Practicalities and Possibilities: Linguistic approaches to short-form social media

A British Association of Applied Linguistics and Cambridge University Press Seminar

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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KEYNOTES

Keynote I: Professor Ruth Page, University of Birmingham

Influencer stories of mental health on TikTok

9.25am - 10.25am

This paper will examine how social media influencers narrate experiences of mental health, illness and wellbeing in short form videos posted on TikTok. The data consists of 23,700 videos taken from 65 influencers in three categories: experts (professionals with credentials), wellness influencers and content creators with lived experience who document their journey through mental health issues. The results of our corpus assisted multimodal discourse analysis show that these influencers reconfigure the narration of mental health in different ways, using the affordances of the story formatting in TikTok's videos which include sound memes, compilations, greenscreen, stitches and duets. These story formats are used to repurpose sharing experience and expertise, where Experts educate, provide evidence and explain mental health symptoms and treatment, Wellness influencers endorse and offer solutions, often based on stories of their own experience, while Lived Experience influencers tell stories of recovery, relapse and ongoing steps in managing the challenges of mental health and wellbeing that foster and seek support from others.
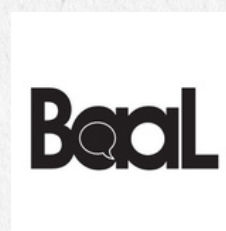
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Keynote II: Professor Nelya Koteyko, QMUL

Digital ethnography with marginalised communities: Balancing agency and anonymity

12.30pm - 1.30pm

Research ethics discussions of agency and vulnerability have pointed to the risks of overgeneralization and paternalism when anonymity is enforced in research with marginalised and disabled communities. Some neurodiversity-driven research, for example, argues that vulnerability is societally imposed on autistic people and naming can give a sense of authorship and a voice. However, not all autistic research participants display autistic identity across all contexts (i.e. people may continue to mask in some environments) and it is not always possible to establish individual preferences when it comes to social media data. In this talk, I will emphasise the importance of considering context when presenting research results and incorporating flexibility in applications to institutional ethics boards. Drawing on a digital linguistic ethnography of Twitter and Facebook use by autistic adults, I will show how researchers can use knowledge of participants' situated experiences and practices of (non-)disclosure to inform ethical decisions.

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LIGHTNING TALKS

Talk 1: Dr Tamsin Parnell, University of Nottingham

Young people's experiences of eating disorders on social media

10.25am - 11.55am

In this lightning talk, I will explore how 25 young people from across the UK talk about their experiences of posting and viewing content about eating disorders on social media. I will discuss: (1) young people's strategies for avoiding "unhelpful content" online and (2) the advantages and disadvantages of posting and viewing eating disorder content online according to young people, as well as (3) young people's hopes for making social media a better place for those with eating disorders. I will also briefly conduct an analysis of some social media posts shared by young people to highlight some shared representations of experiencing an eating disorder online.

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LIGHTNING TALKS

Talk II: Dr Alex Krendel, University of Southampton

Reactions to ectogenesis in YouTube comments

10.25am - 11.55am

In this lightning talk, I will discuss the work completed on the linguistics strand of the Wellcome-funded Future of Human Reproduction project. This involves using corpus linguistic methods to analyse how ectogenesis (complete or partial gestation outside the body) is discussed in YouTube comments under videos covering the topic in differing ways. The project is strongly interdisciplinary as it incorporates perspectives from linguistics, bioethics, law, speculative design, psychology and literature. I will highlight findings from the study which are of particular interest to different members of the project, depending on their discipline, to demonstrate how corpus linguistics can be used in a cross-disciplinary manner.
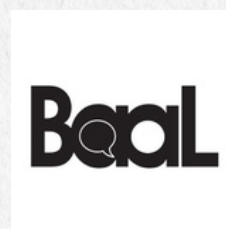
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LIGHTNING TALKS

Talk III: Dr Caroline Tagg (The Open University)

Researching mobile conversations in context

10.25am - 11.55am

This lightning talk outlines the methodology and ethical considerations underpinning the "Mobile conversations in context (MoCo)" research project. The project combines the interactional analysis of mobile phone app text and voice messages with interviews and time-use diaries to explore how mobile conversations shape, and are shaped by, the offline activities and encounters in which interlocutors are engaged. I also share some of the findings emerging from this new approach to mobile messaging as short-form media.

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LIGHTNING TALKS

Talk IV: Dr Jai Mackenzie (Birmingham Newman University)

Researching mobile conversations in context

10.25am - 11.55am

This presentation examines the methodological and ethical principles and processes that underpin the Marginalised Families Online project. Drawing on qualitative interview and social media data from nine UK-based single, adoptive and/or LGBTQ parents, this research explored the relationship between everyday parenting, family practices and digital media. In the talk, I will outline my use of grounded theory and mediated discourse analysis to shape the research design and analytical processes for this study. Further, I reflect on the ethical implications of working intensively with a small group of participants, and collecting samples of their personal social media.

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