

# COMPUTING IN VARIATIONIST LINGUISTICS AND THE HUMANITIES

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## ABSTRACT (200 WORDS)

What might the various humanities disciplines learn from each other in the use of computational techniques? After surveying a few sample illustrations across the humanities, this paper focuses on linguistics as an ‘example humanities discipline’, to consider what lessons there may be in both the successes and teething troubles of applying computational approaches to language data. These experiences illustrate the key issues of whether, and which, computational methods might be transferable between disciplines; and when, on the contrary, more ‘tailor-made’ methods might be called for. I consider what core methodological principles might guide the endeavour to put numbers on the inherently non-numerical data typical to the humanities, addressing issues of relative significance, weighting, universality, and validation. Once meaningfully ‘encoded’ in this way, the data are opened up to further processing by a range of ‘off-the-peg’ computational methods: both classical statistical analyses and the increasingly popular phylogenetic methods, particularly those of the latest *network* type. To close, I survey some objections typically heard from colleagues less ‘computationally inclined’, and offer suggestions of how to address them: not least by making the most of the full flexibility and power of computational techniques, to ‘sell’ their utility to often innately sceptical humanities disciplines.