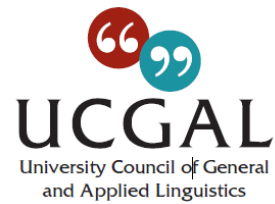


UCGAL Newsletter No. 1

October 2010



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Introduction

This Newsletter is a new venture of the University Council of General and Applied Linguistics, which will be circulated every 2 months and will include items of general interest about linguistics research and teaching. The aim of the newsletter is to promote public understanding of linguistics and its social impact, and we invite linguists across the field to submit stories to us!

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What is UCGAL?

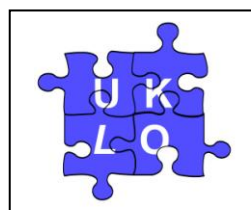
The University Council of General and Applied Linguistics was established in 2009 by a group of learned societies, to promote understanding of linguistics and its strategic importance for research and education in the United Kingdom. The members are:

[Association for French Language Studies](#)
[British Association for Applied Linguistics](#)
[British Association of Academic Phoneticians](#)
[British Association for Clinical Linguistics](#)
[Forum for Germanic Language Studies](#)
[Henry Sweet Society](#)
[Linguistics Association of Great Britain](#)
[Philological Society](#)
[Poetics and Linguistics Association](#)
[UK Cognitive Linguistics Association](#)
[University Council of Modern Languages](#)
[CILT/ National Centre for Languages](#)

More information about UCGAL can be found on our website at www.linguistics.ac.uk .

UK Linguistics Olympiad

The UK's first ever Linguistics Olympiad (UKLO) took place in spring 2010, and was a great success, with over 600 schoolchildren taking part. This is a



competitive event for schools, promoting skills of linguistic analysis, and part of an international network of Olympiads (founded in 2003). Test material was produced by a consortium of English-speaking Linguistics Olympiads (ELCLO) which was set up last year on the back of the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO).

The UKLO Chair Prof Dick Hudson writes: “We structured the competition in two rounds. Round 1 was taken in schools, so we supplied the test material and schools scheduled and invigilated the tests. We distinguished two levels: Foundation and Advanced. The two levels shared three questions, with two others unique to each level. Foundation papers were marked by teachers (using answers provided by us), while the organisers marked the Advanced papers.



“On the basis of the Advanced test we selected twelve candidates for Round 2, which was a two-day residential event hosted by Sheffield University's School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics. The event included a day's tuition as well as a three-hour test. The standard of these candidates was so high that we decided to select not one but two teams to progress to the international event held in Stockholm in July. The UK winners' names are on the UKLO website www.uklo.org .

“The most encouraging thing for us was the enthusiasm in the schools. Just over 600 pupils took part in round 1, of whom 200 took the Foundation level; and those 200 included some pupils as young as 11! The age-distribution can be seen in a graph at <http://www.uklo.org/2010/results.htm#r1>. This means that 600 school children have not only heard of linguistics, but enjoyed doing some analysis of language structure.”

National Teaching Fellowship for phonetician Patricia Ashby

Dr Patricia Ashby of the University of Westminster has been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2010.

Patricia has worked at the University of Westminster since 1975. She has an international reputation as a practising phonetician, teacher of phonetics, and researcher in phonetic pedagogy.

Her skilful use of new technologies (including real-time analysis of speech in the classroom), enlivens what students often find dull, and demystifies what they perceive as difficult. Her approach has impacted on and benefited colleagues in her department, the



University and beyond. Patricia's early experience in art and design gives her insight into the difficulties that scientific study can raise for arts students and underpins her ability to create attractive and informative materials.

Her development of student-centred, enquiry-based learning-through-assessment strategies has demonstrably enhanced success. Her **fieldwork-based techniques** have spread beyond her own courses to other disciplines and countries – from foreign languages to English literature, and speech science.

Patricia's commitment to teaching are captured in these recent student comments: [your] "passion for your subject [...] is perfectly integrated into your teaching, making your lessons enjoyable and fun" and "I will never forget from the moment we met the guidance and experience you gave me [...] you are my perfect role model, you have helped to give me a wonderful start in my career." [Linguistics students, 2009]

Linguistics and the law: an 'impact' story

Frances Rock, Cardiff University

I was sitting in a solicitors' advice room in an urban police station with a gentleman who has just been released from police custody. I was interviewing him about his experiences of written and spoken language during his detention. "Have you actually been in a cell?" the man asked. I had. Researching language and communication as lived processes in police custody, it turns out, necessitates inventiveness about research methods. I had been on 'go alongs' to the arrest of suspects of 'shop theft', I had interviewed police officers and suspects, I had analysed audio-recordings of police interviews with witnesses and, of course, I had spent a strangely eerie and surprisingly long evening in a police cell.

Those who study language and communication do so from a vast range of perspectives. They operate across the different levels of language, some focussing on the intricate details of ways in which humans produce speech sounds or combine parts of words as historical process, others examining how language figures in whole societies and influences large-scale social change. The drip-feed of information on language and the social world from linguists via a number of routes, not least the good number of language graduates each year, has contributed to societal shifts in understanding of matters as diverse as migration and immigration; new technologies; health and wellbeing; racism, sexism and ageism; multilingualism; globalisation; the power and influence of the print and broadcast media, advertising and political language; language learning and literacy; revolution and war; children and socialisation and the communication of complex information and difficult concepts such as risk.

My own experience was as a linguistics graduate whose degree had equipped her with a range of tools. These made it possible to ask systematic questions about the ways in which social worlds operate and to be critical and considerate about how institutions and individuals maintain their ways of operating and their standing through language. I was fortunate enough to turn this questioning into action during my PhD research when scrutiny of language in detention was used to re-write the 'notice of rights' given to every one of the approximately 4000 people, on average arrested each day. In my subsequent academic career I've been able to collaborate with police forces on topics as diverse as 999 calls, media coverage of police activities, and letters delivering bad news. Such collaborations provide exciting opportunities for all involved, ultimately making it possible for academic research on language in society to directly contribute *to* society.

Linguistics in schools: taking stock

Graeme Trousdale, University of Edinburgh

Linguistics, both general and applied, has already had a great deal of influence on school-level teaching. Knowledge from research in linguistics and applied linguistics now underpins literacy teaching in the primary school curriculum, including the teaching of phonics and phonological awareness, and genre-based approaches to writing, and to teaching reading comprehension. Research from applied linguistics informs how teachers adapt the curriculum for children who speak English as an additional language, or are learning English as an additional language; it also has shaped teachers' understandings of, and provision for, children with literacy difficulties, language delay and with specific speech and language disorders.

The celebration of diversity and change found in modern linguistics permeates all official documents concerning literacy, English and foreign languages (for example, 'knowledge about language' is one of the five strands of the foreign-language curriculum); and one of the great successes at Key Stage 5 is the A-level qualification in English Language, which has risen from an experimental subject promoted by teachers and inspired by linguistics into one of the ten most popular A-level subjects.

As might be expected with a subject for which teachers have little prior preparation, linguistics has had more impact on general attitudes and ideas than on the more technical study of language structure – the rules for building sentences or words, the patterning of vocabulary, and so on. To improve this situation, the Committee for Linguistics in Education (CLIE, <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/clietop.htm>) has developed website resources for initial teacher training in the linguistics of French, German and Spanish, and is exploring the possibility of developing similar materials on English. CLIE has also recently commissioned a report, with funding from various professional bodies for linguistics, on the extent to which those training to become English teachers have the necessary subject knowledge to teach both the linguistic and literary elements of the school curriculum. This report is available at <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/clietop.htm#pgce>, and its findings are being disseminated through a series of articles and presentations.

There have also been initiatives to go beyond the current curriculum and to introduce young people to linguistics as an autonomous intellectual discipline. This has often proved to be of particular interest to students of school subjects like biology, philosophy, computing and mathematics. In addition to publications in magazines whose target audience are AS and A2 students, academics have been involved in setting up and teaching a week-long residential course on linguistics for gifted and talented pupils, and have attended school-based conferences organised by teachers who are keen to find out how current research can inform the student learning experience. In conjunction with the Linguistics Olympiad (discussed elsewhere in this newsletter), the activities mentioned above suggest that interest in linguistics in schools is growing, and has the potential for impact across a range of subjects taught at pre-university levels.

The full CLIE report, *Who's Prepared to Teach School English?*, is available at <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/CLIE/pgce2010.htm>

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