Workshop:

Theorizing and generalizing in fieldwork-driven language research

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This workshop will be open to any questions participants have about their research. To launch the discussion, however, we will focus on two related aspects of the research process that are not often discussed in doctoral training in the language sciences: generalizing and theorizing.

- Generalizing: The idea that 'one cannot generalize' from case studies is regularly accepted as a fact in linguistic research. The first purpose of this workshop will be to question this assumption. Is it always true? And if one can never generalize from case studies, what might be the societal or intellectual impact of our qualitative research? We will examine different ways of understanding 'generalizing'. We will also discuss when and why we might want to adopt or avoid the discourse of generalizing altogether. The aim is not only to prepare oneself to answer a kind of criticism often addressed to qualitative research, but also to clarify the purpose of one's work.

- Theorizing: A major challenge for field researchers is to move from richly textured experiences which are diverse, subjective and piecemeal to the construction of a coherent and meaningful image of the field that matters to its actors, to decision-makers or to other researchers. In this part of the workshop, we will ask ourselves: When and how should we theorize? Should we wait until the observations are completed, or could it be interesting to theorize even prior to entering the field? Different strategies for theorizing will also be discussed, as will the reasons why it might be important to pay closer attention to our own theorizing processes.

The workshop will be interactive, focusing on the discussion of practical problems. Time permitting, we will also consider the role of writing in theorizing and generalizing. At the end of the workshop, a bibliography for further exploration of these questions will be made available.