

What can historical treebanks teach us about noun phrase semantics?

Alexandra Simonenko

*Ghent University*

In this talk, I will discuss three case studies in which historical treebanks are shown to open up new perspectives on long standing puzzles in the semantics and morphosyntax of noun phrases. The first and second case studies are concerned with the widely assumed evolutionary steps from a demonstrative to a strong definite determiner and from a strong definite to a weak definite determiner, respectively (Simonenko & Carlier 2020, Simonenko & Carlier in prep.). The third study focuses on the comparative evolution of adnominal possessives in Romance languages (Simonenko & Carlier 2022). By discussing these three cases, I hope to illustrate the "double nature" of historical treebanks as, on the one hand, a quasi-experimental environment which provides time-indexed quantitative data for testing predictions made by the formal models of the noun phrase, and, on the other hand, as a collection of patterns which challenge -- and need to be accommodated by -- the formal models. Relatedly, I will discuss how treebanks can contribute to our understanding of the notion of grammaticalization.