



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

2021

Birmingham English Language Postgraduate Conference



Programme

Friday 23rd April 2021

Virtual Conference

University of Birmingham

About.

What is BELP?

The Birmingham English Language Postgraduate Conference - known as BELP - is an annual conference for Postgraduate students in English Language and Applied Linguistics. Since 1998, BELP has provided postgraduate researchers with a platform to present work and network with researchers in the fields of English Language and Applied Linguistics. The 2021 conference is entirely virtual, operating on the Zoom conferencing platform in order to be as inclusive as possible during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Location

Virtual, via Zoom (www.zoom.us)

Entry

Free

Website

www.belpconference2021.weebly.com

Twitter

#BELP2021

Acknowledgements.

At the beginning of the 2020 academic year, I volunteered to run PG Tips with Stephen Appleton. PG Tips is a postgraduate group for postgraduate researchers based in the Department of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Birmingham. It was tradition that PG Tips host the annual Birmingham English Language Postgraduate Conference. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic outbreak in the UK forcing us into lockdown in March 2020, the BELP Conference was unable to go ahead that year.

Since then, however, PG Tips has been continuing to run online via the conference platform Zoom, developing the postgraduate researcher community in the department, with students tuning in from different countries across the world. With the support of technology and experience of conferences shifting online, Stephen and I strongly believed in the benefit of running the BELP Conference in the year 2021. Moving from initial planning stages with Stephen, and with the help of many volunteers from the postgraduate community, we were able to launch the conference; to take place on Friday 23rd April 2021.

It has been my great pleasure (and a lot of hard work!) to make BELP happen this year. I believe that community and collaboration is something integral not just to research but also to our human nature, which we need to facilitate and nurture at every opportunity. The conference welcomes postgraduate researchers and taught postgraduates to attend and present their work and engage in academic discussion. I am also delighted to invite and welcome distance-learning students and undergraduates to attend the conference. The conference has a diverse range of sessions, from plenary speaker Viola Wiegand talking about (corpus) linguistics and open research, to a round table panel discussion with Ashley Blake, Nouf Alharbi, and Bingjun Zhang talking about progressing with a PhD during COVID-19, to a variety of oral presentations and poster presentations from delegates.

While I have led the organisation of the conference for 2021, I must acknowledge and give my sincere thanks and appreciation to volunteers from the postgraduate community in the department: Nouf Alharbi, Stephen Appleton, Ashley Blake, Sharon Glaas, Eloise Parr, Qiuyi Sun, Eleanor Vivian, Greg Woodin, Keith Wilson, and Bingjun Zhang; and Amélie Doche; and staff members: Joe Bennett, Marcus Perlman, and Viola Wiegand (BELP2021 plenary speaker).

I hope all delegates of the conference enjoy the day and thank you all for your support of this event.

Samantha Ford

Samantha is a second year Doctoral Researcher funded by Midlands4Cities Arts and Humanities Research Council to research the figurative creativity of metaphor in advertising with Big Cat Advertising Agency. For more information, visit: www.samantha-ford.com. @samanthaford473

Key dates.

Application for Conference Committee: Sunday 31st January 2021

Abstract submission and panel discussion deadline: Sunday 7th February 2021

Notification of acceptance: by Monday 8th March 2021

Programme announced: Monday 15th March 2021

Registration deadline: by Sunday 18th April 2021

Conference: Friday 23rd April 2021

For more updates, visit the conference website:

www.belpconference2021.weebly.com.

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Contents.

About	1
Acknowledgements	2
Key dates	3
Programme	5
Plenary	7
Round Table Panel Discussion	8
Abstracts for Oral Presentation	9
‘Look’ and ‘See’: A Corpus-Based Study of verbs that are used as both sense verbs and verbs of perception	9
Cognitive Predictors of Individual Differences in Children’s Language Acquisition	11
Corpus-based wordlists in the language classroom.....	13
Predictors of Heritage Language Acquisition – the role of exposure, literacy and aptitude	15
A comparative corpus-based study on epistemic lexical verbs in academic writing.....	17
Cross-linguistic transfer in placement description and reference tracking in speech and gesture: The case of Polish-English bilinguals.....	19
The iconic impetus of language: From sensorimotor simulation to the lexicon	21
False News Discourse on Covid-19.....	24
Using corpus techniques to explore lexical change in parliamentary discourse	26
Abstracts for Poster Presentation	28
Teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards communicative language teaching in listening and speaking classes	28
Say it or not: A mouse tracking study on the production effect on learning Arabic vocabulary as an additional language in children	30
“Fucker kills people fast”: A corpus assisted analysis of opinion in tweets about the COVID-19 pandemic	32
Exploring interlocutor's impact on Chinese English learners' communication strategy use in English immersion classroom settings	34
Mimetic words and iconic gestures for causal events: A developmental study of Chinese-speaking children	36

Programme.

All times given in the programme are in BST. Please consult a [Time Zone Converter](#) to find out what time the conference will be running local to you.

08.30	Registration and networking
08.50	Welcome
09.00	Plenary – Viola Wiegand <i>Open science – some challenges and opportunities for (corpus) linguistics</i>
10.00	Break 1
10.15	<i>Look and see: A corpus-based study of verbs that are used as both sense verbs and verbs of perception</i> Jie Liang
10.45	<i>Cognitive predictors of individual differences in children’s language acquisition</i> Ashley Blake and Ewa Dąbrowska
11.15	<i>Corpus-based wordlists in the language classroom</i> Sarah Alzeer
11.45	Break 2
12.00	Round Table Panel Discussion – Ashley Blake, Nouf Alharbi, and Bingjun Zhang <i>Progressing research during COVID</i>
13.00	Lunch break and poster session <i>Teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards communicative language teaching in listening and speaking classes</i> Maram Asiri <i>Say it or not: A mouse tracking study on the production effect on learning Arabic vocabulary as an additional language in children</i> Nouf Alharbi

	<p><i>“Fucker kills people fast”: A corpus assisted analysis of opinion in tweets about the COVID-19 pandemic</i> Eloise Parr</p> <p><i>Exploring interlocutor's impact on Chinese English learners' communication strategy use in English immersion classroom settings</i> Bingjun Zhang</p> <p><i>Mimetic words and iconic gestures for causal events: A developmental study of Chinese-speaking children</i> Chenxi Niu, Alan Cienki, and Gerardo Ortega</p>
13.45	<p><i>Predictors of Heritage Language Acquisition – the role of exposure, literacy, and aptitude</i> Magdalena Grose-Hodge</p>
14.15	<p><i>A comparative corpus-based study on epistemic lexical verbs in academic writing</i> Fei Xie</p>
14.45	<p><i>Cross-linguistic transfer in placement description and reference tracking in speech and gesture: The case of Polish-English bilinguals</i> Paulina Popławska</p>
15.15	Break 3
15.30	<p><i>The iconic impetus of language: From sensorimotor simulation to the lexicon</i> Greg Woodin</p>
16.00	<p><i>False News Discourse on the Coronavirus</i> Bashayer Baissa</p>
16.30	<p><i>Using corpus techniques to explore lexical change in parliamentary discourse</i> Stephen Appleton</p>
17.00	Closing remarks
17.15	Dinner break and networking
18.00	Social event (end time to be confirmed)

Plenary.

Open science – some challenges and opportunities for (corpus) linguistics

Viola Wiegand

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In this talk, I will introduce the current landscape of open research in (corpus) linguistics and the challenges and opportunities in this space. We seem to be moving to a point where open research is increasingly a requirement rather than just “a nice thing to do”, although it is not always easy to implement it (fully). Therefore, I will acknowledge some of the challenges that (corpus) linguists may face when trying to implement open science practices. My examples relate to challenges with sharing corpus data and tools (e.g. ethics, copyright, reproducibility and sustainability). For ideas on how we can work with these situations to turn them into opportunities, I outline some of the innovative solutions that individual projects have adopted to overcome such challenges. I also consider the role of the community and what we might be able to learn from other disciplines like Digital Humanities. Overall, the talk aims to suggest that even small steps toward more open practices are better than nothing!

Viola Wiegand is a Lecturer (Teaching) at the University of Bath’s Department of Education. She is also a Research Associate at the University of Birmingham, where she has been part of the CLiC Dickens project team since 2017. She contributed to the development of the CLiC web app, a corpus tool for literary texts. In her PhD (Birmingham, 2019), Viola used corpus methods to study the meaning of the concept of surveillance in a range of discourse domains. Her research areas include corpus linguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, and digital humanities. Viola is Assistant Editor of the *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* and co-edited the volume *Corpus Linguistics, Context and Culture* (2019, De Gruyter) with Michaela Mahlberg.

Round Table Panel Discussion.

Progressing research during COVID

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Research activities have been impacted in different ways including research work (i.e., data collection), productivity while working from home, and dealing with mental health and wellbeing. Bingjun Zhang, Nouf Alharbi and Ashley Blake share their journeys regarding moving research online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Please join them to hear more about what they have learned along the way and how they embarked on ethics amendments, recruiting participants and the different methodologies used to test participants online.

Bingjun's research looks at interlocutor's impact on the communication strategy use of Chinese English learners. In her original research plan, she attempted to carry out classroom observation, questionnaire and semi-structured interview, but all these methods were moved to online format during Covid. Bingjun will introduce how she deals with the drastic change of her study, particularly focusing on the amendment of data collection and the ethical issues. She will also share her experience about task management and how to keep productive during the time working from home.

Nouf is investigating the production effect on the acquisition of vocabulary in child learners of Arabic as an additional language. In this talk, Nouf will reflect on her experience during the novel pandemic, Covid-19, as a parent working from home while trying to maintain hers and her family's wellbeing.

Ashley is researching individual differences in children's language acquisition. Ashley will discuss her journey in recruiting participants and how she revised her research methodology and processes to work with children online via the video conferencing platform, Zoom.

Abstracts for Oral Presentation.

‘Look’ and ‘See’: A Corpus-Based Study of verbs that are used as both sense verbs and verbs of perception

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Keywords: look, see, phraseology, corpus, L2 writing

The sense verbs have caught the interest of linguists. Viberg (1984) observed verbs representing senses in English are lexically different to other languages. In addition to the cross-linguistic difference, the meaning of these verbs in real communications has extended from denoting senses to representing perceptions. For example, prototypically, the sense meaning of ‘see’, a visual verb, is to notice something by using eyes. But in a sentence like “I see what you mean”, the meaning of ‘see’ has shifted to represent understanding, a type of perception without the involvement of eyes. The polysemy of this group of verbs poses significant challenges for students learning English as a foreign language (Sato and Tanaka, 2017). Moreover, visual perceptions verbs have been shown to occur more frequently than others denoting hearing, touch, taste and smell (Winter, Perlman and Majid, 2018). In the light of the higher frequency of visual verbs, this study focuses on ‘look’ and ‘see’, two basic but polysemous verbs, and aims to use corpus data for ‘look’ and ‘see’ to exemplify the relationship between visual sense and perception. In this presentation, I will start by examining the phraseological use of these two verbs in the British National Corpus and analyse how these two verbs are represented in different word sequences. This presentation is part of the doctoral research in which I will also compare with the phraseological use found in a Chinese learner corpus in order to investigate learners’ difficulties when they produce phraseological units of these two verbs.

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- Viberg, A. (1984) ‘The verbs of perception: a typological study’ In B. Butterworth, B. Comrie and O. Dahl (eds.) *Explanations for Language Universals*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 123-162.
- Winter, B., Perlman, M. and Majid, A. (2018) Vision dominates in perceptual language: English sensory vocabulary is optimized for usage. *Cognition*, 179, 213-220.

Jie Liang is currently a first-year PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham. Her research is corpus-based and investigates the phraseological use of high frequency verbs in a reference corpus and a Chinese learner corpus. Before starting her PhD, Jie received her Master's degree in English Language Teaching from the University of Warwick in 2017 and then worked as an English tutor in a local university in mainland China for two years.

Cognitive Predictors of Individual Differences in Children's Language Acquisition

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Keywords: language acquisition, cognitive skill learning

Language acquisition is supported by two learning and memory systems: declarative (explicit) memory and non-declarative (implicit) memory, of which procedural memory is a subsystem. Previous research suggests that grammar learning is implicit and supported by the procedural memory system. A wide body of research has explored this relationship, often using the serial reaction time task, but findings have been mixed and additional research is needed using other paradigms to test procedural learning. Grammatical deficits, which are often seen in children with developmental language disorder (DLD) are attributed to impairment to the neural regions underlying procedural memory (see Ullman & Pierpont, 2005; Ullman, Earle, Walenski & Janacsek, 2020). Whilst this theory is not disputed, Dąbrowska (2010) suggests that both implicit and explicit processes are involved in language acquisition, which occur in different stages and in differing degrees.

Dąbrowska believes that there is a relationship between the speed of automatization and children's linguistic ability. This perspective explores children's language acquisition by combining insights from the usage-based model of language acquisition and skill acquisition theory. According to usage-based theories, grammatical development involves extracting constructional schemas from previously encountered utterances (Tomasello, 2003). These schemas are then entrenched and routinized through recurrent practice (Dąbrowska, 2010). We understand this through previous literature regarding skill acquisition theory: language learning is a complex, cognitive skill involving distinct processes which correspond to generalisation and routinization.

In this study, we examine the relationship between the ability to automatize a complex cognitive procedure and cognitive and linguistic measures.

Experimental design comprises a large individual differences group design, comprising typically developing children and children with language difficulties (such as DLD), aged between 7 and 9 years. My research methodology was revised due to the Covid-19 pandemic and all experimental tasks are conducted online using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The multiple-trial Tower of Hanoi (MToH) task is used to measure individual differences in the speed of automatization, as a predictor of linguistic attainment.

Children complete the puzzle 30 times, the last 5 attempts while performing a simultaneous secondary task. The more strongly the procedure for solving the puzzle is proceduralized during learning, the less performance will be affected when participants' attention is divided between solving the puzzle and the secondary task. In addition to the MToH task, children complete a battery of cognitive tasks and standardized linguistic assessments. Participant recruitment and data collection is ongoing.

It is hypothesised that the speed of automatization will vary between typically developing children and children with DLD, due to proposed impairment to the neural regions supporting procedural learning. We also expect to see a correlation between different performance measures of the MToH and performance on cognitive and linguistic tasks. Data collection is in the final stages and initial results will be shared at the BERP conference.

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Ashley Blake is a PhD Researcher at the University of Birmingham where her research focuses on individual differences in children's language acquisition. Ashley's research combines insights from skill acquisition theory and the usage-based model of language acquisition to investigate how the speed of automatization predicts differences in children's linguistic ability, both in typically developing children and children with developmental language disorder. Ashley's research is part of a large-scale research project led by Professor Ewa Dąbrowska (University of Birmingham and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg) and also supervised by Professor Dagmar Divjak (University of Birmingham) and Dr Nick Riches (Newcastle University).

Corpus-based wordlists in the language classroom

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Keywords: corpus-based wordlist, evaluation tool, vocabulary, tool development, tool validation

Advanced analysis of computerised corpora contributed to reviving the use of wordlists for English Language Teaching (ELT) which led to a proliferation of various types of corpus-based word lists. Guided by the board question: How can ELT practitioners decide on the suitability of a corpus-based wordlist for use in a given context? This study proposes an evaluation tool designed to help practitioners assess the suitability of a given wordlist for their purpose. It is motivated by the paucity of evaluative research that takes into account the key considerations that should be made before implementing a wordlist in the language classroom. It is also a response to a call for making existing lists more suitable to particular contexts (Dang, 2020).

The target users of the tool are, broadly speaking, ELT practitioners, such as teachers, curriculum or assessment coordinators, or materials developers involved in directing vocabulary acquisition. The tool aims to cater to practitioners with different levels of expertise and knowledge, and especially those who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of developing corpus-based word lists.

This study was conducted in four phases, the first was a preliminary online survey of current practices and views related to the construction, exploitation, and evaluation of corpus-based wordlists for English language teaching and learning. The 74 collected responses reflected how practitioners view and use wordlists in ELT contexts. The second phase entailed the development of the proposed tool, which was based on and guided primarily by (a) the content of Nation's (2016) critique framework, (b) a review of the relevant literature on wordlist production and use for pedagogical purposes and (c) the results of the initial survey. The third phase consisted of the tool's review through interviews with a panel of six experts and practitioners according to four criteria, namely clarity of wording, relevance, accessibility, and practicality. Based on the reviewers' feedback, the researcher revised the tool. The fourth testing phase aimed to empirically test the tool's effectiveness and efficiency and the comprehensiveness and relevance of its content. Two studies were conducted: a review intended to obtain critical feedback on the tool from an expert panel of eight participants, and a study in which the tool was used to evaluate the suitability of a wordlist, from the perspective of 11 ELT practitioners, in a real-world scenario.

It was found that the tool should allow practitioners assess the suitability of a wordlist for their purpose in a structured manner, even though it may not provide conclusive answers. However, because of the complexity of wordlist evaluation, practitioners who lack expertise and knowledge in corpus linguistics may find the tool challenging. The results indicated that

awareness of wordlists is necessary for successful implementation of wordlists. To support these practitioners in learning about wordlists and to engage them to think critically about issues that directly influence the use of wordlists, the researcher developed an introductory document about corpus-based wordlists for language teaching.

References

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Sarah Nasser Alzeer is a Lecturer at the Department of English Language and Literature, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, and a PhD student at the English Language and Applied Linguistic Department, University of Birmingham, UK. Alzeer's current current project is "Corpus-based Word Lists".

Predictors of Heritage Language Acquisition – the role of exposure, literacy and aptitude

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Keywords: Heritage Language Acquisition, Incomplete Acquisition Hypothesis

Heritage Speakers, early bilinguals of minority languages (Montrul, 2008), are a highly heterogeneous population with diverse levels of achievement. As they learn the HL from their main caregivers, HL Acquisition is an instantiation of First Language Acquisition (FLA). However, its trajectory is very different from that of monolingual FLA. This is because with the growing exposure to the majority language, the heritage language undergoes a decline, the beginning of which can usually be observed with the onset of schooling.

Investigations into qualitative properties of Heritage Languages reveal that the outcomes of Heritage Language Acquisition (HLA) are divergent from those observed in monolinguals growing up in communities where the language is dominant. This led to the formulation of the Incomplete Acquisition Hypothesis (Polinsky 2006, Montrul 2008). Literature suggests there are two key factors that might contribute to the divergent outcome, which are reduced input and the lack of formal education in the target language. However, it is possible that it is the exposure to written communication that facilitates later language development. Most recent research into first language acquisition indicates that literacy and its impact on FLA has been underestimated (Ravid and Tolchinsky, 2002; Dąbrowska 2012). This factor has also recently been carefully discussed in the field of HLA (Benmamoun et al, 2013; Dąbrowska, 2013; Kupisch & Rothman, 2018; Van Osch & Sleeman, 2018) with some suggesting poor or lack of L1 literacy as the reason for “incomplete” acquisition.

In order to investigate the predictors of HLA and examine cross-linguistic influence of bilingual acquisition, I am conducting a study focusing on 7-12-year-old children growing up in Polish families living in the UK has been designed. The participants are given a battery of standardised tests and interviews with parents are conducted. The outcome is measured by analysing speech samples and normed grammatical tests. Next, mixed effect modelling is performed. Data collected from the first 20 participants is now being analysed in order to find first correlations and further participants are being tested. The outcomes of the analysis are going to be presented at the conference.

My hypothesis is that literacy will be a strong predictor of the outcomes for both languages and strong reading skills in one language might facilitate the acquisition of the other. The

quality and quantity of input is likely to strongly correlate with the outcome of language acquisition for both languages but exposure to the language used in the wider community is likely to hamper the development of the HL. With regard to language aptitude, it is likely to moderate the role of these two factors as it has been suggested to have a compensatory function in language attrition in Heritage Speakers allowing them to maintain a high level of HL despite the reduced exposure.

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<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006916654365>

Magdalena Grose-Hodge has been investigating language acquisition both theoretically and practically for two decades. Before joining Birmingham University, I worked at a number of British HE institutions teaching English for Academic Purposes and Foundation Courses. I also have a background in Translation, English as a Second Language and Literacy. Currently, I am investigating the predictors of Heritage Language acquisition and observing early bilingual development in a cross-linguistic longitudinal study. At the same time, I am raising two Heritage Language Speakers, who continuously remind me of the challenges that early multilinguals face.

A comparative corpus-based study on epistemic lexical verbs in academic writing

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Keywords: corpus linguistics, learner corpus, epistemic lexical verbs, English for academic purposes, academic writing

Epistemic lexical verbs (ELVs) represent a more precise and overt means of helping writers to deliver the degrees of uncertainty or assertiveness towards their statements in academic discourse (Hyland & Milton, 1997). Crucial as these linguistic devices are, however, ELVs are taken as a difficult aspect of English for EFL learners. They tend to heavily rely on a narrow range of devices, and the grammatical constructions they employ also seem simpler compared with native speakers of English (NS). The current research, therefore, sets out to further dig out the discrepancies between NS and Chinese L1 writers of English in manipulating ELVs to deliver epistemic modality in their academic writing, and also input analysis result to my future study on corpus-based materials design regarding ELV teaching.

Two corpora for this study, the native speaker and Chinese English learner corpora were compiled. Both corpora are electronic collection of academic writings produced by MA/MSc-level postgraduate students whose programmes are related to English Education/Language. Building on the previous study and current corpus data analysis, a list of 26 most frequently used ELVs was produced and all tagged by using *Keyboard Mastro* based on the ready-made annotation categories (epistemic type, different levels of certainty, function type and citation style).

The comparison of NS and Chinese writers reveals that the latter group tends to overuse certain ELVs, shows a stronger preference to express authoritative statements and also depended on a restricted range of forms of personalized, impersonalized and depersonalized constructions. In addition to abovementioned complications, Chinese EFL learners have incomplete mastery of full range of syntactical constructions of ELVs, and some grammatical errors have been identified when they are trying to incorporate them in their writing.

The initial data analysis reveals that the manipulation of ELVs in academic writing is problematic for Chinese students. It also gives an idea of whether authentic corpora (especially learner corpora) could be a helpful source for materials development to assist EFL learners to produce native-like language. My following study will focus on learner corpus-based teaching materials design and investigate its potential in ELV teaching.

Reference:

Hyland, K., & Milton, J. (1997). certainty in L1 and L2 students' writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 6*(2), 183–205.

Fie Xie is a Postgraduate Researcher in Linguistics at University of Birmingham. I hold a Master's degree in TESOL at University of Edinburgh. My current research looks at how learner corpora can be applied in the EAP writing materials design. Merging insights from comparative corpus-based analysis and second language acquisition theory, I aim to explore the value of learner corpora in EAP writing materials development and how it could be used, especially in epistemic lexical verb teaching for Chinese EFL learners.

Cross-linguistic transfer in placement description and reference tracking in speech and gesture: The case of Polish-English bilinguals

Paulina Popławska

Keywords: co-speech gestures, multimodal transfer, L2 learners, placement description, reference tracking

The linguistic representations used to describe the world are shaped by the linguistic resources of each language. Taking a multimodal perspective, we can describe the world both in speech and gesture (McNeill, 2005). Moreover, in line with the Interface Model, the meaning conveyed in gesture is shaped by the different formulations of each language (Kita & Özyürek, 2003). But what happens when a second language (L2) learner has to learn new concepts in the target language? Crosslinguistically, not many words overlap both conceptually and linguistically. Whereas the term *conceptual transfer* here refers to the change in conceptual meaning categories in L2, *linguistic transfer* means a situation in which a speaker's knowledge of L1 use can influence L2 use (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2010). In this thesis linguistic transfer will be explored on a structural, morphosyntactic level. As such, L2 speakers have to learn new conceptual categories as well as the linguistics resources to express them.

Two areas in which we can explore the notion of transfer is in placement terms and reference tracking. Although many studies have explored the process of expanding conceptual meaning categories from L1 to L2 in the placement domain, the reverse process of reducing them has not received significant attention. Polish for instance can express an objects' vertical orientation using the word *stawiać* 'stand' but - *kłaść* 'lay' if it is horizontal. English however has a hypernym put which conceptually corresponds to any type of placement regardless of orientation. Similarly, looking at reference tracking, the focus is on linguistic transfer in subject pronouns use where bilinguals move from pro-drop L1 Polish to non-pro-drop L2 English.

Study 1 targets conceptual transfer by videorecording 32 placement descriptions of 100 participants (including two monolingual control groups). The same group took part in Study 2 on reference tracking providing videorecorded narratives of two silent videos each. The recordings are still being analysed.

Based on previous research (Gullberg, 2009; 2011) I hypothesize that Polish-English bilinguals will overspecify the placement descriptions (use English stand/lay or add referent posture information outside the verb). Moreover, in line with the Interface Model

assumptions, if Polish-English bilinguals operate with L1-based meaning, their gestures will overall look Polish-like (object-incorporated handshapes aligned with verbs); if their attention shifted to the motion in line with English, their gestures will overall look English-like (path-only aligned with locative expressions). In study 2, in line with previous research (Azar et al. 2017) I hypothesize that Polish-English bilinguals will use noun phrases to reintroduce referents and null pronouns to maintain referents thus transferring their L1 speech patterns to their L2 English. In addition, if speech and gesture are parallel, cross-linguistic influence on their gestures is expected to align with patterns of influence in speech.

This research will provide a fuller picture of the nature of cross-linguistic transfer by examining it multimodally from two different perspectives: conceptual and linguistic. It will provide further evidence that speech and gesture parallel in bilingual production and may also further verify the assumptions of Interface model on a new, understudied population. Overall, this research will contribute to narrowing the gap between the types of transfer already investigated and those that are yet to be explored.

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The iconic impetus of language: From sensorimotor simulation to the lexicon

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Keywords: iconicity, language evolution, sensorimotor simulation, conventionalization, grammaticalization

Longstanding in linguistics is the view that language is arbitrary. A classic example in support of this view is given by Saussure (1966), who argues that the referent of the English noun 'tree' can be represented equally well by the Latin noun 'arbor'. Neither of these words is any more suitable for signifying its referent – rather, it seems to be solely by language-specific convention that 'tree' and 'arbor' have come to represent the same meaning.

Other, more recent accounts of language have observed that communicative forms often resemble their meanings and so can be described as iconic (e.g., Dingemanse et al., 2015; Perniss & Vigliocco, 2014). This phenomenon is well attested in signed languages, as exemplified by the sign for 'eat' in British Sign Language, in which the fingers are bunched together and moved toward the mouth as if engaged in eating. In spoken languages, the clearest example of iconicity is onomatopoeia, where the sound of a word is imitative of the sound to which it refers (e.g., Bladon, 1977). Other iconicity is less obvious. For instance, in English and other languages, high front vowels tend to appear in words denoting a small size (e.g., /i/ in 'tiny' /taɪni/), whereas low back vowels tend to appear in words denoting a large size (e.g., /a/ in 'large' /la:dʒ/). The fundamental pitch of these vowels reflects the correlation between vowel pitch and the pitch that things, particularly animals, tend to make according to their size (small = high, large = low) (Blasi et al., 2016; Ohala, 1994; Parise & Spence, 2012).

In this paper, we propose that sensorimotor simulation – the reactivation of previously experienced perceptions and actions during thought and communication (Barsalou, 1999, 2007) drives the production of iconic words, signs, and gestures. People routinely represent the content of their sensorimotor simulations through language (Hostetter & Alibali, 2008, 2018; Perlman & Gibbs, 2013), and simulations are activated when people comprehend language (Hauk et al., 2004; Pulvermüller, 1999). We thus argue that successful communication can be partly viewed as the relaying of sensorimotor simulations from speaker to listener, or from writer to reader. Iconic forms of expression may be particularly good at communicating the content of sensorimotor simulations due to their direct resemblance to these simulations.

We present a model of language evolution in which iconicity is placed front and centre. We argue that iconic forms produced via sensorimotor simulation are repeated and shared between speakers, gradually becoming codified as part of the lexicon. Through this codification, iconic words and signs lose their iconicity through processes connected to conventionalization and grammaticalization (Flaksman, 2017). However, while individual forms lose their iconicity over time, sensorimotor simulations trigger speakers to produce new iconic vocalizations, expressively modified words and signs, and gestures. New iconic coinages then become susceptible to de-iconization through conventionalization and grammaticalization (Flaksman, 2015). As the cycle repeats, the continual coinage of iconic words and signs replenishes the iconic lexicon (Flaksman, 2017). In this way, sensorimotor simulation maintains iconicity in the lexicon.

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False News Discourse on Covid-19

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Keywords: false news discourse, coronavirus, linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, keyword analysis

With the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), many people all over the world have fallen prey to misinfodemics, a phenomenon in which false information, unproven claims, and misleading statements easily go viral in the discourse on pandemics and lead to the spread of diseases. This paper investigates the distinctive rhetorical strategies of false news discourse on Covid-19 with the aim to understand how these texts seek to craft legitimate alternative narratives of the origin, spread, and treatment of the disease. Most previous research on false news have utilized natural language processing to identify linguistic features of false news and then to develop automatic false news detection algorithms based on these features (Dey et al., 2018; Rashkin et al., 2017; Rubin & Lukoianova, 2015; Volkova et al., 2017).

This study, in contrast, adopts a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach (Baker, 2020) to identifying the rhetorical strategies used by false news writers. A total of 51 online false news articles about Covid-19 that were verifiably labelled as false by fact-checking websites were examined using a combination of keyword analysis and qualitative concordance analysis. The keywords were extracted by comparing the corpus of false news with multiple reference corpora representing broadsheets, tabloids, and news websites and blogs. In this way, only keywords that distinctively represent *false* news discourse were identified and studied, while controlling for register variation.

Preliminary results show that false news distinctively uses words related to eight semantic categories: medical organisations, medical tests and investigation, proper names, geographical places, science and technology, treatment, quantities, and war. By examining the context of the keywords under each category, it is shown that false news discourse employs several rhetorical strategies, such as de-legitimizing, scapegoating, using prestigious jargon, emphasizing sensory evidence, and appealing to the readers' emotions as well as religious beliefs. The limitations of keyword analysis and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

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Using corpus techniques to explore lexical change in parliamentary discourse

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Keywords: corpus linguistics, political discourse, lexical change, foreign policy, Hansard

Democratic parliaments across the world publish transcripts of their proceedings online, which serve both as an official record and as a means of ensuring transparency and accountability. Parliamentary transcripts are a valuable resource for corpus linguistics provided we recognise their limitations: for example, because parliamentary discourse differs from other discourse types, and because the transcripts may not be fully accurate or verbatim (Slembrouck 1992; Mollin 2007).

Working within these limitations, this paper explores how corpus techniques can be used to understand how a parliamentary discourse changes over time. It focuses on lexical change in the foreign policy discourse of the United Kingdom government between 1989 and 2014, a period with major developments in European policy at either end. It uses a bespoke 17-million word corpus assembled from Hansard (Parliament.UK, 2020), the Official Report of proceedings in the UK Parliament, comprising the words attributed to ten successive Foreign Secretaries and the junior ministers working with them.

After compiling a complete wordlist for the corpus, the research used frequency analysis to identify which words and phrases display the largest rise or fall in frequency during the period. From this, several themes were selected for detailed investigation. One such theme is 'freedom', which is used as a case study in this paper. The word 'freedom' rose steadily in frequency through the period, more than quadrupling between the first and last five years. The discourse refers to many kinds of freedom including academic, journalistic, political and religious freedom. Analysis of collocates and concordances reveals which of these grew to form a distinct strand of the UK government's foreign policy discourse. This in turn provides insights into ministers' changing conceptualisations of the nature and purpose of foreign policy.

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Slembrouck, S. (1992). The parliamentary Hansard verbatim report: the written construction of spoken discourse. *Language and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 2, 101-119. DOI: 10.1177/096394709200100202.

Stephen Appleton is a Doctoral Researcher in Applied Linguistics. His research is a corpus-assisted discourse study of the UK government's articulation of foreign policy between 1989 and 2015. He has assembled a bespoke, 17-million word corpus of foreign policy discourse from *Hansard* transcripts of proceedings in the UK parliament. He is using this to identify shifts in the major themes of ministers' discourse and in their manner of articulating policy. Combined with historical and contextual source material, this gives a linguist's specialist insight into the changing nature and purpose of foreign policy discourse.

Abstracts for Poster Presentation.

Teachers' and students' attitudes towards communicative language teaching in listening and speaking classes

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Keywords: communicative approach, attitudes, communicative competence, EFL, listening and speaking classes

The demand for English language classes has substantially increased worldwide due to its status as a world language. However, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students still tend to encounter serious challenges when attempting to communicate in English in their daily lives. These difficulties have been attributed to a variety of factors, including language class teaching methods. Although communicative language teaching (CLT) has been introduced to help students use language in various meaningful contexts, its implementation has encountered several obstacles, including students' attitudes and a mismatch between the attitudes of teachers and students, which negatively affect instructional outcomes. Thus, the attitudes of teachers and students are significant and must be considered before making pedagogical decisions. To facilitate successful communication classes, this study aims to answer the following question: What are teachers' and students' attitudes towards CLT principles in listening and speaking classes? This study's participants are females in a female-only teaching environment. Thus, the research will also have a useful cultural impact on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) community due to the high demand for studies that explore female attitudes and perceptions, given that females in the KSA tend to have distinctive features compared to males or even females in other contexts. A mixed-methods approach will combine quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. Unlike other studies related to CLT, three sources of data will enable triangulation: online questionnaires, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers.

Data from the observation and interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. The questionnaire data reflect contradictions between the teachers' and the students' answers. For example, the students' showed positive attitudes towards grammar teaching, while the teachers did not. To determine whether the teachers' and students' attitudes translated into language classes, phase two of the research will compare the questionnaire results with the language classes' observations and the semi-structured interviews. This study will

contribute to an understanding of the causes of problems that are associated with CLT in practice. Despite the great efforts of the Saudi educational system, it seems that the English language programme in the KSA has not yet achieved its objectives. This study can contribute to the KSA's economy because significant funds are being spent to improve university outcomes, including developing learners' ability to communicate via English. Moreover, the results will support research that encourages the study of learners' attitudes and compares them with teachers' attitudes. This study also attempts to develop learners' communicative competence. Previous studies have noted that learners with a poor command of English face serious challenges and experience anxiety when they need to use English, but their confidence increases and their anxiety decreases when their communicative competence is developed.

Maram Asiri is currently a PhD student at the University of Birmingham investigating teachers' and students' attitudes towards communicative language teaching in listening and speaking classes.

Say it or not: A mouse tracking study on the production effect on learning Arabic vocabulary as an additional language in children

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Keywords: additional language acquisition, word learning, production, perception, mouse tracking

Saying or repeating words is an effective method when learning and recalling new vocabulary because repetition enhances memory, especially when reading items aloud versus reading items silently (what has been called “the production effect”). This effect arises over different types of production, including writing and typing, as well as in studies that used pictures and word stimuli (Fawcett et al., 2012; Icht and Mama, 2019). Although the production effect has been shown to be advantageous when acquiring less frequent or unfamiliar words in several studies using different methods, it is understudied in children, and in studies exploring children’s acquisition of words in second or foreign language learning. To investigate this, a group of children (4-7 years old), learning Modern Standard Arabic as an additional language, took part in a word learning study. The study was delivered online, and asked children to learn unfamiliar Arabic words in different conditions: listen only and listen-then-repeat. Following the learning phase, children were then tested on their recall by selecting one of four pictures in response to the spoken word. Mouse tracking was used to assess accuracy, and also to gain insight into hesitancy and competition in the responses. In line with previous studies, preliminary results suggest that production facilitates word learning in children, and that word frequency contributes to word-learning difficulty in producing words.

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Nouf Alharbi is a doctoral researcher in psycholinguistics at the University of Birmingham, the UK. Precisely, Nouf is interested in studying language production and communication development in neurotypical and atypical children. Within this research direction, Nouf combines between experimental and naturalistic observation to understand mental processes of comprehension and production.

“Fucker kills people fast”: A corpus assisted analysis of opinion in tweets about the COVID-19 pandemic

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Keywords: Corpus linguistics, online communication, social media, appraisal theory, COVID-19

Since the first announcement of the COVID-19 outbreak in late 2019, Twitter has been instrumental in the spread of information and opinions across the world.

A corpus of 900 English language tweets was collected in three subcorpora from May to August 2020. A sample of 450 tweets were manually coded and analysed to determine what themes and opinions were being expressed on Twitter about the COVID-19 pandemic and whether that changed over time. This goes some way to ascertain a change in public opinion of the pandemic and subsequent action and policies taken by governments and agencies around the English-speaking world. A further goal of the research was to explore the socio-political contexts that could influence the results found, and conversely the socio-political contexts that could be influenced by trends on Twitter. A mix of quantitative word frequency analysis and qualitative thematic and appraisal theory analysis was applied to the corpus. The effectiveness of the combined methods of the study was also considered throughout the study.

The results indicated that factual tweets were more common than tweets that contained explicit opinion. Furthermore, tweets relating to illness and death, and politics were the most common. Features such as quoting, expletives, capitalisation and hashtags are used to strengthen and emphasise opinions in relation to the pandemic. In addition, the issues and topics found within the content of the tweets in the corpus are consistent with the constant changes in the political and social climates. In particular, mentions of the change in numbers of positive cases and deaths, both locally and globally, and particular political or public health policy or guidelines that have been reported by the media were present in the content of many of the tweets. This indicates that Twitter is a valuable platform for understanding what level of information is being accessed and understood by the public.

Research such as this has practical applications for better insight into the fears, frustrations, and general opinions of the public about a major global issue such as an infectious disease outbreak. Additionally, the complementary results and discussion for the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods demonstrates that mixed methods are an effective

approach to the analysis of online communication that contains a high level of opinion.

Eloise Parr is a first year PhD linguistics student at the University of Birmingham. Her research is using corpus assisted metaphor analysis to explore pregnancy metaphors. She graduated from Coventry University with a BA (Hons) in English in 2019. After that, Eloise graduated from the University of Birmingham with a MA in Applied Linguistics, where she was also a research assistant in the Department of English Language and Linguistics. Her research interests are critical discourse analysis, political communication, feminist linguistics, and metaphor.

Exploring interlocutor's impact on Chinese English learners' communication strategy use in English immersion classroom settings

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Keywords: communication strategy, second language acquisition, interlocutor, pedagogy, English immersion classroom

This study focuses on interlocutor's impact on Chinese English learners' Communication Strategy (CSs) use in English immersion classroom settings during their overseas study. The purpose of this research is to 1) investigate the type and frequency of Chinese students' CSs use in their classroom verbal discussion; 2) compare the differences when they talk to Chinese English learners and other English-as-L2 language users; 3) examine how the change of the interlocutors in conversation influences Chinese students' communication; and 4) suggest pedagogical implications in CSs training.

This is an empirical study and the data will be collected through classroom observation, questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Participants will be recruited from the students attending MA TESOL courses at the University of Birmingham, which has a number of international students from China as well as other countries. Due to the unprecedented situation caused by COVID-19, the observer will enter the online classroom sessions and audio-record student's utterances in their group discussion. The transcripts of participants' conversations will be analysed through categorizing the communication strategies based on the taxonomy created by Dornyei and Scott (1997). Also, participants will be invited to fill out the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) questionnaire (Nakatani, 2006) to provide a self-report of their CSs application during the class discussion. A semi-structured interview will be carried out to attain further explanation from those participants who presented representative and distinctive results in the last two methods.

The data from these three methods will be both qualitative and quantitative, which are anticipated to find out Chinese English learners' different CSs application when they communicate with different interlocutors. In other words, this study will tend to explore how the English-speaking partner in an authentic English-speaking classroom stimulates or motivates Chinese students' oral expression. The findings will be helpful for both English learners and educators in China to realize what can only be achieved in international settings is exactly the shortage of domestic language training. The results of this study will

suggest pedagogical implications of the instruction in Chinese English learners' CSs training and therefore achieve the improvement of their language proficiency.

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Mimetic words and iconic gestures for causal events: A developmental study of Chinese-speaking children

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Keywords: causal event, language development, mimetic words, iconic gestures, Chinese

Causal events are ubiquitous in our daily life and they consist of a causing subevent and a caused subevent. Research has shown it takes time for children to learn how to express these perceived actions and changes with most research focusing on the development of causative morphosyntactic structures in child language (e.g., Bowerman, 1974; Family & Allen, 2015). However, less is known about languages lacking inflectional morphology, such as Chinese (but see Chen, 2017; Deng, 2019; Hsu, Rispoli, & Hadley, 2019). Chinese is interesting from this perspective because while it lacks rich morphology, it has a large set of mimetic words that could be recruited to express causal events. Mimetic words (MW), defined as marked words that depict sensory imagery (Dingemanse, 2012), are often accompanied by iconic gestures to create a composite message (Dingemanse, 2012, 2013; Kita, 1997). They have been argued to play a facilitating role in early language development (Imai & Kita, 2014; Laing, 2019; Motamedi et al., 2021). Some MWs could function as decontextualized linguistic items, composing sentences in a conventional way, whereas other MWs, even appearing inserted mid-sentence, belong to a different dimension which does not contribute to describing event structures per se, but creates effects of re-evoking related sensory experiences (Kita, 1997), such as affective experiences, motions, etc. An interesting, but as yet unexplored question, is whether and how the two types of MWs are exploited in Chinese children's acquisition of causal event language.

In order to address this question, this study used an elicitation task and examined causal event expressions by Chinese-speaking children (4-7 years old) and adults. Seventy-nine children and fifteen adults were asked to describe 43 video clips showing a variety of causal events lasting 5-10 seconds each. These videos were designed for the CAL project which investigated causal representations across languages (Bohnenmeyer, 2015). We first analysed the overall numbers of MWs depicting causing or caused subevents across the age groups, as well as their accompanying gestures. We then further examined the types of these MWs in order to understand the roles they play in Chinese children's utterances.

Our results show that (1) overall, children were more likely to use MWs to depict a causing subevent than a caused subevent; (2) the majority of MWs were accompanied by iconic gestures (86.84%, 88.00%, 83.33%, and 95.45% from age 4 to 7 respectively); (3) The MWs

were used by children and decreased with age, but they were not used by adults; (4) coherent with Kita (1997), these MWs either replaced causative predicates, conveying meaning comparable with morphology, or modified event descriptions by adding sensory experiences involved. Four-year-olds used these two types equally frequently whereas older children were more likely to use MWs as modifiers.

Taken together, we found Chinese children before age 4 tended to use MWs as replacements of causal predicates. Different semiotic forms (MW and iconic gestures) are thus a useful resource for children to learn to talk about causal events when explicit morphology is not available.

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