

Xinxin Yan

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Research interests Theoretical and Experimental Pragmatics, Semantics, Relevance theory, Simile & Metaphor Interpretation and Production, [The Online Processing of Metaphors and Metonymy](#), [Automatic Figurative Language Detection](#), [Interpretation and Generation](#)

Education **University College London** London, UK
PhD in Linguistics Sep 2019 – Nov 2024
Thesis: *From Likeness to Meaning: A Relevance-Theoretic Account of Similes and Other Comparison Statements*
Supervisors: Professor Robyn Carston, Dr. Wing Yee Chow

University College London London, UK
MRes in Speech, Language & Cognition (Distinction) Sep 2018 – Sep 2019
Thesis: *Rethinking the relationship between metaphors and similes*
Supervisor: Professor Robyn Carston

University College London London, UK
MA in Linguistics (Merit) Sep 2015 – Sep 2016
Thesis: *Effects of speech rate on second language learners' intelligibility*
Supervisor: Professor Yi Xu

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University Suzhou, China
BA (Hons) in English and International Business Sept 2011 – Sept 2015

Academic Employment & Positions **Postdoctoral Researcher** Sep 2024 – present

Department of Linguistics, University College London (UCL)

-Work on a BA/Leverhulme Small Research-funded grant (2023-2024; PI: Prof. Robyn Carston FBA) that investigates the cognitive processing of metaphors and metonymy when they are used for different communicative functions.

- My primary role involves designing and conducting psycholinguistic experiments using various behavioral techniques (e.g., eye-tracking text reading; self-paced reading study) to compare the processing of metaphor and metonymy across different communicative functions.
- Responsible for the full research cycle – from experimental design and stimuli preparation to data collection, statistical analysis and interpretation of results.

Research Assistant

Oct 2021 – Feb 2022

Department of Linguistics, UCL

- Designed, conducted, and analyzed a series of self-paced reading experiments investigating the processing of referential and predicative metaphors.
- Contributed to the writing and revision of the empirical sections (Methods and Results) for the resulting publication in *Cognition* (Carston & Yan, 2023).

Research Fellow

April 2017 – July 2018

Department of Literary and Translation Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)

- Contributed to the project “Localization of Corporate Websites from a Multimodal Perspective” (2017–2019), funded by the Research Development Fund (PI: Dr. Hui Wang).
- Conducted comparative linguistic analyses of verbal content on original and localised corporate websites using the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar.
- Investigated genre-specific conventions of corporate homepages and examined how translation practices reveal underlying power dynamics, ideological positioning, and cultural norms, drawing on principles of critical discourse analysis.

Publications

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

- Carston, R., & Yan, X. (2023). Metaphor processing: Referring and predicating. *Cognition*, 238, 105534. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2023.105534>
- Zou, B., & Yan, X. (2014). Chinese Students' Perceptions of Using Mobile Devices for English Learning. *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(3):20-33. <https://www.igi-global.com/gateway/article/full-text-html/117192&riu=true>

Book Chapters

- Zou, B., Yan, X., & Li, H. (2018). Students' perspectives on using online sources and apps for EFL learning in the mobile-assisted language learning context. *Handbook of Research on Integrating Technology Into Contemporary Language Learning and Teaching*, edited by Bin Zou and Michael Thomas, IGI Global, 2018, pp. 328-344. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5140-9.ch016>

Manuscripts in preparation

- Yan, X., Chow, W., Carston, R. (in prep.) The Processing of Metaphors and Similes: How Form Makes a Difference.
- Yan, X. (in prep.) What really are similes? Distinguishing similes from literal comparisons.

Conference Presentations & Talks

Refereed Conference Presentations

- (Sep. 2023). **The Processing of Metaphors and Similes: How Form Makes a Difference.** 10th Biennial Meeting of Experimental Pragmatics (XPrag), Paris, France. *Finalist for the Sam Glucksberg Student Prize for Best Presentation.*
- (Aug. 2023). Poster: **The Processing Difference between Metaphor and Simile: Evidence from a Cross-Modal Priming Study.** 29th Architectures and Mechanisms for Language Processing Conference (AMLaP), San Sebastian, Spain.
- (Sep. 2022). Preregistration Poster: **JOHN IS A CACTUS vs. JOHN IS LIKE A CACTUS: Do We Process Metaphor & Simile Differently?** 9th Experimental Pragmatics Conference (XPrag), Pavia, Italy.
- Carston, R. Yan, X. (Sep. 2022). **Metaphorical Referring is Costly.** 9th Experimental Pragmatics Conference (XPrag), Pavia, Italy.
- (July 2021). Poster: **Like A Rolling Stone: How Do Similes Differ From Literal Comparisons?** 17th International Pragmatics Conference (IPrA), Winterthur, Switzerland. *Awarded Best Student Poster.*
- (July 2021). **Experimental Evidence for Differences Between Interpreting Similes and Literal Comparisons** 15th Annual Lancaster Linguistics and English Language Postgraduate Conference, Online.
- (June 2021). **Similes and Literal Comparisons: Theoretical and Processing Differences?** Linguistics and English Language Postgraduate Conference, University of Edinburgh, Online.
- (April 2017). **The linguistics theories behind the film *Arrival*.** Daxia Interdisciplinary Linguistics Conference, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China.
- Zou, B. & Yan, X. (Oct. 2014). **How does Mobile Technology Influence English Language Teaching and Learning?** The 7th International Conference on ELT (English Language Teaching), Nanjing University, Nanjing, China.
- Yan, X. & Li, H. (Oct. 2014) **The Use of Language in Consecutive Interpretation.** TEFL Shanghai Teaching 2014, Shanghai, China.

Invited Talks

- (May 2023). **Processing Differences Between Metaphors and Similes: Evidence from a Cross-Modal Priming Study.** Invited presentation at the Pragmatics Research Seminar, UCL.
- (May 2022). **How Are Similes Understood: A Relevance-Theoretic Account of Simile Interpretation.** Invited talk at UCL Linguistics PhD Day.
- (Jan. 2022). **Interpreting Similes and Comparison Statements.** Thesis chapter presented at the Pragmatic Research Seminar, UCL.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Nov. 2021). How Similes and Literal Comparisons Are Interpreted Differently? Meaning and Grammar Research Group, University of Edinburgh. 	
	Other Conference Presentations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (May 2025). The Interpretation of Similes and Novel, Category-Crossing Metaphors. 2nd Relevance Researchers' Network Conference, Online. • (Oct. 2022). Like a Rolling Stone: How Do Similes Differ from Literal Comparisons? 1st Relevance Researchers' Network Conference, Online. 	
Teaching Experience	Module Instructor , UCL Linguistics Short Courses 24/25	Jan 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-developed and taught the pragmatics module of “Literal” Expressions and Their Uses with Teru Konishi and Dr. Yolanda García-Lorenzo. 	
	Instructor, Python for Beginners Workshop	Nov 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed and led a three-day introductory Python workshop, covering fundamental programming concepts for linguistics students. 	
	Teaching assistant	Jan 2021 – Dec 2024
	Division of Psychology and Language Science, UCL	
	PLIN0034 Introduction to Computational Linguistics	23/24; 24/25
	PLIN0081 Semantics and Pragmatics	21/22; 22/23; 23/24
	PLIN0018 Issues in Pragmatics	22/23; 23/24
	PLIN0010 Intermediate Pragmatics	21/22; 22/23
	PALS0002 Research Methods & Statistics	21/22
	Research Project Demonstrator	Oct 2022 – Feb 2024
	Department of Psychology, UCL	
	PSYC0037: Year 3 Research Methods Workshop	
	- Supported students in experimental design and programming; provided statistical support using R	
	Master’s Thesis Supervision	
	Ouyongzhen Wang	June 2022 – Sept 2022
	Panos Tsiaras	June 2020 – Sept 2020
	Teaching Assistant	Sept 2017 – June 2018
	Department of Applied Linguistics, XJTLU	
	LNG103 Introduction to Linguistics	
Scholarships & Awards	Best Student Poster Award	2021
	<i>International Pragmatics Association</i>	
	Dean’s List (Top 5% of students for academic performance)	2020

University College London

Progression Scholarship

2012, 2014, 2015

Xi'an Jiao-tong Liverpool University

Excellent Research Project Award

2014

Xi'an Jiao-tong Liverpool University

Summer Undergraduate Research Grant

2013, 2014

Xi'an Jiao-tong Liverpool University

Honourable Mention – Mathematical contest in modelling

2011

Consortium for Mathematics and Its Applications (COMAP)

Technical Skills

Experimental Methods:

- Extensive experience designing and conducting high-quality psycholinguistic and behavioral experiments both in-lab and online, including **eye-tracking studies** (SR Research EyeLink 1000), **cross-modal priming paradigms**, and **self-paced reading experiments**.
- Proficient in experimental design and implementation using **PsychoPy** and **GORILLA** for controlled stimulus presentation and response collection.
- Experienced in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis:
 - *Quantitative*: **data preprocessing** and **visualisation** using R and Python; statistical modeling using **linear mixed effects models** (lme4, lmerTest); **generalized linear models** (glm); **factor analysis** and **Bayesian regression** (brms).
 - *Qualitative*: analysing and labelling textual data using **MAXQDA**.

Programming: Python, R, HTML

Tools: Psychopy, SR Research Eye-Tracking Software, Gorilla, GitHub, LaTeX

Languages: Mandarin (native), English (fluent), Japanese (basic)

Service & Outreach

Seminar Organizer

Nov 2022 - July 2023

Relevance Reading Group, UCL

- Founded and co-led a biweekly reading group with Teru Konishi, dedicated to going through and holding in-depth discussions of the book, *Relevance: Cognition and Communication* (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

Co-organizer

Oct 2020 - May 2022

Pragmatics Reading Group Talks, UCL

Peer Reviewer for Journals

Journal of Cognitive Psychology; Language and Cognition

Student Academic Representative

Oct 2018 – Sept 2019

**Attended
Trainings
& Workshops**

The Sixth Summer School on Statistical Methods for Linguistics and Psychology (SMLP), 12-16 September 2022, University of Potsdam, Germany.
Generalised Additive Mixed Models Workshop, 12-14 December 2022, University of Reading, UK.
ACTL summer school, 27 June – 1 July 2022, University of York, UK.