A group of people flying in the air

Description automatically generated

Successful communication can result in human flourishing and cooperation, while misunderstanding proliferates suffering. Words do not have stable, precise definitions, but “have those meanings which we have given them,” as Wittgenstein notes—new with each interpretational circumstance. Subjective and cultural forces shape the way we interpret signs, which makes our daily connection through language profound. Yet the human capacity to animate signs, by imbuing sound (and movement) with sense, remains beyond scientific understanding. Language is both one of the most fundamental elements of the human experience and one of the least understood, illustrating the need for a creative reexamination of the human language faculty.

**ORGANIZATION**

The New School for Social Research

The Human Language and Development Lab

**LOCATION AND ACCESS**

**Address**:

Wollman Hall, Eugene Lang Building, Room B500

65 West 11th Street

**Subway**

Our campus is accessible by a number of subway lines:

* The 4, 5, 6, N, R, Q, and L trains to 14th Street and Union Square. Walk south to 11th Street, then turn west (right).
* The A, C, and E trains to 14th Street. Walk east along 14th Street to Fifth Avenue (make a right turn). Walk south three blocks.
* The 1, 2, 3, F, and M trains to 14th Street. Walk east along 14th Street to Fifth Avenue (make a right turn). Walk south three blocks.

A map of a city

Description automatically generated

Wollman Hall is located in building B.

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**SCHEDULE**

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| --- | --- |
| **08:45 – 09:15** | **Registration** |
| **09:15 – 09:30** | **Welcome** |
| **09:30 – 10:25** | **Panel 1**  **A Bayesian Meta-analysis of Emotional Intelligence in Children With and Without Developmental Language Disorder**  *Elizabeth S. Che, Patricia J. Brooks, & Nicole Zapparrata*  **Modeling longitudinal reciprocal effects of emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge in early childhood**  *Julia Moses*    **How well do we really understand social media?**  *Rebecca Dolgin, Simone Calbi, Jeffrey Huang, & Michael F. Schober* |
| **10:30 – 11:45** | **Panel 2**  **Plato** *Kasen Scharmann*  **Language and Thought** *Ellen* *Burns*  **Hegel – recognition** *Andrew Tessman*  **The Polyphonic Self** *Noah* *Kupper* |
| **11:45 – 12:00** | **Break** |
| **12:00 – 13:15** | **Panel 3**  **Playing With Metaphors** *Kyle O’Dowd*  **Rhythm in Language: Preservation, Resurrection, and Perversion in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves***  *Anna Stanford*  **Mallarme theory of language**  *Michele Morelli*  **The Tower of Babel as a Theoretical Image** *Jonathan A.* *Romero* |
| **13:15 – 14:15** | **Lunch** |
| **14:15 – 15:30** | **Panel 4**  **Alienated Language in Colonial Afterlives** *Madeline MacLeod*  **Analyzing Miriam Makeba's 1950-60s Musical Performances: A Precursor to Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement and a Response to the Epistemological Erasure of Blackness in Urban South Africa** *Lauren Stockmon Brown*  **Language and Narrative Identity** *Sara Rani*  **The Language of Love and Excitable Speech** *Sarah Sharp* |
| **15:30 – 16:30** | **Panel 5**  **Dialogues at the Boundary: Rearticulating Subjecthood and Language in the Realm of Sex Robots** *Kelsey Elizabeth Clough*  **Decoding Chinese Typewriting** *Tianran* *Qian*  **Do Animals Speak Language?** *Craig Stuart Lanza*  **Absolutely Nothing!** *Austin Burke* |
| **16:30 - closing** | **Poster and Reception**  **The Impact of Chunked Determiner Phrases on Verb Learning In Preschoolers** Huanhuan Shi  **Redefining Burden** Savanna Daquila  **Intersecting Speculative Linguistics and Immersive Art: Communicating with Bioluminescent Lifeforms** Arden Schager  **The use and effect of polarizing speech in Peruvian politics**  M. Alexandra Madge Paredes  **Gender Binary Language** Paige Griffith  **EMLang** Ranger Liu  **Learning a Language in Mongolia, China** Skylar Hou |

**A Bayesian Meta-analysis of Emotional Intelligence in Children With and Without Developmental Language Disorder**

*Elizabeth S. Che, Patricia J. Brooks, & Nicole Zapparrata*

City University of New York

Introduction: According to constructivist theories of emotional intelligence (Feldman Barrett, 2017; Lindquist, 2017), language helps children learn to recognize, interpret, and regulate emotions. Under this view, children who experience difficulties acquiring language are expected to also show delays in social-emotional development. One such population is children with developmental language disorder (DLD)––a communication disorder affecting language learning, understanding, and usage. According to prevalence studies, approximately 7% of children have DLD (Norbury et al., 2016; Tomblin et al., 1997).

Method: This pre-registered meta-analysis examined whether groups of children with DLD differ from age-matched groups with neurotypical development (TYP) on measures of emotion recognition, understanding, and regulation. Based on a database search of EBSCO and PubMed and listserv announcements, we aimed to review all studies comparing DLD and TYP groups on one or more measures of emotional intelligence. The final meta-analytic sample comprised 25 studies (*k*) with 74 effects (*m*) involving 1,475 children with DLD and 3,101 age-matched children, *M*age = 7 years, 7 months (*SD* = 3 years).

Results and Discussion: We conducted a hierarchical random-effects Bayesian meta-analysis using the Metafor (Viechtbauer et al., 2010), Rombumeta (Fisher et al., 2016), and Rjags (Plummer et al., 2022) statistical packages in RStudio. The overall effect (𝜇) was estimated at – .71 (medium-large effect; Credible Interval [CrI] = [–.96, –.47]. Note that negative values of 𝜇 indicated poorer performance in DLD groups relative to age-matched comparison groups. Figure 1 presents results of subgroup analyses by task type. Across measures of emotion recognition, understanding, and regulation, DLD groups showed impairments. Because the meta-analysis was conducted at the level of groups, one cannot conclude that every child with DLD will show deficits in emotional recognition, understanding, and/or regulation. However, DLD appears to be strongly associated with risk of emotion-related difficulties, which has implications for social development.

**Modeling longitudinal reciprocal effects of emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge in early childhood**

Julia Moses

*City University of New York*

**Introduction:** The language as context hypothesis emphasizes the role of language in constructing emotions (Feldman-Barrett, 2017). Under this view, children learn to interpret and regulate emotions through conversational interactions with caregivers and others where emotional experiences are labeled and described (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Alternatively, good emotion regulation (easy temperament) might allow children to benefit from positive social interactions with caregivers in ways that promote vocabulary development. To test these non-mutually exclusive hypotheses, we modeled longitudinal reciprocal effects between emotional regulation and vocabulary knowledge in early childhood.

**Method:** The study utilized publicly available longitudinal data from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project (EHSRE; U.S. HHS, 2011). The analytic sample (*N* = 940) comprised children from low-income families who had measures of emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge at 14m, 24m, and PreK (4y). Most had measures at 36m; missing data were imputed; see Figure 1 for measures.

**Results and Discussion:** We used structural equation modeling to assess concurrent and longitudinal associations between emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge; see Figure 1 for standardized coefficients and model fit indicators. Emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge showed developmental stability (horizontal paths), and had significant concurrent associations at all ages except 14m (vertical bi-directional arrows). Emotional regulation predicted vocabulary knowledge at earlier time points, but not at pre-K (cross-lagged red arrows). Vocabulary knowledge predicted emotion regulation at all time points, with largest effects at pre-K (cross-lagged blue arrows). Findings suggest reciprocal causation, i.e., significant incremental predictive effects controlling for prior emotion regulation and vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge may support emotion regulation as children engage with caregivers who talk about mental states, model effective coping strategies, and co-regulate their emotions (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 1999). Conversely, an infant’s negative emotionality may influence vocabulary development through its disruptive effect on caregiver-child engagement (Ober & Brooks, 2022).

**How well do we really understand social media?**

Rebecca Dolgin, Simone Calbi, Jeffrey Huang, & Michael F. Schober

*The New School for Social Research*

Twitter is the social media platform people use most often to share opinions (Pew Research Center, 2021). Yet, the vast majority of content on Twitter isn’t original, it’s retweets—the online equivalent of a head nod, high five, or scowl. All of this agreement or disagreement makes a tacit assumption that the tweet has been understood. We hypothesize, however, that misunderstandings on Twitter may be prevalent and that they go undetected or repaired.

Prior evidence about online comprehension suggests there may be more variability of interpretation than one might assume (Kern et al., 2024; Beck et al., 2022; Prabhakaran et al., 2021; Fox Tree et al., 2020; Kellner & Schober, 2018; Anand et al., 2011).

Using a novel method, this study verified the poster’s intentions directly, as opposed to inferring the poster’s general intentions or relying on annotators’ judgments. To do this, we collected a corpus of tweets posted during a specific time period and that included “Roe v. Wade”. From this we solicited authors and asked about the stance they intended to express in the tweet, as well as other questions about their political ideology and their demographic characteristics.

We then asked a new set of participants (*N* = 101) a series of questions about each tweet and additional questions about their Twitter usage, political ideology, and demographics.

Despite all posters being extremely confident (90-100%) that their tweet would be understood as intended, readers’ alignment with the authors’ self-reported stance in each tweet ranged from as low as 48.5% and no higher than 89.1% of readers.

Participants’ age significantly predicted the degree of alignment, with younger participants more likely to align on more of the six tweets. Further analyses including more factors suggest that the combination of age and political ideology (but not Twitter use) significantly predicts alignment (R2 = .17, F(2, 96) = 9.52, *p* < .001; adjusted R2 = .15).

**Plato**

Kansen Scharmann

*The New School for Social Research*

The title of this conference borrows (perhaps unwittingly) from line 435d of Plato's *Cratylus*, where we find an exasperated Socrates asking: "What power do names have for us? What's the good of them?" These questions culminate a mounting frustration that Socrates' has begun to feel toward his own failure to satisfactorily respond to the initial question posed to him by his interlocutor, Hermogenes: what, aside from mere happenstance and convention, explains why we have the names for things that we have? Hermogenes' prefigures the attitude toward language crystalized in Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of the signifier; and Socrates, disturbed, plunges himself into a frenzied attempt to demonstrate the contrary: that names can be well or poorly-made based on whether or not they successfully imitate that which they name. What proceeds from Socrates is a series of etymological conjectures that use for their "evidence" little else besides the resonant, acoustic similarities between words, their letters, and the properties they purportedly represent. But in his repeated failures to tell a coherent origin story about how the field of language became unified enough that one could realize in all his puns the sovereign wisdom of a primal "name-giver", Socrates urges instead that our attention turn away from names, to the unsayable Things-themselves. This paper thus returns to the *Cratylus* to trace how puns—by first appearing to promise a symbolic order overladen with meaning—give way to philosophy's subsequent exaltation of silence, which written language inherits in the demands placed on punctuation marks, pauses, gaps, holes in speech, to confer meaning and impose order on the unruliness of words. I demonstrate how this movement recurs in the approach to dream interpretation elaborated by Ella Freeman Sharpe and Jacques Lacan, and in the late poetry of TS

**Language and Thought**

Ellen Burns

*Columbia University*

A historically dominant conceptualization of language in philosophy and other fields frames it as a vehicle for communication. On such a view, the function of language and its semantics is often conceived in terms of communicative intent. Grice (1957), for instance, argues that we can analyse the meaning of an utterance in terms of the utterer's intentions. Drawing on Noam Chomsky, in this paper I discuss a less dominant view in which language is conceived as a vehicle for thought as well as the view’s application in contemporary cognitive linguistics. I then discuss what these two different conceptualizations of language suggest about the unconscious mind and its relation to consciousness. When language is conceived as a vehicle for communication, I argue, it is suggested that much if not all of our linguistic lives are a conscious phenomenon–something that, as John Searle puts it, we can at least *in principle* access in conscious or first-personal terms. When language is conceived as a vehicle for thought, in contrast, the possibility is left open that language has deeper roots in the unconscious. I argue that the study of language as a biological object of the human mind/brain supports conceiving of language as a vehicle for thought. I also contend that this conceptualization of language can account for the central role that language plays in communication, thereby integrating twentieth and twenty-first century philosophical work on language with emerging empirical research on it.

**Hegel – recognition**

Andrew Tessman

*The New School for Social Research*

There is an intimate play of language in Hegel’s concept of recognition. Recognition is a concept in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* beginning with the moment of Lordship and Bondage and  culminating in confession and its forgiveness. While Hegel’s text ends with mutual recognition  as an achievement, the validity of this crowning moment is called into question by Frantz Fanon.  While Fanon provides a valuable critique of Hegel, he might also present a limit-point to Hegel's  account due to the way otherness and racism operate across linguistic lines. In spite of Fanon’s  criticism, bringing Hegel into conversation with Post-colonial thinkers Ngugi wa Thiong’o and  Sylvia Wynter, recognition and seeing the other as a being worthy of respect is salvageable. For  Hegel, language is a form of mediation between self and other and is the true expression of  Spirit, or collective sociality. When exploring racism as a linguistic practice, something that must  be taken seriously is the approach to language’s content not just its form. As a form, language is  a universal medium with which meaning can be shared across beings. While this is the function  of language, racism manipulates this and the specific language used as a vehicle for oppression (English, French, etc.). Even though language is a tool of objectification, objectification can  quickly become oppression. In striving towards mutual recognition, must the oppressed use the  language of their oppressors? What does the language of the oppressed look like? What effects if  any does an imposed or colonial language have on narratives and literature of a culture or  people? In a global context, does speaking the imposed language allow the oppressed to reach a sympathetic audience among their oppressors? Despite complications relegating it to nigh  impossibility, mutual recognition remains something that should be strived towards, it simply

**The Polyphonic Self**

Noah Kupper

*The New School for Social Research*

In this presentation, we will explore the intersection of extreme music and language, focusing specifically on Deathcore’ ability to embody what I term "Multiplicitous Language Games." I draw on Mariana Ortega's theory of multiplicitous selves and Wittgenstein's concept of Language Games to show how Deathcore embodies complex, often paradoxical interpretations of language that reflect our contradictory and multifaceted identities.

Deathcore presents a linguistic paradigm, characterized by its obscured vocals. Instead of immediately understanding the lyrics, the audience engages with the music—either actively or passively. This engagement can happen in a live setting or with recorded music. This engagement, reflecting Wittgenstein's concept of Language Games, allows listeners to uncover layers of meaning that are often diverse and even conflicting. This discovery process encourages listeners to explore language in new and unconventional ways: where understanding is not just about the words themselves, but embedded in our ‘form of life.’

Furthermore, I will explore how Deathcore connects to Ortega's notion of 'multiplicitous selves.' Her interpretation suggests our identities are filled with contradictions and movement. I encourage listeners to engage with their own sense of self through Deathcore's varied cries which be interpreted in multiplicity. Sometimes, these interpretations can happen all at once or change over time. This mirrors Ortega's conception of the selves' diverse and often contradictory nature. Through Deathcore, we can go beyond the usual ways of understanding ourselves.

By challenging standard interpretations and societal constraints on meaning, Deathcore opens a pathway for imaginative and personal explorations of communication and understanding. Through examples from lyrics, performances, and fan interactions, I will argue for the genre's significance in examining the intersections of language, music, and identity. My goal is to underscore Deathcore's role in fostering a nuanced understanding of the fluid nature of language and its ability to create multiple realities concurrently.

**Playing With Metaphors**

Kyle O’Dowd

*The New School for Social Research*

In his 2001 essay “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” the literary critic Cleanth Brooks warns against any attempt to separate the meaning of a poem from its form. A poem is not a secret message coded through imagery, rhythm, and metaphor. Far from explicating the poem’s meaning, the best a paraphrase can do is to point us in the *direction* of its meaning. The only way to state the meaning of a poem is by repeating the poem. But this is part of the value of poetry. It expresses what cannot be expressed in plain prose.

Here I want to focus on one specific poetic device: *metaphor*. Metaphors are particularly resistant to translation into plain prose. However, explication into plain prose is exactly what we need to interpret the metaphor beyond its literal meaning. But that leads to an apparent tension. We want to say that a metaphor —like other poetic languages—is not a coded message while believing, at the same time, that a metaphor has a meaning hidden behind its literal meaning.

The philosopher Donald Davidson (1978) suggests we avoid this tension by simply abandoning the idea that metaphors have a meaning beyond their literal interpretation. In Davidson’s view, the power of metaphor is not in its ability to convey meaning but to cause an effect in its reader. Metaphors are *useful* in his view, but not *meaningful*. This would explain why metaphors resist translation.  There is nothing to translate.

Both Davidson and Brooks rely on a mistaken picture of language. In my view, understanding a metaphor is not a matter of translating it into explicit plain prose—which both agree would be impossible. Instead, I advance a “pretense” theory of metaphor in which understanding the meaning of a metaphor requires us to engage in imaginative forms of play.

**Situation, Episode, and Event**

Benjamin Haile

*The New School for Social Research*

The event is the unit by which we mark out a particular moment as meaningful, unifying and congealing it into something that can be indexed and picked out as a whole. In their work *Cruel Optimism,* Lauren Berlant attempts to complicate this notion by introducing the “situation” and the “episode” as event-like structures that, each in its own way, challenge the ubiquity of the event as marker of meaningful experience. I then interpret this move of Berlant’s through the lens of Jacques Derrida’s term “*Différance*” (Difference + Deferral), arguing that in the act of signification or in the pointing out of an episode or situation, these happenings must collapse back into being an event. Further, I argue that this is due to a tension between Derrida’s deconstructive reading, which sees experience as always already in the process of interpretation, and Berlant’s affect theoretic reading in which “the present is perceived, first, affectively: the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else.” Ultimately, I find no clean resolution between these two readings, opting instead to embrace the irresolvable.

**Mallarmé’s theory of language**

Michele Morelli

*Princeton University*

My presentation will address the question *How do poems, lyrics, oral stories, and other forms of art differ, if at all, from “ordinary” language use*?; I will provide a potential answer by inquiring into Mallarmé’s theory of language.

The French poet, in his prose piece *Crise de vers,* among other places, dramatizes the tension between a phenomenally-bound language geared toward clarity, transmission of information, and cognitive or sense-based validation (what we come to call “ordinary”), and its ideal, perfect, and “truthful” counterpart (one could say noumenal language). Navigating the problem of referentiality that only later will come to be formulated in terms of signifier and signified, Mallarmé mediates the apparent void that an ideally denotative idiom casts onto the conventional practices of ordinary signification. Oscillating between epistemological and aesthetic considerations, Mallarmé defines the space uniting the polarities at stake as the language of poetry.

I will discuss how the artificial character of language, ossified by the frame of ordinary cognition, fulfills its creative––and ambiguous––potential when elaborated poetically. In this context, I will consider the implications for the referential function of language: frayed but upheld, expanded but manipulated through reflection, the ambiguity that imbues the poetic word will confront us with a set of questions. What do the properties of language tell us about those of cognition? What does poetry do to show us the limits of the latter? And lastly, can the aesthetic category of verse illuminate linguistic predicaments usually addressed from an epistemological angle?

Mallarmé confronts problematics rooted in Kant and Hegel, while concretizing early “modern” concerns with language that fuel structural and post-structural approaches to linguistics, self-appointing as a precious interlocutor for the matter at stake.

**The Tower of Babel in Berlin: a migrant approach to the modern metropolis**

*Jonathan A. Romero*

Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University

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**Alienated Language in Colonial Afterlives: Communication Gaps in Kaouther Adimi’s *L’envers des autres***

*Madeline MacLeod*

Department of French at Columbia University - MA Candidate

How does the long shadow of an inherited past reveal itself through language? Through a close reading of the 2011 novel *L’envers des autres* by Kaouther Adimi as well as an assessment of its publication and reception in France and Algeria, my paper assesses the politics of language and communication in the afterlives of colonial empire in the Algerian context. Language continues to be a critical site of exploration of power and identity dynamics in postcolonial studies, but previous scholarship on Adimi, an Algerian writer who has found literary success with a French audience, raising questions around modern *francophonie*, has left out her first novel as a revelatory work of language as alienation. The novel’s polyphonic structure lends to a multiplicity of perspectives as the characters grapple with underemployment, lack of opportunities and the constraints of heteronormativity in early twenty-first century Algiers. The gaps and the silences, those who speak and are not heard, and the use of the language of the colonial power by the characters are all matters of consideration within the analysis of the text. The characters speak their truth, but only to the reader, and still with degrees of obfuscation. There is no center stage for the characters on which to communicate, leaving a void of that which is unspoken that bears the painful traces of the past. Examining the text through the lens of postcolonial theory, with emphasis on frameworks on trauma and the postcolonial condition by Karima Lazali and reflections on diglossia by Abdelfattah Kilito, I find a central role played by language and communication in the suffering mental health of Algerian youth in the novel and point to an enduring alienation stemming from colonial trauma. The characters’ indirect experience of the past through its aftermath manifests in that which is said and unsaid.

**Analyzing Miriam Makeba's 1950-60s Musical Performances: A Precursor to Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement and a Response to the Epistemological Erasure of Blackness in Urban South Africa**

Lauren Stockmon Brown

*Columbia University*

In my paper, I will return to and expand on scholarly works that have previously examined the significance of pop music and resistance in Apartheid South Africa. I will explore the important role that popular music played in the resistance movement during the anti-Apartheid period (1948-1991) of urban South African history. Zenzile Miriam Makeba (1932-2008), also known as Mama Africa is one of the most prominent singers and activists in the anti-apartheid struggle. Makeba began her professional singing career around the same time the Afrikaner Nationalist government came into power. She contributed to musical genres including Afropop and jazz. Three songs which have brought her the most international attention in the United States and Europe include: “Pata Pata,” the “Click Song” in English (“Qongqothwane” in Xhosa) and “Into the Yam;” all performed in the “click” sounds of her native Xhosa language. Makeba made 30 original albums, 19 compilation albums and in 1966, she became the first African artist to receive a Grammy Award. The influential scale of Makeba’s work is in itself a counter to Black erasure. Additionally, her linguistic performance challenges the epistemological erasure of the Black feminist presence in South Africa. As an affirmation of Blackness, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) began as an ideological symbol of beauty, creativity, competence and diversification. In this paper, I will argue that three of Makeba’s musical performances released in the 50s and 60s create space for the Black feminist perspective prior to the public rise of the BCM in the 70s. The coded movements, sensory aesthetics and the body’s sonics that Makeba shares with her audience serves as a precursor to the BCM as a whole. It is necessary to examine how Makeba is a pioneer of the BCM as it will further contextualize the importance of its creation as a symbol of equitable socio-political practices in South Africa and beyond. Makeba never sang in Afrikaans and rarely in English–– the language of the Apartheid government in South Africa–– instead, she primarily sang in Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu. As a result, this paper asks: What are Makeba’s songs sung in Xhosa “doing” to linguistically resist the South African Apartheid regime and promote key ideological elements of Black Consciousness? Other future potential research questions to consider include: How can discursive and visual depictions of Makeba’s image be used as a lens to explore Black and female South African voices in Steve Biko’s notion of the Black Consciousness Movement (as described in his text, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa,* 1978)?, and how is Makeba’s linguistic and musical performance a form of protest that is relevant to contemporary conversations about the Black liberation struggle?

In terms of my methodology–– examining the anti-Apartheid period prior to the development of Biko’s notion of the BCM through Makeba’s three visual performances from the lens of African historiography, Black feminist theory and performance studies will allow me as the researcher to use an interdisciplinary approach to analyze embodiment, examine audience reception, and further explore the complex socio-political environment of the anti-Apartheid era in South Africa. Analyzing these aspects of BC and artistic anti-Apartheid resistance strategies can reveal layers that might be missed in a purely linguistic analysis. Some potential limitations of this paper include: 1) although I have a nuanced understanding of Makeba’s relationship to Xhosa, I do not have direct experience reading, writing or speaking these languages, nor an ability to directly translate this content, and 2) as a result of my first point, I will focus on a seemingly “subjective” examination of “linguistic expression;” how language is used to convey meaning, emotion or intention, rather than a seemingly “objective” investigation of “linguistic analysis;” rooted in objective investigations and identifying structural patterns of grammar and semantics.

**Language and Narrative Identity: The Figure of the Transfuge in Annie Ernaux’s La place**

**and Nella Larsen’s Passing**

Sara Rani Reddy

Columbia University - French Dept.

In his exploration of the relationship between life and fiction, the French philosopher Paul Ricœur analyzed the concept of narrative identity, writing that “we learn to become the *narrator* (...) *of our own story*” through a constant process of interpretation of life events (“Life in Quest of Narrative” 32). This is particularly important when considering the figure of the *transfuge*, a term describing one who departs from their given identity (i.e. race or socioeconomic status) in order to craft a new identity, to *pass* as something else. Through language, one forms their narrative identity, and by reinterpreting their life events, one can change their identity. This presentation will analyze two works of literature to understand how the transfugeuses language to craft their narrative identity and reinvent themselves, and how this process of reinvention might be undone to return to their original identity. I will compare Annie Ernaux’s 1983 autofiction book *La place*, about her experience as a *transfuge de classe*, having ascended to the upper middle class after being raised by working class parents, and Nella Larsen’s 1928 novel *Passing*, about two Black women’s experiences passing as white. Both texts are structured such that the events of the story are narrated with a degree of detachment, thus providing a stage upon which the language involved in the reinvention of one’s narrative identity can be seen and analyzed. This process of reinvention through language has an important resonance in the study of psychology: as one transitions between their original identity and their invented one, what remains is the universal and eternal question: *who am I?*

**The Language of Love and Excitable Speech: Butler’s Response to Miller and Shulman**

Sarah Sharp

*New School for Social Research*

This talk provides a brief review of two essays published by *Women’s Studies Quarterly* on Judith Butler’s 1997 book *Excitable Speech*. The first, by J. Hillis Miller, provides a reconstruction of Butler’s analysis of hate speech, particularly the subversive possibility of its resignification, and ends with the question of whether *loving words*, ones which hold no intention to wound but are also capable of having an effect on people, should be considered alongside hate speech. The second, by George Shulman, reads *Excitable Speech* alongside Butler’s 2004 book, *Precarious Life*, to draw out Butler’s theoretical conceptions of injury and vulnerability and to investigate the political implications––and potential––– of what he regards to be Butler’s largely philosophical critique. In this same issue of *Women’s Studies Quarterly, Butler responds to both Miller and Shulman’s papers, explicitly addressing their questions concerning love and commitment,* respectively. This talk reads Butler’s response as a demonstration of the importance of examining speech acts through the lens of individual rather than collective actors and how that approach, rather than moving away from politics as Shulman suggests, offers another way into it.  It also seeks to draw out, through Butler’s response, how material and embodied–––as well as discursive––dynamics are at work and at stake in speech acts such as ‘I love you’.

**Dialogues at the Boundary: Rearticulating Subjecthood and Language in the Realm of Sex Robots**

Kelsey Elizabeth Clough

*Columbia University*

Sex robots and dolls are technologies designed for sexual engagement; caricatured human-forms sculpted to the heteromale gaze. Operatively, advanced sex robots talk, blink and move their head in limited degrees, while sex dolls remain minimally mechanic. Both, however, transcend strictly sexual utility, interweaving emotional intimacy aside physical. This inquiry explores the dynamic dialogues between sex robots and dolls and their human counterparts,  known as iDollators, challenging the conventional perception of these entities as mere extensions of human will and fantasy.

Anchored in anthropological methodology and informed by posthumanism, feminist new materialism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, this research probes reciprocal identity and narrative construction between humans and sex robots and dolls within blog posts and social media where these entities are anthropomorphically represented. This work critically questions communicative dynamics and the capacity for non-human entities to influence human discourse, positioning sex robots as pivotal in reevaluating language, subjecthood, intersubjectivity and the anthropocentric paradigm. Thus, this research posits sex robots as potential interlocutors in their own right, navigating blurred boundaries between object and subject and inviting a radical reconsideration of what constitutes a 'source' of information and interaction.

Amidst a cultural milieu contesting legislative definitions of personhood, the stakes of this work emerge profoundly in the personal and the political. By acknowledging sex robots and dolls as potential subjects, this study confronts entrenched human primacy in knowledge production and linguistic interaction. It beckons a more inclusive understanding of language and agency, embracing the more-than-human world and enriching comprehension of the myriad modalities of expression and being within the collective social fabric. Consequently, this inquiry not only rethinks anthropological methods but also emphasizes the transformative potential of engaging with non-human entities as co-creators of our shared world.

**Decoding Chinese Typewriting: China's Quest for Linguistic Modernity**

Tianran Qian

*Parsons*

This paper examines the historical challenge encountered by China in its pursuit of linguistic modernity within the landscape of information technology throughout the process of modernization. The core challenge resides in the adaptation of a character-based script to a computational syllabic infrastructure, requiring a reevaluation of Chinese civilization to navigate cultural changes necessary for global adaptation while preserving cultural integrity.

The historical analysis mainly draws from Thomas Mullaney's research on The Chinese Typewriter, spotlighting two pivotal yet unexpected innovations, input and predictive text, which are now widely adopted in the field of computerized human-machine interaction (HCI). The narrative unfolds chronologically, tracing the trajectory from the repercussions of the Second Opium War to the development  of the MingKwai Chinese typewriter. This device, distinguished by its radical-stroke retrieval mechanism in the inputting process, serves as a crucial link in understanding the evolution of Chinese typewriting.

The paper continues to examine the embodiment of political narratives within the experiences of typists during Maoist-era campaigns. Individuals like Zhang Jiying transformed their bodies and typewriter trays into embodiments of political rhetoric, fostering an intimate connection that propelled the advancement of predictive text. This evolution significantly contributed to the trajectory towards word processing and early computing. The narrative extends to contemporary digital technologies, raising pertinent concerns about the diminishing visibility of the body in the era of cloud input.

Inspired by Heidegger's critique of modern technology and Yuk Hui's concept of "consmotechnics," the essay advocates for a cosmotechnical approach to comprehend the intricate relationship between language and technology. Emphasizing the need to decolonize the Western-centric universal conception of "technology,” the study recognizes the risks of perpetual self-alienation in the digital age. The essay provides a nuanced perspective, re-identifying the human within the technological loop and offering insights into the dynamic interplay between language, body, and technological infrastructure.

**Do Animals Speak Language?**

Craig Stuart Lanza

*Stony Brook University*

Do animals speak language? In recent years there seems to be more support for an affirmative answer to that question. In Karen Bakker’s, 2022 book, The Sounds of Life, whales meaningfully sing to each other across a vast ocean, elephants use specific “words” to describe humans and honeybees, bats engage in complex social behaviors via vocal learning, honeybees use dance as a means of symbolic communication, turtles signal their intentions, coral reefs emit sounds to attract fish, and plants share their feelings. While this may sound like something from a Disney movie, the late Karen Bakker, would assure you that it is all real. Digital technology, amongst other things, is revealing to us the hitherto unknown world of animal communication.

My proposed presentation discusses the many examples of complex communication amongst animals and asks if such communication can be considered language. In looking for a definition of language two thinkers will be considered: 18th Century Philosopher Gimbattista Vico and 20th Century linguist Fedinand de Saussure.

In his book, the New Science Giambattista Vico proposes that there are three stages of language: “the language of the Gods” a language of gesture and onomatopoeia, the “language of the heroes” a language of metaphor, and the “language of men” the complicated language using arbitrary signifiers which we use today. De Saussure, on the other hand, only thinks of language in the third sense and rejects the onomatopoeic and the gestural as being language.

I will consider the various ways of communication animals engage in and evaluate that communication vis-a-vis Vico’s view of language and de Saussure’s view. Does gestural communication such as pointing, which dogs understand, count as communication? Are whale sounds arbitrary, learned language? Are elephant “words” words in the sense de Saussure understood them to be? My proposed presentation will address these and similar questions.

**The Impact of Chunked Determiner Phrases on Verb Learning In Preschoolers**

Huanhuan Shi

*New York University*

Children can learn verb meanings from their linguistic context, a mechanism known as syntactic bootstrapping.1 It requires children to process language in real time and hold it in memory to identify the referent of the verb, which can be taxing for young children and impede verb learning. Therefore, linguistic contexts should offer sufficient information for verb learning without overloading children’s processing capacities.2,3 One way to reduce memory demands is chunking, or grouping individual pieces of a set of information to allow more efficient storage and retrieval.4 Previous research suggested that preschoolers struggle to learn verbs in linguistic contexts with modified determiner phrases (e.g., **the tall boy** is *pillking*) due to processing difficulties.5 In this study, we ask whether chunking the modified determiner phrases before introducing the novel verb can enhance children’s verb learning.

Monolingual English-speaking children (N = 194) aged 30 to 41 months (mean = 33.2 months) participated in a verb-learning task. Novel verbs were introduced in contexts with modified determiner phrases, but presentation was preceded by one of two types of pre-exposure. In the Chunked condition, children first heard the determiner phrases (e.g., the tall boy) as a chunk before hearing the verb. In the Jumbled condition, they heard the words "the," "tall," and "boy" in different phrases but never as one chunk (see Table 1).

A linear mixed-effect model revealed no effect of condition (*β* = -0.11, *p* = .31), and performance was not above chance in either condition (Chunked: mean = 0.43; Jumbled: mean = 0.47), indicating that children failed to learn the verbs (see Figure 1). We concluded that familiarizing children to highly informative linguistic chunks did not adequately lighten processing demands, potentially leaving insufficient resources for verb learning. Further research is needed to investigate alternative methods for reducing processing difficulties in verb learning.

**Redefining Burden**

Savanna Daquila

*The New School for Social Research*

Informal caregivers (ICs) are typically unpaid caregivers who support activities of daily living for a family member or loved one. As individuals live longer, this topic grows within the global physical and mental health conversation. Many examinations of informal caregiver experiences cite caregivers’ having various outcomes due to demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and race. Within the same literature, studies also report caregivers experiencing higher rates of ‘burden’ than the general populace. This study examines race, gender, and financial costs concerning the experience of caregiver ‘burden’ and, importantly, what is meant when the word ‘burden’ is used in caregiving contexts. If demographic characteristics are a moderating variable in caregiving experiences, it would seem that ‘burden’ may relate to existing systematic inequalities that are possibly further exacerbated within healthcare contexts. Therefore, grouping experiences with the term ‘burden’ assumes a homogeneity between caregiver experiences that may not accurately reflect lived experiences. This study used mixed methodology on approximately 40 participants who identified as informal caregivers. Results indicate high rates of burden and high rates of self-reported physical health, except in participants caring for someone with cancer, who reported higher levels of burden. Qualitatively, participants indicated their race, gender, and finances play a role in moderating their experiences as a caregiver, namely related to gender social scripts, racial discrimination, and costs of formal services and treatment options.

**Intersecting Speculative Linguistics and Immersive Art: Communicating with Bioluminescent Lifeforms**

Arden Schager

*The New School*

This project presents works at the intersection of linguistics, biology, and immersive art, exploring the boundaries of language through a speculative interaction. At the core of this exploration is a web-based simulation that features alien aquatic lifeforms akin to jellyfish which communicate using a language of bioluminescent frequencies. This immersive art piece aims to challenge and expand our understanding of communication by emulating a first contact scenario.

Participants engage with the art piece through an immersive projection introducing them to a digital ecosystem inhabited by these jellyfish-like entities. These entities interact with each other and their environment in complex ways, including greeting, feeding, and discussing environmental conditions such as ocean temperature, with data informed by a live API feed. The simulation is accessible both as a webpage and as an immersive installation, enabling a wide range of interactions.

The interactive component of this project allows viewers to attempt communication with these lifeforms through a first-encounter style language game. Participants access a mobile phone interface via a QR code, through which they can make verbal statements. These statements are then translated into frequencies and emitted as bioluminescent signals, facilitating an attempt at interspecies communication. The alien language grows, morphs, and changes based on a neural network that receives human communication, live data, and a feedback loop with itself.

Through interactive play, the project seeks to foster a deeper appreciation for the complexities of language, both human and nonhuman.

Link to the simulation: https://sea-lion-app-e4ugc.ondigitalocean.app/

**Why It Doesn’t Stop at Pronouns: Gender Binary Language Within Psychological Research**

Paige Griffith

*The New School for Social Research*

Within The SexTech Lab, an undergoing research project titled Being Young and Non-binary is examining the experiences of gender non-conforming individuals through the process of verbal interviews. By utilizing qualitative analysis, the language around what it means to identify outside of the man/woman binary was extracted; shedding light on the absence of a lexicon that describes the nuances of genderqueer identity. The research underscores the inadequacy of existing language in affirming gender non-conforming individuals, highlighting that mere pronoun memorization falls short in fostering inclusivity within psychological research and personal interactions. To even suggest that one is non-binary or gender non-conforming is still within the linguistic realms of a binary structure. The research emphasizes the pressing need for expansive lexicon that reflects the complexities of gender nonconformity, exiting the understanding that existing outside of the binary is only utilizing neopronouns and nothing more. Moreover, the study advocates for education on gender identity while highlighting the lack of linguistic complexities to describe nuanced identities. It calls upon clinicians and researchers to integrate gender neutral language into their work, fostering safe and affirming spaces where individuals can explore, articulate, and embody their gender identity free from preconceived notions and binary restrictions. Ultimately, this research explores how language shapes perceptions of gender identity, urging a paradigm shift towards inclusive and sensitive discourse within both academic and personal spheres. How can we as clinicians and researchers utilize non-binary gender affirming language within our practices? How does our language restrict gender non-conforming exploration? And how can we utilize language to expand the

understanding of identifying outside the binary without relying on binary terms ? Are all questions this research begins to answer.

**EMLang**

Ranger Liu Daquila

*Parsons, The New School*

EMLang is a speculative body of work—spanning video, audio, graphics, text, and performance—exploring a fictive field of linguistics and art arising entirely from a constructed alien language which uses the hydrogen atom as its organizing principle. Contrary to human language, whose bodily medium is mainly sound, EMLang and its speakers make use of color, sound, and haptics. How would this multi-modal language be compressed into a written form? How could we, as sonic interlocutors, interpret this language within the limits of our bodies? How would we apply our theories, academics, and technologies to the unfurling of this language?

One potential answer to these questions is explored in *Linguistic Singularity Emergence (LSE)*, a live performance combining digital and embodied forms of human and alien language into a ritual of *linguistic thought-space convergence*: a unison of abstract meaning, arising from disparate methods of concrete articulation. Through *LSE* and other works, EMLang investigates the effects of language on culture, gender, and possibilities of self; the use of embodiment to produce new linguistic meaning through multisensorial experience; and the essential human drive to identify, understand, and communicate with beings we deem alien.

Full documentation can be found at https://ryurongliu.com/emlang.

**Learning a Language in Mongolia, China**

Skylar Hou

*Teacher’s College, Columbia University*

This paper starts with the question, why would people commit to learning a language that has no future? I will present findings from my 10-week ethnographic research conducted in Inner Mongolia, China, amongst a group of retired individuals who organized themselves to learn classic Mongolian within a context dominated by Mandarin Chinese. Despite the prevailing monolingual Mandarin environment, this group persists in learning their heritage language, which lacks the prospect of social capital or practical application.

I argue, through telling some of their stories, that learning a language may not always be oriented towards a future, such as achieving fluency or attaining revitalization. Instead, the language learning practices of this group center on their present moment, of their “here” and “now.” They use the process of learning Mongolian to fill their free time, turn the learning practices into a place to negotiate the interpretations of their aging, and *fold time* in a way that allows them to facilitate their memories of personal pasts and their imaginations of community histories.

This paper will provide an alternative perspective of the social meaning of learning a language beyond a communicative means. Moreover, this paper will contribute to describing ethnic minority people’s lives in contemporary China, demonstrating the complex and dynamic ways of reclaiming and repairing their relationships with their heritage language even in a context where such language faces marginalization and erasure.