

# INSTITUTE OF COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

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## Major Research Areas

The research policy of the Institute of Comparative Linguistics is based on principles similar to those of international institutions working in the field: retrospective research in languages and the dominating method of internal and external reconstruction; philology, understood as text interpretation in the broad perspective of linguistics and cultural history. Another strand of our research concerns evaluating academic tools that the Institute has developed so far (corpora of ancient and modern languages) and providing access to the sources administered by the Institute. This makes our Institute the only research and training institution with such a profile in the Czech Republic (Austria has four such institutions, Germany five).

Research revolves around affinity among languages (genetic relationships), drawing on the fact that all languages in a family share certain features in the different subsystems. These similarities are numerous as well as deeply systemic, and they can only be reliably explained as having the same genetic origin and developing from a single source (called *proto-language*; in our case, Proto-Indo-European or Proto-Semitic). The basic theoretical principles are the theory of language change, reconstructability of the process of the change, and change typology.

It is not to be forgotten that Czech is an Indo-European language; therefore, comparative linguistics is vital for exploring also our mother tongue. At the same time, the Institute of Comparative Linguistics is not, and cannot be, an institution specializing in Czech or Slavonic studies, and vice versa.

### **Profiling Projects**

The Institute's major projects revolve around the main topics constituting our research profile explained above. Indo-European Heritage in Czech is our project related to comparative linguistics; as part of the CU FA research plan entitled Language as a Human Activity, Its Product and Factor, the project first explores relevant research methods, seeking to define the approach to reconstruction and comparison, and then aspires to apply these methods to the material of various languages, including Czech.

Related to corpus linguistics, which is the basic instrument of philological research, the project Oriens Electronicus was conducted as part of the Czech National Corpus and Corpora of Other Languages research plan. The objective was to develop or expand several corpora of ancient as well as modern languages of the Near East (Arabic, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hittite, Old Persian and others). Researchers then use these corpora to produce linguistic studies of each of the languages.

Members of our Institute are also involved in the Prague Arabic Dependency Treebank, a project led by the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University.

From a broader perspective of the cultural history of the Near East (though firmly based in philology), the Institute furthermore contributes to a project mapping the literatures of the Ancient Near East.

### **Major Publication Projects**

Since 2006, members of our Institute have published twelve monographs devoted to various aspects of comparative linguistics and philology, especially relating to the ancient languages of the Near East. Our publishing activities cover basic research methods of comparative linguistics as well as the electronic corpora of Near Eastern languages which the Institute has developed.

Since 1997, the Institute has been publishing an annual journal, *Chatreššar*. Formerly published in Czech, the journal comprised contributions by members of the Institute; in 2007 it became an international academic journal on comparative linguistics and especially the ancient languages of the Near East. Our partners in publishing this journal include universities in Frankfurt, Vienna, Cambridge and Krakow.

### **National and International Partner Institutions**

The Institute of Comparative Linguistics enjoys a long-term partnership with the Institut für Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft at the J. W. Goethe Universität in Frankfurt am Main. Our co-operation involves several research projects and several conferences; the next conference is planned for 2012. Our major joint project is TITUS (Thesaurus Indogermanischer Texte und Sprachmaterialien). Other close foreign partners include the Institut für Sprachwissenschaft at the University of Vienna, the Department of Afro-Asian Linguistics at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and St. John's College, Cambridge University.

Locally, our staff are involved in the *Prague Arabic Dependency Treebank* project managed by the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, CU.



### **Major Conferences and Events**

The Institute is a regular organizer and co-organizer of international conferences, primarily specializing in corpus linguistics applying to ancient languages (Indo-European and Semitic, in particular). The most recent conference held in Prague was titled *Electronic Corpora of Ancient Languages* (2007), while a similar one is scheduled for Prague in 2012.