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Passing on the Baton



Professor Hans J Ladegaard took up the headship of the Department in September 2015 and finished his term at the end of August 2021.



Prof. Ladegaard actively communicated with staff and students during his tenure as Head of the Department.

There is something healthy about a system that expects leaders to step down after a period of time and pass on the baton to somebody else. At PolyU, heads are expected to step down after six years, and I believe this is a good system. No leader can give his/her utmost to a job indefinitely, and no leader should be in charge indefinitely no matter how good they are.

Being Head of Department is no walk in the park! It means attending meetings galore, responding to emails galore, and writing QA reports galore. And because we are all so frantically busy, we may sometimes lose sight of the primary goal: research and education. Universities have become focused on metrics, and it seems that academics now have to document the value of everything they say, write, and do. I'm not arguing that we should not be accountable, but I worry sometimes that we lose sight of the human factor: the need to encourage and support our students – and each other. When I joined PolyU and was asked to share my vision, I said I wanted the Department to be a happy place to work and study. That is still my vision.

Given the amount of work, why would anyone sign up to be Head voluntarily? I sometimes asked myself that question, but I always knew what the answer was: because of the Department. I have had the privilege to work with an amazing group of colleagues: committed, dedicated and hard-working. I have always felt unwavering support – from academic and non-academic staff alike – and that is the reason I have enjoyed being Head, despite the hard work.

And when I look back, there were many highlights: every time a bright PhD student passed his/her viva with flying colours, I was delighted; every time a hard-working colleague was promoted, I was happy; when students told me in Staff-Students Consultative meetings that our teachers were outstanding, I rejoiced; and when I realised that 18 research-track colleagues published 102 journal articles, book chapters and books in 2020/21, I was proud. But much more important than research output and high SFQ scores are the collegiality, helpfulness, and team-spirit I have experienced in the past six years.

THANK YOU to a wonderful team: from General Office staff, IT and Marketing to Visiting Lecturers (who saved me time and again by accepting to teach classes with very short notice) and all academic staff. It has been a great pleasure and privilege to work with you!

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

BA Graduates Enjoy Promising Career Prospects

According to the 2020 PolyU Graduate Employment Survey, the average starting salary of graduates from our BA in English Studies for the Professions (BAESP) programme was HK\$17,639, which is the highest among the three academic departments in the Faculty of Humanities (FH). The BAESP was also the only programme within FH to register an increase (+4.6%) from the previous year. In addition, a survey by JobsDB on the employment status of 1,200 Hong Kong tertiary students and graduates in 2020 indicated the average salary of our graduates was higher than the overall average of the surveyed Hong Kong tertiary graduates.

Ninety-five percent of our BAESP graduates were employed full-time or decided to pursue further studies within their year of graduation. The top three careers by earning capacity were Administration & Management (average salary: HK\$19,484); Sales & Marketing (average salary: HK\$15,403); and Teaching/Research (average salary: HK\$12,703).

Our BA programme (the BAESP was retitled to the BA in English and Applied Linguistics (BAEAL) starting with September 2021 admissions) helps prepare students to become exemplary English language professionals ready for the demands of the 21st century. Our graduates are trained to be proficient and confident communicators and users of English, as preferred by many potential employers!



Prize Presentation of the ENGL New Logo Design Competition



Prof. Bernadette Watson admires Abby's design and says the new logo visualises the meaning of communication.

When presenting the award virtually to Abby, our Professor Bernadette Watson said she was impressed by how the logo visualises the meaning of communication. She admired Abby's work and viewed it as having both creative and aesthetic appeal.

The new title reflects our status as an interdisciplinary department that features linguistics and communication experts from all around the world. This diversity is also the hallmark of our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and is reflected in the wide range of subjects that students can take at these two levels. And the new title is also synonymous with our tagline, which is "Excelling in Professional Communication".

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Nurturing Young Researchers via the Junior Research Mentoring Programme

The Department took part in a new Junior Research Mentoring Programme (JRMP) launched by the Academic Registry of PolyU which aims to introduce secondary students to research projects to explore broader knowledge and to help them make informed university programme choices. The programme ran for 3 months, from May to August 2021, and close to 100 students from 36 local secondary schools and international schools joined. They participated in 36 research projects offered by different academic departments.

Seven of these students engaged in three research projects under the training and supervision of our academic staff:

1.Changes in verbal and non-verbal behaviour as proficiency in English develops (Research Leader: Dr Renia Lopez)

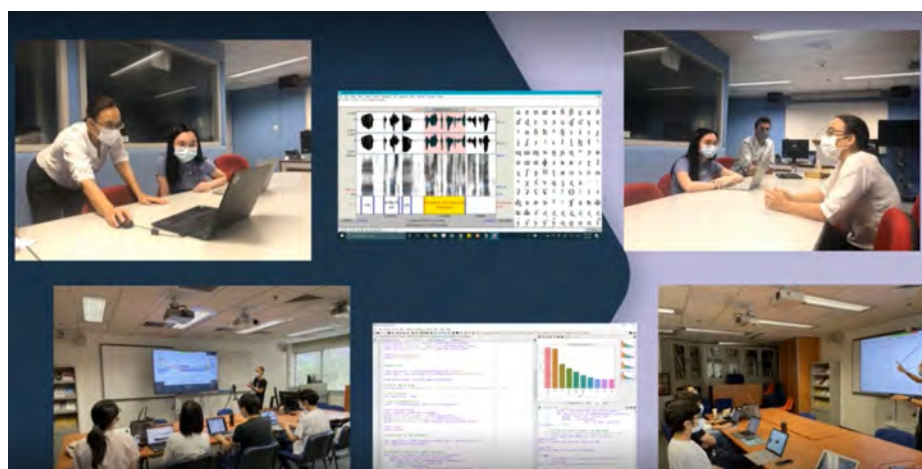
This project investigated how our communicative skills change with proficiency. A major part of this project included recording learners of English over a period of two years and comparing their performance when carrying out oral communicative tasks (similar to the ones used by the Cambridge B2 First Assessment). The students were involved in all aspects of the project, including collecting the data; editing the material (the videos); transcribing selected extracts; and analysing the data collected. They also received training in Praat and ELAN, the software used in the project for the transcriptions.

2.Language, social media, and time (Research Leader: Dr Dennis Tay)

Many people, especially younger individuals, post on social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. As such, it is worth exploring how our language changes subtly, or sometimes dramatically, across time on these platforms. What could the results of such an analysis teach us about the dynamics of social media, language use, and ourselves? The students involved in this project were able to acquire valuable academic and research skills, including developing a more thorough understanding of discourse analysis, statistical analysis, data searching on the internet, the basics of the Python programming language, and working together as a team to solve intellectual and practical problems. They also learned how verbal and numerical reasoning can be combined in research and life.

3.Leveraging ‘uncertainty’ during a health crisis: A comparative analysis of the use of hedges in the speeches of four international political leaders during 2020 (Research Leader: Dr Margo Turnbull)

Speeches given by political leaders during a time of crisis are important political tools in the management of uncertainty and public anxiety. At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in January 2020, there was very little knowledge about the novel coronavirus, infection routes, and mortality rates. Political leaders had to balance what was known and unknown as they responded to local situations and introduced infection control guidelines. This research analyses uncertainty as a discursive tool that is used to build trust with citizens. The students that took part in this project have learnt about compiling and using corpora of speeches made by international leaders to explore how uncertainty was managed and leveraged by these speakers at key time points during the first six months of the health crisis.



Participating students receive valuable learning experience about language research by working with Dr Renia Lopez and Dr Dennis Tay in their research projects.



Dr Margo Turnbull (second from right) attends the JRMP Closing Ceremony on 20 August 2021 with students and project associate of her research project.

EVENT

HIGHLIGHTS

PolyU Summer Programme 2021 – English Around You (5 August 2021)



Participating students have a fun and interactive face-to-face learning experience with our teaching staff during the activities.

Forty-five Secondary 4 to 5 students from about 30 secondary schools experienced “English Around You” through activities organised by the Department under the PolyU Summer Programme 2021. Participating students learned how to use English communication skills to solve real-world problems effectively in both local and global multilingual settings and discovered that English can also be “applied” like science through three practical workshops titled “The Tools of Persuasion”, “Inclusive Language and Media”, and “Talking Together: Communication Between Doctors, Nurses, and Patients”. According to a post-event survey, all students in attendance enjoyed the programme and over 95% indicated they would recommend it to their friends.

Departmental Online Seminar

Performing metadiscourse in asynchronous versus synchronous student presentations (27 September 2021)

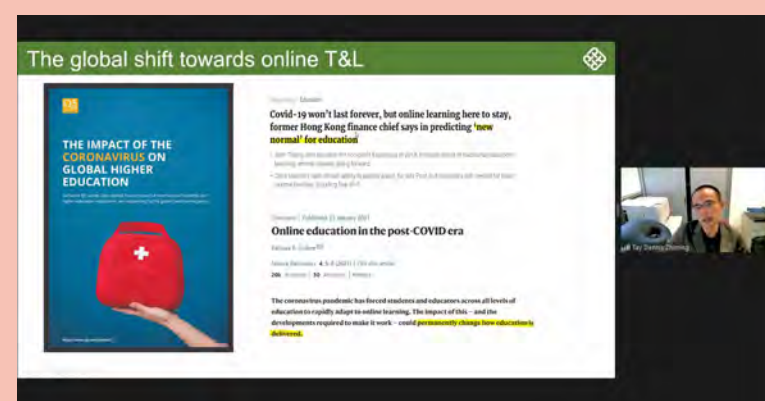
Professor Annelie Ädel from the English Department at Dalarna University, Sweden, used a reflexive approach to metadiscourse and led a discussion with over 170 participants on Zoom where she asked “How is metadiscourse used in student presentations?” Professor Ädel used synchronous and asynchronous student presentation material from an MA programme in Applied Linguistics as examples to illustrate functional taxonomy. Professor Ädel also presented some quantitative results based on her second research question: “To what extent are there differences in the use of metadiscourse that can be associated with the two communicative contexts (synchronous versus asynchronous)?”



Joint Online Seminars with the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE)

Modeling classroom language pre and during COVID-19 for critical reflection (6 September 2021)

COVID-19 forced a global shift towards online pedagogy that has challenged many institutions, teachers, and students. For those in higher education, it has also motivated research and critical reflection on new and taken-for-granted practices alike. While much of this research rightly focuses on policy, attitudes, and digital technologies, more could also be said about how language use has adapted to or been affected by the online classroom. In a Zoom seminar with over 170 participants, our Dr Dennis Tay shared his personal reflections and lessons learnt from his own language use in the same undergraduate course pre-COVID (2019/20) and during COVID (2020/21). Dr Tay illustrated the quantification of language using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, the basic use of generalised linear mixed models to compare language between semesters, and hierarchical clustering to discern stylistically similar language “blocks” and transitions within semesters.



A recording of this seminar is available on the Department's YouTube channel:
<https://youtu.be/95LWriPIKnE>

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Online Orientation Events for the New Academic Year

It is the practice of the Department to arrange a face-to-face orientation at the start of every new academic year to welcome new students and help them transition smoothly into their studies. Because of the COVID-19 situation, the orientations for the 2021-22 academic year were done via a hybrid format.

1. Programme Orientation for BA Students (24 August 2021)

An orientation was held for two groups of students this year: (i) Senior Year students admitted to Year 3 of the BA in English Studies for the Professions (BAESP) programme; and (ii) Year 1 students for the BA in English and Applied Linguistics (BAEAL) programme, which was retitled from the BAESP in September 2021. Department Head Professor Hans Ladegaard gave his welcoming remarks at the event venue physically and introduced the participating academic staff to students in the room and to those joining online. Programme Leader Dr Max Diaz then gave an overview of the 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. Student representatives were also selected at the end of the activity.



Dr Max Diaz explains the roles of student representatives at the orientation and encourages students to volunteer to help.

2. Programme Orientation for MA Students (28 August 2021)

Around 110 new students from the MA in English Studies for the Professions (MAESP) programme took part in the event, with 50 of them attending physically. The activity started with a welcoming 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 highlighted what students can obtain during their study at the Department, which included quality education, strong administrative support, and excellent support for learning, such as academic advising, seminars and workshops, and user-oriented online learning platforms. One current MAESP student and two fresh graduates also shared their study experiences and gave advice on how new students could get the most from their studies.



Dr Victor Ho gives useful advice to new students at the orientation on how to plan their study and explains the arrangements for hybrid classes in the first semester.

RESEARCH

New Book by Academic Staff on Research in Speech-Language Pathology

Our Professor Louise Cummings published a new book titled “Language Case Files in Neurological Disorders”. The book features case studies of ten individuals with acquired neurological disorders that have implications for speech, language, and communication. With a brief medical overview of each condition, Prof. Cummings reveals each disorder's clinical presentation and language and communication features. The detailed linguistic analysis on the carefully assembled narrative captures the impact of each neurological disorder on an individual's daily life and social activities. It further explains the complex interrelationship between language, communication, and cognitive and motor symptoms.

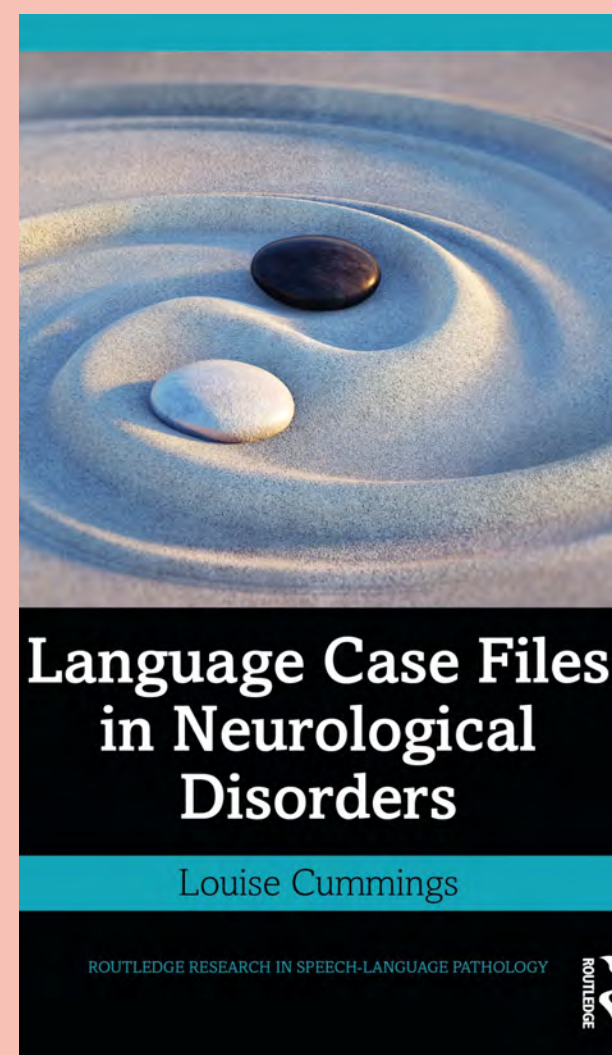
The book will be of interest to students of all levels, researchers, and clinicians in speech-language pathology and related disciplines, including neurology, psychiatry, and psychology.



More information about the book:
<https://bit.ly/3rET0v5>



A video with an overview of the book by Prof. Cummings is available on the Department's YouTube channel:
<https://youtu.be/D6bqnZHz7xs>



Recent Research Publications

Consoli, S. (2021). The teacher-researcher & student-participant relationship: What risks can we take? In C. Hall & C. Cunningham (Eds.), *Vulnerabilities, challenges and risks in applied linguistics*. Multilingual Matters.

Curran, N. M. (2021). Discrimination in the gig economy: The experiences of Black online English teachers. *Language and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/009500782.2021.1981928>

Jiang, M., Shen, X., **Ahrens, K.**, & Huang, C.-R. (2021). Neologisms are epidemic: Modeling the life cycle of neologisms in China 2008-2016. *PLoS One*, 16(2): e0245984. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245984>

Lin, P. (2021). In search of the optimal mode of input for the acquisition of formulaic expressions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 55(3), 1011-1023. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3055>

Neupane Bastola, M., & **Hu, G.** (2021). “Chasing my supervisor all day long like a hungry child seeking her mother!”: Students’ perceptions of supervisory feedback. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 70. DOI: 10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101055

Tay, D. (2021). COVID-19 press conferences across time: World Health Organization vs. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In R. Breeze, K. Kondo, A. Musolff, & S. Vilar-Lluch (Eds.), *Pandemic and crisis discourse. Communicating COVID-19* (pp. 13–30). Bloomsbury.

Watson, B. M., (2021). Taking a positive psychology perspective: A rejoinder to “collecting qualitative data during a pandemic”. *Communication and Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cam.19747>

Xu, S. B., & Hu, G. (2021). A cross-disciplinary and severity-based study of author-related reasons for retraction. *Accountability in research: Policies and Quality Assurance*. DOI: 10.1080/08989621.2021.1952870