

Secondary Publication



De Rentiis, Dina

Mind over meaning and system : on Chresiology

Date of secondary publication: 18.09.2026

Version of Record (Published Version), Article

Persistent identifier: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-117258x

Primary publication

De Rentiis, Dina (2024): Mind over meaning and system : on Chresiology, in: Culture, Theory and Critique, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 330–342, doi: 10.1080/14735784.2026.2635943.

Legal Notice

This work is protected by copyright and/or the indication of a licence. You are free to use this work in any way permitted by the copyright and/or the licence that applies to your usage. For other uses, you must obtain permission from the rights-holders.

This document is made available under a Creative Commons license.



The license information is available online:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Mind over meaning and system – on Chresiology

Dina De Rentiis 

Humanities, University of Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces Chresiology, a meta-theoretical framework that redefines concept-driven research by prioritising relational dynamics over determinations of meaning and system allocations. Chresiology shifts focus from asking first ‘What does this concept (or term, sign, symbol) mean?’ or ‘Where does it fit?’ to exploring first ‘How does it connect and relate to others?’. The paper shows how Chresiology provides a scalable framework for advancing interdisciplinary and theoretical inquiry. By temporarily suspending predefined meanings and emphasising use over meaning and system, Chresiology offers a flexible methodology adaptable to both small-scale manual analyses and large-scale computational research. The framework’s core relational tools – vectors, Conditional Possibilities (CPs), and tags – enable researchers to uncover connections and patterns across disciplines, fostering innovative pathways for interdisciplinary analysis. Practical applications, including the exploration of the concepts of ‘trace’ and ‘behaviour’, illustrate its ability to challenge disciplinary boundaries and illuminate previously unrecognised relationships.

KEYWORDS

Metatheory; meaning; system

1. Introduction

This article introduces a new meta-theoretical framework, Chresiology, designed to redefine concept-driven research by prioritising relations and connections over meaning and system allocation. The use of ‘relations’ and ‘connections’ in this article is explained in section 2. ‘Meaning and system allocation’ here refer to the interlocking processes by which conceptual meanings become stabilised within disciplinary or theoretical systems. In this framework, ‘meaning’ and ‘system’ are understood as co-dependent operations: meanings gain stability only through their allocation within systems, and systems, in turn, reproduce themselves by regulating meanings. Chresiology does not deny the importance of meaning or system but temporarily suspends their primacy, allowing analysis to focus on how concepts operate within dynamic relational networks.

The label *Chresiology* derives from the Greek *χρησις* (*chresis*), which translates to ‘use’, ‘practice’, and ‘familiarity’. This etymology reflects the framework’s emphasis on use rather than on meaning. When applied to signs and symbols, the term ‘use’

CONTACT Dina De Rentiis  romlit1@uni-bamberg.de

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

in Chresiology does not invoke philosophical accounts of linguistic practice – such as Wittgenstein’s rule-governed language games (Wittgenstein 1971) or Austin’s theory of speech acts and performative utterances (Austin 1962) – but designates any occurrence of entities recognised as linguistic signs or symbols within existing definitions of these terms.

Chresiology is meta-theoretical in scope because it does not constitute a theory of any specific phenomenon but offers a framework for comparing, generating, re-organising, and applying theories themselves. It can be employed both as an exploratory method and as a reflective lens for disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge formation. Chresiology builds on and complements other relational and post-structural approaches that emphasise situated meaning and dynamic interconnection. For example, it shares with Karen Barad’s agential realism the view that entities are not pre-given (Barad 2007); with Actor-Network Theory (e.g. Callon 1984; Latour 1996; Law 1992) a commitment to tracing associations across heterogeneous actors and systems; and with relational content analysis (e.g. Carley 1994; Knoke 2020; Lazer 2011) an attention to the structures that emerge through co-occurring meanings or attributes. However, Chresiology shifts the analytic focus away from stable ontologies or discursive reproduction and toward temporarily suspending determinations of meaning and system allocation in order to map potential conceptual pathways. In this sense, it offers a complementary perspective on relational knowledge construction, aimed at revealing not only what is said or connected, but what could be connected under alternate conditions. As section 6 shows, Chresiology is designed to complement, not to supplant meta-theories such as hermeneutics, structuralism, deconstruction, and discourse analysis.¹

A brief analogy may clarify the shift in focus: Chresiology treats signs like photons and electrons that exhibit particle or wave properties depending on experimental circumstances, emphasising their behaviour when used in dynamic assemblies. Just as photons behave differently according to the experimental setup, signs are treated dynamically in Chresiology, enabling the discovery of new relational pathways that transcend static classifications. Chresiology achieves this through a small set of relational tools – vectors, conditional possibilities (CPs), and tags – which are introduced in sections 2 and 3.

By introducing Chresiology, this article pursues two interrelated aims: reorienting conceptual analysis and creating new analytical possibilities for disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The article is composed of two main parts. Sections 2–5 outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of Chresiology, detailing its relational principles and operational tools and demonstrating their application through selected examples. Sections 6–9 position Chresiology in dialogue with established meta-theoretical frameworks. They highlight its continuities and distinct contributions to critical and relational thought. They also reflect on potential challenges and prospects for future implementation, particularly in interdisciplinary and digital contexts.

¹Chresiology is likewise conceived to support and complement relational approaches such as relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997; 2017; Dépelteau 2018; Liang and Liu 2018), theories of natureculture (e.g. Blackman and Featherstone 2010; Venn 2010; 2000; Haraway 2016), and intersectionality theory (Haschemi Yekani 2022; Bordalejo and Risam 2020; Carbado et al. 2013; Crenshaw 2017; 1997; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; McCall 2005). The specific ways in which Chresiology contributes to these frameworks – as a meta-framework for mapping their relational assumptions – will be developed in forthcoming studies.

2. Theory and methodology

At its core, Chresiology represents a fundamental shift in focus – from asking first ‘What does this mean?’ or ‘Where does this fit?’ to exploring first ‘How does it – whatever it is – connect?’.

This methodological suspension of meaning allows the researcher to study how signs and symbols move between contexts and generate combinations. Chresiology therefore reframes conceptual analysis as exploratory rather than classificatory practice – an intermediate phase of inquiry in which relations and connections can be detected before being re-inscribed into systems of meaning (a practical example is given in the next section).

The Chresiological process begins with an entity, that is, anything that can be defined, delimited, or labelled within its context of use. Entities may be linguistic, visual, material, or procedural, and their definitions are always provisional: what matters is not what an entity is but how it operates within and across systems.

At the operational level, Chresiology relies on vectors – dynamic aggregations of attested definitions, meaning attributions, and system mappings, derived from use rather than from validity or justifiability (see section 3). In Chresiology, a vector connects an entity – any identifiable object, term, or practice – and a limit point – ideal only in geometric sense, indicating direction without implying completion. The vector’s function is not to reach that point, but to register the distribution of recorded meaning determinations (for example, definitions, descriptions, explanations) and system allocations (for example, allocations within taxonomies, systems of thought) as they align with that limit point. Vectors can aggregate instances of signs and non-signs – that is, entities that are not produced or taken up as signs (see section 7) – provided these uses can be identified and related. What defines a vector is not the type of item it contains but the distribution of uses it represents.

Importantly, in vector construction, concepts are not treated as identical to terms. Instead, the uses of terms such as French or English ‘trace’, English ‘mark’, or German ‘Spur’ serve as entry points for building a vector. The guiding principle is to include terms whenever possible but to exclude them when necessary, ensuring that only terms whose uses align in meaning determination, system allocation, or contextual function are included. Such alignments are treated as features within vector construction.

Overlaps between vectors based on shared features then generate conditional possibilities (CPs) – potentialities that arise when two or more vectors share conditions, as when [trace] and [behaviour] both fulfil the condition of ‘something that follows or results from a cause’ (see section 3).

In practice, quantitative or distributional indicators – such as frequency, duration, or disciplinary reach – may be noted to express how strongly certain alignments recur across uses. This weighting is heuristic rather than truth-assigning: in Chresiology, it functions as a qualitative device for identifying which alignments, commonalities, or overlaps warrant analytical attention, supporting interpretation rather than generating quantitative data.

Tags and hashtags operationalise relations by linking research objects to vectors and making relational connections explicit without fixing meaning. A general tag functions as an abstract connector; a hashtag denotes its visible, searchable form in digital or data-driven environments. The distinction matters mainly in practice: the same relational logic applies whether tagging is manual or computational.

Consider the tag #repurposing. When applied to a fork in *The Little Mermaid* or to Marcel Duchamp's urinal, it connects each object to the [behaviour] vector through the shared condition of using an artefact in a new way. The tag does not define the object's meaning; it signals a relation between practices. In the same manner, #trace can connect a fingerprint, a linguistic remnant, and a philosophical concept of absence, revealing how different disciplines converge on the idea of residual presence. Tags thus allow comparison across heterogeneous materials, bridge manual and computational analysis, and provide a minimal notation system for mapping relations without predetermining their meaning.

In this paper, the terms 'relation' and 'connection' are themselves used as Chresiological hashtags (#relation, #connection). Each refers not to a fixed theoretical concept but to an aggregate of overlapping definitions of 'relation' and 'connection' across relevant disciplinary traditions. This tagging marks that the framework treats these notions as dynamic entities whose meanings emerge through their intersections.

3. Relational tools in practice

To illustrate how Chresiology functions in practice, this section explores the relationship between the terms 'trace' and 'behaviour'. These terms are not central to Chresiology itself but serve as illustrative examples; any pair of terms could equally demonstrate how vectors and conditional possibilities (CPs) are constructed and applied. The choice of 'trace' and 'behaviour' is simply pragmatic: both terms are widely used across disciplines. This makes them well suited to showing readers working in different contexts how overlaps between uses can be identified and mapped.

The term 'trace' spans archaeology (evidence of past activity), psychoanalysis (imprints in the unconscious), forensic science (physical evidence), linguistics (syntactic placeholders), computer science (operation logs), and philosophy (Derrida's *différance*). Across these disciplines, the use of 'trace' refers to something left behind as the result of a process or action. Likewise, in psychology, biology, anthropology, and criminology, behaviour describes observable or recorded activity. The uses of 'trace' and 'behaviour' thus overlap in expressing the condition of something that follows or results from a cause.

This intersection generates a conditional possibility (CP): the potential to link the [trace] vector to any object that matches one of its meanings or system mappings, and to link objects that correspond to several such mappings with all of them rather than only one. CPs thus represent links between research objects and vectors. The capacity to connect research objects, signs, and symbols to the vectors [trace] and [behaviour] provides a foundation for comparative inquiry across disciplines – from physical footprints to symbolic residues.

In application, researchers collect uses, tag data (for example #trace, #behaviour), based on recorded meanings or system mappings, determine commonalities (for example features of use) and explore connections between the tagged objects. Identifying commonalities involves comparing the features and contexts of use across vectors to locate shared conditions that can justify treating them as related. Weighting can indicate how frequently certain relations appear, but qualitative assessment remains central.

For example, the conditional possibility to apply the tag #behaviour (CP2) and the conditional possibility to apply the tag #trace (CP1) provide a basis for research when the vectors [behaviour] and [traces] exhibit overlapping conditions. Each conditional possibility – #behaviour (CP2) and #trace (CP1) – represents a distinct scenario defined by its specific conditions. Within the confines of these individual conditions, CP2 and CP1 stand as independent and valid domains of potentiality. When these conditional domains converge or interact, they generate a third conditional possibility, CP21. The emergent conditional possibility CP21 embodies the synthesised potentiality resulting from the union of CP2 and CP1. Essentially, the interaction between CP2 and CP1, when conditions overlap, leads to the emergence of CP21, a distinct conditional possibility with its own set of conditions and implications.

Delineating overlapping conditions involves two tasks: identifying commonalities and establishing thresholds for overlaps. Not every overlap between vectors is analytically productive. Chresiology therefore uses thresholds – criteria for determining when shared features between vectors justify treating them as conditionally connected.

Thresholds secure rigour in a method that otherwise privileges openness and possibility. They serve three purposes: to distinguish coincidence from relevance, to manage uncertainty and vagueness, and to balance flexibility and precision.

Thresholds may be established quantitatively (for example, frequency or recurrence of shared features) or qualitatively (for example, consistency across disciplinary contexts). The key is transparency: researchers must state which criteria determine when a relation counts as an overlap. A connection between [trace] and [behaviour], for example, becomes significant not simply because the two terms co-occur, but because their uses share the condition of following from a cause in multiple, independent use cases.

This threshold-based approach removes the need for mathematical derivation. Instead of calculating CPs mechanically, Chresiology treats them as evaluative intervals – points at which conceptual potential becomes analytically actionable. Thresholds translate Chresiology's balance between openness and rigour into an operational rule.

4. Minimal case study: [imitatio Christi] and [imitatio auctorum]

To illustrate the Chresiological process and address scalability, let us turn briefly to the study of 'imitation' in philology and the history of religion. Traditionally, *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ) and *imitatio auctorum* (imitation of exemplary authors) were viewed as distinct phenomena, studied separately in history of religion and philology. This research consensus could be revised on the basis of a manually created and analysed corpus (e.g. De Rentiis 2018; 2012). The results were presented with established concepts and theories.

Constructing the vectors [imitatio Christi (CP3)] and [imitatio auctorum (CP4)], revealed e.g. an overlap centred on the shared feature of 'following footsteps', generating a relational pathway linking religious and rhetorical imitation (CP34). Focusing on this overlap enabled to re-examine frequently used expressions like 'to follow in someone's footsteps' (*sequi vestigia*) in texts such as Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* or Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* and Renaissance rhetorical manuals referencing Cicero. This analysis led to the transformative insight that religious and rhetorical imitation are historically and dynamically related, evolving over time to generate new meanings and systems.

5. Summary of the Chresiological process

The Chresiological process unfolds through an iterative cycle of exploration and evaluation.

5.1. Exploration

You begin by collecting as many recorded meanings and system mappings as possible for your chosen entities. Justifiability is irrelevant at this stage: you may select an entity because it is an object of research, but you need not do so – nor must any recorded meaning or system mapping be gathered because it is valid or sound.

Each collection forms a vector, a dynamic aggregation of use. Building a vector generates potentially infinite conditional possibilities (CPs) for linking entities to that vector based on shared features – temporal, functional, or contextual.

When links to different vectors are created under the same conditions – such as through the use of the same phrase or object – this produces a vector overlap, which in turn generates a new CP: the potential to link entities to both overlapping vectors rather than to only one.

While you build vectors, you compare them to locate overlaps and generate combined CPs. Establish thresholds to determine when an overlap becomes analytically relevant. Typically, you set low thresholds initially and then increase them upon evaluation.

After generating CPs, you apply them by tagging research materials (for example, #trace, #behaviour). Tagging is the final preparatory step before evaluation: it makes relations and connections explicit and helps detect recurring patterns without fixing meaning or system allocation.

5.2. Evaluation

Once relations and connections have been traced, the process shifts from exploration to evaluation. Results are tested within established or new theoretical frameworks. This stage restores interpretive justification after the temporary suspension of meaning, lending Chresiology its critical reliability.

5.3. Iteration

The process is iterative rather than linear. Insights from each step feed back into new exploratory and evaluative cycles: features can be added or redefined, vectors expanded, thresholds adjusted, and CPs refined. Each repetition produces a more nuanced map of relations and connections – an evolving architecture of knowledge rather than a fixed taxonomy (Figure 1).

This cycle constitutes the operational core of Chresiology. It translates the framework's theoretical principles – use over definition, conditionality over certainty, and relation before meaning – into a reproducible sequence of research actions. By combining methodological precision with conceptual flexibility, it allows scholars to trace how signs and symbols, terms, and systems interact, transform, and generate new configurations of knowledge.

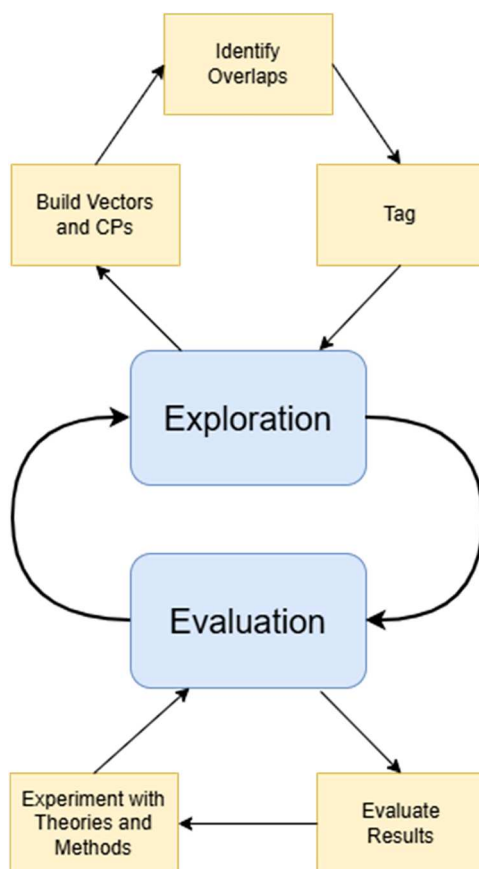


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Chresiological Process.

Unlike topic modelling or collocation analysis, which rely on statistical proximity, Chresiology identifies connections through shared conditions rather than co-occurrence. It therefore captures latent relational patterns that remain invisible to purely semantic or frequency-based approaches.

6. Meaning and system in established meta-theories

Chresiology is designed to stand in dialogue with established meta-theories such as structuralism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and discourse analysis. Each of these approaches contributes valuable methodologies. However, as we will show in this section, they all prioritise meaning and system over relations and connections.

Hermeneutics' focus on meaning requires little elaboration. From its beginnings and across its many forms, the theory and art of understanding (*Kunstlehre des Verstehens*) has centred on uncovering meaning within historically and culturally grounded contexts.

Structuralism, as developed by Saussure, views language as a system of signs in which meaning emerges through changing but stable relations between signifiers and signifieds (Saussure 1966, 113). Since Saussure, when scholars study meaning – whether in signs, texts, or discourses – the concepts of 'system' and 'structure' have been crucial and

precisely defined, whereas ‘relationship’ and ‘connection’ have remained definitionally subordinate and vague. If ‘verbal language’ is defined as ‘a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates’ (Bloch and Trager 1942, 5), such notions are visibly implicated in the definition. When Chomsky proposes to ‘consider language to be a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements’ (Chomsky 2002, 13), he does not reject the issues and notions of ‘connection’ and ‘relationship’, or declare them irrelevant (Chomsky 2002, 49), but he subsumes them under the rule-governed ‘construction’ of ‘(syntactic) structures’. When, on the other hand, theorists invite us to conceive ‘language’ as a ‘behaviour’ and ‘habit’ (Normand 2009; Skinner 1957; 1938), they retain the idea of language as systemic while approaching communication as a complex meaning-making and meaningful system. Last, but not least, when Foucault and Derrida propose that we consider language to be the subject and/or object of ‘discourse’ (e.g. Foucault 1966) or a ‘play of signifying references’ (Derrida 1997, 7; 1967), they question radically the concepts of ‘system’, ‘structure’, and ‘significance’, but leave the notions of ‘communication’, ‘dis/connection’, ‘transmission’, ‘exchange’ as subordinate and vague as classical structuralism.

Deconstruction challenges the stability of meaning itself. Derrida’s concept of ‘difference’ destabilises the notion of fixed relationships in language, emphasising how meaning is deferred and relational (that is, the idea that meaning arises from the interplay of differences and is never fully present or fixed). While deconstruction critiques systematisation by exposing the constructedness and instability of meaning, it retains the proposition that all signs differ deferring from all non-signs (Derrida 1997; 1967).

Discourse analysis, particularly in the Foucauldian tradition, investigates how systems of knowledge and power shape meaning and social practices. It emphasises the constructed nature of discourses and their systemic operations, making it highly effective for examining the power dynamics embedded in language and systems. However, because it is grounded in systems and structures of meaning, discourse analysis ultimately affirms the pervasive influence of discourse and the ‘sheer impossibility’ (Foucault 1966, 7) of thinking, speaking, or acting independently of it. While discourse analysis is a powerful method for exposing and challenging dominant discourses, it ultimately confines research within the frameworks of discourse.

In each of these traditions, meaning and system remain the organising principles of inquiry, while relations and connections are treated as secondary effects. What unites these approaches is the assumption that the sign is stable enough to sustain systems of meaning. Chresiology begins where this assumption ends: with the sign itself and the relational conditions that make meaning and system possible.

7. Chresiology’s theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundation of Chresiology is rooted in the theory of the (linguistic) sign. From Chrysippus and St. Augustine to Saussure, Derrida, and beyond, theories of the sign agree that anything, whether it is a spoken or written word, a footprint, smoke, a skin rash, a flood, a grain of sand, or a flying bird, can be used as a sign, but not everything is produced or taken up as a sign.

Theories of the sign also consistently imply that a sign displays a set of perceptible, tangible or measurable features. Authors label and conceptualise this set of features differently: Ferdinand de Saussure as ‘the signifier’ (Saussure 1966; 1982), St. Augustine as ‘the outer appearance’ (De doctrina christiana II.1.1 Augustinus 1865) of the sign, and Jacques Derrida as ‘trace’, ‘written mark’, ‘gramme’ or ‘grapheme’ (Derrida 1997, xv). However, all theories concur in one point: the ‘outer appearance’, the ‘signifier’, the ‘(written) mark’ or ‘trace’ of a sign does not matter in and of itself. It matters because it is connected to ‘something other than itself’. Deconstruction builds on the thought that ‘the signified (sense or thing, noeme or reality) is not in itself a signifier’ (Derrida 1997, 18). This does not change whether theories consider the connection between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, ‘outer appearance’ and ‘the other something it makes come to mind’ to be an immanent property of the sign itself (Saussure 1966; 1982), the effect of a ‘play of signifying references’ (Derrida 1997; 1967), or the manifestation of a power play in which discourse determines the playing field, the rules of the game, and the behaviour of the players (Foucault 1966).

The proposition that the ‘appearance’, ‘signifier’, or ‘(written) mark’ of a sign does not matter in and of itself is an assessment. This assessment is essential for defining ‘the sign’ and for distinguishing sign from non-sign. Work on signs as signs requires this assessment and distinction, but work on or with them as connectors and objects of research does not. It is also possible based on the assessment that the ‘appearance’, ‘signifier’, or ‘(written) mark’ of a sign matters in and of itself, independently from its meaning and system allocation.

The Latin metaphor *textum* – as used, for example, by Ovid and Quintilian, and fundamental to our modern notion of ‘text’ – stems from the verb ‘weaving’ (*texere*). This metaphor highlights what we see when we consider how meaning is made and life sustained in contexts where symbolic systems are absent, impaired or deliberately withheld: for example, in the pre-linguistic world of infants, in the embodied expression of the neurodiverse, or in the politicised silence of acts of resistance. Like fabric, the results of ‘the play of signifying references that constitute language’ (Derrida 1997, 7) can be tailored, altered or discarded.

However intricately language and discourse may bind, entangle, or govern us (Foucault 1966, 7), they do not govern us with the necessity of gravity. No matter how deeply we are embedded in linguistic regimes, we are not condemned to speak as we are to fall: stepping off a cliff invokes gravity with absolute force, but opening one’s mouth – physically or virtually – does not compel speech unless one chooses to speak.

Therefore, even when we recognise the constitutive power of language in shaping what we call ‘to be human’, and even when we scholars spin elaborate webs of words, we remain – beneath all ‘texts’ we produce and consume – as naked as Andersen’s emperor. And in the end, it is we who choose the fabrics we spin, the patterns we weave, and the meanings we wear.

Chresiology is designed to leverage this liberty. Critics may argue that the framework’s flexibility risks undermining analytical rigour or interpretive depth. For example, discourse analysis and hermeneutics ensure validity by grounding their analyses in historical and cultural specificity. To address such concerns, Chresiology employs iterative validation methods, such as cross-checking CPs against established or new theories and empirical benchmarks, ensuring that its exploratory insights maintain a degree of analytical reliability.

Rather than replacing existing frameworks, Chresiology complements them by introducing an exploratory dimension that reveals novel connections, which may later inform or be validated by established and emerging approaches. This ability to uncover patterns and to facilitate collaborative research within both disciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogues positions Chresiology as a fruitful addition to the theoretical toolkit of contemporary scholars.

8. Challenges and solutions for future implementation

Chresiology's versatility offers exceptional analytical freedom but also poses two challenges: complexity and over-flexibility. Both require balancing openness with rigour.

8.1. Complexity and transparency

Constructing vectors and conditional possibilities (CPs) can be resource-intensive, especially across large corpora. The solution lies in structured transparency rather than technical elaboration. Chresiology aims at ensuring checks and balances between computational and human bias. It functions on a continuum from close reading to computational modelling. It is adaptable, not software-dependent.

Computational tools – such as text-mining or network analysis – may assist in identifying overlaps but cannot determine conceptual relevance. Chresiology treats them as assistive instruments, not arbiters of meaning. Human judgment and responsibility remain decisive; automation accelerates exploration without displacing reflection.

8.2. Over-flexibility and weighting

Because Chresiology privileges relational openness, it risks losing analytical precision if all connections are treated as equally valid. To manage this, the framework distinguishes between evaluability and justifiability – a dynamic weighting that shapes its analytical rhythm.

- *Evaluability* measures the functional plausibility of a relation during exploration.
- *Justifiability* measures its interpretive coherence during validation.

Weighting these values (for example, on a 1–3 scale) offers a straightforward practical means of prioritising openness early on while progressively reintroducing disciplinary rigour. A relation rated high in evaluability but low in justifiability might still warrant provisional inclusion, provided that subsequent cycles reassess its legitimacy. This flexible weighting prevents premature closure without abandoning methodological accountability.

8.3. Ethical and epistemic considerations

The integration of computational techniques introduces further responsibilities regarding bias, transparency, and data provenance. Recording how CPs are generated and thresholds defined transforms flexibility into epistemic accountability. The goal is not

to replace interpretation with data-driven discovery but to embed interpretive responsibility within relational research.

Ultimately, Chresiology's strength lies in this disciplined openness. By weighting evaluability and justifiability, and by combining transparency with interpretive control, it sustains a rigorous yet generative mode of inquiry – one capable of expanding the field of possible relations while keeping each connection explicable, revisable, and accountable.

9. Conclusion and outlook

By putting mind over meaning and system, Chresiology proposes a new way of doing research as a process of connection rather than containment. It shifts analytical attention from what objects and concepts of research are to how they relate and connect, treating movement – between ideas, disciplines, and interpretive acts – as a field of inquiry in its own right.

At the core of this framework lies a simple but generative inversion: use precedes definition. Through vectors, conditional possibilities (CPs), and tags, Chresiology provides a minimal yet flexible toolkit for tracing how entities behave in different contexts. These tools make it possible to map the intersections and divergences through which new meanings and systems emerge. Temporarily suspending definitional certainty does not abolish meaning; it merely suspends it long enough for relational potential to become visible.

The framework's procedural rhythm – alternating between evaluability and justifiability – embodies its balance of openness and rigour. In exploratory phases, evaluability encourages experimental mapping of connections; in subsequent phases, justifiability restores interpretive discipline. This alternation ensures that Chresiology remains both inventive and accountable. It transforms indeterminacy from a methodological risk into a source of critical insight.

Chresiology's contribution extends beyond method. It offers a reflexive stance toward knowledge itself, recognising that systems and meanings are contingent articulations within broader networks of relation. By tracing how concepts migrate across disciplinary and historical boundaries, Chresiology exposes the relational architectures that sustain knowledge while revealing their capacity for transformation. Its procedures, whether applied manually or computationally, can serve both traditional interpretive work and digital analysis. In each case, the guiding question remains the same: what else could be connected?

The framework thus fosters a culture of inquiry that values connection over closure and responsiveness over fixation. It invites researchers to approach concepts as living entities – provisional, mobile, and shaped by their encounters. This perspective not only advances interdisciplinary dialogue but also encourages intellectual humility: to analyse is to choose which relations to recognise and which to leave aside.

Though meta-theoretical, Chresiology is critical in showing how systems of meaning consolidate authority and exclude. By suspending meaning and system allocation, it opens space to examine how knowledge legitimises some uses of signs while marginalising others. In this way, Chresiology contributes to critical theory by revealing and reshaping the relational conditions and effects of power in action and discourse.

Ultimately, the motto 'mind over meaning and system' captures the ethos of Chresiology. Like Ariel's repurposed fork in *The Little Mermaid*, the framework asks what other

uses our familiar tools might have once they are freed from their assigned systems. In that act of #repurposing – curious, playful, and critical – Chresiology reminds us that theory itself is a form of practice: an ongoing choreography of relations through which meaning, system, and critique continually take shape anew.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Dina De Rentiis is Chair of Romance Literary Studies at the University of Bamberg. She works at the intersection of philosophy, philology, and critical theory, with particular interest in comparative literature and cultural analysis. She is the founder of the meta-theoretical framework Chresiology.

ORCID

Dina De Rentiis  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5409-0940>

References

- Augustinus, Aurelius. 1865. *5,1: Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis episcopi, opera omnia*. Ed. novissima, Emendata et auctior. Edited by Jacques Paul Migne. Vol. 38. Patrologiae cursus completus / Patrologia Latina. Migne.
- Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. <http://archive.org/details/austin-how-to-do-things-with-words>.
- Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Blackman, Lisa, and Mike Featherstone. 2010. "Re-visioning Body & Society." *Body & Society* 16 (1): 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X09354558>.
- Bloch, Bernard, and George L. Trager. 1942. *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*. Baltimore, MD: Special Publications of the Linguistic Society of America. Pub. by Linguistic society of America at the Waverly press, inc.
- Bordalejo, Barbara, and Roopika Risam. 2020. *Intersectionality in Digital Humanities*. Leeds: Arc Humanities Press.
- Callon, Michel. 1984. "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay." *The Sociological Review* 32 (1_suppl): 196–233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1984.tb00113.x>.
- Carbado, Devon W., Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson. 2013. "INTERSECTIONALITY: Mapping the Movements of a Theory." *Du Bois Review* 10 (2): 303–312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000349>.
- Carley, Kathleen. 1994. "Extracting Culture through Textual Analysis." *Poetics* 22 (4): 291–312. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(94\)90011-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)90011-6).
- Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. 2013. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4): 785–810. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2002. *Syntactic Structures*. 2nd ed. A Mouton Classic. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1997. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." In *Feminist Legal Theories*, edited by Karen Maschke, 139–167. New York: Routledge.

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 2017. "On Intersectionality: Essential Writings." *Faculty Books*, March 1. <https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/books/255>.
- De Rentiis, Dina. 2012. *Die Zeit Der Nachfolge: Zur Interdependenz von 'Imitatio Christi' Und 'Imitatio Auctorum' Im 12.-16. Jahrhundert. Erste Auflage Tübingen 1996*. 2nd edn. Vol. 273. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Romanische Philologie. Walter de Gruyter.
- De Rentiis, Dina. 2018. "Imitatio Als Form Kulturellen Handelns." In *Nachahmen Im Mittelalter: Dimensionen – Mechanismen – Funktionen*, edited by Andreas Büttner, Birgit Kynast, Gerald Schwedler, and Jörg Sonntag, Heft 82, 27–71. Köln: Beihefte Zum Archiv Für Kulturgeschichte. Böhlau Verlag.
- Dépelteau, François, ed. 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan US. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ub-bamberg/detail.action?docID=5217705>.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *De La Grammatologie*. Collection 'Critique'. Éd. de Minuit. Paris.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Of Grammatology*. Corr. ed. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (2): 281–317.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 2017. "Manifest Für Eine Relationale Soziologie." In *Netzwerke, Kultur Und Agency: Problemlösungen in Relationaler Methodologie Und Sozialtheorie*, 1st ed. edited by Heiko Löwenstein and Mustafa Emirbayer. Edition Soziologie. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.
- Foucault, Michel. 1966. *Les Mots et Les Choses: Une Archéologie Des Sciences Humaines*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 2016. *Manifestly Haraway*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Haschemi Yekani, Elahe. 2022. *Revisualising Intersectionality*. Palgrave Pivot: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Knoke, David. 2020. *Social Network Analysis*. 3rd ed. Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Latour, Bruno. 1996. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications." *Soziale Welt, Zeitschrift Für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung* 47 (4): 369–381.
- Law, John. 1992. "Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy, and Heterogeneity." *Systems Practice* 5 (4): 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01059830>.
- Lazer, David. 2011. "Networks in Political Science: Back to the Future." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44 (1): 61–68. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510001873>.
- Liang, Lily, and Sida Liu. 2018. "Beyond the Manifesto: Mustafa Emirbayer and Relational Sociology." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, edited by François Dépelteau, 395–411. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_20.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30 (3): 1771–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1086/426800>.
- Normand, Matthew P. 2009. "'Much Ado about Nothing? Some Comments on B. F. Skinner's Definition of Verbal Behavior'." *The Behavior Analyst* 32 (1): 185–190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03392182>.
- Saussure, Ferdinand. 1966. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Saussure, Ferdinand. 1982. *Cours de Linguistique Générale: Éd. Crit.* Edited by Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Tullio Mauro. With Charles Bally and Tullio Mauro. Payothèque. Paris: Payot.
- Skinner, B. F. 1938. *The Behavior of Organisms*. The Century Psychology Series. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Skinner, B. F. 1957. *Verbal Behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Venn, Couze. 2000. *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity*. With ebrary, Inc. Theory, Culture & Society. London: SAGE Publications. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/academiccompletetitles/home.action>.
- Venn, Couze. 2010. "Individuation, Relationality, Affect: Rethinking the Human in Relation to the Living." *Body & Society* 16 (1): 129–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X09354770>.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1971. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. <http://archive.org/details/philosophischeun0000witt>.