



University of Maribor

Faculty of Arts

Exploring Current Trends in English Studies

Book of Abstracts

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“We are different...we are special”: Language Teacher Identities Outside the State Context

Kirsten Hemplin

Language teachers are essential in preparing learners to navigate the globalised world, which makes understanding them and the work they do undeniably important (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015). Identity not only provides a powerful lens through which we can explore teachers and teaching (Trent, 2015) but it is also closely connected to other significant constructs, such as professional practice (Leibowitz, 2017) and development (Sachs, 2005), wellbeing (Day & Kington, 2008), sense of efficacy (Canrinus et al., 2012), motivation, and long-term commitment to the profession (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2015). In the study presented, the population under focus have thus far escaped the research gaze: experienced teachers who were trained to teach English in the state context in Slovenia and who, for various reasons, are working outside of it (e.g., in the private context). Their identity is explored from a largely poststructural perspective using a qualitative, narrative research design – two sequential interviews (semi-structured and artefact) were used to gather data, which was then analysed through a thematic narrative approach (Riessman, 2008a, 2008b). The findings reveal key insights into how the participants’ teaching identities are shaped through lack of status, insecurity in various forms inherent in the private context and the other – multiple and at times conflicting – identities they claim.

Beyond Numbers and Toward Nuance: Assessing Vocabulary Use in Student Writing

Bernarda Leva

As part of the General Matura exam in English, students are required to demonstrate their knowledge by writing a written composition. This task offers the examiner insight not only

into the student's thoughts and opinions on a given topic but also into their use of the English language and vocabulary. The paper focuses on a comparison between quantitative and qualitative analyses of vocabulary in selected samples of student writing. The qualitative analysis assesses vocabulary diversity, accuracy, appropriateness of word use in context, and overall lexical richness. Using established writing assessment criteria, we analyse and interpret the texts, paying attention to subtle nuances and specific features that are often overlooked by lexical analysis tools. The findings are illustrated with an example that includes calculations of lexical diversity, density, and frequency, and are then compared with the results of the qualitative analysis.

Generative AI as a Feedback Tool in an Oral Speaking Skills Course

Sara Orthaber, Barbara Majcenovič Kline, Tomaž Onič, Nastja Prajnč Kacijan, Kirsten Hempkin

In a university-level oral skills course, students are expected to deliver weekly speeches of 3 to 4 minutes, following preparatory instruction provided through lectures. These frequent speaking tasks serve both as a platform for skill development and as material for tracking student progress throughout the semester. However, providing immediate, high-quality feedback on multiple linguistic and rhetorical aspects—such as grammar, structure, cohesion, pronunciation, and enunciation—within the short timeframe between speeches poses a significant challenge for lecturers, particularly in larger groups. This paper explores how generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, can be effectively integrated into the feedback process using pre-prepared prompts. By doing so, we aim to support lecturers in generating consistent, detailed feedback in real time, while simultaneously contributing to a digital portfolio that documents each student's oral progress. We present preliminary findings from a pilot implementation, demonstrating how AI-assisted feedback can enhance both efficiency and pedagogical quality in speaking-focused courses.

Projects for and with Students

Monika Kavalir

In the last six years I have organized and led a number of projects which were either meant to benefit students or included students as collaborators, or both. Despite the many challenges and the considerable time investment, I find this type of activities very rewarding, with pedagogical and research benefits. I will present five different projects: IKTERUS – a ŠIPK project focused on improving communication between international students and healthcare staff; two Digitalna UL projects resulting in the development of a Mini Course in Old English and a Virtual Adventure in the Tower of London; an RSF creative contest in writing Modern Dialogues in Shakespearean English; and an ULTRA project developing self-study interactive tasks to learn academic referencing skills.

Appraisal Analysis by EFL Students

Agata Križan

At the Faculty of Arts in Maribor, students of EFL also do appraisal analyses as part of their Language Development 3 course requirements. Appraisal is “one of three major discourse semantic resources construing interpersonal meaning” (Martin and White, 2005: 34). By doing appraisal analysis, students explore how attitude (affect, judgement, and appreciation), graduation, and engagement are constituted to build interpersonal meanings, which helps them become critical readers and improve their communication skills. The paper highlights some benefits of doing appraisal analysis and provides some examples of appraisal analysis.

The Whereabouts of the Hyperreal

Mojca Krevel

Since the main objective of the mini-conference is the familiarisation with the research and teaching interests of SDAŠ members, I will use my 15 minutes to first outline the scope and objectives of my research in general, and then present my current area of focus. The general context of my work are the profound changes in the conceptualisations of reality and subjectivity connected to the ontological shift that has been in progress since WW2, marking the onset of the socio-historical epoch of postmodernity. My research focuses on how the postmodern non-dualist order of hyperreal fractality affects the established – decidedly Cartesian – literary-theoretical categories, particularly in the domains of narratology, genology and stylistics. After briefly presenting my key findings to date, I will demonstrate the practical implementation of these findings in my ongoing research, which explores the intersections between mental health and the postmodern condition in contemporary fiction.

AI, Myths, and Cults in Popular Culture

Victor Kennedy

One of the most ancient of myths involves the creation of life, and human attempts to emulate God by creating a perfect being. The myth of Pygmalion, the artist who tried to bring his creation to life, was adapted by Mary Shelley into the tale of *Frankenstein* (1818), the scientist who brought his creation to life; the 21st-century version is the story of the tech companies and entrepreneurs who claim to have developed a conscious artificial intelligence (AI). I will explore the development of these myths in our age of technology in popular culture, and show how these themes in stories and song reflect real issues and concerns in our society. Myth has been a foundation of literature, art, and music since the beginning of human culture. Epics, comedies, romances in poetry and prose from Ancient Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and other cultures still form the basis of many of the novels, films, tv series, and songs that are popular today. Recent examples include Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Penelopiad* (2005)¹,

¹ The novel tells the story of Homer’s *Odyssey* from the perspective of Odysseus’ wife.

Robert Eggers' film *Nosferatu* (2024)², Tom Kapinos and Neil Gaiman's television series *Lucifer* (2016-2021)³, and Marillion's song "Grendel" (1982)⁴. Katherine Butler and Samantha Bassler, in their study of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, contend that although "The primary modern association of myth is with falsehood," "biblical episodes that were regarded as infallible truth, through the myths about the gods and heroes of the ancient world that were believed to communicate the wisdom of the ancient times, through legendary tales of historical personages, to newly created, literary stories" (Butler and Bassler 2019, 1). Today, however, our view and use of myth is more complex than such a basic dichotomy suggests.

The Changing of Myths; Mythical and Text Adaptation in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

Katja Težak

Mythological stories and their popularity have seen a drastic rise in recent years and have taken on contemporary forms of adaptation beyond just novels and screen adaptations, as we will explore in the presentation. The Canadian contemporary writer Margaret Atwood is well known for expanding on mythological stories and she has taken on one of the most frequently adapted stories from Greek mythology, namely Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. In the proposed presentation I will explore adaptation theories such as narratological shifts, time shifts and Genette's transtextuality as well as textual reformulations in Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in order to explore in what ways myths change in their contemporary interpretations.

Not Just a Printer's Widow: Joan Orwin and the Making of Christopher Marlowe in Print

Andrej Zavrl

The paper introduces Joan Orwin as a central figure in the early print history of Christopher Marlowe. As the printer of the first edition of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), Orwin played a crucial role in shaping the material and textual transmission of his work. Although her name appears on the title page, Orwin has received limited scholarly attention and is frequently dismissed or footnoted as merely a printer's widow who inherited her husband's trade. This paper argues for a reassessment of her professional agency and situates her within the broader network of early modern stationers, restoring her visibility as an active participant in the production of Marlowe's legacy.

² Based on F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), which was adapted from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which was in turn based on various Central and Eastern European vampire myths.

³ Based on the biblical *Lucifer*.

⁴ Based on the Anglo-Saxon epic poem, *Beowulf* (first written down sometime between 975 and 1025 AD). Like John Gardner's novel *Grendel* (1971), the song tells the story from the monster's perspective.

There Is No Way Out: English as an Interference in Slovene Public Space (and Vice-Versa)

Simon Zupan

Translation permeates nearly every aspect of contemporary life, shaping how information circulates across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Increasingly, however, translation is carried out by non-professionals—journalists, tourism workers, and other domain specialists—whose limited linguistic and cultural awareness can lead to misunderstandings or unintended distortions. Idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and subtle nuances are often overlooked or misinterpreted, resulting in translations that are linguistically awkward or culturally inappropriate. This paper examines several examples of such translation phenomena in Slovene public space, focusing on media discourse, tourist signage, menus, and public notices. Through close analysis, it highlights the ways in which target texts are influenced—sometimes unintentionally—by the structure, semantics, and cultural logic of the source language. The study underscores the importance of translation literacy and advocates for greater awareness of the socio-cultural implications of everyday translation practices.

Attitudes of Slovene L2 Speakers of English to English as *Lingua Franca* (ELF)

Smiljana Komar

The purpose of the presentation is to discuss the design of a study in which I am going to analyse the attitudes of Slovene L2 speakers of English towards English as *lingua franca* (ELF). The study could be regarded as an extension of a study I carried out in 2022 and in which I analysed the attitudes of Slovene L2 speakers of English towards six native standard varieties of English. Using the verbal guise test, the participants were exposed to audio clips of Received Pronunciation (RP), General American (GA), Scottish English (ScE), Irish English (IrE), Australian English (AusE) and New Zealand English (NZE). They were required to complete a two-part questionnaire. In part one, they were asked to rate, on four-point Likert scale, statements about the cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits of the speakers, as well as the linguistic traits which they believed contributed most to their attitudes to a particular variety. In part two, they had to range the six tested varieties according to their preference, familiarity and appropriateness for teaching to Slovene learners of English.

The results of the study confirm the findings of numerous other similar studies in giving preference to the two standard varieties (RP and GA) before the five remaining ones (see Carrie 2017, Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006, Lewandowski 2017, Rindal 2010, Stopar, 2015, Šabec 2000). In addition, they also show that there is a correlation between cognitive, affective and aesthetic traits associated with most of the varieties, with the exception of GA, which although it is perceived as friendly, well-educated, confident, trustworthy and liked (affective and cognitive traits) it is also least beautiful, not posh or prestigious and not funny (aesthetic traits). Similar to other studies, the participants find RP prestigious, most well-educated, beautiful, as well as trustworthy and liked. This is also the reason why most of them believe that RP is the right variety for teaching English to Slovene L2 learners.

The forthcoming study will have a similar design: using the verbal guise tests, the participants will be exposed to two native varieties (RP and General American) and to several ELF varieties (Slovene, Croatian, Austrian and Italian). The participants will be required to complete a two-part Likert scale questionnaire. In part one, they will rate statements about the cognitive,

affective and aesthetic traits of the speakers. In part two, they will have to rate different statements about the beliefs and attitudes towards different varieties of English (native and non-native).

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Is It a He or a She Who Cackles While Prowling?

Andrej Stopar, Gašper Ilc, Frančiška Lipovšek

The role of verbs extends far beyond their structural function. In discourse, they generate implicatures that shape our perception of the world, while their conceptual and cognitive dimensions contribute to the formation of metaphors and other figurative language phenomena. Our study focuses on two specific categories of verbs: those related to animal movement and those describing animal sounds. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), we examine how these verbs influence the selection of human agents, particularly in relation to the conceptual metaphors WOMEN ARE (SMALL) FURRY ANIMALS/BIRDS and MEN ARE LARGE FURRY ANIMALS (Kövecses 2005). Additionally, we analyse the co-occurrence of these verbs with other lexical elements to explore their semantic preferences and associations (e.g., Stubbs 2001, 2007; Partington 2004). Our findings present a classification illustrating varying degrees of preference for male and female subjects. While the results only partially confirm the influence of the aforementioned conceptual metaphors on verb selection in reference to male and female agents, they highlight their significant semantic preferences and meaning associations. Some usages reinforce gender stereotypes (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon 2010), whereas others remain largely neutral, the latter case being more prevalent in verbs related to animal sound emission.

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Exploring Multimodal Discourse through a Register-Based Framework

Katja Plemenitaš

Multimodal discourse analysis investigates how meaning is constructed not only through language but also via other semiotic resources such as images, layout, gestures, sound, and spatial design. This paper draws on theoretical frameworks grounded in systemic functional linguistics (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen; O'Halloran), which extend Halliday's linguistic metafunctions to non-linguistic modes, enabling a systematic analysis of multimodal communication. Focusing on a model based on the contextual variables of register, tenor, and mode (e.g., Martin & Rose), I analyze an award-winning image to demonstrate how these variables shape multimodal meaning. Additionally, I evaluate existing categorizations of intermodal connections, i.e., the relationships between linguistic and non-linguistic elements, and discuss challenges in applying these frameworks across diverse multimodal texts.

Choosing Climate Change Reading for a Younger Audience

Michelle Gadpaille

Picture a time when the temporal order of our days has been flipped—when daytime is too hot and everybody has to work and go to school at night—when one must keep indoors during daylight, desperately trying to sleep. At the same time, the seas around your island home are rising; the government keeps evacuating households that live by the coast, so that the port city is creeping up the blue hills behind it. The more prosperous people leapfrog up the mountainside to the relative cool of the highlands. But where is there a place for a teenager and her widowed mother? The Caribbean novel, Diana McCaulay's *Daylight Come* (2020), presents this scenario, and in so doing offers the five crucial elements that fuel YA fiction: relatable peer characters; inter-and intra-personal conflict; gritty adventure; hard life lessons; and a complete absence of moralizing. How can this novel be implemented in an Environmental Humanities program?

Interpretative Potential of Panel Boundaries in Graphic Novels

Tomaž Onič

This presentation deals with the graphic novel, which is still an underrepresented genre in literary studies. In particular, this talk explores the interpretative potential of the formal design of panel boundaries within graphic novels, with a focus on irregular panel grids. Drawing on close readings of selected graphic novels, such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Maus*, this presentation highlights how deviations from conventional panel structures – such as irregular shapes, ruptured borders, and asymmetrical layouts – support narrative meaning and emotional effects. These visual strategies often reflect psychological states, temporal disruptions, or power dynamics within the story – thus acting as visual stylistic elements. By analyzing how artists use panel boundaries as expressive devices, this contribution draws attention to the page layout as a tool that is beyond mere decoration but rather participates actively in storytelling and invites interpretative engagement from the reader.

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