Corpus: Computational approaches and methodological challenges* (Vahid Asadi, Università degli Studi di Milano / Daniel Russo, Università dell'Insubria / Angela Andreani, Università degli Studi di Milano)
- *Interlingual strategies and cultural prestige in Early English grammars* (Cristiano Ragni, Università di Verona)
- *The page as a place in Early Modern England: Multimodal strategies in multilingual teaching texts* (Donatella Montini, Sapienza Università di Roma)

- *Exploring the use of English metalanguage in the formation of 19<sup>th</sup>- century scientific terminology. A methodological reflection on the analysis experts' interactions in historical sources* (Beatrice Ragazzini, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna)

## SEM55. Abstracts

### Early Modern linguistic terminology in the *MetaLing Corpus*: Computational approaches and methodological challenges

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In linguistic communication, it is necessary to refer to features of language, such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, usage, or meaning, and the existence of a disciplinary metalanguage allows speakers to discuss these language-specific elements unambiguously (Audi, 1995, Wilson, 2013). The capacity to use and interpret metalanguage is therefore a fundamental linguistic skill, enabling humans to engage in conversations that transcend specific domains (Anderson et al., 2002). This research explores how metalinguistic concepts were used and evolved in early modern English texts from 1500 to 1700, a period of linguistic and intellectual transformation.

The study investigates how terms related to grammar, syntax, and orthography changed in frequency and usage during this time. The research draws on early modern English corpora using natural language processing (NLP) techniques. Key methods including frequency analysis and collocational studies were used to track the development of metalinguistic terms over time. The findings suggest an increase in both the frequency and depth of metalinguistic discussions from the 1500s to the 1700s, reflecting the intellectual shifts of the early modern period (Andreani & Russo, 2023). As it sheds light onto how language was understood and conceptualised in early modern English by tracing the evolution of metalinguistic phenomena, this study also highlights the potential of computational tools in revealing new perspectives into the history of linguistic thought. The aim of this study is to deepen our understanding of the linguistic discourse of the period and explore the challenges and opportunities of research in historical computational linguistics.

This research is part of the MetaLing Corpus Project, which is creating a corpus of texts including language-related discussions in order to study the development of the English metalanguage used to analyse and compare, appraise and classify, teach and learn the languages of Europe between 1500 and 1700, i.e. in a period predating the establishment of philology and linguistics as academic disciplines.

## References

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### The page as a place in Early Modern England: Multimodal strategies in multilingual teaching texts

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'Early modern print cultures are cultures of translation' and translation practices were frequently employed in the service of didactic strategies, which, in turn, fostered the emergence of visual representation cultures. While educators engaged with pedagogical concerns, printers and typographers played a crucial role in visually shaping these texts, ensuring that the content could be effectively communicated to readers and learners: polyglot texts, incorporating two, three, or more languages, demanded the printer's expertise in presenting interlingual translations in a way that made their relationships clear to the reader. Joseph Webbe (d. 1630), an English Roman Catholic linguist and translator, conceived and patented what might be termed a 'learning by sight' approach, which integrates interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation. His method for teaching Latin lexicon and syntax to English pupils relied exclusively on visualizations of the two languages,

representing an example of information design that surpassed the traditional synoptic layout of multilingual didactic dialogues. My presentation will reconsider Webbe's *ante-litteram* multimodal experiment, integrating theoretical discussions on the use of visualizations and images for didactic purposes into the broader debate on the teaching of Latin in the seventeenth century, at the heart of which lay the question of whether Latin should be taught as a living language or through formal grammar instruction.

## References

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## Exploring the use of English metalanguage in the formation of 19<sup>th</sup>- century scientific terminology. A methodological reflection on the analysis experts' interactions in historical sources

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This proposal aims to investigate how the English metalanguage was used by experts in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1800 - 1850) to shape scientific terminology in their own field of research through interactions and knowledge exchange with scholars of other disciplines.

At a time in which various scientific disciplines were trying to order their knowledge into nomenclatures and conceptual classifications with the aim of efficient communication and international knowledge exchange, also known as the age of the "professionalisation of science" (Ellis, 2014:777), this study aims to analyse the English metalanguage used for the formation of terminology and knowledge in 19<sup>th</sup>- century historical sources, by reconstructing the interactions and correspondences among scholars of various disciplines.

With a focus on William Whewell's correspondences with experts of other disciplines, this contribution reflects on the use of English metalanguage in the formation of terms with regard to electrodynamics and astronomy, in which various researchers were involved (Faraday, 1834; Herschel, 1843). In doing this, this study explores the English metalanguage used to describe the creation of scientific language in various areas of research (Whewell, 1840a; 1840b), focusing on the reflections of experts on the formation of terms and their features.

On a methodological front, this contribution presents digital practices to collect historical sources from online archives across various text types such as letters and journal articles to reconstruct interactions among experts through a "social network analysis" (Sigrist & Widmer, 2011:347), with which terms and scientific language were formed. Ultimately, this contribution shall describe the use of English metalanguage of terminology as an instrument for discussing the formation of scientific language and knowledge across fields of research, at a time in which nomenclatures and conceptual classifications in various scientific disciplines were formed (Lightman & Zon, 2014), and before the codification of terminology as an academic discipline (Wüster, 1931).

## References

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### **Interlingual strategies and cultural prestige in Early English grammars**

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This paper investigates the interlingual dynamics of two foundational early modern English grammars: Paul Greaves' *Grammatica Anglicana* (1594) and Thomas Tonkis's *De Analogia Anglicani Sermonis* (1612). Using a comparative and contextual approach, it explores how these texts contributed to broader cultural and linguistic processes of codification, language teaching, and the legitimisation of English during a period marked by both polyglossia and emerging national identity.

Greaves' *Grammatica Anglicana*, written in Latin but focused on English, employs a Ramist structure to articulate a hybrid pedagogical purpose—targeting both native English speakers and Latin-literate foreign learners. It embodies the tension between vernacular autonomy and classical imitation, positioning English within a Latinate intellectual framework.

Tonkis's *De Analogia Anglicani Sermonis*, also written in Latin and largely overlooked by modern scholarship, promotes the status of English through Latin-based grammatical analysis aimed at an educated, transnational audience. Drawing examples from English, Latin, Greek, and Romance languages, the grammar operates both as a multilingual instructional tool and a diplomatic gesture, reinforcing the internal structure of English through morphological analogy and showcasing its value abroad.

By comparing these texts with *Lily's Grammar*—the first and only Latin grammar officially sanctioned for all English schools—this paper reflects on a pivotal moment in the transition from Latin to English as the primary medium of scholarship and national expression. It argues that language teaching in this period extended beyond grammatical instruction, serving as a means of asserting cultural authority and national identity. In this light, Greaves' and Tonkis's grammars are not merely didactic texts but acts of linguistic nationalism and cultural mediation.