

# U-Lingua

The Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain's Quarterly Magazine



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The New Meme Reality

such ✨language change ✨: the growing nuances of the sparkle emoji

Old Languages, New Approaches: An Interview with Marieke Meelen

## BEYOND THE PAGE

A Wug-tonne of Advice: An Interview with *Because Language*

Spreading the Word: An Interview with Gaston Dorren

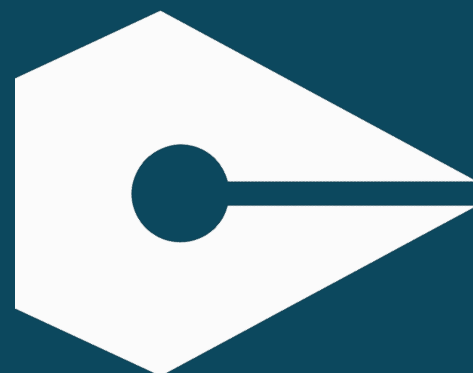
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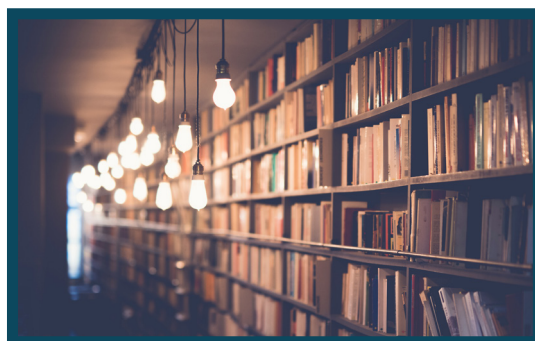
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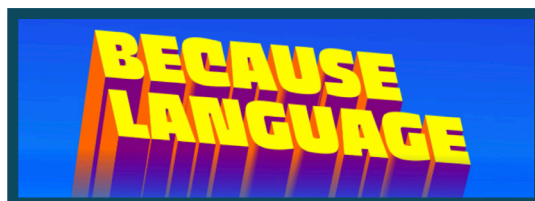
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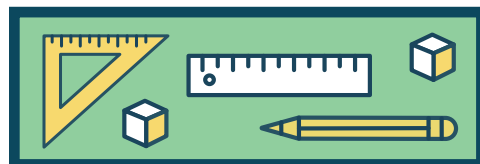


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# EDITOR'S LETTER

How quickly the last year has gone! For this final issue of my time as Editor-in-Chief, I'm proud to give you *The Digital Issue*. As the modern world becomes increasingly technological and we watch as the Metaverse inches over the digi-scape, we thought it fitting to explore how language and linguistics has been shaped by the digital age. So much of human language has been dependent on pen and paper in the past, and the spread of internet use means that language is changing faster than ever — isn't it mind-blowing that words like *covidiot*, *rona*, *quaranteams* and *double-vaxxed* weren't in our day-to-day vocabulary just a couple of years ago? Technology has transformed the face of linguistics, and this issue aims to spotlight and explore this development and what it means to be a linguist in the world today.

The Section Editors and Columnists have worked tirelessly since the New Year to compile a selection of great reads: from deeper dives into online corpora to interviews with researchers, podcast hosts and broadcasters. Just in case you're thinking about exam season coming up, the ULAB committee has prepared a list of articles, books and chapters we think everyone should read. We're also presenting the winning entry of the first ULAB essay competition. I'm especially excited for Bea's discussion on the sparkle emoji, Kitty and Romany's interview with *Because Language*, and Olivia's look at the language in the video game *Pathologic 2*.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you to the Editorial Team, who have been the reason for the enjoyment and ease I have experienced in this role. Their work is always immaculate and original, and I hope you have loved reading their output as much as I have. To you, our readers, our deepest gratitude for the support you have given us and your interest in our magazine. In this last quarter, we have successfully achieved printed publications — if you'd like one too, please reach out on [ulinguamagazine@gmail.com](mailto:ulinguamagazine@gmail.com) or on instagram [@ulinguamagazine](https://www.instagram.com/ulinguamagazine).

I hope you'll find this issue as eye-opening as I have, and I'm excited to see what the next Editor-in-Chief has in store for us!

S. C. Jat  
Editor-in-Chief, *U-Lingua*  
University of Cambridge

## UPDATES FROM NATIONAL CHAIR

As always, we at ULAB have been hard at work over the last 3 months! We have marked all of the submissions to our first ever essay competition, and are pleased to announce the winner as Andrew Tobin for his essay *Iconicity as an Explanation for Linguistic Universals*, which you can read in this issue of *U-Lingua*. The *Journal of the Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain* has also published its second issue, showcasing research from three more talented authors. Our beloved National Committee members Tom Williamson and Eloise Parr have run a successful series of online events called *Life and Linguistics*, which aimed to help undergraduate linguistics students achieve their career goals. Our Local Committee have of course been busy organising the ULAB 2022 Conference, and you can read about all their exciting updates below!

As my time as ULAB National Chair is nearing an end (for real this time!), I want to say how great an experience it has been to be part of such an incredible organisation, working with such motivated and hard-working people on the Committees and Subcommittees to create opportunities for undergraduate students, to bring them together and to help them achieve their long term goals. I wish the best of luck to the next National Chair and the rest of the incoming ULAB Committees and Subcommittees, and I look forward to seeing where the Association goes next.

Clíodhna Hughes  
National Chair, *Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain*  
University of Edinburgh

## UPDATES FROM LOCAL CHAIR

ULAB 2022 is just around the corner! We are so excited to share three days of linguistic fun with you. The conference will be taking place in just over a week this April 9th-11th at the University of Edinburgh. We received abstracts from almost 50 undergraduates from over 10 countries so thank you to everyone who took the time to submit. We have now approved over 45 talks and we cannot wait to learn about all the exciting research people have been undertaking. We will also be receiving talks and workshops from some of our favourite academics and industry professionals. We've been working hard to make this event as accessible as possible and we are very pleased to announce that we have been able to provide bursaries for many of our speakers and attendees.

This conference will be ULAB's first ever hybrid event, blending in-person and online talks. We are very excited to meet those of you who will be making the journey up to Edinburgh as this will be ULAB's first in-person event since 2019 (we're so excited we're even having a ceilidh to celebrate)! If you'd like to purchase a last-minute ticket (either online or in-person), you can find all the information on how to do so on our website (<https://www.ulab.org.uk/conferences/conferences/45>). The ULAB conference is not only an opportunity for us to get together and celebrate undergraduate linguistic research but also an important event to ULAB itself, as it is when we host our Annual General Meeting. So, if you'd like to get more involved in ULAB and run for a position, please come along to the AGM.

We can't wait to see you all very soon!

Caitlin Wilson  
Local Chair, *Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain*  
University of Edinburgh

# MEET OUR LOCAL COMMITTEE



## CAITLIN WILSON

*Local Chair*

Caitlin (she/her) is a fourth year undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh. She is focused on theoretical syntax and language preservation. When she isn't drawing syntax trees, she helps with fieldwork on the University's Nilotic Languages research team. Passions outside of Linguistics include terrible YA fiction, being a bad runner, and Oxford commas.

## BEATRIX LIVESEY-STEPHENS

*Accessibility Officer*

Beatrix (Bea) Livesey-Stephens is a final year Language & Linguistics student at the University of Aberdeen, and is the Accessibility Officer on the Local Committee. She does her best to make sure that the conference is as holistically accessible as possible, through consulting the rest of the Committee on different facets of the conference and the measures she can take. Bea has recently become an absolute discourse analysis convert, and you'll hopefully see some of her work at the conference.



## DARJA PRUDCENKO

*Local Secretary*

Darja Prudcenko is a second-year Psychology and Linguistics student at the University of Edinburgh. When it comes to linguistics, she is particularly interested in Slavic languages, phonology, language typology, and historical linguistics. Outside of her studies, she enjoys horse riding, pole dancing, and analyzing Russian Silver Age poetry.



## OLIVIA SZCZERBAKIEWICZ

*Panels, Plenaries and Workshops Coordinator*

Olivia Szczerbakiewicz is the Panels, Plenaries and Workshops Coordinator on the Local Committee. She is a final year student of English Language and Literature at the University of Edinburgh. She is particularly keen on applications of cognitive linguistics and stylistics to literary texts, as well as the intricacies and differences in translation. You might recognise her from writing for the *Words, Words, Words* Column of *U-Lingua*. In her free time, she is slowly writing a novel.

## ELIF YILDIZ

*Local Treasurer*

Elif (she/her) is a third year Linguistics undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. Her areas of interest are typology, syntactic theory and cross-linguistic variation. She is also the editor of the *Hot off the Press* section, which brings current affairs and linguistics together. When not reading the news, she can be found trying to increase her non(yet!)existent spicy food tolerance.



## CLIODHNA HUGHES

*Merch Coordinator*

Clíodhna Hughes is a fourth-year Linguistics student at the University of Edinburgh, particularly interested in speech technology, phonetics, language evolution and first language acquisition. She enjoys doing linguistics outreach, attending student conferences, and getting involved in just about anything linguistics-related! Outside of linguistics, her hobbies include glass fusing, playing underwater hockey and making unbrievable cheese puns.





## MICHAEL GOESSLER

*Tech Coordinator*

Michael Goessler is a third-year Linguistics student at the University of Edinburgh originally from Styria, Austria. He entered the world of linguistics as a conlanger, knowing from age 15 he wanted to make language science his degree. He spends most of his time syntactically sceptical over thematic relations, or otherwise playing the trumpet and having writer's blocks or trying to find more stuff to do while quietly (and not so quietly) complaining about how busy he is.



## JOANA POČOPKAITĖ

*Social Secretary*

Joana Počopkaitė is a second-year undergraduate Linguistics student at the University of Edinburgh. In linguistics, she is especially interested in cross-linguistic variation, language evolution, language acquisition and typology. Outside of her studies, she enjoys crocheting, learning languages and (usually unsuccessfully) experimenting in the kitchen.



## CLARA BRAUN

*Merch Coordinator, Raffles and Prizes Coordinator*



Clara is a second-year undergraduate studying Portuguese and Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. Her areas of interest include language acquisition and field work on endangered languages. She is currently looking forward to her year abroad in Brazil. Outside of uni, she can be found trying out new vegan recipes, practising various sports outside or reading.





## KEYU DONG

*Panels, Plenaries and Workshops Coordinator*

Keyu is a first-year Linguistics undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. She is interested in minority language protection, language policy, cognitive science and semantics. In the Local Committee, she helps with the panels, plenaries and workshops. Outside of uni, she enjoys collecting useless cute things and taking a nap.

## TRUDY KALVYNAITE

*Publicist*

Trudy, a second year Psychology and Linguistics student at the University of Edinburgh. Particularly passionate about language endangerment, language acquisition and theories of universal grammar, as well as applications of syntax and discourse. Usually a visual person, Trudy engages in graphic and other types of design, as well as painting, writing, acting and exploring new people, places, territories.



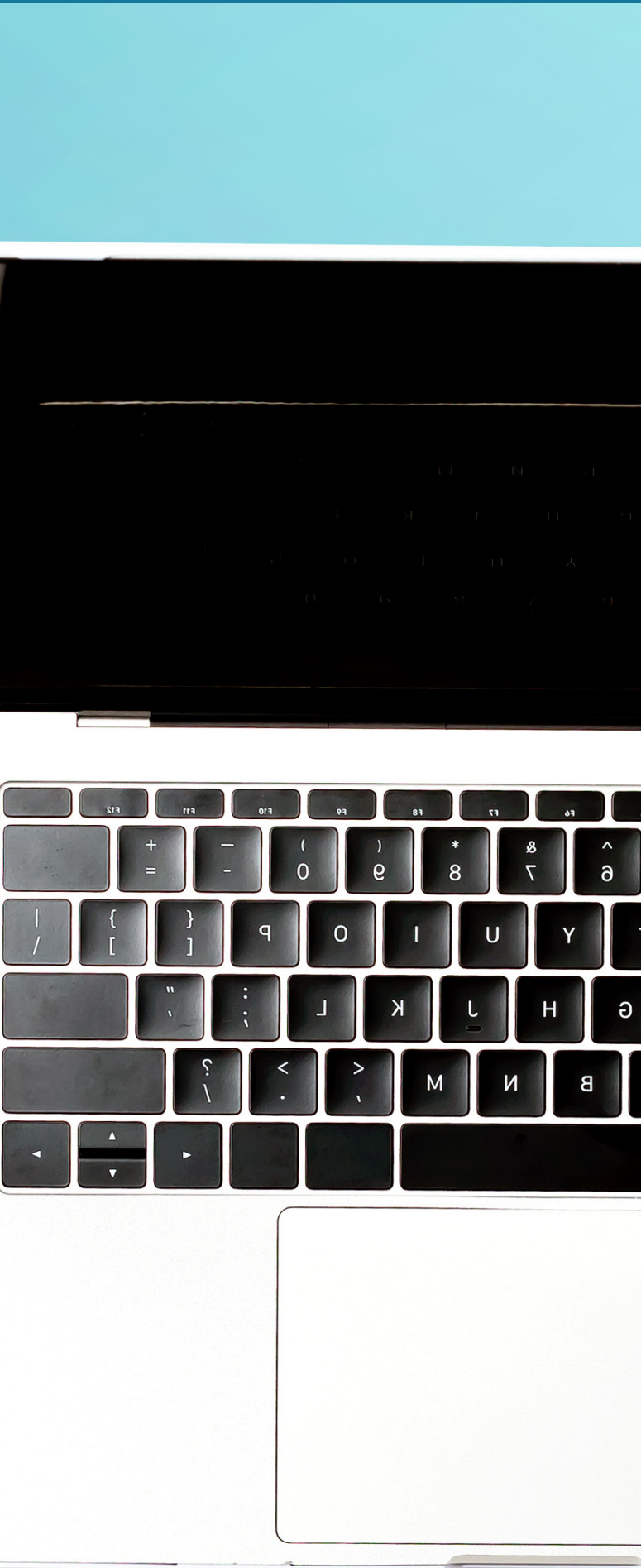
## NICOLE CHAN

*Tech Coordinator*

Nicole is a first year Linguistics and English Language student at the University of Edinburgh. Hailing from Hong Kong, she is particularly interested in language acquisition and sociolinguistics. Her hobbies outside of her studies include rope skipping, travelling and reading about different cultures.

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# FROM *MUMS* TO *INCELS*: GENDER AND INTERNET IDENTITY ANALYSIS THROUGH CORPUS LINGUISTICS

Eloise Parr, 2nd Year,  
PhD English Language and Linguistics,  
University of Birmingham

## What is corpus linguistics?

Corpus linguistics is the study of language that involves using computer software to perform empirical analysis. It is a particularly useful methodology because it can show patterns in language about what is most salient or notable in the data. Corpus software can be used to analyse grammatical features, key words or phrases, or even semantic usage.

Corpus analysis uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques by collecting and analysing further information from your data such as the frequency of particular linguistic features occurring in a text or set of texts<sup>[1]</sup>. The results of a quantitative word frequency analysis (how many times a certain word or phrase occurs in the corpus) should systematically identify word usage and distribution, whereas a qualitative analysis allows for an analysis of word meaning<sup>[2][3]</sup>.

Corpus analysis is helpful in building vast collections of language for large lexical and grammatical studies, as well as more applied subfields of linguistic analysis such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, language teaching and learning, and forensic linguistics<sup>[4]</sup>. One notable use of corpus analysis is to explore how gender is discussed and presented in online spaces on the internet, in particular, online forums. There has been a plethora of research into the language used by users of gendered forums, particularly in recent years. This has been aided by corpus linguistics as language data can be scraped from the web in minutes, which means the language is often much more fresh and recent than printed language (which can take months or years to collect, edit and publish). Some of this research will be discussed below.

## Mumsnet as a women's online space

*Mumsnet* was created in 2000 as an online space for parents, especially mothers, and a safe space for those with shared experiences of pregnancy and motherhood to gain a sense of belonging and community<sup>[5]</sup>. It is commonly used to gain support and share parental knowledge and advice, although there are forum threads on topics outside of pregnancy and parenthood, including politics, relationships, health, and the media. Although there are some male users, the majority of *Mumsnet*'s community are women. This makes it a gendered online space and therefore of particular interest for researchers interested in exploring the ways in which female and feminine identities are negotiated and presented in the digital age.

A study in 2021 by Kinloch and Jaworska<sup>[6]</sup> explored the ways in which women conceptualise their maternal bodies whilst having postnatal depression, with a backdrop of (often sexist) societal norms and expectations. They did this by collecting a corpus of nearly 5 million words from *Mumsnet Talk* forum threads that contained the terms *postnatal depression* or *pnd*. The researchers then used corpus software to identify the keywords and key semantic fields in the dataset. A **keyword** is a word whose occurrence and frequency is statistically significant when compared to a reference corpus (often a much larger corpus that is used to represent natural language in a number of different contexts). If a word is a keyword, it therefore means it is unusual in wider language and may indicate something specific about the language or topic of the corpus under examination. This allowed the researchers to find out which words and semantic fields were significant in the discussion of postnatal depression between the women in the *Mumsnet* forum threads, and identify patterns in a much larger dataset than would be possible with simply manual analysis.

In another study, Charlotte Taylor<sup>[7]</sup> compiled a corpus of 61 million words from Mumsnet to explore the relationship between gender and mock politeness and sarcasm. By using a corpus of this size from an online community that is predominantly women, Taylor was able to contrast conclusions from previous research that sarcasm and mock politeness is a male phenomenon. A further analysis of this forum corpus and a multibillion-word internet corpus, *Entente13*, found that there was 'a relatively high degree of interchangeability' between *bitchy* and *sarcastic* in terms of what they described but were used differently based on the gender of who they were being used to describe. In addition, *bitchy* tended to be used more negatively than *sarcastic*, which Taylor suggests shows that women are being judged more harshly than men for the same behaviour. Although these results and conclusions could be found through interviews, surveys, and smaller manual analyses, the use of corpora with word counts into the millions and billions means conclusions can be discussed in bigger terms and more contexts than smaller collections of texts.

*man* and *guy* in a corpus of 214,269 words, Krendel found that men were viewed as victims of women and general society which in turn led women and girls to be objectified and dehumanised. A corpus analysis here allowed the researcher to not only analyse vast amounts of data, but also meant the corpus of forum data could be compared to a reference corpus of general American English to find words and phrases unique to those in the Manosphere.

Another study<sup>[10]</sup> into gendered language on Reddit used a corpus of 67,000 words from a subreddit used by incels. A keyword analysis of this corpus found that discussions of gendered roles in society were notable in the data. This allowed the researchers to search in more depth and discover how male groups like incels both accept and reject gendered social norms. They discovered that incels view men in a social hierarchy based on attractiveness and their abilities to attract women, often placing themselves at the bottom of this hierarchy. Conversely, women did not appear to have an equivalent hierarchy and were viewed as lacking morals and honesty.

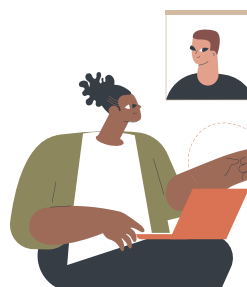
## Incels and the Manosphere — misogyny in men's online spaces

In recent years, there has been more of a public awareness of the *Manosphere*. This is a collective term for predominantly online communities of (mainly cisgendered heterosexual) men that are centred on misogyny and anti-feminism<sup>[9]</sup>. Some notable subcommunities are *Men's Rights Activists* (an actively anti-feminist movement), *Incels* (*involuntary celibates*; a label used to self-identify the inability to find a romantic/sexual partner), *Pick-up Artists* (men who dedicate themselves to the 'art' of seducing women), and *Men Going Their Own Way* (*MGTOW*; men who abstain from relationships with women and in extreme cases, desire to live completely separately from women)<sup>[9]</sup>. Researchers have started to explore the specific language used by those within these communities and subcommunities, particularly the ways in which they conceptualise and discuss gender.

A study by Alexandra Krendel, published in 2020<sup>[9]</sup>, found that the feminine gender role is more defined and discussed than the masculine role in Manosphere forum posts on Reddit. By conducting a corpus-assisted analysis of *woman*, *girl*,



### Take home message



The studies discussed in this article show that corpus analysis is incredibly useful for research into language and gender. It allows a researcher to:

- find patterns in data that would be nearly impossible to find manually;
- analyse larger chunks of language in a much quicker and more efficient way than manual analysis;
- compare the findings to very large general collections of naturally occurring language;
- make stronger and wider conclusions about language usage and gender representation in various contexts.

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# SPUTNIK, MANSPLAINING AND CORPUS LINGUISTICS:

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SITES PROVIDE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE CHANGE

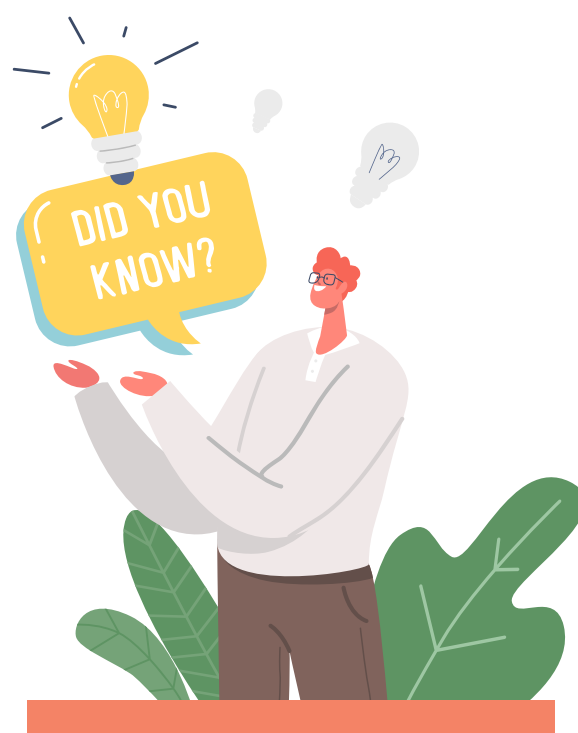
Lara Clarke,  
second year Psychology and Linguistics,  
University of Oxford

When the Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite on 4th October, 1957, none of the journalists of the time really knew what to call it. The word *satellite* existed at the time, but referred pretty much exclusively to natural bodies like moons — a few articles did what they could by comparing the aircraft to a 'red moon' or an 'artificial moon', but the majority simply lifted the Russian translation of satellite — *sputnik* — from the Soviet newspapers that first reported the launch<sup>[1]</sup>. As a result, *sputnik* was splashed on national front pages within hours, if not minutes, of its first usage in English. In fact, you could make the case that those front-page headlines *were* the first widespread English usage of the word *sputnik*, discounting discussions in the editing room about exactly which term to use. This newborn neologism was then hand-delivered to hundreds of thousands of homes across the Western world, sparking an explosive launch not unlike that of the satellite it describes.

This introduction — far from the gradual ripple-like spreading suggested by the wave model of language change — had a far-reaching impact on English. While *-nik* had been used as a suffix in the English of Yiddish speakers since the 18th century<sup>[1]</sup>, *sputnik* inspired a whole range of newer and often ironic formations seen in American English in the late 1950s and across the 1960s, including:

- *Muttnik*<sup>[2]</sup> (Laika, the dog carried in the Soviet satellite that followed sputnik)
- *Computernik*<sup>[3]</sup> (computer nerd or enthusiast)
- *Neatnik*<sup>[4]</sup> (a compulsive organiser)

This sort of suffix stemming from a particular word, also known as *libfix*, will be familiar to you if you've been a victim of *mansplaining* over the last ten years.



The libfix *-splaining* is used to imply a condescending explanation of a concept from someone in a non-expert position — usually to a member of a minority group — in formations such as *whitesplaining* (coming from a Caucasian person), *straightsplaining* (from a heterosexual person) and *ablesplaining* (from a non-disabled person). A personal favourite of mine is *Larasplaining*, coined by a teacher of mine who was particularly frustrated by my repeated attempts to tell classmates about the historical context of *A Streetcar Named Desire* despite my very basic understanding of the 1940s American South. There's some debate about whether this pejorative use of *-splain* actually predates mansplain as a construction<sup>[5]</sup>, but like *sputnik*, *mansplaining* popularised the libfix and gave it new weight within the language.

The concept of *mansplaining* was first highlighted by essayist Rebecca Solnit in a *Los Angeles Times* article published in 2008<sup>[6]</sup> — but she never used the word. This can be traced to a comment on a *livejournal* article made about five weeks later, which simply read: 'Oh, gosh, thank you so much for mansplaining this to us!'<sup>[6]</sup>

This comment, as unassuming as it might seem, is to *mansplaining* what the front page headlines of October 4th, 1957 were to *sputnik* — the spark that started the spread of the new word across language communities. *Mansplaining* moved much more slowly, entering the mainstream public consciousness in the summer of 2012 after years of usage in feminist internet circles<sup>[7]</sup>, and that spread was primarily online.

Over time, more and more of our communication has become internet-based, and more and more of that internet communication has been focused on and restricted to a few sites. Whether that's a good thing in general is up for debate, but it creates an incredibly rich environment for linguists. Twitter, Tumblr and other text-based social media sites are effectively massive, searchable corpora that are being updated in real time — not just with transcripts of real conversations, but with the conversations themselves. The *livejournal* data from 2008 is incomplete, and based primarily on what people thought was important enough to save at the time. The newspaper evidence we have from 1957 is also only a small part of what was available at the time, and perhaps even more problematically, tells us mostly about

the language use of white, male, middle class newspaper editors and journalists. Because social media and other internet posting gives language users the power to self-publish their words, they present a really exciting opportunity to analyse linguistic evidence in a way that doesn't restrict language change research to studying the language of powerful groups.

On Twitter or Tumblr, data can still be lost: users delete posts all the time, there may well be context to an exchange that is never posted, and ultimately if and when these sites' servers are taken down, users' post histories will inevitably go with them. They're also far from perfect samples of language users; they are bad at representing groups who struggle with stable internet access, or who don't feel comfortable on these sites for a myriad of reasons. But for now, the centralised sites are here, and we should use them to address that power dynamic.

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# BEHIND THE BOOKSHELVES

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The ULAB Reading List





# ULAB READING LIST

Edited by Alessandra Terranova

Alessandra Terranova, University of Edinburgh

## ***The Seventh Function of Language* – Laurent Binet**

'Life is not a novel. Or at least you would like to believe so.' That's how Binet starts his book, a postmodern mix of fact, fiction, and philosophy. With Jakobson's model of communication and its six functions as a background, the novel takes the reader from Paris to Bologna, to Ithaca and Venice, in order to solve a mystery that touches the world of linguistics, semiotics and philosophy of language.

This clever novel can be read and enjoyed on multiple levels, but to fully appreciate its complexities other than the drama and murders that drive the plot, be prepared to brush up your Foucault, Eco, and Searle.

Binet, L. (2017). *The Seventh Function of Language*. MPS.

Eloise Parr, University of Birmingham

## ***The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality* – Jo Angouri and Judith Baxter**

*The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality* is a collection of cutting-edge research and critical discussions about language, sexuality, and gender, specifically related to the English language. The handbook provides the reader with theoretical and methodological discussions and empirical 'real-world' studies in a range of (sub)fields including sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, multimodal analysis and semiotics, discourse studies, and gender studies. Some of the gender and sexuality topics and frameworks discussed include non-binary approaches to gender and sexuality, feminist analyses, and queer theory.

This handbook is key reading for anyone undertaking language or discourse analysis about sexuality and gender, or intending to perform a meta-analysis on a related topic. This is especially the case if the methodologies of the intended research complement the ones covered in the chapters of this handbook.

Angouri, J., & Baxter, J. (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Roma Dhasmana, University of Aberdeen

## ***El árbol de la lengua* – Lola Pons Rodríguez**

This book is a broad, accessible introduction to Hispanic linguistics, from phonology and dialectology to a wider discussion of the perils of prescriptivism and how language and society shape each other. The book is structured around the extended metaphor of a tree (*el árbol*), from its seeds and roots to an entire forest; something that can bring light and shadow to everyone, and something that touches everyone's lives.

If you speak Spanish, whether you're just venturing into sociolinguistics or are a seasoned veteran needing a refresher, I couldn't recommend this more! Its structure makes it accessible and clearly laid-out, so you can pick and choose chapters that take your interest. I'd particularly recommend it if you enjoy Gretchen McCulloch's work, as it definitely takes a 'the kids are alright' stance against prescriptivists!

Rodríguez, P.L. (2020). *El árbol de la lengua* (1st ed.). Arpa Editores.

Grace Cotton, University of Ulster

### ***Belfast English and Standard English* – Alison Henry**

Quite possibly one of the only academic linguistics books written that accurately discusses and understands the complexity of Northern Irish English. Alison Henry provides an accurate discussion into how NI English differs from Southern British English.

Henry, A. (2010). *Belfast English and Standard English : Dialect Variation and Parameter Setting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruth Chapman, University of Cambridge

### ***You Say Potato* – David Crystal and Ben Crystal**

This is more of a pop-linguistic read, focusing on dialectology and accents, but it still provides interesting and detailed maps and information about accent history. Because it is father and son writing together, it has a comfortable tone to it that makes it accessible and enjoyable. There are references to different pop culture figures and lots of humour which make it light but still informative.

Crystal, D., & Crystal, B. (2015). *You Say Potato: The Story of English Accents*. London: Pan.

Kitty Liu, University of Cambridge

### ***Meaning and Variation: The Third Wave of Sociolinguistics* – Penelope Eckert**

Eckert, author of the famous jocks and burnouts study (1989) and overall a bit of a legend, gives a chronological overview of the evolution of sociolinguistics, with special focus on the different methodologies used in the field, categorised by Eckert into three 'waves'. The book has a very relaxed tone, and intersperses the history of sociolinguistics with overviews of some key sociolinguistic studies, and with Eckert's own autobiography of her long and successful academic career.

I found the book really useful as it contextualises the key studies – like Labov at Martha's Vineyard (1963) or Eckert's own jocks and burnouts – within the wider development of sociolinguistics as a field. The book also acts as a nice springboard since it references some cool recent work on the sociolinguistics of sexuality and ethnicity, which you can follow up on.

Eckert, P. (2018). *Meaning and Linguistic Variation: The Third Wave in Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781316403242

Kitty Liu, University of Cambridge

### ***A Clockwork Orange* – Anthony Burgess**

Typically known as the violent dystopian fable that inspired the 1971 Kubrick film, this novel is a stunning illustration of the ordinary language philosophy adage that *Meaning Is Use*. The novella is narrated in an in-universe teenage slang called Nadsat, which blends English with Slavic words, Cockney rhyming slang and other word-play. You start the book having no idea what's going on, but it's amazing how quickly you pick up the slang terms just by hanging in there. Nadsat functions as a major tool for world-building in the novel, and plays out the role of language in identity and social group-membership.

Burgess, A. (2001). *A Clockwork Orange*. New York: Norton.

Will Rimer, University of Cambridge

***Sociolinguistic Typology* – Peter Trudgill**

I'd recommend this book because it's a really exciting and theory-neutral unification of two fields, sociolinguistics and typology, which haven't otherwise been properly integrated yet. Trudgill forms a hypothesis about the nature of language contact and change, and uses this to sketch out a research plan that will appeal to many kinds of linguists, regardless of theoretical or methodological preference. Not only is there appeal to functional approaches, and ready connections to be made between his suggestions about phonology and theories like Optimality Theory, but his book sets the stage for recent generative work on syntactic typology, acquisition and change, such as the Starfish project<sup>[1]</sup>.

Trudgill, P. (2011). *Sociolinguistic Typology: Social Determinants of Linguistic Complexity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[1] <http://stamma.org/get-support/therapies-courses/specialist-services/starfish-project>

Clíodhna Hughes, University of Edinburgh

***Accommodating Broccoli in the Cemetery: Or Why Can't Anybody Spell* – Vivian Cook**

A fun book about English spelling! This one's not meant to be read cover to cover, it's more of a light-hearted collection of fun facts about spelling in English.

Cook, V. (2004). *Accommodating Broccoli in the Cemetery: Or Why Can't Anybody Spell*. London: Profile Books.

Olivia Nutt, University of Cambridge

***Meaning: A Slim Guide to Semantics* – Paul Elbourne**

This text is a really good introduction to semantics, breaking down some key concepts in a way that's eminently approachable without any background in formal linguistics, while still being relevant well into 1st year undergrad linguistics. One of the major problems with semantics books, especially from the 20th century, is that they're incredibly dense and hard to follow, filled with opaque jargon and needlessly ivory-tower metaphors. *Meaning* tends to be pretty good at avoiding these, for instance by transposing the traditional philosophy of meaning argument about 'what is the definition of KNOW' to 'what is the definition of CHAIR'.

Elbourne, P. (2011). *Meaning: A Slim Guide to Semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olivia Nutt, University of Cambridge.

***The Wayfarers series (esp. the first book, A Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet)* – Becky Chambers**

As a novel, it's fantastic: a space opera setting for a character drama starring actually alien aliens in a worn-down and grungy but optimistic galaxy. In terms of linguistics, the author's wife is a trained linguist, and constructed a number of languages for use in the book, many of which are adapted for the different species' particular biological constraints. Present only briefly in *Long Way*, and more in later works (*The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*, in particular) are other societal issues which are familiar to linguists, like issues of under-researched and culturally 'invisible' minority language-speaking ethnic communities.

Chambers, B. (2015). *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Chambers, B. (2016). *A Closed and Common Orbit*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Chambers, B. (2018). *Record of a Spaceborn Few*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Chambers, B. (2021). *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

S.C. Jat, University of Cambridge

### ***The Etymologicon; The Horologicon* – Mark Forsyth**

If you're an etymology geek like me, you'll love the way Forsyth walks us through the English lexicon, connecting the dots between our words, both old and new. In *The Etymologicon*, Forsyth's writing is eloquent and easy to read, engaging the reader in his discussion of semantic shifts, idiomatic reinterpretations and other ways in which the meanings of words have changed over time. He introduces the reader to links they would not have otherwise foreseen, and touches as well on folk etymology and scientific and philosophical reasons behind these semantic changes. If you're interested in this book, *The Horologicon* is another book by Forsyth which was published in the subsequent year. Instead of linking words by etymology, this book groups world-wide vocabulary by the time of day they either refer to or can be contextually used in. I strongly recommend both for a light yet intellectually stimulating read.

Forsyth, M. (2011). *The Etymologicon: A Circular Stroll Through the Hidden Connections of the English Language*. London: Icon Books.

Forsyth, M. (2012). *The Horologicon: A Day's Jaunt Through the Lost Words of the English Language*. London: Icon Books.

Alessandra Terranova, University of Edinburgh

### ***Speaking and being* – Kübra Gümüşay**

In *Speaking and Being*, Gümüşay looks for ways to change our society for the better: the author starts by dealing with the interaction between language and perception, in fact she believes that it is necessary to understand how language constructs 'human-lived realities' in order to grasp the power of language. If on one hand language makes the world perceptible to people, on the other it adapts to the geographical and cultural context, revealing what is valued or not in a given society. Gümüşay explains her thesis that language codifies things and people, often leading to discrimination – in her examples the focus is specifically on sexist and anti-Muslim speech – using the metaphor of a museum of language.

This essay puts language back at the centre of our political action and denounces how verbal violence and hate speech have consequences that no one can afford to ignore. If you are interested in the link between language and identity politics, public debate and polarized communication, then this is the book for you.

Gümüşay, K. (2022). *Speaking and Being*. [S.l.]: Profile Books LTD.

Alessandra Terranova, University of Edinburgh

### ***Media and Migration: Some Linguistic Reflections* – Federico Faloppa**

This book chapter is part of *Destination Italy: Representing migration in contemporary media and narrative*, a volume edited by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa. It reflects on the language used by Italian media to talk about migration in the Mediterranean. By looking at lexical features from both a synchronic and a diachronic point of view, the author attempts to uncover some terminological and conceptual 'grey zones' in the language used by the media: ambiguous representations that fluctuate between inaccuracy, professional idleness, stereotypes, sensationalism, and xenophobia. His analysis suggests new methodological strands of investigation between linguistics, migration, and media studies.

This is a good read for everyone who's interested in Critical Discourse Analysis and wants to see an application of corpus linguistics methods to journalistic corpora. It touches on Judith Butler's ideas on the performative value of labels and on Spearer and Wilson's theory of relevance. This essay, and the whole book, can lead to a better understanding of migration as a multifaceted, complex, and evolving process.

Faloppa, F., Bonsaver, G., & Bond, E. (Eds.). (2015). *Destination Italy: Representing migration in contemporary media and narrative*. Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften.



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# A WUG-TONNE OF ADVICE:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH *BECAUSE LANGUAGE*

Romany Amber and Kitty Liu, second-year Linguistics students at Cambridge, interview Daniel Midgley and Hedvig Skirgård from *Because Language*: a podcast about linguistics, the science of language. We get a rundown of the podcast, their thoughts on linguistics and social issues, and a tonne of advice for young linguists.



*Because Language* podcast site: <http://becauselanguage.com>

Daniel's site: <https://danielmidgley.com/>

Hedvig's site: <https://sites.google.com/site/hedvigskirgard/home>

**Q: Tell us who you are and describe the podcast for people who don't know you.**

D: My name is Daniel Midgley. I'm a linguist. I taught linguistics at the University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University for many many years, and now I am a co-host on *Because Language*. I also do [other linguistics-related] gigs on the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). I'm also a dad. I like listening to music and long walks on the beach.

H: My name is Hedvig, I am from Sweden originally. I've been doing linguistics for quite a while now, [and have] just finished my PhD. I wrote my PhD thesis about Pacific languages and language diversification, in particular when it comes to grammar. I have an interdisciplinary leaning with my linguistics; I like to collaborate with people from cultural evolution, evolution of biology, and things like that. I also manage a project called *Grambank*<sup>(1)</sup> that will be released hopefully later this year. Outside of linguistics I like role-playing games, I like comics, I like to take *lots* of pictures of my cats.

D: Not joining us is Ben Ainslie, our third member, whom we love dearly. He's not here because he is doing some travelling, he's taking a well-deserved pre-vacation. He's a school teacher. He's tremendously funny, tremendously smart, and this is exactly what he would say if he were here right now.

**Q: How did the podcast start?**

D: It started about 2009, when my supervisor/mentor Alan Dench, professor at UWA (University of West Australia), offered me to take over his linguistics segment called *Talk the Talk* on RTR, a community radio station. It was a short segment with whoever happened to be in the studio that day, but over time I decided I would like to have more control over it and do it as a pre-recorded show with the DJ that I liked the best and had done the most shows with. That was Ben Ainslie. We did lots and lots of shows, the show grew on RTR community radio to about an hour-long show. And then —

# BECAUSE LANGUAGE



H: I was in the Netherlands and applying for PhD programmes and I was listening to some *Talk the Talk* episodes and I really liked it. What I was interested in, as a person who's done linguistics for a while, was the fact that *Talk the Talk* had research news and had a bit more deep dives. So, I sent a message to Daniel and said, 'I really like your show', and then I got a PhD position in Australia. Then Daniel asked me to come on the show and talk about some Swedish things. And then they just invited me on [as a permanent host].

D: And also, don't forget the wonderful Kylie Sturgess, who was on *Talk the Talk* for so many shows, and who is not on the show with us anymore. It's a three-cohost deal with me, Ben, and Hedvig, and we are having a great time cranking out shows!

**Q: Talk to us about the about the process of making a podcast, from having the initial ideas to the finished product.**

H: Our ideas come from three broad categories. One is that we've seen some research that we think is interesting to our audience, and we contact the researchers and ask them to come on our show. The prep for that might be looking at some of the major journals, things like *EurekAlert!*<sup>[2]</sup> for linguistics, and keeping on top of conferences. Another thing is, sometimes we get contacted by someone who has just published a book and wants to come on the show and talk about it — if we think that's interesting, we invite them on. The third one is more general, thematic things, like when we had Mei-Shin and Jing-ting on last year to talk about the many things that people call Chinese<sup>[3]</sup>, where we had sort of loose plan of what questions to ask. We have a Google Drive folder with lots of documents and lines and ideas for shows, and we try and get through the most as best we can. Daniel usually writes up the run sheet and tries to keep us vaguely on track.

D: We have some general areas: talking through news and research, the main segment, talking about cool words, and mailbags where people ask questions. Sometimes it comes from our listeners; a lot of good ideas come from listeners. If there's something interesting (maybe it ties into something recent, like Wordle), I have to ask, 'What can we bring to this? What value can we add? Which section does this fit?' Sometimes you just find a topic that clicks. Like, did you know that a researcher has found a correlation between Pokémon names and how big or evolved they are<sup>[4]</sup>? I put the run sheet together with stuff that I found, then we get together, and we talk. The main thing when we're recording is me making sure that we are moving along

and things aren't too hard. Then I take away the audio and I edit it to within an inch of its life. And try to make sure that it sounds good from a technical point of view — the sound is compressed, that there's noise reduction, that the silences are removed. The important thing is to be respectful of the conversation that you had; edit for clarity, but make sure you're true to that conversation. Don't try to make people look like geniuses by going back and recording things you didn't say.

H: Daniel knows what our 'Umms' look like. He can look at a waveform and tell if it's me or Ben saying 'Umm'.

**Q: There are some books that are generally seen as Books To Get People Into Linguistics, like Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct*<sup>[5]</sup>, whose contents are no longer considered particularly current, or whose authors have controversial stances on social issues. (In *TLL*'s case, maybe both.) Do you think we should stop recommending these books?**

D: I've read *The Language Instinct* and I learned heaps from it. I personally think that it should be taken off, because it takes a very Chomskian view of nativism and language acquisition that I think is wrong. But this question also involves how we feel about the state of public linguistics today. Some of the most influential public linguists aren't even doing linguistics anymore — they're doing books on how 'if you're woke, you're terrible', or 'if you disagree with me then you're not being rational'. Whatever you're using to get your answers, whether it's 'science' or 'rationality' or 'intelligence' or whatever you want to call it, you've gotta have compassion and intellectual humility. Otherwise it will take you to terrible people and terrible conclusions that you will think are great because you got to them 'rationally'.

H: One reason why I might be anti- some of those books is because some of the debates they present are outdated now. [Some older generativists] worship at the altar of *Syntactic Structures*<sup>[6]</sup>, but there are young generativists that aren't stuck in the wars from the '70s and '80s. There are a new crop of young generative linguists who're like 'I think it's good to have a theory, it makes a lot of sense and it makes me ask interesting questions, but I don't think it's the ultimate universal truth; it's useful tool in my arsenal.' The more we mainly [engage with] and fight these [more outdated views], the more stuck we get in the idea that we're still fighting this 'good-versus-evil' war.

**Q: We (the interviewers) like how the show directly deals with social justice issues related to language.**

D: That's important for me as well. As a privileged white guy, I don't feel like I'm good at social justice. I make mistakes all the time. But I just feel like it's something that needs to happen. You create the show you feel should exist, and this is the show I want.

**Q: How much can academic linguistics contribute to social justice issues?**

H: There are some basic facts we've learned through linguistics — for example, languages have equal value, multilingualism and bilingualism in children is probably good, certainly not harmful — that I certainly believe wider society would benefit from knowing. Linguists' words matter and are often weighted more by other people (especially, unfortunately, if we come from an ethnic background or gender that's seen as more authoritative), [so when you have a platform,] you repeat these basic things because they need to be told.

D: There are two messages I'm trying to promote when it comes to using linguistics for the public good. One is that it's normal for people to use language differently, and the other is that it's normal for language to change. When I walk into the ABC studios in Perth on Thursday morning, [often I get] new cohosts, who're probably gonna say, 'Oh, you're a linguist. I bet that means you're really concerned about the purity of a language, right? Making sure everyone says things properly'. They are very surprised to hear me say, 'I'm interested when people do things differently. I'm not on board with the kind of school-teacher-ish urge that some people have to enforce language ideologies and enforce language hygiene.' They're amazed. And if I have the same radio host for the next three or four weeks, they get used to this idea that language difference, variation, and change are interesting and not something to get angry about. They even say things like, 'We know, Daniel, we know: language changes'. Which I love, because it means the message is getting out there, and then I'll get somebody new, and the process will begin again.

H: I also think linguistics is changing for the better when it comes to documentation and description. There's more collaborative data collection; people are moving more away from the sense of being a white researcher going off to an exotic country and doing fieldwork, and 'giving back' by printing out your grammar and giving people a copy. Now there are more discussions of collaborative fieldwork: including people as co-authors, asking 'What do you think is interesting to do in your community? What would *you* like?' More collaboration with speakers and signers and users of languages also makes the research better. It's just a win-win.

**Q: How can we keep ourselves from 'getting stuck' in the past?**

D: People often say, 'I would be glad to change my mind if there were incontrovertible evidence that something I thought was wrong', but in language that's difficult because language is complicated and messy and multifactorial. How could I ever really conclusively disprove a thing that I think about how children learn language?

H: Yeah, it *is* difficult to show these things wrong. Always try to not be 100% confident in your own theories. Try and keep an open mind when people critique you. Try and take their perspective: what is the question they are trying to investigate and what is it that they consider evidence for and against it? From their point of view, have they disproved me? If they have, you can have a discussion about whether that's the research question you're interested in. It's always good to reduce the basic assumptions of where the conversations are starting. Otherwise, you start talking past each other, because you're actually not discussing the same things.

D: You can have wisdom or certainty, but you can't have both. And so we need to be less certain.

H: It's one of the reasons that I enjoy working in cross-disciplinary research. The people who engage with cross-disciplinary research are often quite humble, and will be like 'So, from our field we would do it like this; what would you do?' They're also open to be disproven and to learn.

**Q:** One of the reasons that your podcast is so popular is that it's accessible to laypeople while also giving something new to people who study academic linguistics. How do you strike the balance between getting both of those two things right?

**H:** I'm a big believer of the fact that a lot of research is accessible, more accessible than people think. Laypeople are often really interested and can say really smart things [about language], you just have to be a good communicator (or try to be!). I don't want to do science that I can't explain to lay-people because then I suspect that I'm not doing good science. I talk to my family a lot — I explain my research to my mum and my brother and try and make them understand. If the only people I can talk to are other academics then that's a pretty poor world! If we think something is interesting, we bank on that we can make it accessible.

**D:** I think that, once again, not being a very good linguist, but being a good explainer is what helps me. A lot of linguistic ideas are comprehensible if you explain them well. When you're explaining something, my rules are: what do they know? What do they need to know? And is there an interesting way of saying it so that they will like it?

**Q:** Do you guys have any other advice for people graduating with linguistics degrees who don't really know what they want to do with it?

**H:** I have this general tactic I recommend to young linguists: when you see something that you like, send a message to the person who crea-

ted it. Academia has a lot of negativity, and usually the main interaction we have with our peers is critique, which can be really draining. So sometimes when I read a paper I really like, I send a message to the author like, 'I really liked your paper, it was really good for this and this reason'. [Also,] you don't have to feel like you're locked into linguistics. There are lots of different graduate programmes that would accept linguistics graduates, and a lot of things you can do with linguistics outside of academia — for example, a lot of institutions and companies hire communicators. I would recommend going to *SuperLingua*, the blog, because they do regular interviews with people who have chosen different paths<sup>[7]</sup>.

**D:** Anna Marie Trester<sup>[8]</sup> is doing a book about employing linguists and we are going to be talking to her very soon. It's okay to know that academia is not right for you — I had a full-time academic job and I treasure that time, but it wasn't what I loved. You have to have four or five very specific skills to be able to do it, and I had like two or three of those, but one of the skills that I had was teaching and explaining and that was what I loved. So I decided to jump into doing this: it's less remunerative, but it's made me very happy and I get to talk to Ben and Hedvig and some really great linguistic people, because I decided that [changing jobs] was the right thing for me. What was the word of the week we had? *Procrastaworking*. Notice what you do when you procrastinate. See if that's something that you are actually really interested in.

#### References:

- [1] <https://www.shh.mpg.de/439568/glottobank>
- [2] <https://www.eurekalert.org>
- [3] <http://becauselanguage.com/32-fallen-leaves-the-chinese-languages/>
- [4] Kawahara, S., Godoy, M. C., & Kumagai, G. (2021). English speakers can infer Pokémon types based on sound symbolism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648948>
- [5] Pinker, S. (1994). *The Language Instinct*. London: Penguin Books.
- [6] Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- [7] <https://www.superlinguo.com/resources>
- [8] <https://careerlinguist.com>

Clockwise from top left: Romany, Kitty, Daniel, and Hedvig. Image credits: Hedvig Skirgård



# SPREADING THE WORD:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH GASTON DORREN

*In this interview, James Morley (second-year Linguistics undergraduate at the University of Cambridge) chats to language writer and polyglot, Gaston Dorren, about language-learning, communicating about languages to the public-at-large, and linguistics' storied history with 'dilettantes and crackpots'.*

**JM:** Hi Gaston! For those who haven't come across your work before, do you mind introducing yourself: who you are, what you do — and why you do it?



**GD:** I'm Gaston Dorren, I'm a Dutch writer on languages and linguistics. I write books and articles in Dutch and English, the best-known being *Lingo* and *Babel*, which are about European and world languages respectively. When I write, I aim at simultaneously enlightening and entertaining both the reader and the writer, because when you're writing you learn a lot of new stuff and when you try to write attractively, you can have a pretty good time of it. I do, anyway.

**JM:** I think one thing that comes across unmistakably in your writing is your passion, for languages and for linguistics. Where does that come from, do you think?

**GD:** That sort of 'know thyself' introspection is not all that easy. It must have something to do with growing up in an area where there were always five languages around — my family's Limburgish, the Dutch spoken in school and on TV, the French that my father taught and that was actually spoken nearby, the German of a friendly neighbour and also spoken just across the border, and the English of pop songs and television series. Also my mother was quite a 'language-y' sort of person, who liked to learn new words and who would read the newspaper with a red pen to correct errors.

*JM: I think it'd be fair to describe you as a linguistics 'communicator' — your journalism helps propagate knowledge about language, and the discoveries of linguistics, to the public-at-large. Why do you think that's important? What do you think a better appreciation of language can do for people?*

GD: I do feel that there is a point to communicating about linguistics. As humans and as modern Western humans, we tend to draw all sorts of conclusions from the way other people talk. When they speak with an accent, regional or foreign or class-based or ethnic, we jump to conclusions about their lifestyle, their level of education, their competence, etc. And compared to racism or sexism or other forms of abhorrent narrow-mindedness, it's somehow less of a taboo to be prejudiced against people based on their language. Similarly, many people have this feeling that languages outside Europe, well outside Western Europe, can't be much to write home about. Linguists know better than that of course, or so I hope. But I think if there is a mission, this should be it: making people realise that all languages, as different as they are, are intricate and subtle human creations.

*JM: One way you've tried to do that is online — I know you run a blog, and are quite active on social media, for example. What sort of advantages does that kind of digital forum offer for people like you?*

GD: Obviously, the internet has increased our access to all kinds of information hugely, including linguistic information. But whether it has increased public consumption of such information, not to mention proper digestion, processing, reflection, I really can't tell. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but I strongly believe in the value of books, including e-books and audiobooks of course, as a medium for deeper reading, for immersing oneself in subjects. An article here and video there are all good and fine, but they're very fleeting.

That said, social media certainly does have certain advantages

for a writer about linguistics. But perhaps that's mostly for me, from a self-centred rather than communication-centred perspective! For example, it gives me a feel for how people respond to information about linguistics — whether they're baffled and resistant, or simply accept it, for example. Writing, fun as it is, is also a lonely job to do, so social media provides company! And finally, by following certain important specialists, I myself get references to cool new stuff going on — so it works both ways.

*JM: One problem for communicating linguistics, which you've written about in the past, is linguistics' perhaps unique tendency for attracting what you call 'dilettantes and crackpots' — people who co-opt linguistic terminology and ideas, but with ulterior, ultimately unscientific, motives. What do you think it is about language that has made this appeal to 'crackpot' reasoning so enduring historically — and even today?*

GD: Well, we all tend to overestimate our expertise and insights. We're excellent drivers, we all have a pretty good idea about virology and epidemiology, we all know how prime minister Johnson ought to have responded to the Covid pandemic, *et cetera*. With language, it's even worse, because we're all fluent in our mother tongue and many of us can write in a way that looks really good on a print-out. So, we don't doubt ourselves enough. And then there's the fact that language adds to our identity, which to many is a source of great pride, and free of cost at that. So I can see why some people are tempted to dabble in linguistics and, just like anti-vaxxers in medicine and flat-earthers in geology, come up with their own crackpot theories. I also doubt it'll be overcome in time because the same incentives will remain.

*JM: Something you've written a bit in quite a few places is language endangerment, and the likelihood of a massive loss of language diversity in the coming years. Why do you think language-endangerment, and talking about it in the public-domain, is so important?*

GD: Well, I think first it's important to realise it's not so much a 'possibility' as a dead cert. We may — myself included — wish otherwise, but the coming loss of linguistic diversity seems inevitable. For linguistics, the most urgent task is then description of as many languages as possible. Now, that's of course a partly melancholy and hard task, but it can be done. In fact, there's great work being done in this area by some linguists — quite a few now, actually. Nick Evans [Linguistics Professor at the Australian National University] is one example, and perhaps the best person to talk to about this stuff. What makes revitalisation hard though, is that language shift often results in an entirely unrelated language being spoken, but then a later generation wants to revitalise the original language — that's often much harder, because the original language will be completely unlike their adopted language.

Why's it important? That's something I like asking academic linguists, actually. I think it's very important for linguistics, of course, so we have as much data as possible — though obviously, we only have a tiny place in the world, in the grand scheme of things. Revitalising endangered languages is also often very important from an identity perspective. I think it's not easy for me to say too much about that, though, not being a psychologist or sociologist. I'm also aware that, as a European male (who's getting on a bit!), whose native languages aren't endangered, I will have less insight on this than someone from a community whose language (and possibly way-of-life) is under threat.

*JM: It's interesting you say that language and identity aren't so closely bound-up for you, given you're a native-speaker of a (relatively-)rare language in Limburgish. Could you tell us a bit more about it — any interesting quirks?*

GD: Of course. Limburgish is spoken by about a million people, mostly in the Netherlands and Belgium. In that area it's fairly widespread among all social classes, in the cities and the countryside. Like Standard Dutch, it's a form of Low Franconian, but it's more conservative in some ways, phonologically, but also morphologically as it's retained a robust system of three grammatical genders and a more complex conjugation pattern. Since Limburgish borders on both the German and French language areas, it has also undergone their phonology and lexical influences, especially from German, but there are also some French loanwords. Limburgish's most eye-catching, or rather ear-catching, feature is its tone. Just the two, nothing like the East Asian complexities, but still, there are quite a few minimal pairs, either accidental ones or cases where tone distinguishes singular and plural. So Limburgish is like Swedish, Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian in that respect.

*JM: You're also famously a polyglot — what is it that language-learning does for you? Why do you do it?*



GD: It's a mixture of things. For one thing, it fulfils a sort of analytical craving, not only when I learn a language, but also when I learn about languages. Also, cracking a grammar and memorising vocabulary gives a feeling of control, of competence. Languages have also allowed me to broaden my world tremendously. With only Limburgish, my world would be extremely small. With only Dutch, it would still quite parochial. But even with English it would be severely limited. For instance, many of my favourite books about languages have not been published in English, but only in German or French or Dutch or Spanish or even Portuguese.

That isn't to say I always enjoy language-learning. It's work, it can be hard, it can be disheartening, and it may end in failure. Which, I guess, is character-building.

*JM: I've read you're currently learning Polish — how's that been going?*

GD: Not bad. As I wrote in my book *Babel*, I tried to learn Vietnamese before, and that was a dismal failure. I've really nothing to show for my efforts except some insight into East Asian languages and a close friendship with one of my teachers. But Polish is much more feasible. Knowing German helps a great deal, because the grammar follows the same sort of

logic and Polish vocabulary has been influenced by German, both by direct borrowing and calquing, by semantic translation of the parts of compounds. Without German, I think I would find Polish a lot harder.

*JM: As a final thought — if you had to lose one of your languages, which would you choose to lose?*

GD: Before I answer, I'd like to give you a quick anecdote, if that's okay. Before my Dad died, in the last year of his life, he suffered from aphasia. I'd always spoken to him in Limburgish, only speaking Dutch when we had Dutch visitors, you know. But in that last year, he would always speak German. If I were to become aphasic — which I think would be a nightmare — I would certainly not want to lose my Dutch. I think that would leave a choice between Limburgish and Spanish. But some part of me wouldn't want to lose my Limburgish: I use it to talk to my sister, my late parents — perhaps I was cavalier earlier on when I said Limburgish didn't have much cultural importance to me. So I think I'd lose Spanish — I love it, but I don't use it much anymore.

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Old Languages, New Approaches:  
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# THE AGES





# THROUGH



# THE NEW MEME REALITY

*Diana Lepka is currently working towards her Master's degree in Cognitive and Cultural Linguistics (1. Fachsemester) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (Munich, Germany). In this article, Diana gives an analysis of meme-creation following the framework of Baudrillard's simulacra, with reference to the Donald Trump 'covfefe' meme, which she researched as part of her Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature at the Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Lutsk, Ukraine).*

Human social existence is directly connected with language, which reflects various events in the world, and at the same time shapes our perception of them. Ongoing technological progress impacts our channels of interpersonal communication, which are constantly developing, both in analogue life and in the internet space.

Increasing amounts of attention in media discourse are being paid to memes. Many memes emerge as reactions to public and/or political events and are often ideological representations of the original event. In this article, I analyse the development of the Donald Trump 'covfefe' meme as the creation of a simulacrum in the framework of Jean Baudrillard, and its role in the modern political discourse. But first, I will give a brief history of the word *meme* as a concept.

The term *meme* is derived from the Greek *mimema* ('imitated')<sup>[1]</sup> and was introduced in 1976 by British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins compared memes to biological genes because of their ability to reproduce and, therefore, independently exist. This means that memes can replicate, evolve, mutate, and undergo 'natural selection'<sup>[2]</sup>.

In the 21st century, with the development of social networks, internet memes renewed scientific interest in the meme as a concept. Internet memes may take the form of verbal phrases, pictures, videos, or other media containing cultural information. Moreover, they do not mutate randomly, since individuals may deliberately change them for their own purposes. The possibility of deliberate alteration does not conform with Dawkins' original conception of memes. Therefore, internet memes are viewed by some scholars as a different representation of the *meme* concept.

In media discourse, memes are often seen as certain ideological explications hidden in an appealing information shell, which influence their consumers' perception of reality. Therefore, memes on different political topics can also be viewed as *ideologemes*, or rather as a new way to manifest them: an *ideologeme* is a word, set phrase, or phraseological unit which reflects an underlying ideology, worldview, or stereotypical depiction of social structures<sup>[3]</sup>.

The spontaneous creativity of internet users leads to the emergence of numerous similar, so-called 'archetype' memes. Their content is constantly supplemented and deepened, so that these memes gradually lose touch

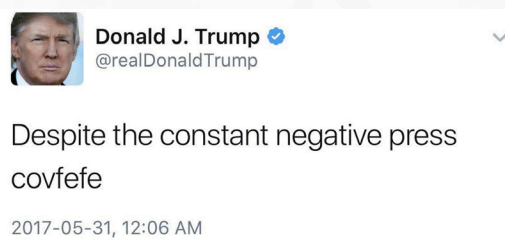
with their source material. Thus, internet memes begin to exist as holistic structures, which can be correctly decoded by the members of a particular social group, regardless of the context. That is why interactions on the internet space that use memes and other media elements is an alternative method of interpersonal communication, and creates a new dimension for social realisation: hyperreality. The notion of hyperreality implies the inability to differentiate between the reality and its simulation. Jean Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality is closely connected with his concept of the *simulacrum*, which is a mere representation of reality and not reality itself. Baudrillard defines the whole world as a simulacrum, where reality is represented by 'fake' representations (photoshopped images, the concept of money, or memes, in our case), making it impossible to differentiate between what is real and what has been 'forged'<sup>[4]</sup>.

The hyperreality of internet discourse is not deterministic and serves as a cornerstone of creativity for internet communities, where individuals can express their ideas using memes that are not directly related to the denotatum. Despite their humorous nature, the satirical features of memes are often utilised for personal gain.

Since 2017, memes using the obscure letter combination *covfefe* have become very popular on the internet. They emerged after Donald Trump's Tweet *Despite the constant negative press covfefe*, where, from the context, *covfefe* is obviously a typographical error for *coverage*, and was removed from the President's profile a few hours later.

The first stage of turning a Tweet into a meme was the viral dissemination of screenshots, where the Tweet itself served as the primary source of the political meme. At this stage, internet users were clearly conveying a specific fact of fundamental reality, without distorting it (Fig. 1).

Figure 1



The second stage involves the distribution of memes that still reference the President's Tweet, but the symbols or parts of the image are not authentic, and only hint at the existence of original primary information. This stage covers memes that still exist in the context of a Tweet, but convey facts in a distorted form. For example, one user tried to explain the meaning of *covfefe* in Russian, making it equivalent to the phrase *I resign* (Fig. 2).

Figure 2



In the third stage, the creation of a simulacrum<sup>[4]</sup>, the primary context of a meme is gradually lost. The connection with the original source is almost absent. The outer shell of the media element is changing — the President's Tweet is no longer used as a referent, and semantic changes in certain characters lead to the emergence of secondary meanings for the meme. This stage covers media elements that still depict Donald Trump, but the wording *covfefe* is used to denote 'carelessness', the wrong steps of the US president and other politicians. Some users made use of the graphic similarities between *covfefe* and the word *coffee* (Fig. 3).

Figure 3

bae: come over  
me: i can't im presidentialing  
bae: i made covfefe  
me:



The last, fourth stage in the establishment of the meme-simulacrum involves the complete loss of connection with the original source of information. Signs and symbols no longer imitate real facts: they are totally equivalent. *Covfefe* becomes a simulacrum with its own set of meanings and interpretations. Memes using this combination of letters no longer contain images of President Trump or his Tweets (Fig. 4; Fig. 5).

Figure 4



Figure 5



In my opinion, media elements using the letter combination *covfefe* are an example of creolised memes consisting of verbal and visual structural levels. Creolisation, in this case, means the emergence of new memes on the bases of the previously blended, already existing memes. Images created through this blending process gradually become unrecognisable, so that individuals start to overlook any features that contain traces of the original, 'archetype' memes. In my analysis, Donald Trump's Tweet was the basis for the creation of a popular catchphrase, which instantly became recognisable. However, this phrase later functioned as the zero degree of creolisation in memes, which then underwent all four stages of transformation into an element of hyperreality. By becoming pure simulacra, such memes exemplify the pluralism of human thought and subjective interpretation for events in society.

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Images taken from  
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# such ✨ language change ✨: the growing nuances of the sparkle emoji

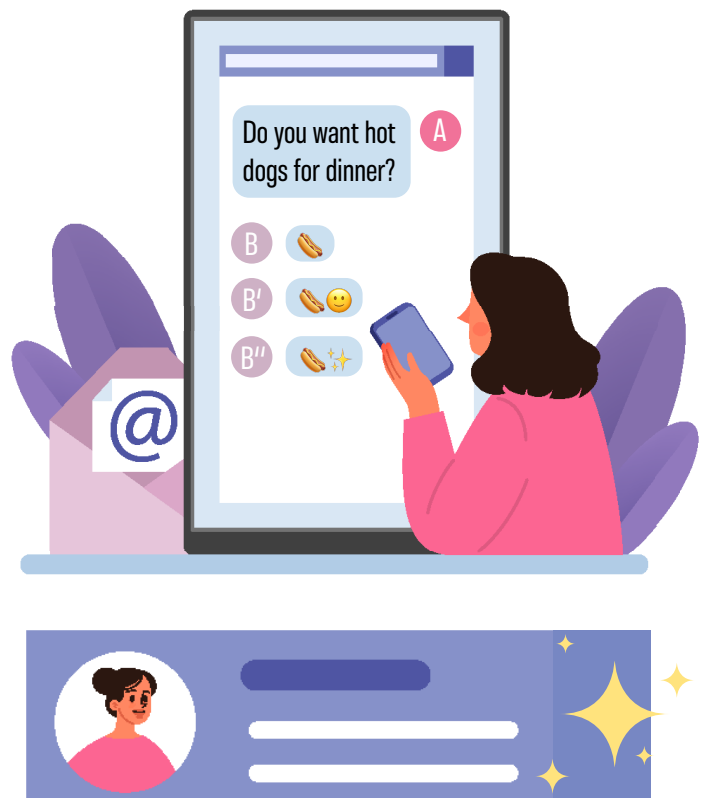
*Beatrix Livesey-Stephens is a final year undergraduate Language & Linguistics student at the University of Aberdeen. She is an unwavering stan of the sparkle emoji.*

If by some chance you unlocked my phone and looked at the emojis I use, ✨ would be right at the top of the list. ✨ is officially referred to as 'sparkles' by the Unicode Consortium, but I affectionately dub it 'the sparkle emoji'. I use the sparkle emoji so much, I thought about giving it up as a New Year's Resolution. I've considered becoming an official sponsor of the sparkle emoji on the Unicode Consortium site. But five, six years ago, I didn't even have access to emoji on my phone. How did I become so linguistically reliant on something that isn't even a word, and has no spoken equivalent? How and why has the sparkle emoji taken over typographic discourse, and where's it headed next?

Introspecting on my personal sparkle emoji journey, it specifically took over my use of smiley faces — popular examples being 😊, 😄, or 😁, which correlate exactly to :), :D, and XD, as these emoticons turn into their respective emojis when typed on social media platforms. The sparkle emoji seemed clearer, more carefree, and importantly, more abstract. I felt that I was at much less risk of being misinterpreted over text when I used ✨ — after all, there's only one ✨, and there are 58 yellow smiley emoji. That said, I thought there was only one ✨ at the time (spoiler: I was wrong).

Some of my first exposures to the sparkle emoji were with it used as a type of complement to another emoji, in bigrams such as 😊✨ or 🍔✨. The use of ✨ as a complement correlates to adding the connotations of common interpretations of the sparkle emoji to the first emoji. Some of these connotations are *happiness, light, cleanliness*, and other overwhelmingly positive adjectives<sup>[1][2]</sup>. Emojipedia notes that as with many of the earliest emojis, the design of ✨ and these associated meanings were derived from conventions in Japanese manga (comics) and anime, where sparkle-like symbols are often presented either alongside or surrounding a character, object or scene. These sparkles are intended to engender a sense of beauty, novelty, impressiveness, or, in the case of a character, internal joy or happiness<sup>[3]</sup>.

Adding a sparkle emoji to a collection of other emojis, or even a sentence, makes the net tone of the utterance more positive, arguably always more so than adding the quintessential smiley face (😊) although this can depend on the platform the message is sent on, since emoji are realised differently across platforms and can be subjective in this manner. Consider the following as alternative responses:



The use of ✨ in B''' suggests brightness, excitement, and more of an affirmative agreement to have hot dogs for dinner than in B). It is clearly attached as a complement to the emoji that precedes it, and adds specific emotional direction to the tone of the response, rather than just the semantic meaning of the hotdog.



Image: words/phrases related to the sparkle (✨) emoji; image credits: Chen (2020)<sup>[1]</sup>

However, use of the sparkle emoji has expanded beyond signifying positive tone or gratitude. In *It's Not Just You. The Sparkles Emoji is ✨ Everywhere ✨*, Keith Broni, Editor-In-Chief of Emojipedia, referred to the sparkle emoji as 'once merely a decorative set of stars' and now 'more popular than ever' even though it has existed for over a decade<sup>[4][5]</sup>. The sparkle emoji is all over TikTok and Twitter as an emphasiser and paralinguistic feature to not only suggest emphasis, but also mocking, irony, or sarcasm, via what is known as 'bookending'. In this context, the positive connotations of the sparkle emojis are subverted, and have similar distribution to the 🙌 bigram (🙌🙌) at the end of written utterances, which is also used for conveying irony. It could be argued that a large number of emojis could be used to convey emphasis using the pattern of / ✨ / text / ✨ /, which bears worth answering. Examples of other emojis that can follow the distribution of the sparkle emoji in the emphasis context — focus-marking tools — are the sirens (🚨) and megaphones (📣)<sup>[6]</sup>. When used in the emphasis context, 🚨 and 📣 convey urgency and loudness due to their association with the real-life objects they represent, but ✨ is very different.

The sparkle emoji's association with newness, cleanliness, and grace means that it lends itself to emphasis contexts in ways that do not reflect urgency or panic like the emojis above — instead, it reflects poise, a calm and collected ✨ hot take ✨, if you will. Although the sparkle emoji originated from the representation of a star, the existence of other emojis that more readily fill in to represent stars mean that the sparkle emoji's distribution is not confused with that of a star when it is acting as a paralinguistic feature — as digital gesture.

Smiley-face emojis are becoming more and more seen as passive-

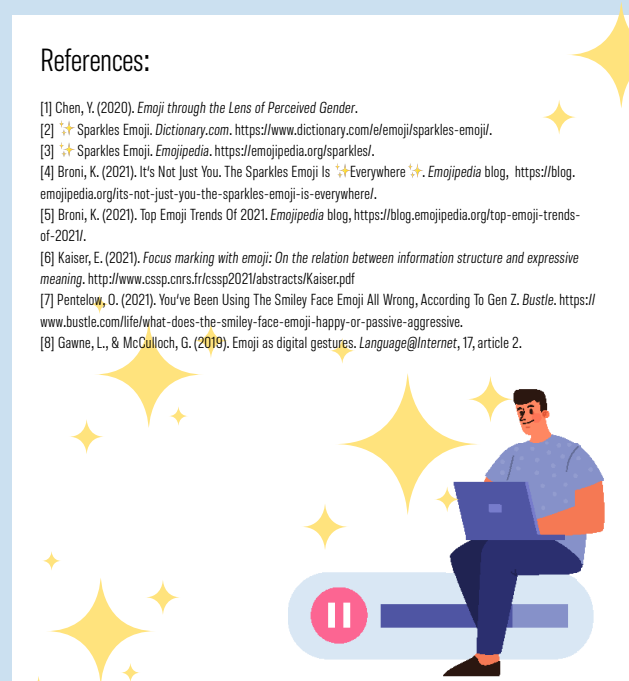
aggressive, especially by Gen Z<sup>[7]</sup>. I think we reached the point of no return when the upside-down smiley face emoji was released (😞), almost exclusively used as a subversion of its upright version, and changing the landscape smiley-face emoji use forever. The versatile sparkle emoji allows straightforward positive-oriented communication due to its lack of association with physical paralinguistic features, while doing a great job as a classy focus-marking tool. The sparkle emoji's abstractness makes it perfect for being understood when using it as a backchannel, especially as an attached reaction to a message rather than its own reply<sup>[8]</sup>.

Of course, the sparkle emoji could be considered to have an allomorph in the form of the dizzy emoji (🌀). The dizzy emoji is arguably more closely related to a physical representation of a star, and for this reason, I use it as a diminutive version of the sparkle emoji, i.e. when I do not want to imply as much of the positive meaning attached to the sparkle emoji, but want to convey about half the meaning. The same goes for different versions of the heart emoji (❤️). The colours of each different heart convey very different information for me. What would you think if your friend who constantly uses ❤️ suddenly used 🍀 in its place instead? Are they conveying the same information? What exactly has changed? Of course, emoji use is subjective at its heart, even if there is a general consensus about semantic fields of certain emojis. I'll go as far as to say that ✨ → 🌀 as an allomorph directly maps onto ❤️ → 🍀, at least in the way I use them.

According to Emojipedia<sup>[3]</sup>, almost one in every 100 Tweets now contains the sparkle emoji. Honestly, the emoji of affirmation, magic, and wonderment deserves nothing less.

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# OLD LANGUAGES, NEW APPROACHES:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIEKE MEELEN

*Dr Marieke Meelen is a linguist at the University of Cambridge, where in addition to her role as Assistant Professor of Historical Linguistics, she does research in comparative syntax, information structure, and computational methods in historical linguistics. Liam (an MPhil student in Linguistics at Cambridge) interviews Marieke on her work in developing and working with historical corpora, and how computational techniques contribute to the development of historical linguistics as a field.*

**LM: Thank you very much for coming! For people who don't know you, could you tell us a bit about yourself and your background?**

MM: My name is Marieke Meelen, I'm from the Netherlands, and I am Assistant Professor of Historical Linguistics at Cambridge. I studied at Leiden University, where I did Comparative Indo-European linguistics, and then a Master's in general linguistics with a focus on historical linguistics, especially working with developing historical corpora. During that I went to Aberystwyth for a year to learn more Welsh, especially Middle Welsh, and other Celtic languages too. I spent a part of my PhD at the University of Cambridge, and got a British Academy fellowship to do a postdoc here, on the emergence of verb-second word order in Welsh and other languages, before my current role.

**LM: You've worked on part-of-speech tagging of historical corpora, such as for Middle Welsh. Could you explain what that involves?**

MM: Middle Welsh word order is very strange if you compare it to Old or Modern Welsh — the latter are verb-initial, but Middle Welsh looks like it was verb-second. As my PhD research question, I wanted to know why that happens, as the only real theories out there were that it was just some literary thing where writers in Middle Welsh thought 'oh we'll all just write in verb-second because it sounds nice' — I thought that wasn't really a linguistically satisfying explanation. Other people, such as David Willis<sup>[1]</sup>, have worked on this before and I think we agree that Middle

Welsh really did have different word order, so I wanted to find out where that comes from. But in order to do that you need to make generalisations based on reading everything there is in Middle Welsh, and that takes a lot of time, even though Middle Welsh as a corpus is not as big as other languages. I needed a way to do that automatically. The first step in trying to find word order patterns is finding out what parts of speech there are in the corpus, so for every word you have, you want to know how you can classify it morphosyntactically. So part-of-speech tagging is really just a classifier, it gives a label to every word, or morpheme if you want to split it up further.

There are various ways of doing part-of-speech tagging. You can have only 10 or 15 different labels for noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. I wanted to find out about Welsh verb agreement as well, because the agreement patterns in Middle Welsh are very strange, so it's no use to just have a label 'verb': what you want is more information to say it's *present tense 3rd person singular*, for instance. So what I did during my PhD was first extend that basic tag set — instead of just having one label 'verb', I had a label for all of the morphological information.

**LM: So corpus research requires quite a lot of tailoring the corpus to the task at hand?**

MM: It does! Because I didn't want to reinvent the wheel, I started working from what they've done for the historical English corpora at the University of Pennsylvania, for Old, Middle, and especially Early Modern English. They've developed tag sets with

constituency-based corpora, which is what I wanted to do, because generative syntax works well with constituency-based corpora. The alternative is dependency corpora [which is a different way to model syntax]. That is actually what most people in NLP work with, but it's more difficult from a theoretical-syntactic point of view. For instance, one thing that Middle Welsh has is different types of pronouns like echo pronouns, or null pronouns, and you can have those because you have topicalised phrases, focused phrases, etc.

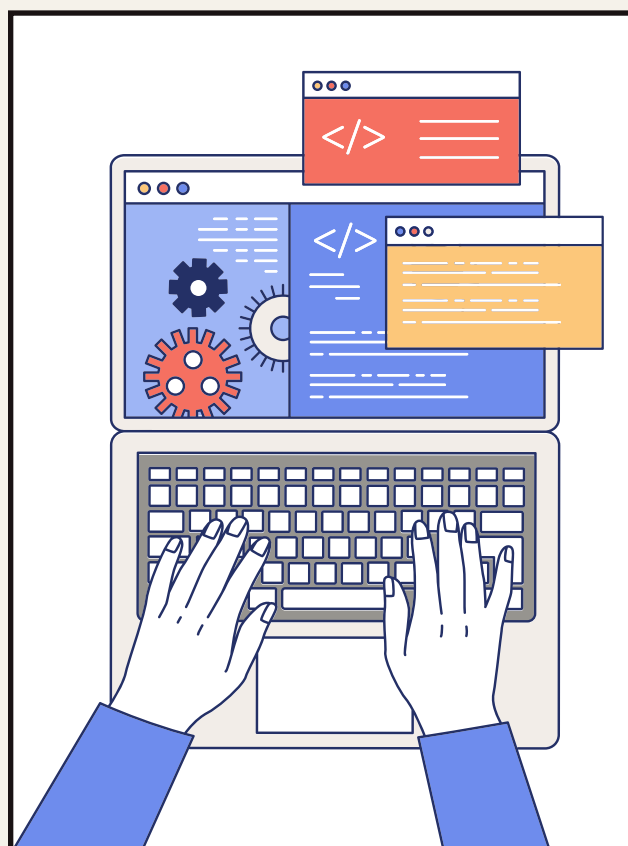
You can have those in a constituency-based corpus because it's slightly theoretically-informed, but the dependency-based corpus never does that.

**LM:** Are there any particular challenges with annotating historical corpora as opposed to corpora of modern languages?

**MM:** There are loads of challenges. Some who are focused on NLP come from engineering and don't actually have a linguistic background. They're very good at the programming side of things, but not necessarily understanding what they're programming. In a lot of cases, especially if you're working with synchronic linguistic data, let's say in Modern English, you don't really need to know an awful lot, because there's nice learning algorithms out there that can take care of all of that for you. As a linguist you'd like to say that that's not really good enough — even though your computer can figure out what the noun is and what the verb is in English, that doesn't mean that that always works. But the major problem is that in order for those things to work you need a lot of data. If you wanted to do some nice NLP thing like language generation for a Twitter bot, if you want that to improve then you just wait for two, three days in Modern English, and you'll have hundreds of millions of new Tweets, and that's hundreds of millions of new data points which you can compare with your language-generated data and then it gets better. But if we're talking Old English, then we're just talking about, one, two, three million words — you can't compare that. It means that some of the tools that work very well in NLP for, let's say, Modern English, don't work at all for any of the older stages of the language, not even for English, and then if you're talking about Welsh we have even less.

**LM:** Do you see any further developments in NLP being able to automate the process more, or do you think that lack of data is a fundamental problem?

**MM:** No, it can be solved, and I think the only way is if people in historical linguistics and NLP work together more, because you do need people who know the language very well. And you also need people within NLP who are happy to not just focus on improving existing tools or solving problems with lots of available data. There's a growing community within NLP who are interested in working with low-resource or under-researched languages, and a lot of support can come from that angle. But with 'low-resource' they often mean contemporary languages where you can still get more data; with historical linguistics, crucially, we don't have that. Also, the data that I work with is all written, on manuscripts — it's not nice spoken data that we can acquire, and we can't get judgments on anything. In historical data there are some pieces of the puzzle that are always going to be missing, and this is why it's good to make corpora and use NLP techniques in the first place: with the help of syntactic theory on the one hand (if you're looking at syntactic problems), and NLP on the other, you can fill in the blank spots. That only works if you really work together with people.



**LM: What do researchers do with historical corpora?**

MM: There are lots of different sides to it. For instance, let's say, if I make a very good corpus of Middle Welsh, then people who do research on the history of the medieval period in Wales, and on when these texts were written can have access to a corpus that has a search function, because they're digitised and annotated. They might be interested in finding out things about where these manuscripts were produced, or who the authors were — most of these texts have no obvious author or scribe, we don't know where they're from. If you have a corpus, you can use it to find patterns that will then help you make a more informed decision on who's the author of this document. Like this, building historical corpora can help people in the digital humanities, or a historian, literary scientist, or philologist — it gives people access to things that they can't do themselves.

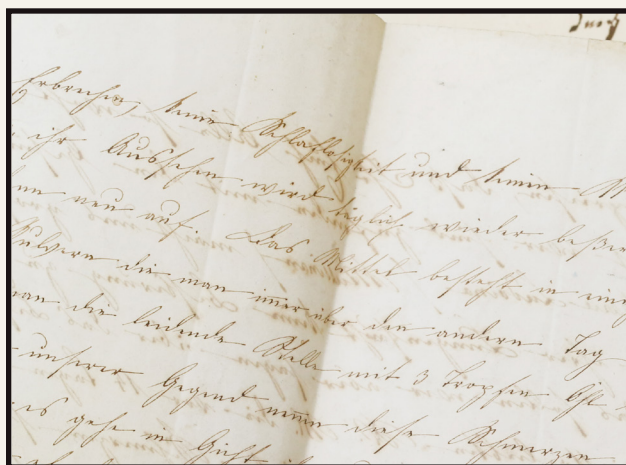
You can also do topic modelling on Classical Tibetan texts so that you can find out where certain texts were translated, what they have in common with some of their Sanskrit originals, or how they relate to some of the Classical Chinese texts we're working with. So one thing that I'm working on with the Tibetan corpora now is trying to develop a sort of document retrieval. It's basically a Google for Classical Chinese and Classical Tibetan, where you can put a passage from your Classical Chinese Buddhist text in the search engine, and then ask it: where can we find this in the enormous Tibetan corpus. Again, that is useful, but lies outside of my research in historical syntax.

What I focus on these days is information structure, including things about topic and focus, but also semantic annotation like animacy. For the new project that I just started about Tibetan and Newar, the research question is 'how did egophoricity as a category emerge?', which is a very semantic and syntactic question. Egophoricity is the grammaticalisation of the speaker's conscious thoughts and involvement, and you have egophoric auxiliaries in a lot of modern Tibetan varieties that weren't there in Old Tibetan. You can say things like, 'this is tea', and if I add the egophoric auxiliary, it would say 'here's the tea that I made (for you)'. We're trying to find out how this emerges: we know the verbs from which it emerges, which at some point changed and gained this more pragmaticalised meaning. We have a postdoc starting on this at Cambridge in February and one at SOAS; one is going to look at the history of Tibetan and the other is going to look at the history of Newar. In Newar [egophoricity] is not an auxiliary, but it's a morpheme in the verb, and we're trying to find out why this difference is.

We're looking at varieties that were in contact in the Kathmandu valley, because we think that they may have influenced each other; there are also isolated varieties far up in the mountains, and we think that the differences may have something to do with the fact that they were isolated and they developed in a different way. But in order to do that, again, we would need annotated corpora. For Tibetan we're quite lucky, we have lots of texts, but there's no way you can go through it manually.

**LM: Has anything particularly surprised you from working with large, annotated corpora — for example, are there any results using 'traditional' methods that you then later found out were incorrect?**

MM: Yes — something that came out in my PhD is that, although some people say that [Middle Welsh] verb-second word order is a bit odd, some people say it's just literary, they all do acknowledge that it's there. But people used to say it's just random — you can have any constituent in that first position, and there's no telling which is which. In my PhD I annotated the corpora for information structure as well, and I found out that if you know the context, you can actually, almost in an algorithmic style, predict what the first constituent will be. You can predict what kind of word order you have based on sentence type — a declarative, a question, a negative sentence, etc. I also found out you can do it for all declarative sentences as well depending on the context; for instance, you can only have direct objects in the first position if they are of a very specific type: either highly familiar topics or new information focus. That wouldn't have been possible without the use of corpora.

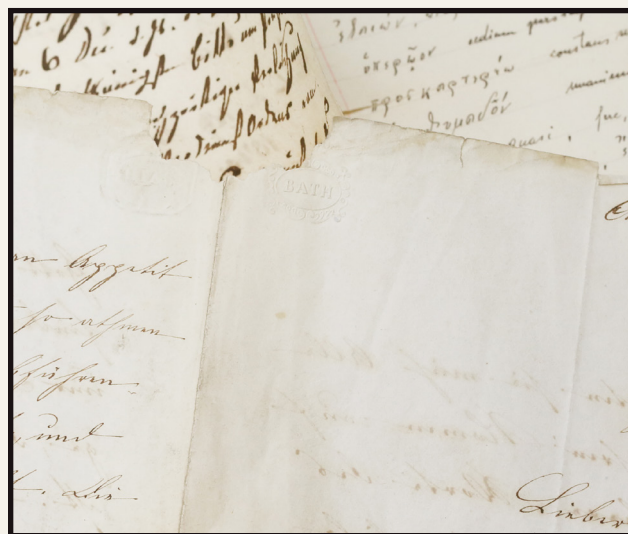




**LM: Do you think further developments in computational methods will fundamentally change the way historical linguists operate?**

MM: I think it will change, but maybe not fundamentally. There's definitely a lot of things that historical linguists can learn from people in the NLP community. I think we'll get better at creating historical corpora quicker, and with more and more annotation. Something that we're struggling with in another project, on the history of pronouns in Slavic and Celtic, is that we're a large group of people and each of us has a different type of computer, and we can't find a single tool that works for all of them. This sounds very trivial, but is a very practical obstacle. Obviously, what you need is a programmer who gets paid quite a bit and makes one annotation tool that does everything. But the problem is that in these projects you don't usually have money to pay programmers. This is one really bad thing about linguistics being classified as a humanities subject, because especially if you're a historical linguist, you're never really seen as needing a lot of money — you just read your historical texts, and maybe you need a whiteboard and a pen. But actually, in order to develop these tools, you do need quite a bit of money.

One important thing that is a little bit overlooked, and is also where the interest from NLP stops, is that for us it's not really good enough if your corpus is 95% correct. If you really want to make good linguistic generalisations with the little data we have, we want to say that 100% of the time we've looked at 100% of the sentences. So there's always going to be some necessary manual correction by actual linguists, and interpretation of the data as well. But other things can definitely be improved by NLP, especially in terms of handwritten text recognition when you work with manuscripts. At the moment that's pretty good for most European medieval scripts, you can even use Google OCR — you just open a medieval manuscript in Google Docs and it will give you the transcript. (You should try it, it's actually quite fun!) I tried this with some Tibetan manuscripts, but Tibetan Google OCR only exists for one particular Tibetan script, and the script that I was working with looks quite different, so the results are rubbish. There's another way of doing this using recurrent neural networks through a software tool called Transkribus<sup>[2]</sup>.

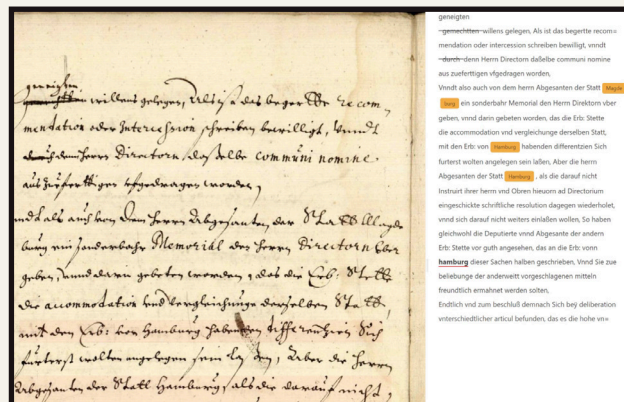


That works better, but, for instance, the fact that the Tibetan script has all the vowels hanging below or flying on top of the line makes it very difficult for these models to have good accuracy, and you have to spend quite a lot of time feeding it information before it works. But once it is working, you can use it to automatically get transcriptions from all these manuscripts. For Tibetan we have 800,000 manuscripts that we'd like to transcribe, obviously we're not going to do that by hand. So there's definitely advances that can be made in that respect as well, and that helps historical linguists in terms of having access to more texts and more data to work with.

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**Screenshot of Transkribus web-transcription**



# A HANDS-ON APPROACH

## How to... Ace an Online Exam

*S.C. Jat is a MPhil by Thesis candidate at the University of Cambridge, and has now done two sets of online exams.*



As we roll into the second year of hybrid education I'm sure I'm not the only one who's begun to forget that just two years ago, I was practising my handwriting and doing timed past paper practice to make sure exam week would go as smoothly as possible. God forbid I lose marks to stupid practicalities like running out of time and illegible handwriting — aren't linguists supposed to like deciphering stuff anyway?

Some of you will love online exams, some will already dread them, and some of you might not have done any (yet). I get it — they're a completely different beast: no one has ever taught you how to do one, they just threw you in the deep end and expected you to swim. No wonder it gives some of us nightmares. So, I've decided to share some of the techniques and tips I've picked up in the last couple of summer terms.



## 01 Game settings

If you're playing a game, you tend to want to know if your challenge is timed or not. I suspect your strategy would be different depending on which mode you're playing in. When the task is timed, you're trying to maximise for reward, sprint-mode. However, if you're running a marathon, you're probably going to want to pace yourself. Same goes with an exam. In the days of crazed scribbling, you might be gunning to wring every last word out, ignoring the way your hand has started to cramp up. Online exams are often much less time-sensitive, and give you the chance to arrange your thoughts (in the form of an essay plan, perhaps,) before having to put it on paper. You might have a few hours, in which case it's essential to read through the questions, plan your answers and go for it. If you have a day (or more), feel free to take a break in between questions to reset — this will help you clear your mind so that you can apply yourself better to the next answer.

## 02 Consolidation is key

So how do you *revise* for something that's open-book? Gone are the days of stuffing as much information as you can into your short-term memory. The most important thing to do in the revision (which literally means 'look again') process, is to piece together all the lectures and classes you've been to, so that you know how it all fits together. I'm also a fan of essay plans. Writing practice essays may be good practice in closed-book, timed situations, but for online exams, it's much better to go over essay structure by simply planning (not just the skeleton, maybe flesh it out a little bit so you're making clear, defined arguments). This is another way of integrating everything you've learnt into applicable knowledge and data.

Summarising your year of study is crucial for you to understand the exam questions' objective better: it helps you figure out what angles you can answer the question from, based on every aspect of the course. There's a reason these things were all put into the same module, I promise!

## 03 Posters and Post-its

My favourite way of consolidating? Making mind-maps. I take a large piece of paper (or tape a few A4 sheets together), so I can visualise how everything goes together. The lines and spatial relations between those tidbits of knowledge help me see the bigger picture (excuse the pun). If you're an auditory learner, it might be more fruitful for you to record yourself talking about related topics, and playing it back.

Another thing could be to put your consolidated notes on Post-Its, scattered around the walls of your living space. This may be good for having small doses of constant reminders, but could also be a stress trigger, so only do what works for you!

## 04 Maybe I'm just an admin freak...

No one likes filing, I get it. I don't either. But the trick to an exam where you can look everything up, is to know *where* to look. The most rewarding thing I did during the revision period was to allocate the relevant articles, essays, notes and chapters to easily accessible files. This meant that during my 6-hour mad rush to get everything I could into words, I only had to straightforwardly get to the notes I'd written and resources I'd collated on the topic. None of the time-wasting scavenging that takes place when you're researching for an essay. This gives you the maximum amount of time to spend on your answers instead.

## 05 Did you get your 8 hours?

At risk of sounding like a broken record, the best thing I did for myself during exam season, online or not, was to maintain good sleep hygiene. You might be tempted to work through the night during a 24-hour exam, but I promise you the product of your efforts at the 14th hour on no sleep will be comparably worse than what you can come up with the next morning, when you've had 7-8 hours of sleep. You haven't lost those hours, and you shouldn't be expected to be awake all night.

In fact, I'd say it's important to keep a good schedule all round. Eat your three meals, move around a bit, have some downtime. These things make sure that your mind is nourished and able to perform at its best, and that your problem solving and critical thinking skills are at their finest. I know it's tempting to sprint for the finish line, but trust me, you can't sprint for more than 6 hours.

Online exams are like marmite. I personally prefer the extra time for refining my points and making sure I've made a clear line of argument. Open-book is also a big bonus, not just because we're no longer cramming to memorise facts, but because the revision period doesn't have to be spent going over and over and over things we already know. I tend to read around the topic, looking at counterarguments and other case studies which could be illustrative to a point made in the essay. This is what examiners will be looking for. The real world isn't about how much you can remember, but how well you can argue your case and apply your knowledge, and online exams, in my view, are a better reflection of that.



# Words, Words, Words

## The Path of Logic

Literature columnist Olivia Szczerbakiewicz brings technology and literature together through a stylistic analysis of the narrative dimension of the video game *Pathologic 2*.

With the advancement of technology and the growth of experimental media, the definition and constraints of a narrative have likewise been driven to evolve and expand. One such narrative form — typically evading literary analysis due to its multimodal, ambiguous nature — is the format of a dialogue-tree driven, interactive video game, such as Ice Pick Lodge's *Pathologic 2*.

*Pathologic 2* is a remake of an indie 'survival' game. The theme of its narrative might strike us as quite poignantly topical — as one of the main characters, the player arrives in a small town, wherein they are forced to act as one of the three doctors blindly attempting to find a solution to a sudden outbreak of a deadly airborne disease called the Sand Pest. Through the course of the story, the player interacts with the inhabitants of the town, learns its history, politics and socio-

cultural conflicts, and is ultimately driven to make a choice between tradition and progress, according to what they deem to be the morally and strategically right course of action. In this article, I aim to shortly analyse the literary content of *Pathologic 2* through the application of Text World Theory, a stylistic theory drawing on principles of cognitive linguistics.

Cognitive linguistics theorises language 'as an instrument for organizing, processing and conveying information ... the formal structures of language are studied not as if they were autonomous, but as reflections of general conceptual organization'<sup>[1]</sup>. Correspondingly, in Text World Theory, mental representations conjured within discourse are called 'worlds' with every communicative event involving at least two world levels<sup>[2]</sup>.

The discourse world is the context of the interaction between the participants involved in linguistic communication within it, while grounded in a specified spatiotemporal location. If we approached the script

of *Pathologic 2* as a static literary text about plague doctors fighting disease in the Russian steppe, this could be visualised as such:

	'Reading' <i>Pathologic 2</i>
Participants	Reader, Ice Pick Lodge (the developers)
Location [spatial]	[Unspecified, split]
Location [temporal]	[Unspecified, split by approximately 100 years]
Objects, entities	laptop, screen
Personal, cultural knowledge	e.g. previous knowledge of the Russian novel through authors like Dostoyevski etc., knowledge of Bakhtin and the theory of theatre, understanding of literary context, conventions and colonial history of early 20th century Russia

Text worlds, on the other hand, are conceptualisations invoked by language used in the interaction<sup>[3]</sup>. As Gibbons & Whiteley note, 'in literary discourse, language tends to be used to create remote, often fictional, text-worlds in the minds of readers. These text-worlds are formed through the combination of linguistic cues in the text and the reader's inferences (drawn from their discourse-world knowledge)<sup>[12]</sup>.

What the player knows about early 20th century medicine and the struggle between cultural tradition and Russian colonialism in regards to its North-Easternmost regions is part of the discourse-world relevant to *Pathologic 2*; while how the player *understands* Artemy Burakh's — the main character's — personal approach to his home-town and its traditions as evidenced in the script/narrative is part of the text-world of *Pathologic 2*.

However, as we have mentioned, *Pathologic 2* is not a static text, but a video game, employing multiple interactive modes — 'socio-culturally specific semiotic resource used in meaning-making such as images, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image and so on'<sup>[2]</sup> — to deliver its premise. Instead of merely following and interpreting the text of the narrative, the player inhabits one of the three playable characters, and, through the use of narrative-dramatic agency impacts 'the unfolding story directly'<sup>[6]</sup>.

Let us take a look at a narrative sample of the *Pathologic 2* dialogue script.

**Aspity:** Hello, doctor. What did you dream of today?

#### OPTION A

→ **Bachelor:** I don't believe in dream-telling. What I do believe is that your place is across the river. You have five minutes to pack your belongings.

→ **Aspity:** Why, doctor? What have I done to you? I thought all the healthy people belonged here, to this part of the town. And yet you would banish me from this ark ...

#### OPTION B

→ **Bachelor:** Who are you?

→ **Aspity:** You wouldn't even say hello, huh ... I'm Sahba. The townsfolk like you call me Aspity. My real, steppe name is Sahba-ötün, but it's hard to pronounce. I am a *souvilag'sh* by trade. Meaning ... 'the one who teaches how to walk'. It's untranslatable to your language.

#### OPTION C

→ **Bachelor:** I dreamed ... I dreamed that an outbreak would happen here today. The plague itself came to me wearing an orderly's outfit and gave me time until the evening ... No matter. It sounds stupid when I say it out loud.

→ **Aspity:** I need a dreamhook. Try to remember the mood, if only for a second. This is crucial. Then, in your mind's eye, imagine a single detail that seemed pivotal to you. Just don't try to invent anything new; remember it. Then I'll be able to see your dream as if it was mine<sup>[3]</sup>.

As we can see, each dialogue option forks off into a different possible text-world, accessed by the player's personal interpretation of the character's approach and their assessment of which knowledge is the most pertinent within the discourse. Due to this, there exist multiple

possible endings, the achievement of which is determined by the many interlinked — and linguistically conditioned — choices and interactions carried out by the player within the story. Each of these choices determines the implementation of incrementation:

<p>Example:</p> <p>A: Have you seen Mark?          B: He's at work. Why?          A: I need his keys to the apartment.</p> <p>→ <i>the introduction of new information is incremented within succeeding speech acts</i></p>	<p><i>Pathologic 2</i> Example:</p> <p>A: What did you dream of today?          B: I dreamed... I dreamed that an outbreak would happen here today. (...)          A: I need a dream hook (...) I'll be able to see your dream as if it was mine<sup>[3]</sup>.</p> <p>→ <i>the introduction of new information — and details of the Text World — is incremented within succeeding speech acts</i></p>
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In Text World Theory, incrementation is the process by which relevant knowledge is revealed and circulated as discourse progresses<sup>[6]</sup> hence growing its *Common Ground*: The player's knowledge of the time, setting and its customs will be incremented when interacting with *Pathologic* more than is the case when reading contemporary fiction dealing with the real-world pandemic.

Delving deeper into the analysis, we can further deconstruct the quoted passage of the game script through its use of the tools of world-builders and function advancers. *World-builders* are deictic elements — words with fixed semantics, whose denotation nonetheless varies — which specify time and place.

**What did you dream of today?** ← As the game is split into 12 consecutive days of the outbreak, measuring time and placing the events in a chronological order is crucial to the logical interpretations of the event.

**What I do believe is that your place is across the river.** ← The river constitutes both a literal element of the spatial landscape and a symbol of the divide between the steppe and the town, pertinent to the central conflict of the game<sup>[3]</sup>.

*Function-advancers*, on the other hand, can be split into *entities* and *temporal, spatial and social deixis*. *Entities* refer to specific people and objects (Bachelor, Aspity/Sahba, townsfolk), which might also mark social relations (brother, father etc.). *Temporal deixis* includes grammatical markers — such as finiteness of the forms or lexical (as *today* in the case of *What did you dream of today?*) while *spatial deixis* might include proper nouns such as *Town-on-Gorkhon* or the *Capital* (here, denoting *Moscow*) as well as wider contextual locations such as *town, across the river*.

medium such as *Pathologic 2*, we can say they serve as a compass orienting the player within the landscape — or, more pertinently to our analysis, a linguistic 'key' to interpreting the visual cues accessed by physically navigating the visualisation of the text world.

*Social deixis*, on the other hand, comprises of the use of given names, family names, titles etc. In the case of *Pathologic 2*, we may observe the term *Bachelor*, referring in context of the game to a scholar of medicine equivalent here with *doctor*, denoting the out-of-town character observing the community; as well as the term *souvilag'sh* — 'one who teaches how to walk'. As with the earlier examples, the interpretation of these can be aided with the contextual discourse world knowledge of the player, such as the knowledge of history or linguistics of Mongolian, the language which inspired the fictional steppe language.

In and of itself, interactive storytelling thus introduces an interesting interplay between the discourse-world of the player — particularly the personal/cultural context directly impacting the choices of the characters, and, consequently the outcome of the story — and the narrative's text world, rendering the story personal and subjective by the background of the player. However, in the case of *Pathologic 2*, there exists a second level to this exchange.

In a static text, these would be the sole source of the readers spatio-temporal knowledge within the text world landscape. In a multi-modal

While a typical interactive story involves the discourse world and the text world, the relation of the player/reader to the choice they are undertaking is carried out only in regard to the character they follow within the text world. *Pathologic 2* complicates this. In the unfolding of its meta-textual narrative, the game gradually reveals itself to be conscious of its own nature and structure: throughout the journey, the three playable characters encounter multiple hints that their journey is a either a game or a staged performance, a theatre play rehearsed in a loop, their 'roles' inhabited by different 'actors'.

**Mark Immortell:** Burakh. I, too, get exhausted running the same scene with you again and again. If you don't care about yourself, have mercy on me, at least.

#### OPTIONS

- **Haruspex:** I'm not doing this on purpose ...
- **Haruspex:** Isn't it supposed to be different each time?
- **Haruspex:** You know ... I'm beginning to enjoy it<sup>[4]</sup>.

This motif of recurrence intertwines with a varying level of awareness the playable characters exhibit regarding their own fictitiousness, as well as their reaction to it. Through the choice of the player character, and subsequent determination of their personality through the player's choices, one can either experience the character's existential crisis of discovering to be a puppet and finding one life's work fictional,

or decide to redefine the 'truth' conditions of the story by questioning whether it matters at all if the plague is real in the discourse world, *if* it remains real within the text world.

Additionally, the very discovery of this additional level has a new implication: the role of the *player* within the text world.

**The Executor:** (...) I repeat: are you ready to die?

- **Bachelor:** In the morning, you told me that you're not unlike a law of nature. A rule, so to speak, of this world. Could you please remind me though, which rules exactly we're playing by?
- **The Executor:** What on earth ...?

#### OPTIONS

- **Bachelor:** I deny you the right to exist. I'm the one in control.
- **Bachelor:** You're not death. You're merely a puppet. It was I who brought you to life-and it is I who will end it.
- **Bachelor:** Are you ready to die, beakhead<sup>[5]</sup>?

In *Pathologic 2*, the narrative progresses on a dual level — first, in the character becoming aware they are merely an 'actor' performing a role and having to come to terms with it; and second, in the player's

discourse world directly impacting the storyline, with the player becoming part of the text world. The game thus implicates discourse-world of the player in the text world of the game:

(cont'd.)

**The Executor:** Touché. Bravo, Bachelor. ... Or are you? It's hard to tell who exactly talks to me from the other side of the glass ... what a cumbersome mask. Anyway. What do you plan to do now?

#### OPTIONS

- **Bachelor:** Solve the same problem in my real life, when the time comes.
- **Bachelor:** Just live on. Rest in peace.
- **Bachelor:** I don't know. I haven't decided yet. But thank you kindly for the enlightening conversation<sup>[6]</sup>.

Through the choice of textual cues determining text world elements, the player is allowed to define the degree to which their own 'persona' textually inhabits the game/narrative, and the level of awareness their player character retains of it. At the end, we can choose the way in which we interpret the multimodal, digital medium — either as an interactive stage play or a game; a narrative enriched with metatextual commentary for the player/reader to consume, or a fully interactive experience, where the linguistic dimension of narration serves as a guiding tool for the player.

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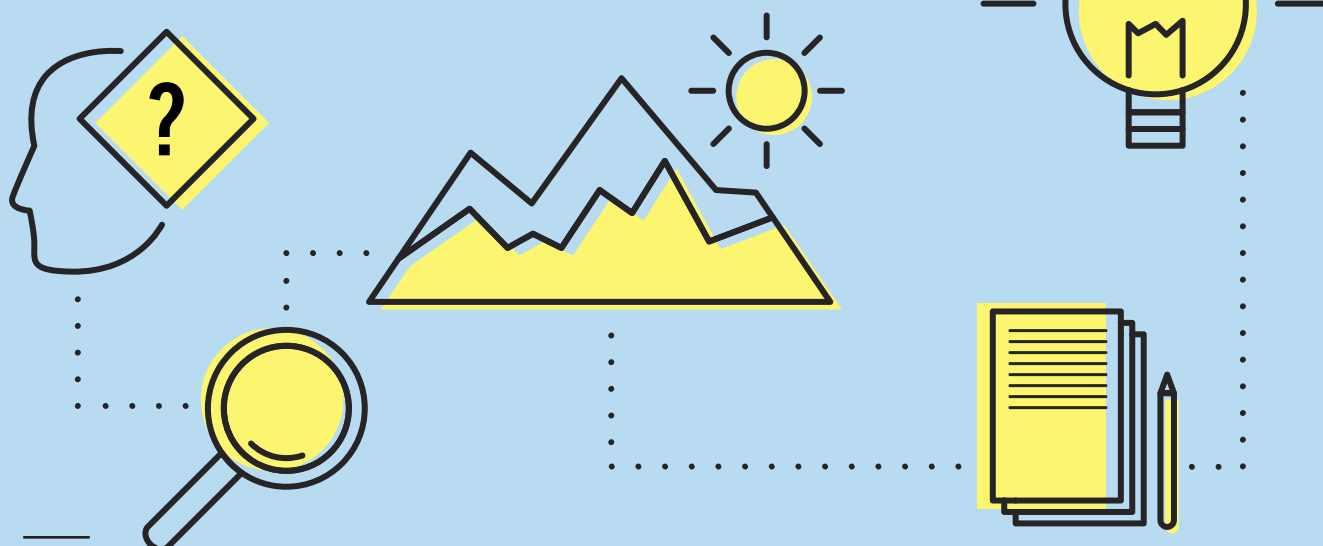
# Curiouser and Curiouser

## Language Documentation in Digital Times

In this issue, columnist Caitlin Wilson discusses the evolution of language documentation and conservation in the 21st century. She explores the importance of ethical motivation and correct data management and conservation for both traditional and digital language documentation.

Many areas of linguistic research have dramatically evolved and changed over the decades. Some, like Natural Language Processing or computational linguistics, could not have been imagined a century ago. Other areas, especially those involving fieldwork, like sociolinguistics or language documentation, have evolved to reflect and make use of the massive progress in digital technology. An area I have particular experience in is that of language documentation. Having spent the better half of 2021 conducting my own documentation, I feel I've come to know the discipline well. However, I started my research during a global pandemic and while being an undergraduate student with access to only a limited amount of funding. The type of research I have been able to undertake and my resources for doing so have thus been heavily limited to the digital sphere. Online Zoom calls and digital transcription are all I have ever known. I'd thus like to reflect on how the discipline has evolved into what it is today and hopefully provide you with some advice on how you can make the most of the opportunities the digital world provides you should you also want to undertake your own research.

Linguistic fieldwork and language documentation conjure up images of scientists travelling to far off lands and living amongst remote communities to document their dialect. Although this romantic view of language documentation may still be true for certain linguists, the majority of us who undertake this type of work won't get the opportunity to travel to exotic lands. Most recently, the coronavirus pandemic has put the brakes on international travel but even before this, concerns over climate change and conflicts in certain parts of the world had already made *in situ* language documentation difficult. Luckily for us, the great leaps in digital communication technologies have meant that we are able to instantly connect with people from all over the globe and subsequently study their languages.



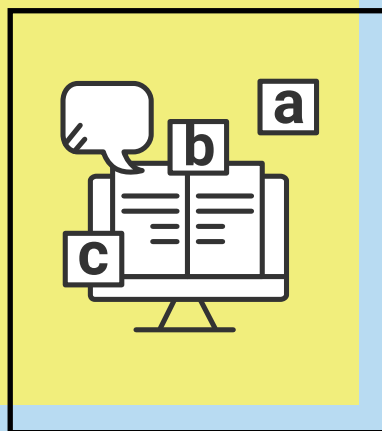


First, let us look at what language documentation 'proper' entails. Language documentation is a discipline that aims to document the grammar and use human languages<sup>[1]</sup>. At its core we can distinguish five main steps to documenting a language: recording, transcription, analysis, translation, and archiving. There is obviously much more that goes into the process such as the collection of metadata and the dissemination of materials. The latter often used to involve sharing written works, often religious in nature, back to the studied population. Indeed, much language documentation that has occurred in previous centuries has had evangelization as its primary aim. Colonial missionaries spread their religion by studying foreign languages and using their findings to translate the Bible in the hopes of converting local populations.

This old research can sometimes come with ethical issues. The aim of these 'researchers' was not to inform our wider knowledge of linguistics and they did not always obtain informed consent from the native speakers. Of course, we can't entirely dismiss this research. For many under-studied languages, Christian texts are the only translated documents we have. These texts can serve as the basis of language revitalization through teaching and dissemination. In my opinion, any record of a dead or dying language should be cherished. If all we have for a language are documents that were created from a place of colonialism and subjugation then we should endeavour to continue the research in an ethical manner, with the consent and input of the native people.



This brings us to the motivations of language documentation. The core of language documentation should be to inform our wider knowledge of linguistics. As Evans<sup>[1]</sup> said, 'One of the most exciting things about linguistic fieldwork is the way it continuously pushes out the bounds of preconceived possibility, by stumbling upon "unimaginable" languages — those that would never have been thought possible.' The overriding aims of documentation should be 'to provide an accurate and adequate record of a language for posterity'<sup>[2]</sup> and to ensure that 'documentation and revitalization is [based on] ethical relationships [...] in a context of mutual understanding'<sup>[3]</sup>. This ethical principle should be our guide through documentation, whether it be in situ or digital.



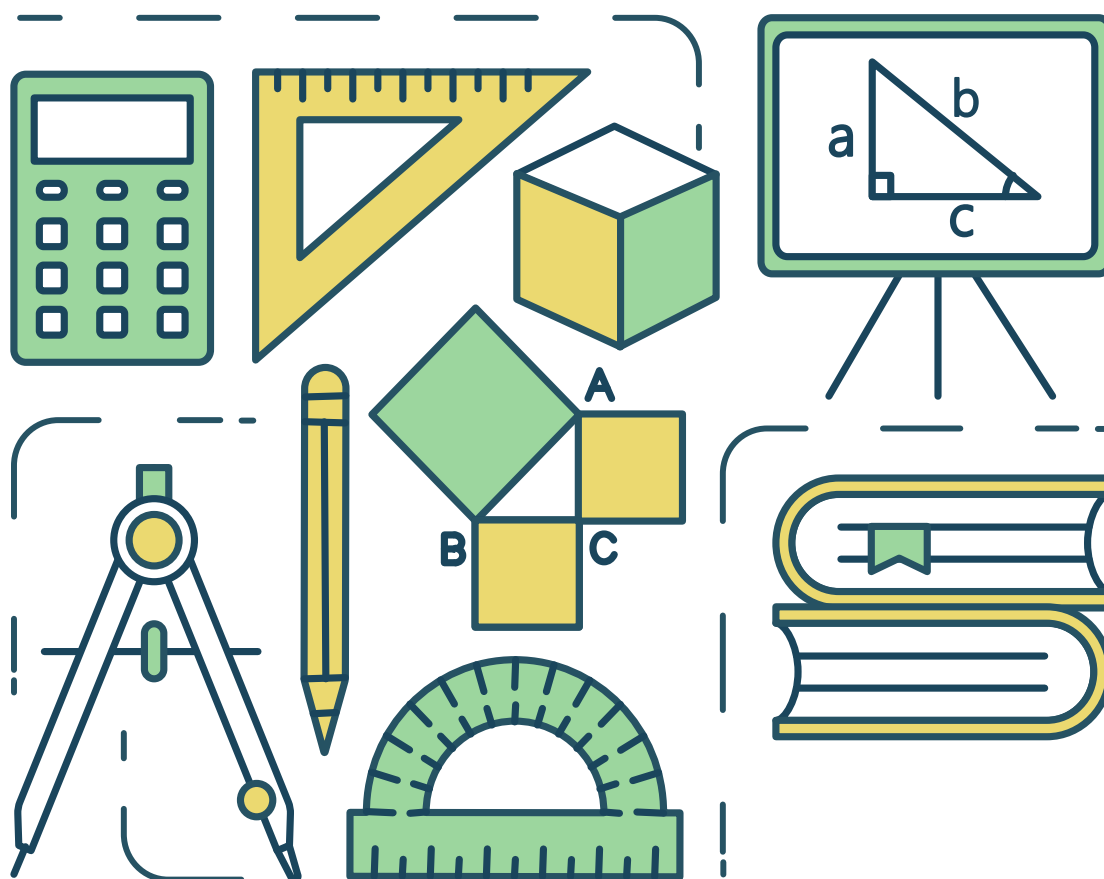
How then, has language documentation changed and adapted to the digital sphere? Enter Digital Linguistics (DLx). Digital Linguistics is the 'science of digital data management for linguistics, including the digital storage, representation, manipulation, and dissemination of linguistic data'<sup>[4]</sup>. Overall, the principles of documentation remain the same; the only real differences are the materials used for the transcription, manipulation, and archiving of the data. The data and metadata collected during documentation are important moving parts in the whole process. Linguistic data, in this sense, is anything from audio-visual media, annotations, corpora, and metadata

(i.e. data that describes another set of data, e.g. locations, dates, speakers, socio-cultural contexts). All these data must be collected, treated, and stored ethically. There are different guidelines and standards that are followed in DLx, including the Open Language Archives Community (OLAC), the ISLE Metadata Initiative (IMDI), and the Data Format for Digital Linguistics (DaFoDiL). I encourage anyone undertaking digital documentation to read up on the best practices and guidelines to follow depending on the type and manner of documentation.

Studying and conserving endangered languages is truly a beautiful thing. I encourage anyone who is keen to learn more about language documentation to get in touch with a scholar and ask them if they'd like help organizing or transcribing their data. This is the best way to get into the world and hopefully undertake your own research. Good luck, linguists!

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# *Anatomy of a Linguist*

*What Keeps Us Up at Night*

## Mathematical Parallels

*In his final column, T. R. Williamson challenges us to consider the similarities he believes exist between words and numbers.*

Amongst certain subfields of linguistics exists the tendency to rely upon tools or methods developed within mathematics for linguistic analyses. This style can be traced back to the work of Frege<sup>[1]</sup>, whose rejection of psychological explanations for the rules of logic inspired Tarski to define truth as a reference to a possible world<sup>[2]</sup>. This in turn inspired Davidson and Montague to apply such concepts to the analyses of sentences of natural languages<sup>[3][4]</sup>.

Therein, it is proposed that the meaning of any sentence can be understood as a function towards a possible world in which the cons-

tituents of that sentence, and their combination, were true<sup>[5]</sup>. This is 'mathematical' insofar as it uses formal logic with lots of nice symbols that tightly define the parameters for natural language semantics.

Similar too are the tools applied in understanding the generation of linearised syntactic constructions within the generative framework of linguistics<sup>[6]</sup>, inasmuch as they are derived by the operations provided by the Universal Grammar we all purportedly have in our heads that determine, on some deeper level, the similarities between all Earth's languages.

I think there are more fundamental parallels that exist between the objects of study, or at least the tools, of linguists and those of mathematicians. Let's say that linguists analyse language, and mathematicians analyse quantification. Of course, this is a radical oversimplification: the term *language* can mean lots of things; psycholinguists really analyse minds; and perhaps some mathematicians just study abstraction. But if we agree that this can form a useful platform for discussion, we may find a number of interesting observations.

One fundamental parallel can be drawn from the units of analysis of these two disciplines. In linguistics, we might say that these units are words, and with mathematics the units might be numbers. With these simplifications, already, similarities appear:

- both have a kind of abstraction that's fixed with a referent;
- both have a kind of self-encapsulating conceptual structure that discriminates other phenomena of the same kind in such a way that forms a set;
- both convey a certain kind of content by referring;
- and most notably, both have a fundamental quality that makes their combination with others, despite being conceptually distinct, possible in such a way that a combination enhances their content.

Honing in on this concept of combination in the cases of words and integers is particularly intriguing. This is because we can observe that the combination of both, say, *cat + big* and  $3 + 5$  have fundamental similarities. In spite of the differences between the two constituents of each combination, which are different differences in each, they still have some kind of *a priori* capacity for merging into an entirely new concept that is nevertheless made up of the previous two; namely, *big cat* and  $8$ .

Of course, the differences here are stark: *cat* is a reference to an object in the world whereas  $3$  is a quantification of objects. With *cat*, there come all kinds of psychological preconceptions like images and memories and emotions; of which  $3$  is vacuous except in personal, *a posteriori*, attachments (e.g., personal memories including the number). The linguistic example cannot recur as easily as the mathematical, either; *big + cat + square + house* is only intelligibly combinable as an imaginative exercise, whereas it doesn't take much imagining to combine  $3 + 5 + 81 + 6.391$ . The conceptual structure of linguistic units denotes properties beyond quantification (i.e., existence) which hampers the plausibility of their recursive combination.

However, it is within this combinatory parallel that I think we find another interesting phenomenon: a kind of revealing, explanatory power. In spite of the limited combinatory possibility of words (ignoring their *grammatically sound* combination, which aids intelligibility), both words and numbers have a productivity in their ability to facilitate

the discovery of novelties. That is, the expression of a novel idea with words and the formalisation of a proof in mathematics both have the same quality of representing a revelation about something whose existence was not brought about by its communication.

It's important not to forget that these examples may not be overly representative. Some languages forgo the concept of a word, such as agglutinating languages, and I'm not sure we could conceptualise undertaking further basic operations on conceptual content (e.g., multiplication).

Another critical distinction I think concerns what we might call these units' 'edges': fuzzy<sup>[7]</sup>. On one hand, it can often be very difficult to see where one word's jurisdiction (e.g., semantic, phonological) ends and where another begins. On the other hand, it's very difficult to confuse  $3$  and  $4$ , or *sine* and *cosine*. Moreover, while there is strictly no fuzziness to the boundaries of imaginary or irrational numbers, they nevertheless carry a kind of perceptual indeterminacy by their infinity being too overwhelming to process that makes their application appear fuzzy; *pi* ( $\pi$ ) still has a critical role to play in geometrical operations, if seemingly fuzzy, just as the word *cat* does in the sentence *I saw the big cat*.

These comparisons may whet the appetite of the generally-curious, but there is something more profound to consider. It concerns how the tools we've uncovered for understanding the world around us have similarities that ordinarily go unnoticed, perhaps simply by virtue of their traditional use in distinct domains. While there is evidence that larger number concepts are enabled by having words for those numbers<sup>[8]</sup>, the point isn't that *it's all interconnected*; it's that knowing that *it may be* gives us analytical power.

Therein lies a fitting way to conclude this column and my oversight of it. It has been my overarching aim to uncover the philosophical oddities that language and its linguists leave behind in their progression — no clearer a marvel exists than the clarity of language's opacity. Its semantic productivity stays a mystery, its rapid acquisition an academic mission, and underdeveloped connections from tenuous exploration may yet present an inception.

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# ULAB ESSAY COMPETITION

Andrew Tobin (University of Edinburgh, 4th Year, Linguistics MA)

## ICONICITY AS AN EXPLANATION FOR LINGUISTIC UNIVERSALS

The linguistic features of the world's languages appear both diverse, and arbitrary: the English word *hand*, the Mandarin *shǒu*, and the Swahili *mkono* show no similarity to each other, nor are their forms similar to the real-life form of the body part they refer to. This arbitrariness is considered a defining feature of human language<sup>[1]</sup>. However, there are also linguistic forms widely recognised as *iconic* – resembling in some ways the properties of their referent. Lexical onomatopoeia (e.g., *bang*) are a well-known type of iconicity, but in spoken languages iconicity is also widespread in morphosyntax<sup>[2]</sup>. Iconicity is notable for being pervasive in a variety of *linguistic universals*, features shared by many or all of the world's languages.

Explanations for linguistic universals are traditionally divided into two camps. *Formalists* view the diversity of language as being restricted by innate constraints on how we are able to learn language (Universal Grammar). *Functionalists* view universals as arising due to the functional advantage those features provide in the production, perception, or learning of language. Iconicity (along with various other aspects of communication such as pragmatics, discourse structure, and processing efficiency) is one of these functional pressures<sup>[3]</sup>. In this essay, I will explore the case for iconic explanations for a range of linguistic universals. As a functional *pressure*, as opposed to an innate constraint, many iconicity-based universals are *statistical universals* (also known as *tendencies*) – a term used variously to describe features that are present in almost all languages<sup>[4]</sup>, the majority of languages<sup>[5]</sup>, or simply in more languages than would be expected by chance<sup>[6]</sup>.

I will begin by discussing some proposed iconicity-based universals in morphosyntax and phonology, followed by an exploration of iconicity-based universals specific to the signed modality, and finally discuss

various limitations on iconicity as a potential source of universals.

In **morphosyntax**, iconicity typically involves the ordering or closeness of morphemes reflecting the ordering or conceptual closeness of the real life concepts those morphemes represent. Iconic motivations have been proposed for several fundamental morphosyntactic universals, including the ordering of inflectional and derivational affixes, the ordering of noun modifiers, morphosyntactic alignment, and the ordering of subject and object.

The first of these – ordering of inflectional and derivational affixes – is Universal 28 in Joseph Greenberg's influential list of language universals<sup>[6]</sup>. This universal states that if both types of affixes are on the same side of the root, derivational affixes will be closer to the root than inflectional ones. For example, in English *writers*, the agent noun derivation *-er* is closer to the root than the plural inflection *-s*. This has been described by Bybee<sup>[7]</sup> as a consequence of an iconic principle whereby elements that are closer in relevance to the stem (such as derivational affixes which often substantially change the lexical meaning) will appear closer to the stem than less relevant elements (such as inflection, which typically does not affect the core lexical meaning).

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**Iconic universal #1:** *If both affixes are on the same side of the root, derivational affixes will be closer to the root than inflectional affixes.*

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This iconic influence of semantic closeness on syntactic closeness also reveals itself in another universal, relating to the ordering of different types of noun modifiers. Overwhelmingly, languages of the

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world position adjectives closest to the noun, followed by numerals, followed by demonstratives (giving the two dominant orders Dem-Num-Adj-N and N-Adj-Num-Dem), and this corresponds iconically to the *semantic closeness* of the modifiers to the noun<sup>[8]</sup>. For example, adjectives are semantically more closely tied to the noun than numerals are, so adjectives appear closer to the noun than numerals.

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**Iconic universal #2:** *Languages will almost always position adjectives closer to the noun than numerals, and numerals closer to the noun than demonstratives.*

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While ‘semantic closeness’ might seem like a vague concept, it can be quantified with statistical measurements of co-occurrence in corpora across different languages<sup>[9]</sup>.

Another tendency with an apparent iconic motivation is seen in *morphosyntactic alignment*: how a language marks a distinction between the subject of a transitive verb, the object of a transitive verb, and the sole argument of an intransitive sentence. There are a variety of ways this can be done, but the majority of languages with a marked pattern have *accusative* alignment<sup>[10]</sup>, where the transitive subject is marked the same as the intransitive argument, distinct from the transitive object. This distinction is **iconic** of the real-world distinction between agents and non-agents in an action<sup>[9]</sup>, and it is plausible that this iconicity has motivated the pattern’s wide distribution. As such, a further iconicity-based statistical universal (tendency) can be constructed:

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**Iconic universal #3:** *If a language has a marked morphosyntactic alignment, it will most likely have nominative-accusative alignment.*

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While being found in the majority of languages that mark a distinction, accusative alignment is in competition with another major alignment (ergative), which will be discussed later.

A fourth possibility for a syntactic universal motivated by iconicity is the preference for subjects to precede objects. This was the first of Greenberg’s universals, and its prevalence is supported by modern research: of the 1187 languages surveyed in *WALS* that have a dominant ordering of subject and object, 97% favour subject-object order<sup>[11]</sup>, and this ordering is also dominant in sign languages<sup>[12]</sup>. It has been proposed that this universal is motivated by the higher iconicity of subject-object order, with the orders ‘agreeing with the order of actor and acted upon in the world of events’<sup>[13]</sup>. This is not particularly convincing though. While in some sentences the order is arguably iconic (in *the boy drew a picture*, the real-world existence of the boy precedes the real-world existence of picture), this generally isn’t the case (in *the girl ate the food*, does the real-world girl in any way precede the food?). More recent explanations have explored other functional pressures, such as a pragmatic preference for agents to appear early<sup>[14]</sup>.

As well as morphology and syntax, iconicity has also been proposed as an explanation for some **phonological** universals, such as some examples of *sound symbolism*, the association of certain sounds with certain meanings. Most famous is the *bouba-kiki* effect, in which individuals, regardless of native language, associate a word like *bouba* with a round, blobby shape, and *kiki* with a pointy star shape<sup>[15]</sup>. Another association has long been observed between vowel quality and physical size, with the pseudoword [mil] being associated with small objects, and [mal] with large ones<sup>[16]</sup>.

Iconicity is a compelling explanation for both of these associations – visual iconicity for *bouba/kiki*, and auditory iconicity for *mill/mal*. For *bouba/kiki*, the key may be in the roundedness of the consonants and the first vowel, with the rounded lips iconically associated with the rounded edges of the ‘blobby’ shape<sup>[17]</sup>. This is comparable to the visual iconicity of sign languages: shaping a body part to iconically represent the shape of a referent. Since the body parts involved here (lips) are used in the production of sound, it provides a rare opportunity for visual iconicity to affect spoken languages. In the case of *mill/mal*, the distinguishing feature is vowel height, and an iconic link between vowel height and physical size has been proposed, associating

the deeper pitch of low vowels (such as in *mal*) with the generally deeper sounds produced by large objects, when struck or dropped<sup>[18]</sup>.

While these examples suggest the existence of iconically-motivated universals in terms of word perception or association, they aren't universals of language structure itself. However, these biases and associations, which have been found in children as young as 2.5 years old<sup>[19]</sup>, are likely to have impacted the development and structure of languages. A survey of the lexicons of almost two thirds of the world's languages found a significant correlation between words for 'small', and high front vowels<sup>[20]</sup>. Similarly, when ablaut is used to form diminutives (conveying smallness), the majority of languages use *li*, providing a strong candidate for a phonological statistical universal with an iconic motivation<sup>[21]</sup>.

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**Iconic universal #4:** *If a language uses vowel ablaut to form the diminutive, it will most likely use li.*

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Similarly, there is a pattern of trilled *lrl* occurring in words referring to *roughness*. From a sample of 329 languages with a trilled *lrl*, over a third used a trilled *lrl* in the word *rough*, compared to only 11% in the word *smooth*. They consider this tendency to derive from an association between the 'acoustically and articulatorily discontinuous nature of trills' and the physically discontinuous nature of rough surfaces.

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**Iconic universal #5:** *If a language has a trilled lrl phoneme, it is much more likely than chance to use it for the word 'rough'.*

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These phonological universals have referred specifically to *spoken* languages, but the patterns and universals of **sign languages** are in many ways different, in part due to the ability of sign languages to exploit *visual* iconicity<sup>[23]</sup>. While modality-specific universals might not appear to be truly universal, they can be construed as implicational universals (i.e., *If a language uses the signed modality, then...*), and are still worth exploring, especially considering the very different nature and scope of visual iconicity and audible iconicity. Two important universals of sign language structure with an obvious iconic foundation can be found in the expression of simultaneous actions, and repeated actions.

The ability to express simultaneous streams of information (by using two hands) is unique to sign languages, and this ability can be exploited by all sign languages for the same purpose — representing nouns which are simultaneously present in an event<sup>[24]</sup>. For example, in the description of a person approaching a car, one hand may represent the car, and the other hand may represent the person. This universal, representing simultaneous referents with simultaneous signs, is intuitive and a clear example of iconicity.

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**Iconic universal #6:** *To describe interaction between two nouns, all sign languages can use simultaneous morphology with noun classifiers.*

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Another widespread sign language tendency (possibly an absolute universal) is the reduplication (repetition) of a verb to indicate a persistence or repetition of the action<sup>[24]</sup>. The repetition of the verb is iconic of the repetition or continuation of the action.

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**Iconic universal #7:** *All or almost all sign languages can use verbal reduplication to indicate iteration or continuation of an action.*

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While it is clear why simultaneous morphology is not found in spoken languages (it is impossible), it is less clear why Iconic universal #7 is not also universal in spoken languages, as reduplication for this purpose is entirely compatible with the spoken modality, c.f. Hawaiian *hoe* 'to paddle', *hoe-hoe* 'to paddle continuously'<sup>[25]</sup>.

Despite the prevalence of iconicity in language, there are some major **limitations** on its ability to lead to universals. Firstly, comprehension of a given iconic link may be culture-dependent (i.e., not universal). Secondly, iconicity may provide multiple distinct structures. Thirdly, iconicity may be in competition with other motivations.

Firstly, an iconic word or sign can only be universal insofar as the cultural understanding of that iconic connection is universal. For example, in International Sign Language, a pidgin sign language used at international events, concepts such as *self-esteem* involve a hand-location near the heart, while concepts such as *learn* involve a hand-location near the head<sup>[26]</sup>. This is iconic of the association of the heart with emotions, and the head with reason. However, as Armstrong notes, 'recognition of the head as the seat of mental powers is by no means a cultural universal', and likewise for the heart and emotions<sup>[13]</sup>. This reliance on cultural beliefs and practices in the forming of iconic signs means that the ability for iconicity to cause language universals is limited by the extent to which *culture* is universal.

The link between culture and linguistic universals can be seen in sign language numeral systems, where recent cultural changes have led to reduced uniformity across languages. The use of digits of one hand to count is a cultural universal<sup>[27]</sup>, so it's not surprising that the use of finger-extension for numerals is a (sign language) linguistic universal. However, a relatively recent cultural change — the spread of widespread literacy — has provided a new source for numerals to be iconically-derived. Some urban deaf sign languages are increasingly using numeral signs that represent the shape of the written numeral<sup>[27]</sup>. Since literacy is not universal, and different cultures may use different written numeral systems, this results in an increased diversity of

numeral signs — for example Ugandan Sign Language's Hindu-Arabic based numeral signs are completely different to Turkish Sign Language's Arabic-Indic based numeral signs<sup>[27]</sup>.

The second limitation on iconicity's ability to cause universals is that it is *selective* — iconic words select only a subset of the referent's features to represent, so even without a relevant cultural difference, iconic representations of the same referent won't necessarily be the same<sup>[28]</sup>. For example, the Turkish Sign Language word for 'bird' iconically represents the wings of a bird<sup>[29]</sup>, while in American Sign Language it is the beak that is represented<sup>[30]</sup>. Each language has selected a different part of the bird to iconically represent, and this prevents absolute lexical universals like 'all sign languages represent the concept of *bird* with outstretched arms moving up and down'.

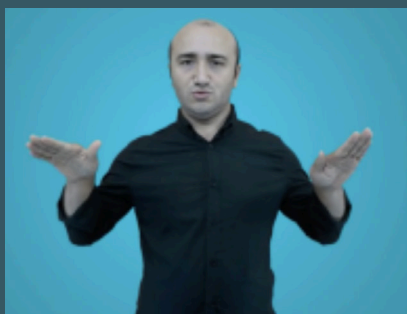


Figure 1: 'bird' in Turkish Sign Language<sup>[29]</sup>.



Figure 2: 'bird' in American Sign Language<sup>[31]</sup>.

This is seen in the case of onomatopoeia<sup>[32]</sup>: while different languages may iconically represent the same animal's noise, they may be only 'approximate and more or less conventional imitations', leading to variation. As is the case with *lrl* and *rough* though, iconicity in sign languages clearly causes some phonological features to be more common in some words.

A third factor limiting the ability for iconicity to lead to universals is the existence of other functional motivations that may be in conflict with iconicity. In the case of morphosyntactic alignment, despite accusative alignment having the iconic advantage, ergative languages still make up around a third of marked alignments<sup>[10]</sup>. This can be explained by this non-iconic option *also* having a functional benefit, in this case relating to the prominence of the different elements in discourse<sup>[33]</sup>. For an iconic structure to be universal, the benefit of the

iconicity must thus be sufficiently strong in comparison with other competing motivations.

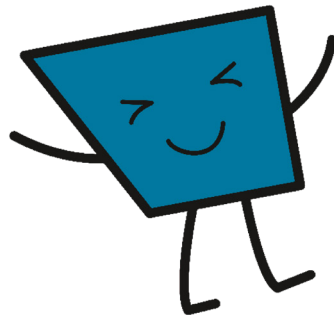
To conclude, iconicity provides a bridge between form and meaning, and thus provides an opportunity for universals to emerge, where the same meaning across languages is expressed with the same iconic form. Iconicity can lead to universals of structure (such as derivation being closer to the stem than inflection) and universals of sound (such as the association of rounded-lip sounds with round objects, or the use of */i/* to express diminutives in vowel ablaut), as well as modality-specific universals (such as simultaneous morphology representing simultaneously-present entities in sign languages). To some extent, iconicity's influence is reined in by the non-universality of some iconic connections, the plurality of forms that iconicity can lead to, and the existence of other functional pressures to compete with. Despite this, iconicity remains a significant influence on the world's languages, and provides a convincing explanation for a variety of linguistic universals.

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# ULAB 2022

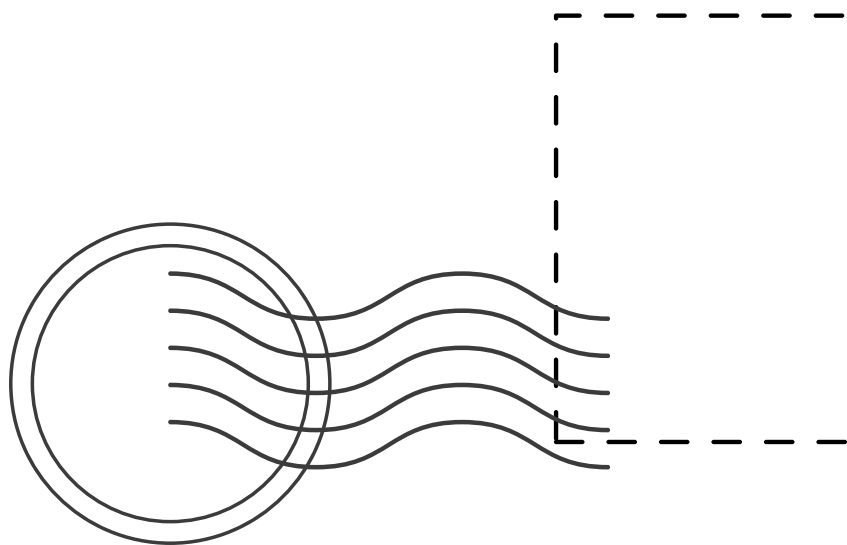
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We asked the Committee to talk about what their roles involve, what they like best about it, and the biggest challenges they have solved. If you would like to join the National Committee, all of the positions described here will be up for election at the AGM, which will take place on 11th April at the University of Edinburgh and Online.



## Clíodhna (National Chair)



My role as National Chair involves overseeing all of ULAB's activities and ensuring they run smoothly, and providing support to other committee members in their roles when they need it. I schedule and chair National Committee meetings every month, and chair the AGM as well as any EGMs. It's a really varied role as it also involves a wide range of other interesting tasks — for example, I proofread every issue of *U-Lingua* before it gets published, I correspond with *JoULAB* authors, and I provide support to the Local Committee in organising the conference. As you might expect, it's a very time-consuming position and can be challenging at times, but if you're passionate about ULAB's aims then it can be incredibly rewarding and I've certainly had a lot of fun doing it!



I love that within the role of National Chair there is scope to come up with and implement your own ideas for the Association. For example, this year I was keen to set up more ways for undergraduate linguistics students to connect with each other, and so came

up with the idea for the buddy scheme. I also wanted to set up an essay competition to provide a further opportunity for undergraduate linguistics students to gain recognition for their work, and so myself and the other committee members worked to make this happen. I love that ULAB has provided me the opportunity to work with other linguists who are just as passionate about ULAB as I am, and it has been a really great experience working with them on so many great projects for the Association.



As I mentioned, the role of National Chair involves ensuring all of ULAB's activities run smoothly, but ULAB has increased its number of activities hugely over the last two years, and so now it can be hard to keep track of what needs doing for all of them! To help solve this, I advocated for the addition of the National Vice Chair role to the committee at the AGM last year. This year I have been able to share some of the workload with Hafren, which has been extremely helpful! After we were elected we divided up ULAB's activities between us in terms of supervision, and it has made the role more manageable.

## Hafren (National Vice Chair)



As the first ever National Vice Chair of ULAB, I was particularly excited by the fact that the role was a blank canvas to fill in with new, exciting projects! Of course, my main responsibility is to support the National Chair, Clíodhna, in all of our activities; as well as helping out the other Committee members when needed. In reality, this results in a wide variety of tasks. I found myself discussing promotional strategies with the Social Media Coordinators; checking in with the Institutional Representative Coordinator, Caitlin; and even interviewing new members of the *JoULAB* team alongside the Journal Editor, Tom.



I was elected as National Vice Chair in the second year of my undergraduate degree. As someone who had spent their first year of university stuck at home and unable to make friends in virtual lectures or tutorials, ULAB gave me an invaluable opportunity to connect with other linguistics students. As such, my favourite part of my role is being able to greatly contribute to an amazing com-

munity which supports linguistics students and encourages them to pursue their own research. I have loved organising our essay competition for undergraduates, and listening to students passionately discuss their studies — or simply having a laugh at the Zoom quizzes hosted by our Events Coordinator, Eloise!



During my time as Vice Chair, I took on the challenge of organising the ULAB-wide United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad (UKLO) Markathon. This involved coordinating a large group of university students from all over the UK, and marking language puzzles completed by school pupils. This required an enormous amount of administrative work and quick communication when things went wrong — such as errata in the marking scheme — but it was a very rewarding experience overall. In total, my team of university students marked over 220 scripts. Another part of ULAB that I really value is our outreach to school students. Through helping out with UKLO and giving pupils the chance to present at our annual conference, I hope that we can introduce other language lovers to the study of linguistics.

## Louis (National Secretary)



The role of Secretary can effectively be split into two equally important subroles. Firstly, I serve as a representative of ULAB to members: this most notably comes in the form of writing our monthly newsletter, received by linguistics students across the country. I also help to maintain a list of official ULAB members, so that I can send out member-exclusive updates, like early copies of *U-Lingua*. The second aspect of being Secretary is to serve as a glue binding the National Committee together: importantly, I keep the minutes for all meetings and can have my say in and vote on any important Committee matters.



I took on the role of Secretary in my second year of being on the National Committee, but the role could easily serve as a great introduction to the inner workings of ULAB. The newsletter is an opportunity to get creative, and it's a lot of fun being able to show off all of the work the different parts of ULAB get up to throughout the year — we've grown into something far, far bigger than just

an annual conference! Coming up with content, especially during the inevitably slower months, can be a challenge but it's your job to keep things fresh. Also, I hadn't taken a single minute before-entering the role, but it turns out it's actually quite enjoyable, assuming you've made sure to have your caffeine fix beforehand.



One of the great things about being Secretary is that it's one of the more regular, quotidian roles, meaning the work is fairly spread out and you can plan ahead quite easily, the monthly spectacle of the newsletter being the primary output. Nevertheless, I've achieved a couple of more specific wins this year: I created a number of readily replicable templates for newsletters, emails to members, and meeting minutes which can be used and adapted by future Committees, and I also helped to run the new Buddy Scheme, sending out emails to set up the groups. Overall, I've found much opportunity to improve written skills through the role — that being said, the stress that comes with sending out an email to 200+ people never quite vanishes!



## Bea (National Treasurer)



As Treasurer, I oversee the bank account we opened in September 2020, and help to manage ULAB's financial decisions with the support of the National Chair and the rest of the National Committee. This includes budget forecasting, contributing to discussions on what to spend funds on, managing our payments, applying for funding, and managing ULAB membership, among other duties. Spreadsheets have become my best friend throughout my 2 years in the role!



I actually love applying for funding. It always reminds me how great ULAB is, and how many amazing initiatives we work on with our own time as student volunteers. Having the chance to talk about what ULAB has achieved and how we'll achieve other goals if we

get funding reminds me that we can do whatever we put our minds to. Bragging about ULAB is one of my favourite pastimes, and the fact that this often translates into getting funding to make ULAB even better is just the cherry on the cake.



Opening a bank account at the beginning of my term was very time-consuming and I absolutely couldn't have done it alone, but the biggest challenge or problem I've tackled has probably just been seeing through ULAB's first years as a financial entity, in the sense that I originally had nothing to forecast from, but as time has gone by and we've implemented membership and applied for funding for various initiatives, it becomes more and more clear that ULAB is very sustainable, and we have big things ahead of us, as long as we keep our feet on the ground but we shoot for the moon.

## Lydia (Archivist)



As ULAB's Archivist, I am in charge of preserving the history of the organisation. One of my main tasks is compiling the *Proceedings*, a publication of the works presented at the annual conference. Beyond the *Proceedings*, I focus on filling out our story by uncovering conference materials starting from the very first ULAB in 2011. There's much more material out there than we currently have on our website, which is why I have undertaken the task of finding and contacting past ULAB Committee members or presenters for any material they may have. This may include lists of Committee members to conference programmes, presentation slides/handouts, photos, ULAB constitutions, conference proceedings, and, really, anything ULAB. I'm also an Associate Editor for ULAB's journal, *JoULAB*, as well as being in charge of their graphic design.



My favourite part of my role is getting to see how far we've come.

Comparing material from the 2011 conference to the most recent is incredibly rewarding, and our growth is visible not only in our visuals and design but in the scope of the organisation. Through contacting past members and presenters, I've also gotten the chance to catch up on where these people are now, and am constantly impressed by their careers and endeavours.



The largest problem I've solved (and am continuing to solve!) is tracking down some of the oldest ULAB material and finding the contact information of the oldest ULAB members. Because we switched websites, some information did not carry over; for a few conferences, there was not even a list of presentations to start with. But after lots of digging, I was able to uncover missing pieces and fill in those gaps.

## Louis (Webmaster)



By the book, being Webmaster simply involves maintaining the content of the website: keeping pages up-to-date and adding new sections of the website when needed, ensuring that it remains the one true source for everything ULAB. In practice, I've done a whole lot more than that, delving deep into the inner workings of the website to create a trove of content and utility that will be able to outlast many Committee iterations to come. If you have any coding or web-dev experience, or are eager to gain some, it's certainly a plus, but not at all essential — the website mostly runs itself these days, and basic editing is easy to pick up. I came into the role knowing only the very basics of web development (and almost nothing about ULAB!), and becoming Webmaster turned out to be a great opportunity to learn a lot very quickly.



It has been incredibly rewarding seeing all the different moving parts of the website come together over the past nearly two years. It's finally in a stable enough state that I feel very happy passing on the reins to the next generation of ULAB stars. I've also enjoyed the creative aspect of developing the site from the skeletal re-

mains I was handed down, into something that truly represents all that ULAB has to offer. On top of all that, the experience I gained working on the ULAB website played no small part in my getting an internship and follow-up job offer at a small London-based tech company, but your mileage may vary on that front.



During my time on Committee, I've done everything from completely rewriting a large portion of the code that runs the website to be more secure and up-to-date, to adding a bunch of new content templates to allow ULAB's brand and content to be represented as best as possible. My biggest achievement has been creating the journal plugin, which enables almost all aspects of *JoULAB*'s publication to be handled within the website, in an analogous fashion to the conferences plugin written by my predecessor. I've also overseen a large amount of new content being added to the website, including complete details on all of our Subcommittees, *U-Lingua*, the newsletter, *JoULAB*, many details from all previous ULAB conferences, our Events and Opportunities pages, as well as membership and Committee application forms. Inevitably, though, there's always more to be done: that's all up to you!

## Ro (Social Media Coordinator)



As the name would suggest, the role of Social Media Coordinator primarily involves running the different social media accounts of ULAB — shouting out events and opportunities such as the essay competition and buddy scheme, and building excitement for the 2022 conference! It's a surprisingly varied role, requiring communication with the majority of the rest of the National Committee and constant engagement with the various happenings around ULAB.



Social media is a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow undergraduate linguists, particularly in the time leading up to the annual conference. It's wonderful to work with so many other members of the various ULAB Subcommittees, and meet people who

discover ULAB through social media. Hyping up everyone's work on social media is a fantastic reminder of how far we've come this year!



I've found organisation and coordination to be the most challenging part of the role. ULAB has been growing and growing over time, and so many developments have been made this year — from printed copies of *U-Lingua* to the essay competition, and so many more — it can get hard to keep track of! The most important things are to plan ahead of time so you don't end up clogging up one social media feed or being too inactive on another, and to coordinate with others to make sure announcements go out at the right times. Running social media is indescribably easier when split between two people, and I've developed a new appreciation for collaborative spreadsheets along the way!



### Caitlin (Institutional Representative Coordinator)



As Institutional Representative Coordinator, I oversee the Board of Institutional Representatives which consists of student representatives from institutions around the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. I organise and chair monthly meetings with the IRs and serve as the main point of contact between them and the rest of the National Committee. I help the IRs promote ULAB in their institutions and plan their events.



I have loved meeting so many new people through this role. The Board of IRs is full of vibrant people who are all excited to share and promote ULAB and it's so great to share their enthusiasm. The

IRs remind us of ULAB's direct impact on students and it's so great to be their first point of contact. I love how flexible this role is; you can really make it what you want and shape the Board of IRs into what you think it should be.



Being a leader in any capacity can be challenging. Leading the Board of IRs can sometimes be especially so as its members are spread out across the world. It therefore can be hard to organise meetings that fit everyone's timetables and make sure that everyone is staying engaged in their role. I found that taking a bit of extra time out of my week to meet with IRs one-on-one was vital in maintaining my relationships with everyone and being able to effectively provide support where needed.

### Emily (York Institutional Representative)



In my role as the Institutional Rep (IR) for York, I work closely with both my home university (University of York) and York St John to provide both universities' linguistics departments with information about ULAB and how students can get involved. I also work closely with the Linguistics Society and the Department's events coordinator here at University of York to host events which not only provides a great social space but also allows time to tell students about ULAB as a linguistics community and the opportunities that await them.



My favourite part of the role is getting to talk about linguistics with people who actually want to listen, and offering that same space to talk about what you're passionate about to other people! This

role has also allowed me to meet some amazing people who I likely wouldn't have had the chance to meet otherwise. The committee is full of wonderful and dedicated people, and I've also got to work closely with other linguistics communities in both universities to help spread information about ULAB.



The biggest challenge I had to overcome was, at times, arranging events for the university to highlight the opportunities in ULAB. This is because it was important to find the right idea for the event I wanted to host, find an effective way to advertise the event to ensure people came to it, and to ensure I had the confidence to stand up in front of the students to discuss ULAB during the event. Thankfully, I am hugely supported by the department and Linguistics society here at York, as well as Caitlin who supports all of the IRs. Thankfully, with their support, everything ran smoothly!

## Tom (Journal Editor)



As Journal Editor, I oversee all of *JoULAB*'s operation; both academic and administrative sides. Academically, this involves approving abstracts and awarding final acceptance to papers recommended for publication by the Board of Reviewers, among other things! Administratively, I'm responsible for overseeing reviewing policy decisions, coordinating social media strategy, interviewing prospective reviewers, and more! I'm assisted along the way by my co-leader, Liam McKnight, Head of the Board of Reviewers.



For me, the best part about being *JoULAB* Editor is carving out the Journal's unique path through the journals publishing sector. At every corner, I've tried to disrupt and improve upon industry practi-

ce in a way that best suits *JoULAB*'s specific needs. The Editor role brings enormous scope for innovation, and implementing innovative ideas is really rewarding.



So the biggest problem *JoULAB* faces is ensuring a steady stream of submissions, year-round. It should be the first task of the new Editor and their Editorial Committee in April to push heavily by any means possible to get people to submit, as it's around that time of year that people are finishing up with their undergrad dissertations. I've been able to solve all other problems (ones more assuredly within my control), e.g., determining fair but rigorous policies, recruiting an engaged Committee, having a clear strategy for the future, etc.

## Steph (Magazine Editor-in-Chief)



As Magazine Editor-in-Chief, I recruit and manage the Editorial Team of *U-Lingua*. This involves organising team meetings, setting deadlines and commissioning themes and articles for each issue. The magazine is published quarterly, so it is quite straightforward to recognise when your heavy-work-load period will be and schedule everything else around it. I liaise with the Section Editors and Columnists to ensure the smooth publication of each issue; proof-read edits and design drafts, as well as reach out to influential and interesting linguists to request interviews. There is some admin involved, including correspondence with other linguistics magazines like *Babel*, organising publication and marketing, and applying for funding. It's important to keep up-to-date with linguistics trends and news, and to be aware of the happenings in the world too — this knowledge of current linguistics and global affairs has been essential in guiding me to suggest themes for issues as well as for article commissions.



I love leading a team, and getting to hear the input and ideas of linguists all over the UK (and sometimes further!). I get to preview all of the articles, and work closely with our brilliant graphic designer Xinmei. I wouldn't be lying when I say I enjoy every part of this role, but I think the creative leadership aspect is definitely

my favourite: when I came into this role, I had full rein of how I would like to shape the magazine going forward. I added columns and changed around the sections, as well as aiming for a wider audience and introducing themes to ensure cohesiveness across each issue. Getting to work closely with the National Chair to implement these changes and see my vision for *U-Lingua* come to life has been rewarding and has taught me many lessons I plan on carrying forward into a potential editorial career. *U-Lingua* is fun and energetic, and covers a very diverse range of topics — perfect for you if you like exploring a bit of everything!



During my time as EiC, I've secured an ISSN for *U-Lingua*, made structural changes to the magazine, and convinced the LAGB to fund us for printed copies. These were all challenges at the time: learning how to get an ISSN, deciding what to add or take off, making a persuasive funding application. I would say that having an efficient, supportive and enthusiastic team has been one of my strongest pillars and motivations to ensure the unfaltering quality of the magazine. There will be difficult decisions to make, but ultimately you have to bear in mind that the image and quality of *U-Lingua* is yours to uphold, and no matter how terrifying it may seem to take content out or disagree with writers and interviewees, it will be your decisions which shape the magazine.

## Eloise (Events Coordinator)



In the role of Events Coordinator, I have followed one core goal: to get undergraduate linguistics or those just interested in linguistics together. The role involves planning and hosting ULAB-run events for our members and beyond. Some events have been social events like quizzes, online dinners and general chatting, whilst others have been informative and full of advice for all stages of linguistic learning. For this academic year, all events have been online which has meant we can attract like-minded people from many different time zones.



My favourite part of the role was finding out how creative I can be! Every event had to be different and after 2 years of Zoom quizzes

for many of us, things needed to be shaken up! I have really enjoyed planning weird and wonderful social events, in particular. Those who have joined our events know I've not shied from asking them to do all sorts of challenges that they might not have thought about in the name of linguistic fun!



The biggest challenge I've had to overcome has been 'Zoom fatigue'. There are now so many opportunities to communicate with others online that it can be exhausting! That's why I've had to work hard to make the ULAB online events fun, innovative and exciting every time. No two events have been the same! From quick fire quizzes to creating your own meme, keeping things unique in this digital age has really kept me on my toes.

## Eloise (Opportunities Coordinator)



The role of Opportunities Coordinator principally involves helping linguistics students learn and understand what is out there for them to do alongside or after their studies. The world of work and postgraduate education can seem scary (trust me, I know what it's like as I'm going through it myself), so I have aimed to make things a little easier for those a step or two behind me. By opportunities, I mean public online events that can enhance learning and networks (like conferences, stand-alone talks, seminars, etc), summer schools, postgraduate education, work experience, and jobs in linguistic-related fields. I've been keeping my ear to the ground (a little something for you pragmatists!) and bringing information about all of the above to our members and beyond. As part of this role, I populated the ULAB public calendar on the website and posted in the ULAB Discord channel with these opportunities I'd found. Top tip for someone wanting to fill this role or look for opportunities for themselves: subscribe to linguistics mailing lists like LinguistList or get yourself on linguistics Twitter — you'll soon find your inbox and feed full of amazing things that can advance your linguistics career!



My favourite part of the role has been when people in ULAB have told me they've enjoyed an online public linguistics event I've recommended, or when I'm attending one myself and I see some recognisable names from ULAB in the Zoom room! It feels good to know others are making the most of these extracurricular opportunities with me.



The biggest challenge I've overcome was when I created an information sheet for those interested in postgraduate study (you can find it on the ULAB website if you're interested). Information about postgraduate study can be so disjointed and often requires a lot of research. I hope I've removed some of that labour for others by creating a list of helpful places to start for information and funding. I wish I could've had the guide I created when I was coming to the end of my undergraduate degree!



## Bea (Accessibility Officer)



Accessibility Officer was a role we added to the Constitution at the 2021 Conference after I suggested it be added, since I had been working in this capacity during my time as Local Chair. As Accessibility Officer you are responsible for promoting accessibility within ULAB, so that people can access what we do, regardless of disability. This is mainly reminding people about alt-text, assisting people with accessibility queries related to the subcommittees of ULAB, captioning, talking through people's conference accessibility requirements with them, sourcing quotes from accessibility professionals when needed, and other duties depending on the day. This is a role that can ideally be held in conjunction with another role on the National Committee, and isn't too time-consuming.



My favourite part of the role is knowing that I have the remit to help make ULAB more accessible. I love helping people solve accessibility issues and giving them new knowledge, and I love learning new things myself. Every time we solve an accessibility issue, it gets so much easier to do things the right way next time.



Very early in my term as Accessibility Officer I created an Accessibility Guide for ULAB. This detailed social media accessibility etiquette such as alt-text, colour contrast, and captions, and accessibility for events such as captions and access breaks. The hardest thing I have had to do is source quotes from accessibility professionals (such as BSL interpreters and captioners) and collate all the material they need — this is by far the most time-consuming part, as people need a lot of prep material to be able to do their jobs well.

## Caitlin (Local Chair)



As Local Chair I am in charge of ULAB's annual conference. I set up a Local Committee to help plan and organise the conference and divided tasks among members. Organising the conference involves everything from securing speakers, finding rooms, ordering catering, planning socials, and so much more. It's a demanding role but it's hugely rewarding too. The Local Chair acts as the first point of contact for the speakers and attendees, so there are lots of emails to get through but if you keep on top of things and think on your feet, it can be manageable and a lot of fun.



My favourite part of this role has been connecting with all the students and staff members at my university who have helped plan the conference. I've also thoroughly enjoyed the creative control

that comes with being Local Chair. It's been so great to be able to provide a platform for students across the UK to showcase their research. I've also learned a lot about the type of team leader I want to be and how I can keep improving my organisation and planning skills.



Local Chair is a challenging role that requires lots of problem solving. I've been lucky enough to have a great Local Committee to help me along the way. The biggest challenges we faced this year were the difficulties we had in securing a venue as well as finding a way to make the conference hybrid. Building a good team with proactive people you can trust is vital to ensure that everything runs smoothly. I've had a great time planning the conference and can't wait to see how it will turn out.

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### Editorial Team

**Editor-in-Chief** Stephanie Jat  
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**Section Editor for *Behind the Bookshelves*** Alessandra Terranova  
**Section Editor for *Beyond the Page*** Joseph Collins  
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**Columnist for *Curiouser and Curiouser*** Caitlin Wilson  
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**Editorial Designer** Xinmei Sun

### Authors

**From *Mums to Incels: Gender and Internet Identity Analysis Through Corpus Linguistics***

Eloise Parr

***Sputnik, Mansplaining and Corpus Linguistics:***

**How Social Media Sites Provide New Opportunities for Investigating Language Change**

Lara Clarke

**The ULAB Reading List**

edited by Alessandra Terranova

**A Wug-tonne of Advice: An Interview with *Because Language***

Kitty Liu and Romany Amber

**Spreading the Word: An Interview with Gaston Dorren**

James Morley

**The New Meme Reality**

Diana Lepka

**such ✨language change ✨: the growing nuances of the sparkle emoji**

Beatrix Livesey-Stephens

**Old Languages, New Approaches: An Interview with Marieke Meelen**

Liam McKnight

**ULAB Essay Competition 2021 Winning Entry: *Iconicity as an Explanation for Linguistic Universals***

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