

# ENGLink

AUTUMN 2020  
I S S U E

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Published in  
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Journal



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# HK\$1.19M Granted for Research Projects

The Department has been awarded HK\$1.19M for two research projects as part of the 2020/21 General Research Fund (GRF) by the Research Grants Council (RGC). Congratulations to Professor Kathleen Ahrens and Dr Renia Lopez as the principal investigators of the two projects. This encouraging result will continue to drive us to excel in our research!

**Project title: Gesture processing in foreign language learners: A study to assess the correlation in language proficiency and gesture-speech processing mechanisms at different stages of language learning**

Principal Investigator: **Dr Renia Lopez**

Duration: **1 January 2021 – 31 December 2023 (36 months)**

Funding Awarded: **HK\$666,500**

Gestures are a—mostly ignored—window into speakers' thinking processes. In second and foreign language (FL) acquisition, studies of gestures are crucial because learners use gestures for communicative and psychological functions related to language learning. Gestures are under-represented in this field and in linguistics, where a comprehensive theoretical foundation as to how gestures develop with proficiency is still missing.



This proposal presents the first long term, multi-participant, longitudinal gesture vs. proficiency study. It will develop a gesture-speech processing mechanism model through quantitative and qualitative analysis of gestures in FL learning, focusing on the pragmatic and semantic meaning of gestures. Data will be collected over a period of three years from at least 40 Cantonese learners of English as a foreign language and will analyze their gestures in three steps.

A proficiency-based gesture model would provide a robust and defensible framework for effective language instruction, supporting the use of various pedagogical methodologies at different proficiency points, such as explicit vs. implicit teaching. The outcomes of this study have the potential to position Hong Kong at the forefront of FL gesture research and to contribute to the field of gesture by developing a new dynamic model, which could serve as a reference point for other FL educators.

**Project title: Metaphor, Gender, and Persuasion: Influencing judgments through source domain manipulation**

Principal Investigator: **Professor Kathleen Ahrens**

Duration: **1 January 2021 – 31 December 2023 (36 months)**

Funding Awarded: **HK\$526,655**

When pitching for venture capital, women have anecdotally argued that they have greater success using source domains associated with masculinity. However, in the field of scientific research, the literature shows that the opposite has held true. Since only limited source domains have been tested in previous works, and since no studies have been completed related to pitching venture capital, there remains room for further study. Moreover, as previous work has postulated that recognition may influence a reader's subsequent reasoning about a particular issue when metaphors are flagged as metaphors (i.e., by saying 'literally' before a metaphor in a process known as intensification), this may provide another avenue for exploration.



This project will examine how metaphor use influences outcomes—thus advancing our understanding of the interplay between metaphor, gender, and persuasion. The project will also impact how men and women striving to position themselves as competent and worthy of venture capital funding, and by extension any major project or prize, can judiciously draw on metaphors from particular source domains to best guarantee success.

# DEPARTMENT UPDATES

## BAESP Student Jenny Cheuk Receives the “Outstanding Student, Faculty of Humanities” Award 2019/20



Jenny receives the award from President Professor Jin-Guang Teng.

Jenny Cheuk, a fresh graduate of the BA (Hons) in English Studies for the Professions (BAESP) programme, received the “Outstanding Student, Faculty of Humanities” award 2019/20. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the award presentation originally scheduled for February was cancelled. A small gathering was arranged in July instead where Jenny received the award certificate together with seven awardees from other PolyU academic departments.

In her written remarks, Jenny said the key to success in life and in one’s studies is “to stay curious”. She said she has always had a strong desire to learn and explore new things and grasps every chance she can to learn and challenge herself.

During Jenny’s university life, she was actively engaged in various cultural exploration activities, including an academic exchange to Spain and the Global Student Ambassador Scheme. Through interactions with people of different cultures, she was able to enhance her cultural awareness and broaden her global vision. According to Jenny, these experiences motivated her into developing a self-initiated social integration project in school with friends who shared similar visions.

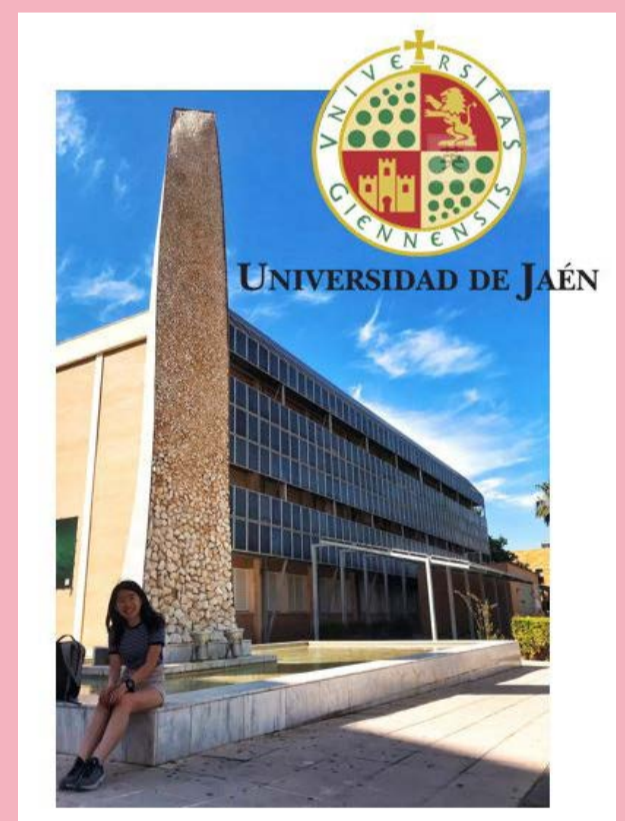
Jenny believes that maintaining a “childlike” curiosity is perhaps the key to her personal growth. She has noticed that when people get older, they tend to be more cautious about raising questions since they are afraid of offending others or of reflecting poorly on themselves. In her remarks, Jenny further emphasised that by recognising the limits of our knowledge and challenging our current assumptions, our desire for life-long learning can be reborn.

In addition to her outstanding academic performance, Jenny also acted as the Department’s Student Ambassador from September to December 2019, where she helped with a district-based seminar and took part in a sharing video to promote the BAESP to secondary school students.

We wish Jenny a bright and meaningful future upon her graduation!



Jenny attended the University of Jaén in Spain for a six-month exchange programme in 2019 where she gained valuable academic, cultural, and personal experience.



The overseas service-learning experience in Kyrgyzstan allowed Jenny to understand the local healthcare situation and learn to work in a more flexible way under different conditions.

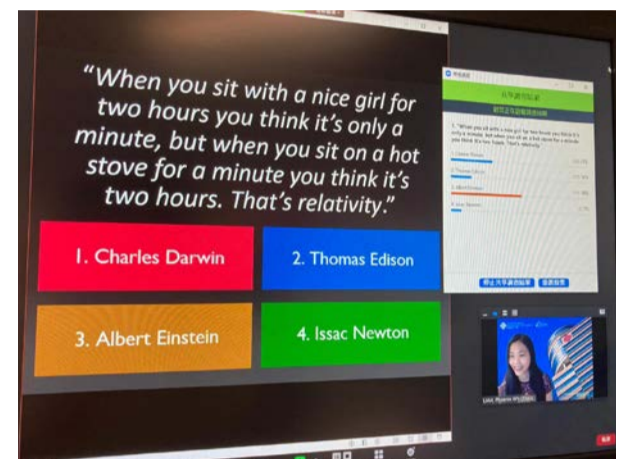
# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## PolyU Summer Programme 2020 – English Around You (5 August 2020)

About 160 S3 to S5 students from over 80 secondary schools took part in an online summer programme organised by the Department under the theme “English Around You”. Participating students learned how English can be used in different situations and became familiar with useful English communication skills that are used to solve real-world problems through three practical workshops titled “The Fashion of Fashionable Language”, “Multilingualism in the City”, and “Solving Crime through Linguistics”. According to the post-event survey, more than 90% of students in attendance enjoyed the programme and indicated they would recommend it to their friends.

The event was part of the online PolyU Summer Programme 2020, which was coordinated by the Secondary School Relations Team of the Academic Registry. The aim of the programme was to promote PolyU and its undergraduate programmes to local secondary school students.

Professor Bernadette Watson, Associate Head of the Department, welcomes students to the Department’s online summer programme.

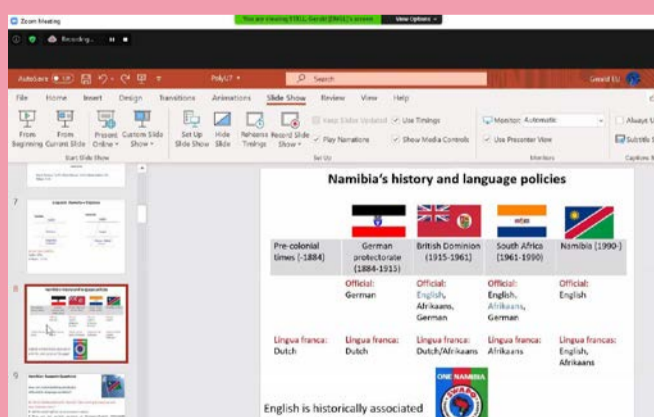


During the “Solving Crime through Linguistics” workshop, Dr Phoenix Lam, Associate Programme Leader of the BA in English Studies for the Professions, introduces students to authorship studies—an area of linguistics—and how authorship studies can help to solve crime in authentic settings.

## Departmental Online Seminars

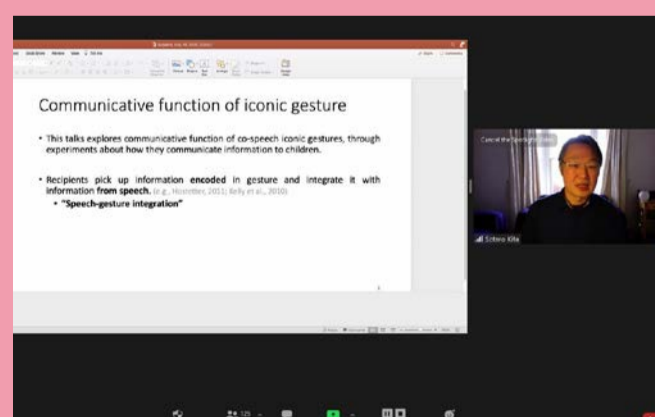
### 1. Postcolonial nation-building and language variation: Linguistic fault lines and convergence in Namibia (14 September 2020)

English replaced Afrikaans, becoming the official language and lingua franca of Namibia, an ethnolinguistically diverse African country, upon her independence in 1990. Dr Gerald Stell of our Department illustrated his findings on the emergence of new L2 varieties in multi-ethnic postcolonial settings to about 90 participants on Zoom. He examined the Afrikaans and English phonetic features elicited from an ethnolinguistically representative sample and found that Whites still align with South African norms while Blacks are moving away from these and mutually converging around local 'compromise' features that are often not directly traceable to indigenous languages.



### 2. What do iconic gestures communicate to children? (25 September 2020)

Iconic gestures facilitate word learning and event memory for children by directing children's attention to the important part of a scene. In this joint online seminar on Zoom with the International Society for Gesture Studies – Hong Kong, Professor Sotaro Kita from the University of Warwick, the United Kingdom, discussed how these gestures work together with speech and convey information to three-to-five-year-old children. He explained that these iconic gestures not only highlight the action a novel verb refers to, but also help children gain the general knowledge that verbs tend to refer to actions. Therefore, iconic gestures bring a broad range of beneficial effects to children in communicative and learning situations. This seminar attracted over 140 participants.



# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## Career Workshop Series for BAESP Students (June & July 2020)



Vivian and Jonathan share their own experience on various sustainability projects and explain how the communication skills of English-major graduates provides the graduates with an edge in this industry.

The Department organised a Career Workshop Series on "Career Readiness and Skills Development for the Sustainability Industry" for students of the BA in English Studies for the Professions (BAESP) programme.

The Series offered three practical workshops between June and July, including a career planning exercise, a case study, and sharing related to the sustainability industry. Through the workshops, BAESP students were able to learn more about the industry and learn ways of making better use of their advantages as English-major graduates.

The workshops were delivered by two voluntary instructors, Miss Vivian Leung, who is a BAESP alumna of 2014, and her working partner Mr Jonathan Ho. They both have experience working on sustainability projects with different Hong Kong and overseas organisations and are the cofounders of the Leaders for Good Initiative, which aims to nurture individuals to become capable and ethical leaders ready to face global challenges and to create a sustainable and just future for all.

We would like to thank Vivian and Jonathan for introducing the sustainability industry to our students and for providing them with valuable advice and guidance on how to prepare for a career in this industry.

## Online Orientation Events for the New Academic Year

It is the practice of the Department to arrange a face-to-face orientation at the beginning of every new academic year to help new students transition smoothly into their studies. The orientation for the 2020-21 academic year was moved to an online format due to the COVID-19 situation.

### 1. Programme Orientation for BA Students (31 August 2020)

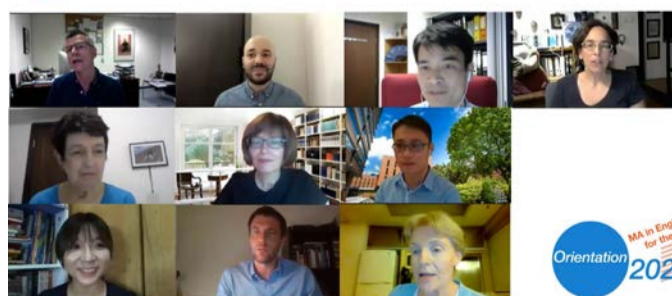
An orientation was held for two groups of students this year: (i) students promoted from Year 1 of the Broad Discipline of Language, Culture, and Communication (BDLCC) who chose to major in BAESP in the coming three years; and (ii) Year 1 students admitted directly to the BAESP with the new arrangement from September 2020. After welcoming over 80 students, Department Head Professor Hans Ladegaard introduced the participating academic staff to the students. Programme Leader Dr Dennis Tay then gave an overview of the BAESP programme curriculum structure and its study pathways. Following this, students were then introduced to the different programmes available to them during their studies, including overseas exchange, service learning, and Work-Integrated-Education (WIE) by the responsible academic staff. A colleague from the Student Affairs Office was also invited to explain the General University Requirements.



Prof. Hans Ladegaard introduces the Department's academic staff to the students.

### 2. Programme Orientation for MA Students (2 September 2020)

Over 100 new students from the MA in English Studies for the Professions (MAESP) programme took part in the online orientation. The event started with a welcome speech from Department Head Professor Hans Ladegaard, followed by a self-introduction by each participating academic staff about their teaching areas and research. Programme Leader Dr Victor Ho then provided some study tips, which included how students could receive support for learning and the importance of using online learning platforms like Blackboard, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams while online teaching is still adopted. Three MAESP students also shared their study experiences and gave advice on how new students could get the most from their studies.



Most of the MA students are working full-time and only return to campus for one or two classes every week. The online orientation gives them an opportunity to meet the Department's academic staff before face-to-face teaching resumes.

# RESEARCH

## Training Videos to Improve Communication Skills in the Workplace

Mary Daphne Root, an Affiliate Member of the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE), hosted a video series where she shared tips on successful communication practices, conflict resolution techniques, the building and maintaining of relationships in the workplace, and job application advice. The videos were posted on the RCPCE website under the Training section for students as outside-the-classroom learning materials and also for individuals who want to improve their communication skills in the workplace:

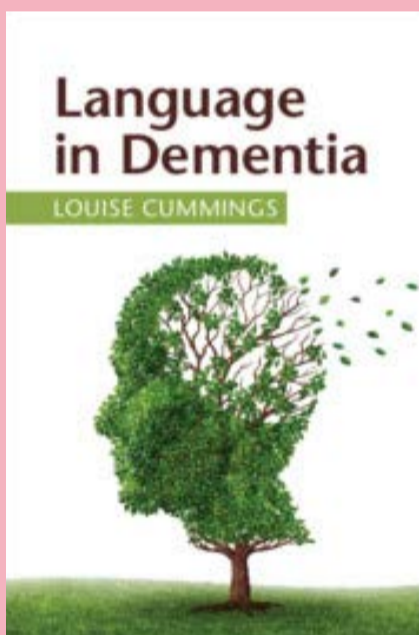


<http://rcpce.engl.polyu.edu.hk/rcpce/video-training.html>

Mary Daphne Root received her Ed.M. in Applied Linguistics from Columbia University and has over a decade of experience working in cross-cultural corporate communications as well as television and live broadcasting.



## New Book by Academic Staff



### Language in Dementia

Dementia is a devastating condition, with profound cognitive changes affecting every aspect of an individual's functioning. In this book, Professor Louise Cummings undertakes a comprehensive examination of language and communication in individuals with cognitive impairment and dementia. Each chapter covers a specific neurodegenerative disorder, and addresses the epidemiology, aetiology, pathophysiology, prognosis, and clinical features, along with the assessment and treatment of these disorders by speech-language pathologists. Many examples of language from individuals with neurodegenerative conditions are also included. The book is suitable reading for all medical and health professionals, including speech-language pathologists, clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists, geriatricians, neurologists, and psychiatrists.



More information about the book:  
<https://cup.org/2RVWXXJ>

## Recent Research Publications

Burgers, C. & Ahrens, K. (2020). Change in metaphorical framing over time: Metaphors of trade in 225 years of State of the Union addresses (1790-2014). *Applied Linguistics*, 41(2), 260-279. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amy055>

Chen, L., & Hu, G. (2020). Mediating knowledge through expressing surprises: A frame-based analysis of surprise markers in research articles across disciplines and research paradigms. *Discourse Processes*, 57, 659-681.

Cummings, L. (2020). *Language in dementia*. Cambridge University Press.

Gasiorek, J., Weatherall, A., & Watson, B. (2020). Interactional adjustment: Three approaches in language and social psychology. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(1), 102-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20965652>

Ladegaard, H.J. & Phipps, A. (2020). Intercultural research and social activism. *Language & Intercultural Communication*, 20(2), 67-80.

Schluter, A.A. (2020). Atatürk's long shadow: Standard Turkish speakers as younger, more successful, and more attractive than their Kurdish-accented regional counterparts. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1822851>

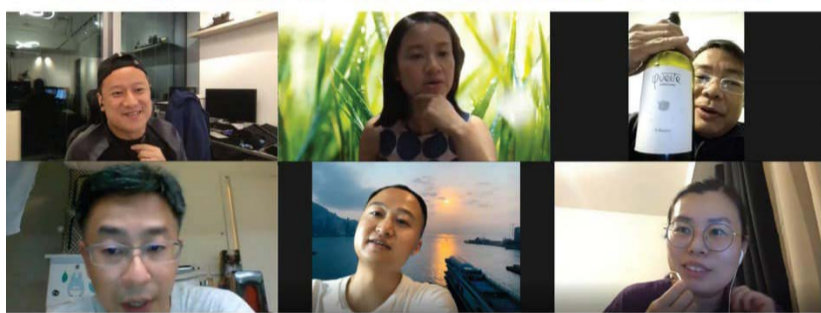
Stell, G. (2020). Shifting prestige norms in post-colonial contexts: interpreting phonetic trends in Namibia's lingua francas. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1786574>

Tay, D. (Ed.). (2020). Metaphor in mental healthcare [special issue]. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 10(2).

# ALUMNI NEWS

## Annual General Meeting of the Department of English Alumni Association (14 August 2020)

### DEAA Annual General Meeting 2019/20



DEAA Chairperson Dr Amy Suen (first row, middle) discusses ideas for future activities with other DEAA members at the AGM.

The PolyU Department of English Alumni Association (DEAA) held a virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM) to catch up with its members and to discuss possible upcoming alumni activities.

At the beginning of the AGM, an alumna of the BA in English for Business and Professional Communication (BAEBPC), Mr Perphy Woo, who is Managing Director of his own company Opium Ventures, was invited to share his experience in coping with the economic downturn during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

After this sharing session, DEAA Chairperson Dr Amy Suen invited attending members to brainstorm possible activities that the Association can organise to maintain a connection with its members. Virtual wine tastings, mini concerts, and movie nights were among some of the suggested options. The DEAA welcomes additional ideas from other members.

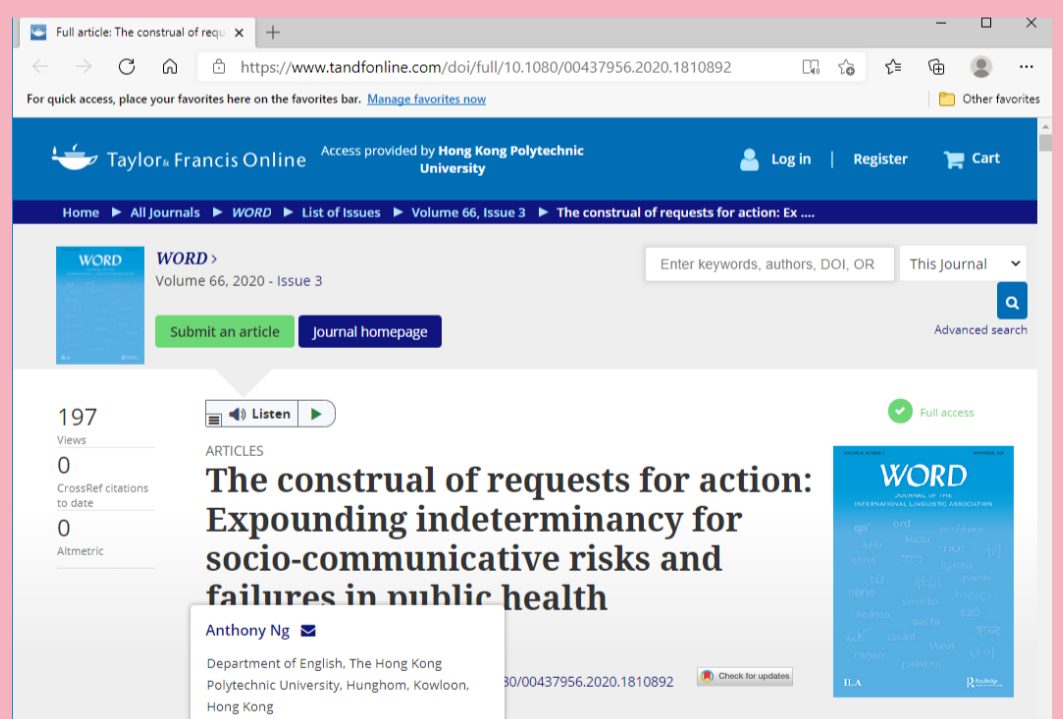


Alumni of the Department who have yet to become a member of the DEAA are invited to submit an online application via this link: <https://www.fhkpuaa.org.hk/Join-Us>

## Research Paper of MA Research Project Published in Linguistics Journal

A research paper by one of our 2018 MA graduates, Anthony Ng, was published in the September issue of *WORD*, a quarterly academic journal by the International Linguistic Association (ILA) published by Taylor & Francis online and in print.

The paper, titled “The construal of requests for action: Expanding indeterminacy for socio-communicative risks and failures in public health” and based on Anthony’s MA thesis, discusses the use of an ideational approach to examine healthcare communication as instances of exchanges of social meanings in a semiotic system according to institutional roles, accountabilities, counterparty risks, and power differentials. 1,206 instances of construals (processes) were quantitatively and qualitatively examined as “requests for action” or “references of information” in government “health advice letters” to educational institutions in Hong Kong, drawing upon resources of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Consciousness. Recommendations are also suggested based on the findings from this research.



Professor Christian Matthiessen was the supervisor of Anthony’s thesis, and he encouraged Anthony to submit an abstract of his thesis to an international refereed conference in Portugal in 2019, where Anthony presented very successfully. Anthony has expressed his gratitude to the early guidance and encouragement by Prof. Matthiessen in helping the paper get published in an international journal.



Link to the full paper:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00437956.2020.1810892>