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Computational Historical Linguistics

The last few years have seen a wave of new computational phylogenetic approaches entering historical linguistics. The application of these computational methods to linguistics is perhaps “one of the most vibrant contemporary streams of comparative linguistics” (Kaplan and Salmons 2010:194). Whilst historical linguistics is not unfamiliar with computational methods, these new methods go far beyond the simplistic and flawed analyses of lexicostatistics or glottochronology (Greenhill and Gray 2009). The new approaches have great potential for illuminating long-standing questions about language subgrouping and human prehistory (e.g. Gray et al. 2009, Greenhill & Gray 2009, Reesink et al. 2009), for exploring how different aspects of languages change and evolve over time (e.g., Greenhill et al. 2010), and for investigating the co-evolution of languages and cultures (e.g. Jordan et al. 2009). The participants in this workshop will present some of these novel approaches, and show what these methods have to offer the field of historical linguistics.