16ᵗʰ LangUE Keynote speakers' presentations

Thursday 9ᵗʰ June 2022

Morning (09.30)   **Prof. Ben Rampton (King's College London)**

Analysing data: The view from interactional sociolinguistics

Abstract

In this presentation, I will outline some of the basic assumptions, the analytic resources and empirical procedures that interactional sociolinguistics offers, putting them to work on some urban classroom data.

Afternoon (14.00)   **Prof. Martin Pickering (University of Edinburg)**
In joint work with Zhenguang Cai and Nan Zhao:

How do people interpret implausible sentences?

Abstract

People sometimes interpret implausible sentences nonliterally, for example treating "The mother gave the candle the daughter" as meaning the daughter receiving the candle. But how do they do so? We contrasted a nonliteral syntactic analysis account, according to which people compute a syntactic analysis appropriate for this nonliteral meaning, with a nonliteral semantic interpretation account, according to which they arrive at this meaning via purely semantic processing. The former but not the latter account postulates that people consider not only a literal-but-implausible double-object (DO) analysis in comprehending "The mother gave the candle the daughter", but also a nonliteral-but-plausible prepositional-object (PO) analysis (i.e., including to before the daughter). In three structural priming experiments, participants heard a plausible or implausible DO or PO prime sentence. They then answered a comprehension question first or described a picture of a dative event first. In accord with the nonliteral syntactic analysis account, priming was reduced following implausible sentences than following plausible sentences and following nonliterally interpreted implausible sentences than literally interpreted implausible sentences. The results suggest that comprehenders constructed a nonliteral syntactic analysis, which we argue was predicted early in the sentence.

Friday 10th June 2022

Morning (09.30)   **Prof. Paul Baker (Lancaster University)**

A year to remember? Introducing the BE21 corpus and exploring recent part of speech tag change in British English

Abstract

This talk describes the collection and analysis of the most recent edition of the Brown family, the BE21 corpus, consisting of 1 million words of written British English texts, published in 2021. Using measures of the Coefficient of Variance, the frequencies of part-of-speech tags in BE21 are compared against the other four British members of the Brown family (from 1931, 1961, 1991 and 2006). Part-of-speech tags that are steadily increasing or decreasing in all five or the latest three corpora are examined via concordance lines and their distributions in order to identify new and emerging trends in British English. The analysis points to the continuation of some trends (such as declines in modal verbs and titles of address), along with newer trends like the rise of first person pronouns. The analysis indicates that more general trends of densification, democratisation and colloquialisation are continuing in British English.

Afternoon (14.00)   **Dr Melanie Bell (Anglia Ruskin University)**

Getting the gist: meaning creation in compounding

Abstract

We are accustomed to the idea that words have meanings that can be found in dictionaries, and that these word meanings are somehow related to our conceptual representations of entities, events, and attributes. Furthermore, it is commonplace that both for creativity, and to name and describe new events and entities, we are constantly in need of new words. By far the most common way of forming new words, across the languages of the world, is through the process of compounding, i.e. by combining two or more existing words. Recent examples in English include, for example, Brexit, blog post and vaccine passport. Once these new words become established in the language, the meaning is relatively fixed and the contribution of the parts can be analysed; in the case of Brexit (British + exit), we know that the denotation is the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. What is less clear, is the mechanism by which meaning is assigned to compound words when they are first coined, especially the relative contributions of the lexical semantics of the constituent words, the linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts in which the word is first used, and the encyclopaedic knowledge of the discourse participants. Using free paraphrases provided under controlled conditions by native speakers of British English, I show that diversity of interpretation is far greater than has often been assumed, and that meaning arises at least as much from the internal world of the language user as from lexical semantics.