

Editor's Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of *The Bangor Linguist*, our brand new monthly magazine. Within each issue, we will aim to explore the many aspects of linguistics and the English language. discuss and reflect some of the variety of research going on around us and also keep you up to date with what is happening in the department. There will also be a healthy dose of “popular linguistics” included, such as reviews of media coverage, puzzles and crosswords. We will also be talking to the Linguistics and English Language staff and students here at Bangor about what they think of Bangor, why they have chosen study or teach here and what they (hope to) do.

In this issue you will find a message from Stuart Smith, this years BLS president (p. 2), a review of Stephen Fry's “Planet Word” (p. 4), some reflections on Welcome Week (p. 2), a linguistics crossword (p. 3), an article on the Vernon Manuscript (front page) and a helpful overview of this month's events around the department (p. 3).

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all who have helped with the production of this newsletter. Without you, this would have never happened.

We all hope that you will enjoy this issue and find what we have included usefull. Any comments, requests, critique or offers of help are greatly appreciated and can be directed at Kathryn Barlow, the editor, via linguistics@undeb.bangor.ac.uk.

Kathryn Barlow

The Mystery of the Vernon Manuscript

Upon its discovery, the Vernon Manuscript has become one of the most important finds in the quest for the mapping of the History of English; however, its true significance has only come to light now.

For years the Manuscript, which consisted of religious text in English, French and Latin, was the most complete and detailed account of how the English language had developed during the Medieval Period. Its primary aim was to help give religious access to those who were not familiar with Latin. However, certain aspects of the pronunciation and



The Vernon Manuscript, Image: University of Birmingham

spelling did not appear to match with other smaller, less significant documents of that period. Many theorists simply hypothesised that this difference was due to the inclusion of both French and Latin may have formed a very weak mix of all three languages to form a Pigeon-like alternative.

This theory was the strongest argument for this difference, until now. Students at the University of Birmingham stumbled upon their theory when one of their students began to read out some of the English aspects of one of the Manuscripts 700 pages. It was not the fact that the Latin or French had influenced the Manuscript's creation but merely the accent in which the authors of the script that had the clearest influence.

The accent in question is surprisingly that of the West Midlands, once thought to only have stronger prevalence during the Industrial Revolution, where the influence of thousands of traders living in and around Birmingham had shaped the language to what it is today. That was until the Vernon Manuscript revealed, that whoever had produced the works did so with a strong influence of both the accent and dialects of the West Midlands area.

Once this discovery had become much more publicised, many volunteers flocked to Birmingham to read out extracts in order to form a chart, mapping out the accent's influence in the area and begin to try and pinpoint certain area in (cont'd on page 2).

A Note from the President

I hope you have all settled back into life at Bangor. The BLS is very pleased with the progress and achievements we have made since the end of last term. We have an entirely new committee for the upcoming academic year and we are all enthusiastic to continue making the society the best it can possibly be. In order to achieve this, we are currently organising a wide array of exciting activities, both of social and academic character and we look forward to seeing you at the events. We kicked off the year with a very successful and busy Welcome Week. It was enjoyed by everyone involved and with a variety of different activities and events it was certainly a week to remember. New friendships were formed between freshers and returning students. Big thanks must go to all Peer Guides within the department who made the week the success it was! You will be pleased to know, we have already started planning next year's Welcome Week and if you weren't a peer guide I would strongly advise you to embrace the opportunity next year.

Stuart Smith

A Look at Freshers' Week

Freshers' week was great, I think that the activities and group events that the Peer Guides and the BLS had arranged were all really good and very useful in terms of getting to know everyone. Even the notorious toilet paper game was actually quite helpful! However, I especially think that the Fun Centre trip worked really well to mix up with different people and just have a good time, certainly something that must be done every year!

The peer guides were also very useful in helping to find my way

around the many uni buildings and halls sites, and they really helped you settle in. I even think of becoming one myself now! I also loved the trip to Llandudno, it was really nice to get to know the wider area a bit and see what other opportunities there are just a stone's throw away. My favourite thing in Freshers' Week was going



An impression of the BLS Student-Staff barbeque at the end of Freshers' Week

to the beach and getting chips that we ate with the seagulls, it was just perfect! A great week, thumbs up!

Alun Derwydd-Jones

The Vernon Manuscript

(Cont'd from page 1) which the Manuscript could have been produced. There is still a large amount of work still to be done, Birmingham University are teaming up with the Bodleian Library in Oxford to produce a digital version of the Manuscript. Understandably with over 700 pages of fragile work to sort through it can be understood that this may take some time. You can see their progress online at <http://bit.ly/uWdgJ1>.

Harry Jansen

The BLS' academic plans

As you all will know the BLS has until now mostly made itself prominent through keeping the office and library and organising social activities, but hasn't really been involved in the academic sphere around the department. This year we have for the first time begun to also embrace this side of things,

seeing as we are primarily an academic society. We are now running an exciting new seminar series entitled "Approaches to Language", which complements the Linguistics Circle. The aim of this new series is to present students and staff from any department with an interest in linguistics with an overview of the multitude and breadth of research the field has to offer and as such will host variety of speakers from different backgrounds, who will give an introduction to their approach to studying language, showcase some of their research and provide a workshop on aspects of their methodology. More information is available on our website: <http://bls.phpws.org/home/>.

Stuart Smith

Upcoming Events for November

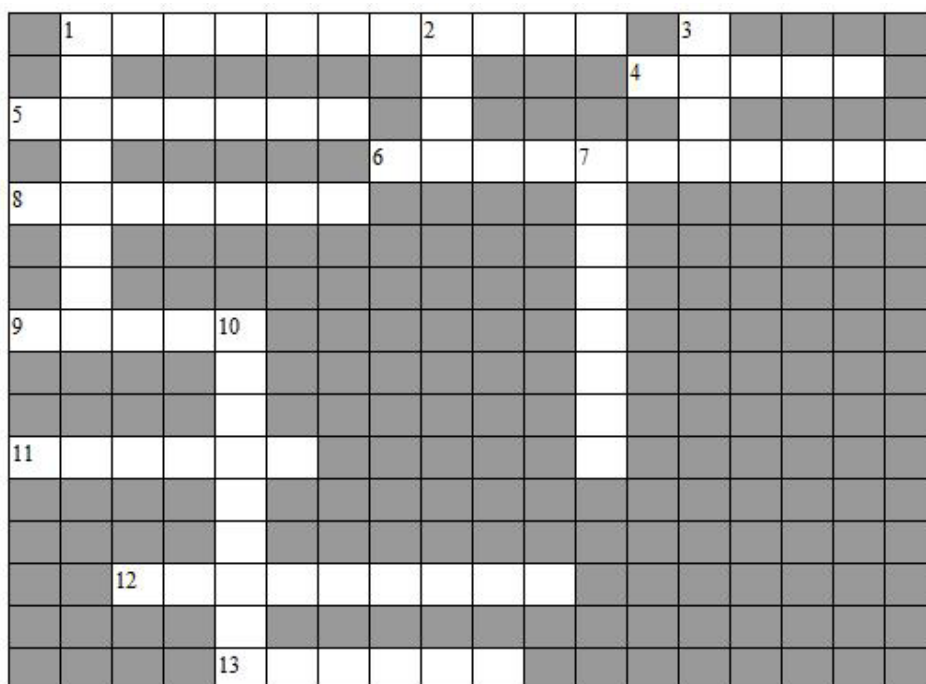
7. Nov Bilingualism Centre Seminar Series, 4pm, Multi-Resource Room (Bilingualism Centre)
Patrick Rebuschat (Bangor): Implicit and Explicit Artificial Language Learning.
10. Nov BLS Lecture Series: “Approaches to Language”, 4:30pm in OSCRB
Dr. Paul Carter (Leeds): Sameness and difference in phonetics.
14. Nov Bilingualism Centre Seminar Series, 4pm, Multi-Resource Room (Bilingualism Centre)
Rhonda McClain (PSU): Using translation as a means to test models of bilingual production.
16. Nov Linguistics Circle, 2pm in the Linguistics Seminar Room
Prof. Mike Hammond: Welsh poetry and phonology.
21. Nov Bilingualism Centre Seminar Series, 4pm, Multi-Resource Room (Bilingualism Centre)
Aritz Irurtzun (IKER-CNRS): Contact-induced change in the Wh-parameter in N. Basque.
23. Nov Linguistics Circle, 2pm in the Linguistics Seminar Room
Dr. Helen Fraser: Forensic phonetics — Cognitive theory.
23. Nov Linguistics Circle, 4pm in the Linguistics Seminar Room
Dr. John Williams (Cambridge): Implicit adult language learning: Prospects and limitations.
24. Nov BLS Lecture Series: “Approaches to Language”, 4:30pm in OSCRB
Delyth Prys (Canolfan Bedwyr): Standardizing terminology: A concept-based approach.
28. Nov Bilingualism Centre Seminar Series, 4pm, Multi-Resource Room (Bilingualism Centre)
David Willis (Cambridge): The Syntactic Atlas of Welsh Dialects and the linguistic effects of language contact and revitalisation in South Wales.

Crossword

Here is a little linguistics crossword. Prepared for you by Matt Jackson.

Down

1. What is the smallest unit of meaning? (8)
2. Content words are _____ Class. (4)
3. A word naming a “thing, person or place” is a _____ (4)
7. “Closed class” can refer to what kind of words? (8)
10. What do we call the study of meaning? (8)



Across

1. What is the study of word structure? (10)
4. If a morpheme cannot be used on its own it is a _____ Morpheme (5)
5. What do we call rules and patterns of language? (7)
6. ‘A’ is a what article? (10)
8. What is the smallest unit of sound? (7)
9. The bank of words in a language is called its _____ (5)
11. How do we describe a word order? (6)
12. The shared rules of language are called _____ Grammar. (9)
13. The items the IPA is made up of, are not letters, but _____? (6)

Answers will be in the next issue!

A Review of Stephen Fry's Planet Word

Apart from the random 5 minutes on some peculiar new slang term, the worrying state of the English Language or the way teenagers text and e-mail, it is not all that usual for us linguists to actually be able to switch on the telly and zap into an hour-long, dedicated program about languages. After all, what we don't have in linguistics is someone like David Attenborough, who seem to have the ability to produce one documentary after another with never-subsiding interest among the viewership. Is that

to do with the topic? Are the big questions of linguistics just not as exciting as the way bats prey through the night and vegetation spreads over our continents? I hardly think so – I've never managed to fill a boring two hours on the train talking about natural history to a random stranger, and even if the topic strikes up, they hardly seem to have any controversial personal opinions on the matter. Linguistics however, after passing the initial so-how-many-languages-do-you-speak barrier, linguistics has filled many an hour I spent on the train, on the bus or even in the queue for theatre tickets, and everybody seems to get engaged really quickly, people really seem to be genuinely interested and want to know more. That's of course no surprise to me, having

chosen to study linguistics at university and seeing how every one of us is affected by language every day. It really must be, then, that it is just the lack of the right media personality that's responsible for the lack of linguistics documentaries on the air. But hold on, doesn't Stephen Fry regularly show a vivid and amorous interest in language? Well, it's no secret to anybody who hasn't totally avoided both radio and television for the last twenty-or-so years that he does, and he might not be a linguist but maybe this love and passion for the subject matter is all that it takes.

Fry's Planet Word (aired Sundays on BBC2) is a series of five one-hour episodes in which Stephen Fry tries to cover the basics of what language is, how we use it and why it is, or should be, important to us. In this program we not only see him ramble on about the beautiful facility that language provides for our personality and culture we are used to hear these things from him, but he takes the role of an active investigator, approaching the topic much like most of those people I happen to strike up a conversation with on a train. He asks the basic questions that people might be interested in. He might not go into much detail when he whizzes from language acquisition in Africa and the UK to constructed languages and the learning of Klingon, then takes the express train to reconstruction and minority languages with a stop at historical linguistics and pale-

ography only to visit Shakespearian English's cousin British Sign Language for a cup of tea and biscuits to then get drunk on swear-words together with Brian Blessed in illustrating how language may be hard-wired and connected to other systems in our brains, but



Photo: Marco Raaphorst

hell, this is pretty much the same sort of random bits and bobs that I remembered after my first semester at uni. No matter what the Telegraph's James Walton, who in his review complains about the apparent lack of depth, might think, I believe the level of detail is just right for what I make out to be the purpose of this program. There is no reason to scare people off on their first friendly encounter with "popular linguistics" by starting them off with a basic course on the workings of linguistic theory and the latest issues in neurolinguistics. I have to agree with the Guardian's Sam Wollaston when he writes that "Linguistics isn't natural television" and

that “you need someone like [Fry] for a show like this” – and that his is exactly the right way to bring to the public the basic questions of linguistics. Oh sure, I would have wished for more than two minutes here and there with Steven Pinker and to know some more about this or that, but we have to think realistically here: the general public don’t have much of a background with languages. It’s not like physics or biology, where once upon a time we all had to learn some basics – so if you haven’t taken English Language A-levels and in doing so paid a lot of attention to the background stuff, you are very unlikely to know any of these basics. Also, as I already said above, if these roughly five hours are enough to present in a interesting and concise manner pretty much what someone might remember from their first semester as a linguistics undergrad at university, I’d tip my hat to that. I’m also sure that all my fellow linguists will agree that if someone who has seen this program doesn’t after ask us how many languages we speak when we tell them that we do “linguistics” that would be something!

On another note there is also an accompanying book “Planet Word” available, which is primarily authored by Dr J.P. Davidson, who is a BBC producer and director and otherwise known as the BBC’s resident anthropologist. The book aims to give some more coverage to the areas touched upon in the show, however I have not yet had a chance to browse a copy of it. While the program will have completed its airing schedule and likely not be available on BBC iPlayer anymore by the time this is published, there was a DVD version announced, which should be

released on the 6th of February next year. So if you feel anything like me you should surely consider watching out for either a repeat or the DVD, as this will make a great watch for the family, friends and any other non-linguist acquaintances you might feel could benefit from a bit of light linguistics awareness presented in a species-appropriate, Fry-typical format. And knowing you could follow up with the accompanying book and your own insights on the next occasion comes as an added bonus. For once I would say this demonstrates well that language is a topic as televisable as any science, and all that with a pleasant after-taste – well done Stephen!

Florian Breit

Department Hoodies

Orders for this year’s hoodies are now being taken. If you are interested in purchasing one, please visit the BLS Office to fill in an order form as soon as possible. We have a wide variety of colours to choose from, which means we will easily be recognised in semester two! The price for a hoodie will be £18.

Stuart Smith

Keep in touch with the BLS

We now have a new website which can be found at <http://bls.phpws.org/home>.

We are now also on Facebook (new page!) and on Twitter: <http://on.fb.me/BangorLinguists>.

<http://bit.ly/BLStweet> (English)

<http://bit.ly/CIBtweet> (Welsh)

There are also some year groups on Facebook, named “Linguistics & English Language ‘XX”, where “XX” is the year of graduation (e.g. ‘12 for the current third years). Make sure to join!

Contributors

Chief Editor

Kathryn Barlow

Editorial Board

Florian Breit

Matt Jackson

Bethan Kemp

Contributors

Allys Clipsham

Alun Derwydd-Jones

Harry Jansen

Stuart Smith

