

English Language and Linguistics Research Seminars 2017-2018

Seminars will be held in **Wells Street 314** at **17:00**.

Semester 1

Wednesday 4 October 2017

Tim Wharton, University of Brighton

Meaning: before and beyond

Grice (1989, 1991) famously presents a ‘myth’, in which he suggests how cognitive capacities might have spiralled in such a way that non-natural meaning might have emerged from natural meaning. Implicit in his myth is the claim that intentional communication, and the meta-psychological abilities underpinning it, are necessary precursors to the evolution of language. In this talk I want to focus on the dimension of human communication that existed before non-natural meaning and suggest that these vestiges are central to any account of human interaction that looks beyond it. Consider infants. Well before they are capable of passing false-belief tests and acquiring full-blown Theory of Mind, they can sense the emotional state of their carers. Indeed, intention recognition probably plays a rather limited role in recognising the emotional states of others. Consider the automatic way in which we interpret paralinguistic behaviours (Lieberman 2000, Wharton 2009), or the way panic spreads through a crowd.

This talk presents work in progress which attempts to synthesize an account of emotion and emotion-reading in a way that fits with, on the one hand, notions from cognitive models of pragmatics such as relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1985/1996) and, on the other, work on emotions in cognitive science (Cosmides and Tooby 2000). On the pragmatics side, the idea is that the kind of information encoded by linguistic expressives, interjections, facial expressions or tone of voice puts the user into a state in which emotional procedures are highly activated, and are therefore much more likely to be recognised and selected by an audience using the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (Wharton 2015). Central to this thinking is the idea that the traditional relevance theoretic notion of cognitive effect needs to be complemented by a new notion of emotional effect, which are typically activated by emotion reading procedures and render them worth processing. Turning to cognitive science, the idea is that an emotion is a kind of superordinate cognitive mechanism, the function of which is to regulate or mobilise cognitive sub-mechanisms responsible for perception and attention, goal choice, information-gathering, specialised types of inference, physiological changes etc. Emotions clearly have a communicative function – though that they may not be their only function – so co-evolving with these programs or procedures would have been programs and procedures responsible for reading them in others.

Wednesday 18 October 2017

Krzysztof Kredens, Aston University
Making sense of adversarial interpreting

Interactions between non-English-speaking individuals and public service officials in England are normally interpreted by only one interpreter. On occasion, however, another interpreter, or an individual (or individuals) with knowledge of the languages in question, may be simultaneously present during the interaction, either monitoring it or volunteering unsolicited input. By analogy to the English legal system, I refer to such contexts – where the ‘official’ interpreter’s output is monitored and/or challenged, either during the speech event or subsequently – as ‘adversarial interpreting’.

My main concern in this talk is to throw a spotlight on adversarial interpreting as a hitherto rarely discussed problem in its own right. I will report on the findings of a research project based on the analysis of an interpreted police interview transcript and input from practising interpreters with experience of adversarial interpreting. I will try to answer the question of how the presence of two interpreters, or an interpreter and a monitoring participant, in the same speech event impacts on the communication process. I will also talk about forensic linguistic arbitration in cases where incompetent interpreting has been identified or an expert opinion is sought in relation to an adversarial interpreting event of significance to a legal dispute.

Wednesday 1 November 2017

Lucy Jones, University of Nottingham

Subverting otherness & challenging ignorance: The discursive construction of legitimate identity in a transgender youth group

Using discourse analysis, I will report here on moments of interaction between members of a support group for transgender youth. The extracts being analysed show four young people working collaboratively to construct a mutual identity, despite differences between them in terms of their gender, age, and experience. Their identity construction is achieved through the foregrounding of their relative expertise in, and experience of, transgender issues; this enables them to actively challenge and resist the ignorance of others, who they present as 'othering' them. In particular, the young people ridicule those who are ignorant and who (albeit implicitly) reproduce transphobic discourse. In doing so, I argue, they ascribe themselves agency and legitimacy by subverting the heteronormative ideologies which inform their experiences of transphobia. The young people thus construct an active, resistant, and validated mutual identity rather than a victimised, submissive, or othered one. The interaction detailed here reveals how speakers can jointly negotiate their identities in response to attacks or challenges to their validity, and I draw on theories from sociocultural linguistics in explaining this. I also argue that the identity work produced by the young people reveals the enormously important role played by support groups and other agencies in helping young people to construct a positive persona in the face of heteronormative society.

Wednesday 15 November 2017

Richard Ingham, University of Westminster

Postcolonial French in England? Examining the evidence from Anglo-Norman

Postcolonial varieties of English and French have been increasingly studied (Kachru 1985, Naffati & Queffelec 2004, Schneider 2007 and references therein) allowing some clear ideas of their linguistic properties to emerge, especially with respect to Kachru's Outer circle varieties. Substrate influence is expected on phonology and also syntax, especially when the latter interfaces with lexical properties such as verb argument structure (Schneider 2007, Aslanov 2015). Morphological paradigms may also undergo considerable simplification in contact with an indigenous language, though this depends on the contact setting (Trudgill 2011).

Against this background, the linguistic status is assessed of Anglo-Norman, the variety of medieval French used in England from the Norman Conquest till around 1400, which has long been in dispute (Tanqueray 1915, Pope 1934, Legge 1980, Kibbee 1996, Kristol 2000, Rothwell 2001, Trotter 2003, Ingham 2012). Thanks to the creation of substantial electronic corpus resources (Trotter 2007), we are now able to make a far better appreciation of this variety and its diachronic development than was available to earlier researchers. In this paper the perspective is taken of seeing Anglo-Norman as a medieval post-colonial variety. This appears initially valid in terms of its high social status, as well as an emerging gap between insular and 'homeland' French, and borrowing of native terms. The paper then concentrates on how well Schneider's (2007) diachronically conceived Dynamic Model of post-colonial varieties fares with Anglo-Norman, in particular the development of endonormativity in grammar and pronunciation. Some problems are discussed in applying Schneider's 'nativization' concept to the diachronic development of Anglo-Norman syntax. These are addressed using Sorace's (2011) Interface Hypothesis, in which aspects of syntax interfacing with semantic/pragmatics are more vulnerable to language contact influence than syntax-internal properties.

In general terms the designation 'post-colonial variety' fits Anglo-Norman reasonably well. However, it differed from contemporary varieties of this type in that for most of its career it was a child L2 variety not supported by formal instruction (Ingham 2015), but reliant on semi-naturalistic transmission. How far its survival was, like those varieties, affected by language politics (Butterfield 2009) remains a matter for discussion.

Wednesday 29 November 2017

Francesco Goglia, University of Exeter

Multilingualism and language maintenance in the East Timorese diaspora in the UK and Australia

The East Timorese linguistic repertoire is complex. It comprises Tetum and Portuguese (now both official languages in East Timor), Bahasa Indonesia English and other local national languages. Moreover, different generations have different degrees of knowledge and use of these languages due to historical changes and resulting language policies in East Timor. This paper will discuss language maintenance, multilingual language practices and language attitudes amongst the East Timorese in Australia and the UK (the two main diasporas). Our discussion builds upon ethnographic research conducted since 2010 and data gathered through sociolinguistic surveys between 2014 and 2015. The research is still on going and here we present our initial findings. Preliminary results show a reshaping of the complex language repertoire over generations. Participants raised in East Timor are more multilingual than their parents, but their children less multilingual with English taking increasingly important role. The East Timorese local languages are exiting the repertoires, with an increasing emphasis on Tetum and English. Tetum is perceived as marker of the East Timorese identity whilst the use of Portuguese is in decline. In Australia, the Chinese ethnic subgroup tends to maintain Hakka in the family.

Semester 2

Wednesday 31 January 2018

Heather Pagan, University of Westminster

'Trovez vous primes le fraunceis e puis le engleise': Lexicography and the medieval multilingual text

The edition and study of multilingual medieval texts and manuscripts has led historical linguists in the last two decades to challenge traditional views of the linguistic landscape of medieval Britain. This recent scholarship has attempted to delineate the contact borders between the vernaculars and Latin, to determine the ways in which this multilingual environment influenced their development.

This paper will discuss how the dictionaries of the three main languages of medieval England, that is the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, the Middle English Dictionary (and by extension the OED) and the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources have shaped, and been shaped by, changing ideologies of medieval multilingualism. It will also consider how lexicographers from these dictionaries cope(d) with multilingual documents, especially those where codeswitching leads to ambiguity.

Wednesday 14 February 2018

Uri Horesh, University of Essex

Language contact in Palestine: a (historical) sociolinguistic view

The study of language contact and contact-induced change has for many years been within the domain of historical linguistics. Probably the most notable work in this field was the book written in 1988 by Thomason and Kaufman. But even they acknowledge that there are social forces that motivate this kind of language change. Of course, Labov and the school of thought he has established view social factors to be potentially significant in every case of language (variation and) change. A rather recent development is the emergence of Historical Sociolinguistics as a field of inquiry. In essence, it zooms in on the Change element of Language Variation and Change (LVC).

In this talk, I will examine spoken data I have collected in Palestine, where Arabic and Hebrew are subject to varying degrees of contact leading to changes in the phonology and other domains. Additionally, Palestinian Arabic itself is showing signs of convergence, as rural features of some local dialects are giving way to urban features as a result of physical and social mobility amongst speakers. I will provide concrete examples of sound changes, lexical borrowings and other contact phenomena to illustrate the importance of both language-internal historical processes and external, social factors for the understanding of LVC.

Wednesday 28 February 2018

Darren Paffey, University of Southampton
Whose city is it anyway? 'Making presence' in Hispanic London

This paper will reflect on fieldwork I carried out in London which sought to capture both the linguistic landscape and also to some extent the language practices of Spanish speakers in the capital, a surprisingly under-researched topic.

My study of the visual environment concentrated on areas known to have a migrant population which has been established both in more recent years (Latin Americans in Elephant & Castle and Seven Sisters from the 1970s onwards) as well as over a longer historical period (Spaniards in Notting Hill since the 19th century). I ask questions arising from the experience of using this increasingly popular methodology of Linguistic Landscapes (Blommaert 2013, Gorter 2006, Landry & Bourhis 1997), particularly in a superdiverse context such as London.

The discussion will also reflect on how this approach helps us to understand issues of 'making presence' (Sassen 2005) as regards two levels/aspects of urban multilingualism: (1) the visual environment or production of texts, and (2) the practices of Spanish-speakers as they engage with the visibility of the language or consumption of texts. How does language 'transform the social landscape' (Vertovec 2007), how do Spanish speakers make claims on these multilingual spaces, and to what extent can/do sociolinguistic methods and practices show us how?

Wednesday 14 March 2018

Martin Dewey, King's College London

Identification, Self-understanding and Professional Expertise among 'Non-native' English Speaking Teachers

This paper considers the complex nature of the knowledge base of English language teachers, examining perceptions of expertise and subject knowledge among non-native speaking English language teachers (NNESTs) and teacher educators. I will report on data gathered from a language autobiography project in which teachers were asked to provide narrative accounts of their language learning and teaching experiences. The study focuses on ways in which teachers self identify (in as well as) with English, claim and disclaim ownership of professional expertise in English language teaching (ELT), and are externally positioned by colleagues and other stakeholders in the profession.

The findings are examined in light of recent debate surrounding the respective attributes, statuses and values of language teachers according to whether teachers identify/are identified as native or non-native speakers of English. There has been recent and intensifying interest in re-examining professional practice in ELT through what has been termed the NNEST lens. This involves critically examining longstanding (but now highly problematic) assumptions about the role of native-speaker English as a classroom model, as a means of determining language competence, as well as reconsidering the high level of prestige customarily (in the case of English, untenably) assigned to native speaker teachers.

Despite significant developments in the NNEST movement to reassign prestige to non-native speaking teachers at a meta-discursive level, non-native English teachers continue to experience de facto discrimination in the work place. Teacher biographies refer often to unequal practices regarding access to employment opportunities, preferential terms and conditions and so on. In some cases teachers report having their own claims to professional expertise and language knowledge undermined, even actively denied. This paper discusses the value of teachers engaging in narrative enquiry as a means of reclaiming professional legitimacy, and ultimately as a means of facilitating a critical pedagogic perspective on current practice.

Wednesday 28 March 2018

Harry Parkin, University of Westminster

Change in the by-names and surnames of the Cotswolds, 1381–c1600

This paper will focus primarily on the influence regional identity has had on surname development in the Cotswolds, a region with its own distinct cultural, economic and topographical history. The names from a time when hereditary surnames had only recently been established, 1381, will be compared with those from a period of greater surname stability, c1600, showing that there had been considerable change in the names of the Cotswolds between these two periods. Often, this change can be related to the regional wool trade, with the shift in focus from raw wool treatment to cloth production appearing to affect the name stock of the Cotswolds. This paper will investigate changes in surname frequency, migration patterns, and the use of dialect terms as occupational names, generating findings which suggest that there are some aspects of regional name development which are not yet fully understood.