

## Recognizing the rules of language patterns

The collaborative research project “patterns” is relying on interdisciplinarity to achieve its research aims

Painters work with colour samples, seamstresses with dressmaking patterns, lawyers with specimen contracts – all of which are kinds of patterns for work to be carried out later. Beyond these special areas we all use patterns, usually without being aware of it - namely in language. Where we find language patterns, what role they play in language learning or in everyday use, how patterns come about, how they change, and at which levels they occur - these are of some of the many questions occupying the collaborative project “Patterns: linguistic creativity and variation in synchrony and diachrony”.

The project was founded in 2019 by Prof. Dr. Sabine Arndt-Lappe (English Studies), Prof. Dr. Natalia Filatkina, Prof. Dr. Claudine Moulin (German Studies) and Prof. Dr. Andre Klump (Romance Studies). Colleagues from Linguistics and Communication Studies as well as from other, related disciplines at Trier University are also involved. The project is administered by the Trier Center for Language and Communication (TCLC).

In the world of work, patterns serve as templates to accelerate, simplify or standardize a particular procedure. Patterns in language are a great deal less accessible, and many areas have yet to be explained scientifically. Especially when the object under investigation is defined so comprehensively as in the collaborative project. As the project description says, “The aim is, on the basis of a quite deliberately broad-based pattern concept and in interdisciplinary co-operation, to conduct extensive empirical research beyond established disciplinary boundaries into linguistic patterns and at the same time to develop an applicable theory of linguistic patterning”.

Language patterns appear at various different levels. The project members point to Angela Merkel’s statement, “Wir schaffen das!” (“We can do it!”) as a prime example at the level of sentence structure. They say that her remark, in either identical or modified form (“Wir schaffen das nicht.” – “We won’t be able to do it.”- “Wir schaffen das?” – “Will we be able to do it?”), has found a place as a syntactic pattern in communication. At the word level “Brexit” still serves as a pattern for numerous linguistic variations such as “Grexit”.

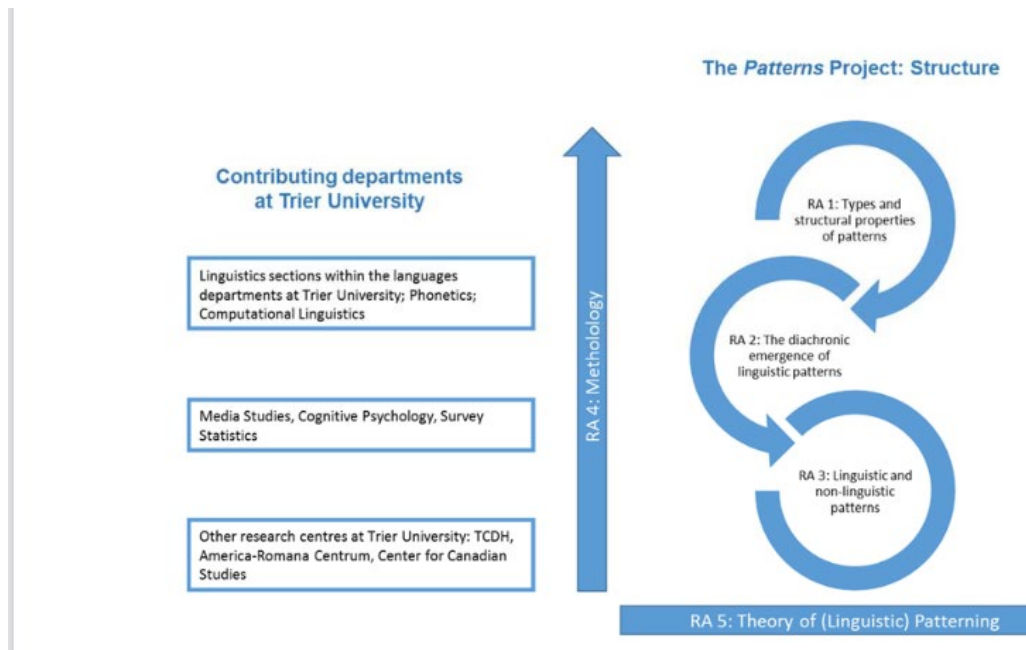
Patterns can also be found in discourses and texts which can integrate non-linguistic elements such as layout and illustrations. Thus, in a working session members of the collaborative project examined patterns of language in the current Corona-discourse in various language areas and application contexts. Patterns are usually recognized subconsciously and help form or understand emerging combinations of words, sentences or other constructions.

“Language is a highly complex system and a very dynamic process. We want to identify the regularity of these processes in language,” are the words project-coordinator Lina Baldus uses to describe the central aim of the research. At the same time each of the disciplines involved has its own exciting initial questions. Milena Belosevic, a member of the Department of German Studies, has for example focused on patterns of argumentation and examined what effects they trigger where trust in refugees is concerned.

In accordance with the deliberately broad-based approach, interdisciplinarity is so-to-speak the project’s trademark. Linguistic, media-science or psychological questions can be dealt with based on large amounts of data through co-operation with Computational Linguistics, the Digital Humanities, Cognitive Psychology and Social Statistics. Moreover, there exists a close co-operation with the project “Mining and Modeling” Text (MiMoText cf. p. 23 in this volume) that is co-ordinated by the Trier Center for Digital Humanities (TCDH).

A further component of the project is junior staff development. Thus, the project not only promotes the active participation of young academics in the collaborative research, but over and above this, maintains an active junior academic network with colloquia and workshops for their (further) development. Students are likewise included when, for instance final dissertations and interdisciplinary seminars share a common theme.

The Corona Pandemic has disrupted the project’s workflow. Working sessions have had to be held in virtual space, guest lectures and workshops have had to be canceled or postponed or have taken place as video-conferences. “All the same, we have still managed to get started and have already initiated a number of things,” says Lina Baldus as she looks back on a successful initial phase.




---

## The Joint Research Project

**Title:** Patterns. Linguistic Creativity and Variation in Synchrony and Diachrony

**Support:** The project is administered by the Trier Center for Language and Communication (TCLC) at the university's Faculty II under the joint direction of Prof. Dr. Sabine-Arndt-Lappe (English Studies) and Dr. Sören Stumpf (German studies, since November 2020), who are also joint spokespersons, Prof. Dr. Andre Klump (Romance Studies) Prof. Dr. Claudine Moulin (German Studies, TCDH) and Prof. Dr. Christian Nuernbergk (Media Studies, since November 2020).

### Project participants:

**Linguistics:** English Studies, German Studies, Yiddish Studies, Romance Studies, Slavic Studies, Computational Linguistics, Digital Humanities, Phonetics

**Media Studies:** Digital and Audio-Visual Media, Media, Communication and PR

**Psychology:** Cognitive Psychology

**Social Statistics:** Survey Statistics

## **Collaborative project participants on research aims from their subject's perspective**

“I am fascinated by words, because how they are pronounced, written or understood tells us a lot about how the vast network in our heads works, in which our linguistic knowledge is organized. For instance, the way someone pronounces a word sometimes allows us to draw conclusions as to what other words the word in question is cross-linked. And how we understand words depends substantially on what other words in the network we can relate them to. That language in use is characterized by patterning reflects the organisation of linguistic knowledge in human cognition.”

**Prof. Dr. Sabine Arndt-Lappe, English Studies, spokesperson of the collaborative project**

“From the point of view of Phonetics, language and speech are full of patterns. The creation of linguistic patterns distinguishes for instance incomprehensible jabbering from meaningful language; it is only by assigning sounds to particular patterns that we understand language even under unfavorable acoustic conditions; ultimately it is individual vocal-linguistic behaviour patterns which allow us to compare voices and recognize speakers.”

**Prof. Dr. Angelika Braun, Phonetik**

“From the point of view of Romance Linguistics, the topic of “patterns” is very interesting, because structural and communicative patterns exist across the Romance languages, which have evolved from Latin. Many of them show a high frequency of use and are series-forming. Linguistic analyses of French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian and of the Romance-based Creoles cast light not only on linguistic patterns as a static reference

group but also on their formal variability in private and public language use.”

**Prof. Dr. Andre Klump, Romance Linguistics**

“The linguistic-historical dimension is particularly exciting where patterning is concerned, as it allows us to – among other things – examine the emergence, distribution and consolidation of patterns on very different linguistic levels. Here the interdisciplinary dialogue between the various disciplines involved in the collaborative project provides a unique “laboratory situation” which - extending across epochs, languages and even media, for instance in the field of text-image interaction - , allows us to gain new insights.”

**Prof. Dr. Claudine Moulin, German Studies**

“From the perspective of media and communication science, patterns are interesting in a variety of ways. A new area of application is pattern recognition in the digital public realm. Besides the linguistic patterns, we are interested above all in constellations in which content spreads, even across several channels, (patterns of diffusion) and what dynamics exist over time from a network perspective (participating networks). Here, depending on the political orientation, we should assume dissonance in the narratives on one and the same topic, which makes itself felt in the style of communication and the tonality employed by those disseminating the content.”

**Prof. Dr. Christian Neuerbergk, Media Science**

“It is particularly interesting that linguistic patterns by no means stand in the way of a creative and humorous use of language. Thus, we find in language use numerous original playful variations on linguistic patterns

that can only be understood (properly) when the recipients are familiar with the conventionalized original item and are aware of it at the time (e.g., “Knock, knock Gnocchi on Heavens Door” - the headline on an advertising poster for a grocery delivery service).”

**Dr. Sören Stumpf, German Studies: project spokesman**