**Session 1 (Chair: Julia Hüttner)**

## Julia Davydova (Feldkirch):

## EFL Adolescents' Use of English in the Era of New Digital Media: An Empirical Investigation

The study reported here sets out to investigate to what extent the Generation Z EFL speakers employ English in their linguistic practices on digital media platforms and how these compare to the patterns of English use on other social occasions. To that end, 630 adolescents (aged 14 to 18) from five grammar schools were targeted in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg. Results of a 27-item survey pinpoint young individuals' habitual reliance on English for (i) socializing on Facebook, Twitter, and similar platforms; (ii) consuming content on YouTube and TikTok and (iii) watching series on various streaming platforms. Simultaneously, English is also revealed as an important linguistic variant underpinning their daily communicative practices, notably interactions with peers. The multiple linear regression analysis pinpoints statistically significant associations between learners' habits of digital media use and their in-group conversational practices. This is interpreted as a sign indicating the emergence of ESL-like qualities in a traditionally EFL setting. It is argued that consuming and engaging with digital media products through English may be affecting the psycholinguistic *modus operandus* of a noticeable cohort of young EFL speakers, who become increasingly bilingual as a result of those practices. Consequently, it is this adjusted psycholinguistic state (from predominantly monolingual to increasingly bilingual) that motivates the addition of English to the sociolinguistic repertoire of conversational practices.

## Irene A. Böhm (Vienna):

## The Sound of Structure: How Wordform Shapes Avoid Morphotactic Ambiguity in Language Learning and Change

I investigate whether languages prefer wordform shapes that indicate word structure unambiguously, using artificial language learning experiments and diachronic corpus studies.

Recent research in the history of English suggests that sound changes may favour wordforms whose phonotactic shapes reliably signal morphological structure over ambiguous ones (Baumann et al., 2019; Matzinger & Ritt, 2022; but Ritt & Kaźmierski, 2016). This preference has been attributed to processing advantages: words that can be identified as complex forms based on their phonotactic shape– such as *eggs* or *hugs* with the shape /Xgz/ – are processed more quickly and accurately (Post et al., 2008). Because these shapes occur exclusively with complex forms, they indicate the need for decomposition. In contrast, words with phonotactic shapes that appear equally in both simple and complex wordforms – such as /Xnd/ in *hand, find* or *banned, fined* – hinder processing. In such cases, the signalling function is confused, and simple forms are erroneously decomposed (Korecky-Kröll et al., 2014; Calderone et al., 2014). Thus, ambiguous phonotactic shapes should be disfavoured in language change.

I present the findings of four studies on this hypothesis: two artificial language learning experiments on the underlying cognitive mechanisms and two historical corpus analyses. In the experiments, I explore the learnability of predictable versus ambiguous sound shapes and demonstrate that, in an otherwise identical language, ambiguous shapes are harder to learn. In the corpus studies, I examine two sound changes in Early Modern English where a preference for unambiguous shapes may have come into effect: sporadic past tense /-d/ devoicing (e.g., *spoilt*, *burnt*; Lahiri, 2008; Wełna, 2009) and vowel shortening (e.g., /breːd/ > /bred/ 'bread'; Luick, 1914-1920; Pinsker, 1974; Lass, 2000). While ambiguity avoidance was involved in the former (Böhm et al., accepted), competing linguistic pressures appear to have played a more significant role in the latter.

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## Ozan Mustafa (Graz):

## The *it BE that* Construction: Extraposition, Cleft, or Something Different?

This paper deals with the form it BE (not) that + clause. While researchers agree on the fact that the it BE (not) that (henceforth, IBT) form is a type of focus construction, there is no consensus on what type. IBTs have been largely analyzed as either reduced clefts (e.g., Declerck 1992; Delahunty 1995) or extraposition (e.g., Haugland 1992; Hurford 1973). This paper argues that the different analyses arise from the fact that the form is ambiguous between a specificational and an existential reading (Bolinger 2018 [1972]). Consider the following example:

(1) a. For the past three years I have been rehearsing in secret a new effect. I can't even tell either of you what it is. It's not that I don't trust you, but I cannot afford that the tabloids get a hold of this now. (COCA 2008: movie)
b. It is not that I don't trust you that is the reason, but…
c. It is not the case that I don't trust you, but…

In example (1a), the negation can be interpreted in two ways: either as rejecting the reason given in the that-clause for not revealing the secret to the addressee (paraphrased in (1b)), or as rejecting the occurrence of the event/state itself (paraphrased in (1c)). The first interpretation has been associated with a cleft analysis; the second with an extraposition analysis. Drawing on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), this paper investigates (i) what evidence supports these two interpretations of the IBT construction and (ii) whether these interpretations truly correspond to the pragmatic categories of cleft and extraposition. It is argued that existential IBTs encode the (non-)occurrence of an event, while specificational IBTs identify a value for an inferred variable (Declerck 1992), without requiring a covert cleft structure.

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## Session 2 (Chair: Ute Smit)

### Gunther Kaltenböck (Graz):
### Clause-final *so*: Emergence and Function of a New Discourse Marker Use

This paper identifies clause-final *so* as a newly emerged, conventionalised final particle in spoken interaction in American and British English. Drawing on data from various corpora (COCA, COHA, Fisher, BNC, DCPSE), the study highlights the significant increase in frequency in recent decades and argues that it results from a process of grammaticalization, which followed cooptation of the result subordinator *so*. This development has led to the gradual loss of prosodic independence, with clause-final *so* frequently being integrated into the intonation unit of the host clause, and the development of specific discourse functions: On the interpersonal level clause-final *so* initiates a turn-change, while on the textual level it marks retrospective relevance of the host clause.

**Esme Richardson-Owen (Salzburg):**

## Sweet Tastes and Sweet Voices: Sensory Word Ratings Meet Use in Discourse

This study explores whether the sensory meaning potential of adjectives—based on speaker ratings—aligns with how they are used in naturally occurring language. To investigate this, I combine sensory ratings from Lynott et al. (2020) with corpus data from the British National Corpus 2014 (Brezina et al., 2021; Love et al., 2017). The ratings indicate to what extent speakers perceive adjectives and nouns in isolation to evoke sensory experiences. For example, *sweet* is rated primarily as taste- and smell-related, whereas *harsh* has a broader sensory profile across all five modalities: vision, audition, touch, smell, and taste. However, the connection between these ratings and real-life language use remains underexplored.

Previous research suggests perceptual affinities between certain modalities—taste and smell, vision and touch, as well as audition and touch—are reflected in both sensory structure and polysemy patterns (Caballero & Paradis, 2020, 2023, 2025; van de Weijer et al., 2023; Winter, 2019; Hartman & Paradis, 2023). Using a dataset of 412 adjectives and 5732 nouns, I analyzed their combinations in corpus data to test whether speaker-rated sensory associations predict usage patterns.

Mixed-effects regression modelling revealed two main findings: (i) the sensory strengths of adjectives and nouns are robustly correlated between rating data and corpus use, and (ii) adjective frequency is the strongest predictor of their pairing with nouns. Highly frequent sensory adjectives like *sweet* occur across sensory domains—e.g., *sweet taste*, *sweet smell*, *sweet voice*, *sweet face*, *sweet pain*—while low-frequency adjectives, such as the smell-dominant *acrid*, are restricted to specific contexts (*acrid stench*, *acrid taste*). These results highlight the interplay between lexical frequency and sensory specificity in shaping how we express perception in language.

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**Felix Berner (Vienna):**

# It Is Sort of Complicated – Open Questions about the Type Noun *sort (of)*

This paper investigates open questions about the taxonomizing (1) and the qualifying (2) use of the type noun (TN) *sort (of)*.

(1) This tool is **a sort of screwdriver** (iWeb)
(2) I was **sort of proud** (iWeb)

In (1), *sort (of)* expresses a relation between sub- and superordinate classes, and functions as the lexical head with the N2 *screwdriver* as its complement (Keizer 2007; Davidse & Brems 2023). In (2), *sort (of)* indicates the choice of the lexeme *proud* as only applying approximately, and functions as modifier of the lexical head *proud* (Hengeveld & Keizer 2011).

Despite having received considerable attention, some open questions regarding TNs remain. While N2 in the taxonomizing use predominately occurs without a determiner and is thus taken to be non-referential (Keizer 2007), cases such as (3) pose a challenge to that.

(3) Even **the best sort of the waiters** slumbered. (COCA)

Disagreement exists also about cases such as (4) and whether they are instances of the taxonomizing use (Keizer 2007), the semi-suffix use (Denison 2005; Brems & Davidse 2010) or a modifying use of the TN (Davidse 2023).

(4) **A European sorta look** (taken from Davidse et al. 2008)

Finally, it remains unclear whether qualifying *sort (of)* has indeed only pragmatic (i.e. non-truth-conditional) effects, or whether cases such as (5) might have semantic (i.e. truth-conditional) effects.

(5) The chickens are **sort of dead**, but they don't know it**.** (COCA)

This study aims to refine the analyses of *sort (of)* and addresses a number of unresolved issues using corpus-based data.

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**Session 4 (Chair: Hartmut Stöckl)**

## Matthias Mittendorfer (Vienna):
## Contrast and Contrastiveness in Structural Parallelism

Over the years, the notion of Contrast has received considerable attention in the literature (e.g. Halliday, 1967; Molnár, 2002; Repp, 2010, 2016). Despite this, it is yet unclear "whether contrast indeed plays a role in grammar – or, to approach the matter in a more cautious way – in the grammar of particular languages" (Repp, 2016, p. 271). Underlying this uncertainty is the fact that the notion is often only defined intuitively, resulting in different, sometimes even contradictory accounts of its grammatical reflexes. Prosodically, it is assumed that Contrast is marked by a L+H* accent in English (Büring, 2003; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg, 1990). The empirical situation, however, is notably less clear (Hedberg2006; HedbergSosa2007. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to investigate the pragmatic and prosodic features of a type of construction which is often argued to be a "prime [example] of contrastiveness" (Repp, 2010, p. 1339), i.e. structural parallelism. More specifically, the following questions will be explored:

RQ1: Does a prosodic reflex of Contrast exist in the prosody of English? If so, which pitch accent is used for this purpose and how systematic is this relationship?

RQ2: Is Contrast, if formally-marked in the grammar of English, categorical or gradient? In other words, is it sensitive to alternativeness or discourse relations?

The data, consisting of simple and complex parallel structures, is taken from ICE-GB (Nelson et al., 2002) and was analysed from two perspectives, i.e. its information-structural and discourse-relational properties following Riester et al.'s (2018), Brunetti (2024), and Repp (2016), as well as its prosodic features using the ToBI framework (Beckman et al., 2006). It will be shown that, in contrast to what is frequently assumed in the literature, the contrastiveness in structural parallelism crucially depends on the type of discourse relation that holds between the relevant discourse segments.

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## Eva Triebl (Vienna), Georg Marko (Graz):
## The Sweetest Taboo. The Language of Sugar

We are preparing an interdisciplinary workshop on the language of sugar. While our primary interest is discourse analytical, with a focus on how experts and laypeople talk about type-1 and type-2 diabetes, the topic has various other facets, some of them discourse-oriented and others more language system-oriented. Discourse-oriented aspects include the role of sugar in health, cooking and taste, ecology and social justice (e.g., the sugarcane industry), and the economy (e.g., the market for sweeteners). Language system-oriented aspects include the word field of *sugar* (synonyms, antonyms, collocates, and cross-linguistic comparisons) and figurative usages of the word (and related terms denoting sweetness).

Our study will establish a semantic profile of the word *sugar* in English through an in-depth analysis of its usage patterns in various general English corpora, including the Corpus of Contemporary American English, the Corpus of Historical American English, and Sketch Engine's EnTenTen (a corpus of web-based English). This is supposed to provide insights into the historical development of the term, its literal and non-literal meanings, its semantic relationships, and its distribution across sociolinguistic variables, offering a panoramic view of the social, cultural, and historical significance of sugar in the Anglophone world. It should also highlight areas of interest and relevance to the aforementioned workshop.

## Evelyn N. Roth (Salzburg):
## Verbal Cues and Credibility: Accent Effects in Remote Medical Assessment

In tele-healthcare settings, the absence of visual information places heightened importance on verbal communication, potentially magnifying sociolinguistic biases that affect clinical decisions. This research examines how linguistic variation influences pain assessment in telephone triage contexts, where healthcare providers must rely exclusively on auditory information.

Recent sociolinguistic research demonstrates that speech characteristics significantly impact listeners' perceptions of speaker attributes including trustworthyness, competence, and reliability (Levon et al. 2021; Sharma et al. 2022). These judgments become particularly consequential in healthcare settings where patient self-reported symptoms form the primary basis for clinical assessment and subsequent treatment decisions.

This presentation analyzes findings from comparative verbal-guise studies conducted in Ireland and the UK. The research design included two studies: a neutral context experiment involving direction-giving scenarios across five accent varieties (RP, three Irish English varieties, and Polish-accented English), and a medical context study simulating telephone triage situations. In both studies, participants rated recordings across dimensions of prestige, solidarity, and credibility, with the medical study incorporating additional pain assessment metrics. All participants completed questionnaires measuring internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice, current mood states, and linguistic background information.

Preliminary analysis reveals statistically significant connections between accent varieties and evaluation ratings in both contexts. In the neutral scenario, internal motivation to respond without prejudice (Plant and Devine, 1998) interacted signifycantly with accent perceptions, with participant gender emerging as an additional influencing variable. The medical context study demonstrates similar patterns, with potential implications for clinical decision-making in telephone triage environments.

These findings contribute to our understanding of how language-based biases may affect healthcare equity when visual cues are absent. The strand of research has important implications for clinical training programs and the development of more linguistically inclusive protocols in remote healthcare delivery systems.

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**Session 5 (Chair: Dieter Fuchs)**

## Georg Wendt (Vienna): Automated Inequality: Discussing AI in the EFL Literature Classroom through Zachtronics' Video Game *Eliza* (2019)

AI, in the popular contemporary understanding of generative tools such as ChatGPT, is best understood as "layered and interdependent arrangement of technology, institutions and ideology" (McQuillan 2022), which arguably produces many harms on a previously unprecedented scale. An EFL classroom with a commitment towards social justice lends itself to discussing the myriad ways in which AI exacerbates inequalities; yet suitable (genre) literature that speaks to the current technopolitical

moment is difficult to come by. This, at least, is the finding of author Jo Lindsay Walton, who after a thorough review of contemporary AI fiction concludes that "[w]ith respect to AI, it seems that science fiction has been moving through a phase of cumbersomeness, confusion, and distraction" (Walton).

Against this background, I introduce a ludic-literary work of fiction to engage students in topics such as AI in mental health treatment and one's own responsibility in working in the tech sector, the 2019 visual novel video game *Eliza* (Zachtronics). Set in a near-future Seattle, the player takes on the role of Evelyn Ishino-Aubrey, who, after a mysterious three-year absence, returns to the tech company she co-founded to work as an in-person proxy for a virtual counseling app called Eliza. As such, she is asked to closely read the scripts "provided to her in real-time by an AI, leaving her no autonomy over what she says" (Zachtronics). How then may educators put *Eliza* to use to guide students in identifying, analyzing, and challenging the representations of AI and tech work and enable students' critical faculties towards future developments?

My contribution to AAUTE 2025 arises from my ongoing research on (critical) video game literacy, that recognizes video games as "techno-social assemblages" (Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2009), which do not only necessitate a close examination in their own right but, through their interactive, explorative and multimodal nature, are particularly well-suited to critically and thoroughly interrogate other assemblages, such as AI, in EFL literature classroom settings.

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## Christine Schwanecke (Graz):

## Digital/Hybrid 'Shakespeariences': The Case of *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming* (2013)

From *Romeo and Juliet* on Twitter (*Tweet Sorrow*, 2010) to *The Tempest* in virtual reality (*Tempest*, 2020/21) to *Macbeth*-inspired video games (*Lili*, 2025): Shakespearean plays have been increasingly digitalised; they have been 'translated,' i.e., adapted from the page/conventional stage to digital space. They are performed online and consumed online. And they are produced multimodally: video clips, pictures, soundscapes, and texts stimulate all our senses and promise democratic accessibility and an immersive experience of Shakespeare, a real 'Shakespearience.'

By way of a major intermedial and digital Shakespeare production, this paper will study one 21st-century emanation of Shakespearean comedy and discuss it in terms of its accessibility and inclusiveness: *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming*, a digital production that was, in 2013, co-produced by The Royal Shakespeare Company and Google+.

Performed in a hybrid manner, both on- and offline, the production promised to 'democratise' Shakespeare, making his play accessible to broad(er) audiences.

On the basis of the aforementioned production, I aim at inquiring into the exclusivity and inclusiveness of Shakespeare's comedy in the digital age. Turning to material of online archives, I will, firstly, analyse how *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming* was intermedially and multi-modally translated onto the 'digital stage' as well as realised off-line, as 'immersive theatre.' Secondly, I will inquire into the inclusive potential of this particular intermedial adaptation and staging of Shakespeare's original, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Thirdly, I will delineate possible affordances and constraints of a translation in which the separation of stage and auditorium is dispensed with and the audience participates interactively in the production both on- and off-line. Gauging the ways in which this multimodal translation allows democratic participation and affective immersion – or bars people from it –, I will discuss the inclusive potential of semiotically and spatially hybrid Shakespeariences like these.

**Christoph Singer (Innsbruck):**

**"It was not her": Elizabeth Belle and the Ethics of Representation**

In the novel *Dangerous Freedom* (2021), Lawrence Scott depicts the life of Elizabeth d'Aviniere, daughter of Maria Belle, a formerly enslaved woman, and John Lindsay, a British captain in the Royal Navy. Through her father's lineage, Elizabeth was also the great-niece of William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice, who presided over the landmark Somerset- and Zong cases. These familial connections situate her story at the center of contemporary debates surrounding the commemoration of the British slave trade.

A central artefact in these debates is David Martin's 1788 portrait of Elizabeth Belle and her cousin, which has recently become a key artefact in the reconstruction, exploration, and dissemination of Belle's history and the attendant discourses. Drawing on cultural memory studies, this presentation will examine the (narrative) ethics of representation across several media, including the aforementioned painting, Amma Asante's film *Belle* (2013), and Lawrence Scott's novel *Dangerous Freedom* (2021).