

Modality Matters: Call for Papers

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Modality (the mode in which language is expressed) is a fundamental topic within language evolution. Most notably, modality is at the centre of the debate of whether language emerged originally as gesture-first, speech-first, or multimodal from the start. Further, the affordances provided to users of existing communication systems are modality-dependent. Modality can affect how language is grounded, transmitted and used in interaction and, as a result, feeds into the language evolution debate at every level. Despite this, much work in evolutionary linguistics, especially in the domain of models and artificial language experiments, tends to extrapolate results from only one modality to language generally. However, in order to justify doing this, we need to first better understand the role of modality in linguistic emergence.

Language evolution, and perhaps linguistics more broadly, places a huge amount of importance in finding linguistic universals. This relies on identifying linguistic features and evolutionary processes that are independent of linguistic modality. Modality-based constraints on structures and strategies may allow one system to develop on a particular trajectory, while another cannot. In this workshop, we will celebrate processes where modality matters, as these examples give us the opportunity to identify exactly what physical properties of a modality are affecting linguistic emergence, which in turn allows us to isolate what might be universal at a more cognitive level.

In this workshop, we will focus specifically on the role of modality in the emergence of language and linguistic features. We invite abstracts that address: a) how modality affects the emergence of structure and/or iconicity in language or, b) how modality affects the emergence of mechanisms in interaction (e.g. repair, feedback, turn-timing, etc.) and linguistic emergence as a result of these mechanisms. Abstracts might address questions such as: What can we infer from results in different modalities? What does this mean for generalisability? What might cross-modal comparisons tell us about universals in communication systems (pragmatic, structural, etc.)? We encourage contributions that discuss evolutionary pressures and mechanisms that are modality specific, as well as work that directly compares data garnered from two or more modalities collected using models, experiments and/or from real word languages. We also welcome theoretical and empirical contributions considering the role of modality in the origins of language.

While modality is a topic that is addressed in many domains within the evolutionary linguistics literature, researchers between fields may not interact enough. We envision that this workshop will be a unique opportunity to assemble people working on topics of modality in many different disciplines. We expect this cross-disciplinary discussion will generate new perspectives, hypotheses, debates and collaborations.

Date of Workshop

Monday 16th April 2018

09:00 to 13:45

Submission Information

Abstracts should be 2-4 pages (excluding references), and follow the formatting guidelines for the main conference, found here: <http://www.evolang.org/submissions>

Follow the guidelines for anonymisation to facilitate double blind reviewing.

Presentations will be 20 minute oral presentations with 10 minutes of questions.

Submit abstracts by emailing modalitymatters@gmail.com

Deadline: **22nd December 2017**

Notification: 31st January 2018

Review Procedure

All submissions will be reviewed by the workshop conveners and 1 other reviewer (authors of other papers submitted). If you submit a paper, you will be asked to review a paper.