

ALT News No. 52

December 2013

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1. Message from the president

As the year of ALT10 draws to a close it's appropriate to reflect on the wider intellectual surroundings of the Leipzig meeting and their implications for typology. The conference was preceded by the ICHL meeting and associated workshops in Oslo, an occasion that made clear to me just how much - and how much more than presently realized - typology and historical linguistics have to contribute to each other, when the contribution includes full-fledged expertise on both sides. Elementary, one might think, but ... at least in North America and Europe, linguistics programs in language departments, and entire language programs and departments, have been targets of choice in budget-cutting for the last two decades. As one result we're rapidly running out of experts and expertise on most language families. I think this is a grave concern for typologists, as accessing historical information requires bibliographical knowledge, reading knowledge of less and less widely taught older languages, and other special expertise. (Philological expertise, to use a word that causes most deans to wield the hatchet by reflex.) Sure, proper on-line historical grammars and etymological dictionaries with links to the daughter reflexes, the literature, the reviews, etc. would make a lot of the specialized knowledge accessible to typologists and others. But who's going to prepare and maintain those tools? Not only is an information vacuum forming, but whole traditions of knowledge are slipping into extinction. On our watch. Speak up.

Back to the ALT 10 penumbra. The conference and workshops were immediately preceded by a first-rate conference on phonological typology organized by Larry Hyman and Frans Plank and held in Oxford. Participating were a large number of the biggest names in phonology presenting cutting-edge work that, without generally being billed as typology, were fully typological in my opinion and worth our close attention. It seems to me that we could easily attract a large critical mass of phonologists to ALT meetings by encouraging just a couple of workshops, panels, or para-ALT conferences at future meetings. The potential is definitely there.

I'll take the opportunity to repeat some of the gist of my introduction to the Leipzig meeting, a venue I likened to Camelot. The Linguistics Department of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, under Bernard Comrie's directorship, has in my opinion done more than any other development or institution in the entire history of linguistics to further the interests and visibility of typology, bring typology and fieldwork together meaningfully, improve the training and job prospects of young linguists with typological interests, and foster collaborative interaction between linguists from around the world. The Institute has been a crossroads and its library is one of the world's wonders for linguists of all subfields, offering unequalled resources, expert librarians, and a workspace in which, sooner or later, you'd run into just about any linguist from just about anywhere. (My own university has one of the world's great libraries, including in linguistics and languages, but I myself often go to Leipzig to work in the EVA library for efficient, thorough cross-linguistic research.) The importance of these two gems, the department (with

its policy of fostering many visitors) and the library, can't be overstated and needs to be emphasized explicitly in public discourse by typologists. Speak up.

Best wishes to all for happy (winter or summer, as the case may be) holidays and a productive and rewarding 2014!

Johanna Nichols

2. ALT10 in Leipzig

2.1. Thanks

We thank the organizing team of ALT10 in Leipzig for an extremely successful and well-organized conference. With 155 speakers and a total of 265 registered participants, the conference was a great success. We also thank the organizers of the eight adjacent workshops, which contributed greatly to the attractiveness of the conference.

ALT is grateful to:

- The organizing committee: Martin Haspelmath (co-chair), Frank Seifart (co-chair), Claudia Schmidt, Heriberto Avelino, Bernard Comrie, David Gil and Barbara Stiebels.
- The program committee: Stephen Matthews (chair), Hilary Chappell, Bernard Comrie, Michael Daniel, Mark Donohue and Martin Haspelmath.
- Our sponsors: We thank de Gruyter Mouton for sponsoring the Gabelentz award and donating books for the student assistants, and John Benjamins Publishers for sponsoring the welcome reception.

2.2. Report on the business meeting in Leipzig

2.2.1. Membership

	Regular	Student	Total
2007:	387	65	452
2008:	376	60	436
2009:	319	56	375
2010:	406	70	476
2011:	313	53	366
2012:	356	52	408
Aug 2013:	303	48	351
Dec 2013:	354	57	411

After a rise in 2012 - possibly a late effect of the conference in 2011 - membership numbers dropped off again in 2013. The provisional figures for 2014 look a bit better. The drop in numbers may be due to the problems members experience when renewing their membership via Rhenus (the logistics company used by de Gruyter Mouton). These problems remain, as also reflected in the membership poll, in spite of frequent attempts by ALT to resolve them. We will have to try a different approach, possibly taking distribution in our own hands, even if that will be a huge logistical challenge.

2.2.2. Financial report

Date	Action	Sum	Balance (Euro)
2011 (Pre-ALT9)			+25.811,63
April-July (recurrent)	ALT9 costs Banking costs	-10.736,52 -35,23	+15.075,11 +15.039,88
2012			+15.039,88
Jan 06 (recurrent)	Bank interest Banking costs	+171,83 -33,11	+15.211,71 +15.178,60
Feb 17	Membership	+3.501,00	+18.679,60
Feb 29	Legal help	-100,00	+18.579,60
May 09	Support SWL5	-1012,10	+17.567,50
May 22	Board & EC meeting	-838,00	+16.729,50
2013			+16.729,50
Jan 02 (recurrent)	Bank interest Banking costs	+129,42 -24,74	+16.858,92 +16.834,18
Feb 19	Legal help	-100,00	+16.734,18
Feb 19	Survey costs	-75,00	+16.659,18
Mar 01	Membership	+3.924,00	+20.583,18
Apr 29	Scholarships	-3.833,49	+16.749,69
June 14	Scholarships	-520,00	+16.229,69
July 24	Scholarship	-250,00	+15.979,69
July 12	Award	-488,00	+15.491,29
Estimates for the coming years:			
- Membership 2013		+3500	
- Membership 2014		+3500	
- Memorial volume Anna Siewierska		-3000	
- Awards 2015		-2500	
Estimated pre-ALT11 balance		approx. 17.000	

2.2.3. Membership poll

The results of the membership poll were discussed at the end of the business meeting. See section 5 below for a full report.

3. Upcoming ALT conferences

3.1. ALT11 in Albuquerque

ALT11 will be held at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, organized by Joan Bybee, Bill Croft, Ian Maddieson and others.

The conference dates are August 1-3, 2015. Please note that the LSA Institute will be held at the University of Chicago, July 6-31, 2015.

A first call for papers will be sent in the first half of 2014.

3.2. Call for bids for ALT12

We are launching a call for bids for the organization of ALT12 in 2017. As agreed in 2008, conferences will follow the cycle "Europe, America, Other". After ALT10 in Leipzig and ALT11 in Albuquerque, ALT12 will be held outside Europe or (North or Latin) America.

We would like to invite any department interested in making a bid for the 2017 ALT conference to do so by contacting the president at [<johanna@berkeley.edu>](mailto:johanna@berkeley.edu) by February 15th 2014. To help the executive committee in considering bids, we ask you to answer the questions below, which cover basic information about the venue and its infrastructure. The Executive Committee will aim to reach a decision by March 15th.

1. Organizing committee

Proposed members of the local organizing committee
Availability of administrative support

2. Location

Availability of conference halls of various sizes
Availability, cost and accessibility of hotels, student accommodation
Access by local public transport
Proximity to airports, train stations etc.

3. Timing

Preferred timing, and alternatives, if available

Also depends on:

- availability of conference halls, hotels etc
- combinations with other workshops, conferences etc in the area
- avoiding clashes with other conferences, schools etc, e.g. LSA institute, ICHL

4. Finances

- Potential funding sources (research councils, university funding, other sponsors)
- Options for offering scholarships to students & scholars from developing countries

5. Other points

- Any proposals for adjacent workshops?
- Any other ideas to make the conference attractive to potential participants (inside and outside ALT)?

4. ALT officers

4.1. Elections

The election ballots have been counted, and the full slate has been accepted. The new officers' term starts on January 1st 2014.

We thank the outgoing members of the executive committee, Pattie Epps, Nick Evans and Volker Gast, and we welcome the new members, Felix Ameka, Isabelle Brill and Keren Rice.

We also welcome Brigitte Pakendorf, Masha Polinsky, Mark Van de Velde and Fernando Zuñiga as associate editors of *Linguistic Typology*, and we thank outgoing associate editors Joan Bybee, Guglielmo Cinque and Martine Vanhove.

4.2. Officers

President

Johanna Nichols (Berkeley)

Editor

Frans Plank (Konstanz)

Secretary-Treasurer

Jean-Christophe Verstraete (Leuven)

Executive committee

Felix Ameka (Leiden)

Isabelle Brill (Paris)

Kees Hengeveld (Amsterdam)

Ritsuko Kikusawa (Osaka)

Bill McGregor (Aarhus)

Keren Rice (Toronto)

Associate editors

Bill Croft (Albuquerque)

Larry Hyman (Berkeley)

Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm (Stockholm)

Ian Maddieson (Albuquerque)

Marianne Mithun (Santa Barbara)

Brigitte Pakendorf (Lyon)

Masha Polinsky (Harvard)

Jae Jung Song (Dunedin)

Mark Van de Velde (Paris)

Fernando Zuñiga (Bern)

5. Members' poll

The last part of the business meeting in Leipzig was devoted to a discussion of the survey of ALT members, which we ran in February-March 2013. In this section we summarize the results of the survey, and we list a few points that are currently being discussed in the executive committee.

5.1. Respondent profile

We asked respondents to identify the year of their PhD (if applicable) and their experience with ALT.

The respondent profile was as follows:

- 183 respondents
- evenly distributed over age groups
- experience with conferences (60 %), submitting to / reviewing for Linguistic Typology (40 %), committees (30 %), awards (20 %)

→ The survey is fairly representative.

5.2. Views on typology

We asked respondents to describe their main interests in typology by choosing domains from a list.

The following ranking emerged:

- Typology & linguistic theory (120)
- Typology & field/documentation work (103)
- Typology & linguistic history/evolution (96)
- Sample-based cross-linguistic work (77)
- Typology & cognition (55)
- Quantitative / computational typology (33)

→ This ranking of interests is more diverse than what is reflected in ALT's current mission statement.

5.3. Evaluation of ALT functions

5.3.1. Logistics

We asked respondents how they wanted to pay their annual dues. There was an overwhelming preference for secure on-line payment, an option that is not currently offered by Rhenus logistics (the logistics company used by de Gruyter Mouton for handling subscriptions and membership).

→ This is an absolute priority for ALT members.

5.3.2. Ranking of scientific activities

We asked respondents to rank ALT's activities by importance.

The following ranking emerged:

- Journal (80 % high importance)
- Conferences (55 % high importance)
- Awards (30 % high importance)

5.3.3. Conferences

Respondents were:

- Clearly positive about how the conferences reflect their interests and current developments in the field
- Mainly neutral about acceptance standards

→ Members are generally happy with the conferences.

5.3.4. Journal

Respondents were:

- Clearly positive about how the journal reflects their interests and current developments in the field
- The price of the journal had a more mixed evaluation, and some respondents called for open access.

→ Members are generally happy with the content and quality of the journal, but there are some worries about its price.

5.4. New suggestions

We asked respondents to evaluate a number of suggestions for future actions. Here we only list those suggestions that attracted over 50 % 'yes' votes (as opposed to 'no' and 'neutral').

5.4.1. Conferences

- Organization of adjacent (extra-program) workshops and training sessions on current issues in typology
- Open calls for program committee membership
- Plenary talks by leading researchers from outside typology but with potential interest for typology

5.4.2. Journal

- Open calls for responses to target articles
- Open calls for special issues
- 4 issues per year

Note: Moving to 4 issues per year is one of the factors that could get LT into ISI. Respondents were clearly in favour of this option if it is relevant to obtaining an impact factor and increasing prestige, regardless of the price increase.

5.4.3. Other initiatives

Most of the initiatives listed were not seen as priorities (e.g. open executive committee meetings, office hours, outreach activities), except for the organization of summer schools in current typological subfields.

5.5. Points for action

5.5.1. Plans

We take the following points for action from the survey.

Logistics:

- Negotiate or develop a secure on-line system for membership payment and management

Conferences:

- Consider open calls for program committees
- Consider extra-program workshops & training sessions
- Consider summer schools (if we have volunteers to organize or host them)

Journal:

- Consider open calls for responses to target articles and special issues
- Consider moving to 4 issues per year (and ISI inclusion)

Organization:

- Consider more bottom-up organization (open calls for nominations for officer positions, program committees etc.)
- Re-consider mission statement in relation to members' current understanding of the field

5.5.2. Implementation

Implementation will take some time, but the following points are currently being addressed. Other points will be addressed as they come up on ALT's calendar.

- Bottom-up organization: We asked members to submit nominations for the new officer positions to the nominating committee. The nominating committee received six (self-)nominations for this round, which is good, but still shows some room for more member involvement.
- Secure on-line system for membership payment and management: de Gruyter Mouton and Rhenus logistics are currently unable to provide us with this, so we will have to look into other options. One is to

take all aspects of membership admin into our own hands, but this requires more manpower than we currently have. The executive committee is looking into the options.