CCLS/SFB 1252: Bodo Winter (University of Birmingham)
Statistics in linguistics: Thoughts on recurrent issues and pedagogy

Monday, 11 October 2021, 2:00 p.m.

It is safe to say that linguistics has been undergoing a quantitative revolution. However, despite massive advances in almost all subfields of linguistics, certain issues persist. In this talk, I want to openly reflect on what I personally see as the most pressing issues of statistical methodology, based on my experience consulting on projects across subfields, from corpus linguistics over phonetics to typology. Each subfield has their own deeply engrained methodological 'rituals' that we, as a field, should openly discuss. Ultimately, most issues we face are rooted in a lack of adequate statistical pedagogy as methods classes and statistics textbooks can be seen as the ultimate locus of many practices that are worth questioning. A case in point is the newest generation of corpus linguistics methods textbooks, all of which thoroughly endorse significance tests even though it is next-to-nigh impossible to apply such tests to corpora without violating the independence assumption. Finally, I will argue that Bayesian statistics — although clearly no panacea — provides opportunities for us to free ourselves from deeply engrained statistical rituals.