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BAAL/Cambridge University Press Seminar

Corpora in Applied Linguistics: Broadening the Agenda

By Robbie Love (Aston University, UK), Gavin Brookes (Lancaster University, UK) and Niall Curry (Coventry University, UK)

In April 2021, we hosted the BAAL/Cambridge University Press seminar, *Corpora in Applied Linguistics: Broadening the Agenda*, at Aston University. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the seminar was hosted online. Our aim was to bring together researchers who use corpora in Applied Linguistics and to facilitate discussion of the ways in which corpora are used in contemporary Applied Linguistics research.

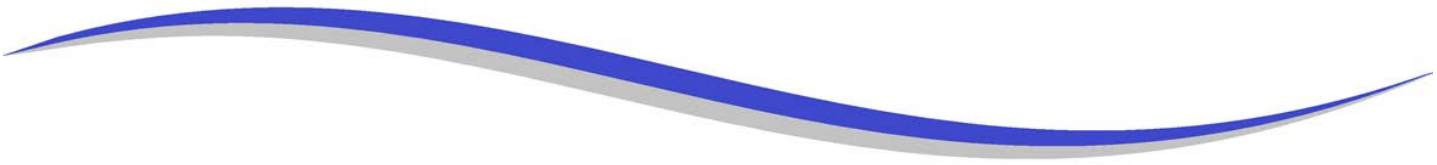
The opening plenary was given by David Wright (Nottingham Trent University). Wright's talk outlined the role of corpus linguistics in some of the earliest and most high-profile cases in forensic linguistics and the growth of the field since the mid-1990s. He set out a roadmap for the continued application and expansion of corpus methods in forensic contexts, which involved: (i) consolidating existing research and practice, (ii) seeking out and utilising already publicly available corpora and datasets and (iii) expanding the remit of 'forensic linguistics' to include new approaches whereby the relationship between language and law, crime, justice and evidence can be examined.

Following this were two research papers that continued the discussion of forensic linguistics. Firstly, Marton Petyko and Lucia Busso (Aston University) reported on research into latent topic changes in the *Operation Heron* abusive letter series, demonstrating how their novel approach can be used to identify topic-specific arguments and elicit hidden themes in forensic texts. Then, Mark McGlashan (Birmingham City University) presented an analysis of children's online disclosures of abuse to *Childline*, discussing how this work could be of direct use to relevant practitioners in better supporting children to make such disclosures.

The next panel featured papers by Anna Čermáková (University of Cambridge) and Chris Fitzgerald (University of Limerick). Čermáková presented an investigation into vague language in classroom talk. Using the *DIALLS* corpus, she retrieved key examples of vague language, such as the quotative *like*, and signalled the value of such language to education by highlighting the role it plays in students' knowledge construction processes. Fitzgerald presented an investigation into epistemic modality in Irish historical narratives, putting into relief a number of important synergies that exist between historical linguistics, corpus linguistics and oral histories.

The final panel of Day 1 featured two papers concerning the analysis of data from Twitter. Firstly, Sten Hansson and Ruth Page (University of Birmingham) presented their work utilising a corpus-assisted approach to examine blame avoidance in tweets from UK government departments and political figures, finding that the government justified its actions using a series of legitimising appeals. Saira Fitzgerald (Lancaster University) presented an analysis of Twitter discourses surrounding the International Baccalaureate in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which uncovered shifts in discourses that are intertextually linked to events in the wider world.

Day 2 commenced with the second plenary talk, presented by Paula Buttery (University of Cambridge). Buttery discussed the uses of corpora in education technology and offered an interdisciplinary perspective on the development of corpus-informed language correction technologies. She discussed how computational linguistics, conversation analysis and corpus linguistics can provide a rigorous approach to addressing extant challenges in language education, signalling the need for interdisciplinary thinking, critical perspectives and industry engagement for the further development of language education technologies.



Continuing the topic of education, Peter Crosthwaite (University of Queensland) discussed the state of the art with regards to data-driven learning for young learners, surveying the benefits and barriers to implementation in the primary and secondary classroom. He argued that, while young learners are used to living in a digitally-connected world, this does not necessarily translate into the proficiencies necessary for successful engagement with corpus data. Kamonchanok Sanmuang (Kasetsart University) discussed the pedagogical applications of research into specialised lexical frames for undergraduate public health students in Thailand. By analysing a 1.3-million-word corpus of academic articles, Sanmuang developed targeted linguistic instruction and demonstrated the effectiveness of such an approach for improving proficiency in specialised academic language.

The next panel focussed on the theme of health communication. First was Luke Collins (Lancaster University), who discussed the application of corpus methods to the investigation of voice-hearing. Collins examined semi-structured interviews with 67 voice hearers and discussed some of the implications of the project findings for clinical interventions designed to support voice-hearers to live well with their voices. Next, James Balfour (Lancaster University) presented an analysis of schizophrenia as a metaphor in the British press. Analysing a corpus of UK newspaper articles, Balfour examined the collocates of the noun *schizophrenia* and found that the term was used metaphorically in relation to a range of topics, including finance, fashion and sport.

The final panel featured papers from Karoline Irschara (University of Innsbruck) and Valeria Franceschi (University of Verona). Irschara presented an investigation of gender in radiology reports, discussing language patterns and collocations. Among the findings was a focus on administrative processes and issues of consent among female patients. Then, Franceschi discussed the creation of a corpus of destination video blogs. Her paper carried forward the focus on specialised discourses in less-studied genres and offered a further, multimodal dimension.

The programme ended with a panel discussion, featuring several of the speakers. Discussion topics included the challenges and opportunities of working and publishing with colleagues from other disciplines; ethical issues with regards to collecting and analysing sensitive data; and new directions and future developments in applied corpus linguistics. One of the main outcomes of the seminar was a shared understanding that the opportunities for corpus methodologies to contribute valuably to contexts outside the realm of linguistics are only growing.

The aim of the seminar was to bring together a diverse group of researchers to share perspectives on the applications of corpus linguistics in a range of disparate contexts. In doing so, we afforded the opportunity for participants to consider some current methodological innovations as well as broad challenges that unite scholars in the field, regardless of specific inter-disciplinary application.

We are very grateful to BAAL and Cambridge University Press for supporting the seminar.