Papers relating to the presentations are available on the seminar website, www.education.leeds.ac.uk/about/events/adult-esol-in-multilingual-britain

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Language and social media: New challenges for research and teaching in applied linguistics

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The seminar took place at the Beyond Distance Research Alliance, University of Leicester, and was coordinated by Ruth Page. Thirty-four people attended in person, and around 35 more attended remotely via Adobe Connect. Delegates came from the USA, Poland, Germany, Austria, Spain and the United Kingdom, while remote attenders included delegates from Japan, Iraq, Canada, North America, Italy and Australia as well as other locations in the United Kingdom.

Introduction

The objectives of the seminar were:

1. To bring together scholars whose research examines the language of social media texts.
2. To evaluate the challenges that social media poses for traditional methodologies and concepts used in applied linguistics.
3. To explore the potential of social media as a resource for teaching in applied linguistics.

Over the last decade, social media genres such as blogs, wikis and social network sites have become an object of study across a wide range of subfields in applied linguistics (including Critical Discourse Analysis, corpus linguistics, stylistics, sociolinguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), literacy and multilingualism). The texts produced in social media provide an opportunity to rethink key terms central to the study of language (such as CONTEXT, INTERACTION, VARIETY, LANGUAGE and COMMUNITY). Likewise, the rapidly evolving, multimodal, intertextual and ephemeral characteristics of social media challenge the extent to which traditional research methodologies can be applied to the study of 'online'

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language. The resulting plurality provides a vital stimulus for debate and innovation in applied linguistics, but best practice(s) for studying the language of social media texts are still emergent and in need of clarification.

Using social media texts to reflect critically on the concepts and methods used in applied linguistics also has relevance in pedagogic contexts. First, social media are becoming a resource for exemplar texts used for teaching applied linguistics, and offer popular material for undergraduate project work. Second, while current undergraduates have clear expectations about the place of social media in their education (Hughes 2009), their knowledge about language and linguistics is in decline (Alderson & Horak 2010). This presents a timely opportunity to harness the engagement with social media in order to think creatively about how language and linguistics can be taught within higher education and other pedagogic contexts.

Plenary speeches

In his plenary talk, Dr. Jannis Androutsopoulos (University of Hamburg) outlined a framework for the study of multilingual practice in social media, giving examples from a case study on Facebook language practices. Multilingualism in social media encompasses everything language users do with their entire range of linguistic resources, mediated by keyboard-and-screen technologies, and oriented to networked audiences. In the framework Androutsopoulos proposed, these practices were examined at three levels: a) properties of digital writtenness, including literacy competences, the constraints of keyboard production, and visual language; b) access to the digital mediascape, including the ability to embed voices on profile pages (for example by linking to online music recordings or video), copy-and-paste practices, and access to online translation services (which mix multilingualism with scriptswitching); c) participation in 'friends' networks, leading to increased common ground afforded by 'semi-public' audiences, language choice strategies resulting from 'context collapse', and the increased performance quality of networked language. In their interplay, these resources and constraints were described as shaping linguistic heterogeneity in networked communication in specific ways, leading to multilingual practices that are individualised, genre-shaped, and based on open-ended, but nonetheless stratified semiotic repertoires. As a result, networked multilingual practices are related to but distinct from both multilingualism in offline communities and other domains of computer-mediated communication.

The plenary talk from Dr. Caroline Tagg (University of Birmingham) continued this exploration of the linguistic strategies that multilingual speakers use in the context of Facebook, focussing on the concept of addressivity. Social network sites (SNSs) like Facebook have been said to blur the interface between what is considered public and what is kept private. However, what we see on SNSs is not necessarily an erosion of the value of privacy, but a nuanced response to a complex communicative situation of 'context collapse'.

Language choice – the decision to draw on the resources of one language or another at any point in an interaction, as well as how and when to code-switch between them – is one strategy used in multilingual interactions to indicate the extent to which a posting is considered to

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be 'private' or intended for more 'public' consumption. Tagg's talk focussed on the use of English (alongside other languages) by Facebook communities whose members share a first language, and its use as a lingua franca between groups who do not. For both types of group, English extends the resources available to users in managing online conversations within the 'collapsed audience' of a semi-public SNS. Language choices made on Facebook are also shaped by users' responses to other features of the site, such as its asynchronous nature, the possibility of translocal interaction, the particular communicative dynamic that Facebook affords, and the norms that emerge around new practices.

Tagg's talk raised questions for understanding language use and interaction on social media: how might a 'collapsed audience' shape what people say, how they say it, and the language they say it in? What linguistic strategies might users employ in negotiating the line between what is 'private' and what is 'public' – and what does their interaction reveal about what both public and private mean to people online? And how might users' language choices shape, and be shaped by, the type of interaction taking place on SNSs? The importance of these questions was highlighted for social media research in particular, and sociolinguistic study more generally.

The plenary talk from Ashraf Abdullah (University of Leeds) presented his research on a currently under-scrutinised social media environment: the virtual world Second Life (SL). Abdullah focused on describing the word-formation processes identified in a 190,000 word corpus of English and Arabic SL language.

The neologism Slexipedia – coined from the blending of SL and Crystal's lexipedia (Crystal 2004) – reflects the kinds of words and word-formation processes found in the vocabulary of the language of residents in SL. In addition to identifying and introducing a SL Glossary, Abdullah's paper identified the innovative word formation processes of SL vocabulary that have emerged ecologically, and the manner in which this language is used socially in conversational interaction. Empirical observation of the corpus employed two methods of analysis; computational (quantitative) using WordSmith Tools and descriptive (qualitative) methods. Frequency counts and distribution of the use of the vocabulary items led to results that showed that in addition to new words formed according to the processes mentioned in Stageberg (1981), there were new processes like acronym-word blending and acronym compounding that have not been accounted for previously in linguistic studies.

Papers and posters

Nine papers and eight posters were also presented at the seminar. John Caulfield (Cardiff University) presented research on Irish bloggers and Twitter users, describing the creative language use and interaction that build a community of practice between minority language users in social media. Erika Darics (Portsmouth University) questioned the traditional distinction between synchronous and asynchronous social media genres, showing that the perception of appropriately timed responses is a crucial element in the perceived politeness and impoliteness of a group of business colleagues using Instant Messaging. Lieve Gies (University of Leicester) presented research on online communities who have debated the

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outcomes of the Meredith Kercher murder trial, using metaphor analysis to describe how the protagonists of the case have been represented. Johann Unger (University of Lancaster) closed the papers for the first day by critiquing the use of Critical Discourse Analysis in social media contexts and arguing that we need to pay more attention to the 'many small voices' of activism and resistance on sites like Twitter, rather than concentrating on hegemonic discourse.

The papers on the second day began with Frank Monaghan (Open University) documenting the use of social media by football activists and the interplay between online and offline forms of resistance to a major football club's activity. Stephen Pihlaja (also from the Open University) turned to YouTube in a discussion of arguments between atheist and Christian video-bloggers. Tereza Spilioti (University of Kingston) used a corpus of text messages to show how the deictics used by participants varied according to their perceived situational context, and posed questions for future work on deixis in social media. The final two papers both returned to data taken from Facebook. Ebtesam AlOthman (University of Manchester) used a corpus of wall posts to examine code switching and script shifting practices in multilingual Arabic speakers. Mariza Georgalou (University of Lancaster) used an ethnographic approach to set out the creative ways in which multilingual Greek speakers enhanced the ways to maintain privacy beyond those enabled by Facebook's infrastructure.

The seminar included two workshops. In the first, delegates worked in small groups to address one of the following questions:

- How do social media genres help us rethink the central terms of applied linguistics (such as TEXT, CONTEXT, VARIETY and INTERACTION)?
- What challenges does the multimodal and dynamic nature of social media texts pose for traditional research methodologies used in applied linguistics? What solutions might be found?
- What forms of social media are currently under-researched from a linguistic perspective, and why?

In the second workshop, delegates worked in small groups to design a small activity where social media could be used to teach a topic in applied linguistics. Examples included rewriting the lyrics of a popular song as a tweet, in order to examine which linguistic practices were most used to shorten texts; exploring World Englishes by asking students to take photographs of language use in their local environment, analysing the language choices made and discussing them in relation to language policy; using revisions of a Wikipedia article to analyse modality, stance and point of view; and asking students to construct a biography of their social media interactions in order to explore which kinds of texts tend to be used most often.

Outputs

All the presentations were recorded in Adobe Connect and will be made available to members of BAAL via the mailing list. The workshop discussions began before the face-to-face seminar with a wiki (http://languageandsocialmedia.pbworks.com), which will remain online as the basis for a resource of teaching materials on this topic.

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