To the Editors,

We submit our research article "A case for systematic sound symbolism in pragmatics: Universals in *wh-words*" for consideration in the Journal of Pragmatics.

We test a bold new idea: that a pressure to rapidly recognise the pragmatic content of turns in conversation can have an impact on the lexicon of a language. Specifically, we hypothesise that languages should evolve so that content interrogative words (*wh-words*) to sound similar within a language in order to facilitate pragmatic inference in conversation. The observation that interrogative words sound similar (who, what, why, when, where ...) is not new - and the mechanisms by which they become similar have been studied. However, we provide an ultimate explanation for their similarity.

Our study does two new things:
1. We use bespoke quantitative tests of similarity using a corpus of over 900 concepts in 172 languages.
2. We produce a novel prediction: that the similarity will be greater for languages which place wh-words at the beginnings of clauses.

We find positive evidence for our hypothesis. But more importantly, we show that it's possible to link the domains of processing, pragmatics and cultural evolution, and then rigorously test hypotheses using quantitative methods. We feel that the readers of the Journal of Pragmatics are clearly the target audience for our research.

Here are list of researchers who would be suitable reviewers:

Michael Cysouw (expertise on interrogatives and typological distributions)
    Philipps-Universität Marburg, cysouw@uni-marburg.de
Terry Regier (evolutionary explanations of cross-cultural differences)
    University of California, Berkeley, terry.regier@berkeley.edu
JP de Ruiter (On-line processing of pragmatics, quantitative methods)
    Tufts University, jp.deruiter@tufts.edu
Lynn Perry (Iconicity and cognition)
    University of Miami, lkperry@miami.edu
Soren Wichman (Lexical databases, statistical patterns in the lexicon)
    Leiden University, s.k.wichmann@hum.leidenuniv.nl
Morten Christiansen (Processing constraints on language evolution)
    Cornell University, christiansen@cornell.edu

Also, a list of researchers who have the right expertise, but are currently working with the authors, and so have a conflict of interest: Stephen Levinson, Fiona Jordan, Bodo Winter, Damian Blasi and Marcus Perlman.
Yours,

Anita Slonimska & Seán Roberts