

THE GRADUATE CENTRE FOR EUROPE ANNUAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE 2009
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The 2009 Graduate Centre for Europe (GCfE) Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference took place between 16 and 18 April under the title “Europe: A Continent of Paradoxes.” The GCfE was launched in 2005 as a major postgraduate-led and cross-disciplinary initiative which provides an academic and social forum for graduate students with an interest in Europe and in contemporary and historical European matters. The 2009



conference was the third of its kind and built on the success and popularity of the preceding conferences of 2007 and 2008. This year’s full programme included an afternoon of skills sessions for Postgraduate Researchers, a day and a half of plenary panel sessions, as well as two keynote speeches.

The conference attracted more than forty participants from twelve universities, seven of which were outside the UK. Fifteen different nationalities were represented, including three from outside the European Union (the USA, India and Georgia). The international character of the conference was therefore reflected not only in the content of the papers presented, but also in the diverse backgrounds of the participants and the represented institutions. Seventeen papers of extremely high quality were included in five panels under the following headings: “History and Theology,” “Culture and Representation,” “European Identity and Law,” “Politics” and “Culture and Memory.”

As one might expect of a conference which examined the paradoxical nature of the European continent, all of the papers presented provoked stimulating questions and rigorous discussion, engaging and challenging paper-givers and audience members alike. Several participants commented on the thought-provoking and academically-productive nature of such an interdisciplinary conference, since it highlighted a number of ways in which research from across several fields and disciplines (e.g. history, art history, theology, literary studies, political science, cultural studies, law etc.) can be enriched by varied and seemingly unconnected topics and approaches. Four of the five panels were chaired by members of the GCfE’s Postgraduate Steering Committee, making the conference an all-round postgraduate experience which equipped all chairs and presenters with invaluable skills for future conferences.



The skills sessions for Postgraduate Researchers, which took place on the first afternoon, were a particularly popular aspect of the conference. Two initial sessions were offered on “Giving Conference Papers and Preparing to Publish” and “Viva Tips,” and the afternoon was rounded off with a session by the *BJLL*’s own founding General Editors, Laura Hilton and Joshua McEvilla, on “Setting

up and Running an E-Journal.” These sessions not only introduced a variety of skills vital to academic life today in an informative and inspiring way, but also gave participants the chance to get to know each other in a friendly and productive environment before presenting their own work on the following two days.

This year the GCfE was fortunate enough to have two keynote speeches which helped raise the conference profile and added official political and diplomatic dimensions to the debate on Europe and European matters. On the Thursday evening, the Swedish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Staffan Carlsson, gave a speech entitled “Sweden’s EU Presidency: A Green Mission?” which provided an illuminating outline of the challenges and opportunities facing Sweden during its Presidency of the EU which began on 1 July 2009. Birmingham Edgbaston’s local MP, Gisela Stuart, entertained delegates for the third consecutive year on the Friday evening, giving a characteristically provocative, but also extremely sobering, analysis of European politics today.

The academic pursuits of the three days were, of course, supplemented by social activities essential to the conference experience, in the form of a European quiz on the first evening, and of the conference dinner at Staff House on the second. These elements ensured the free-flowing exchange of opinions and experiences that had started in daytime could continue to flow freely ‘after hours,’ and, it is hoped, gave participants the opportunity to turn academic acquaintances into lasting friendships.

The final verdict on the conference was that it was an overwhelming success, and academically and socially rewarding for all involved. The success of the conference was the result of the hard work and outstanding teamwork displayed by all members of the Postgraduate Steering Committee (Tara Windsor, Nicola Corkin, Clare Watters, Matthew Frear, Rachel Slater, Agnieszka Bidzinska, Olga Okan and Alex Standen). The Committee is grateful for support from the GCfE’s academic Director, Dr Nicholas Martin, and members of the Academic Advisory Group, as well as the GCfE’s

administrators. The Committee is currently working towards publishing the proceedings of this year's conference in an online journal (*The Birmingham Journal for Europe*). Meanwhile, preparations have already begun for the next conference which will take place in March 2010.

More information on the Graduate Centre for Europe and its forthcoming events can be found at www.gcfe.bham.ac.uk

THE FIFTH CORPUS LINGUISTICS CONFERENCE 2009 WANG FANG

Following successful Corpus Linguistics Conferences at Lancaster and Birmingham, the jointly-organised Corpus Linguistics Conference 2009 was hosted by the English Department at the University of Liverpool from 20 July to 23 July. Around 380 participants from over forty countries presented their research results in corpus linguistics, greatly appreciating the opportunity to engage with papers, posters and work-in-progress reports, as well as with workshops and colloquia covering various aspects in the field.

The conference began with a workshop and colloquium day on Monday 20 July. Five workshops and seven colloquia addressed current research topics, including the construction and application of parallel and spoken corpora, the use of corpus tools such as Concgram and SketchEngine, and the use of corpora in the fields of literature, and of figurative language, for instance.

The main conference ran from Tuesday 21 to Thursday 23 July. Dr Michaela Mahlberg chaired the opening ceremony in which the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, Professor John Belchem, warmly welcomed delegates. Usually ten parallel sessions took place on each day of the three-day main conference. These were complemented by five plenary sessions. Of the plenary speakers, Professor Douglas Biber addressed delegates with a speech entitled "A Corpus-Driven Approach to Formulaic Language in English: Multi-Word Patterns in Speech and Writing." In this study, Douglas utilised a corpus-driven approach to identify and analyse the most frequent multi-word patterns in two different linguistic spheres: daily conversation and academic writing. He also investigated the ways in which those identified patterns, such as 'it should be noted,' or 'in the case of,' etc. are different in these registers. In his speech about "English in South Asia: corpus-based perspectives on the lexis-grammar interface," Professor Joybrato Mukherjee outlined the current research achievements which various projects at the University of Giessen, Germany, and other collaborating

institutions registered. He also focused on the lexicogrammar of Indian English and Sri Lankan English as two particularly relevant South-Asian varieties and presented various findings from corpus analyses, such as the use of the prototypical ditransitive verb 'give.' He further argued that one must go beyond corpus data for various questions related to speaker attitudes, exonormative and endonormative orientations. Professor Svenja Adolphs gave a very entertaining speech entitled "Corpus, Context and Ubiquitous Computing," representing the different ways in which one may relate measurements of context gathered from multiple sensors to people's use of language. She further discussed some of the issues that arise from the design, representation and analysis of spoken corpora that contain additional measurements of several aspects of text and context. Dr Mike Scott's presentation focused on "Key Cluster and Congram Patterns in Shakespeare," arguing for a methodological move away from single-word Key Words to multiple-word ones which are shown to occur distinctively in individual plays or in the speeches of individual characters. The last plenary was given by Professor Tony McEnery who provided a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of Muslims in the UK, thus highlighting the strength of corpus linguistics in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The conference also included ten parallel sessions of individual paper presentations, namely: corpus compilation; dictionaries and terminology; corpus tools and software; applications; grammar; syntax and morphology; contrastive corpus linguistics; learning and teaching; specialised corpora; and metaphor and discourse analysis. Participants from Europe, North America and Asia presented their corpus research achievements and further engaged in fruitful discussions with the audience and international experts. Furthermore, the posters at the conference demonstrated a series of corpus linguistic research findings ranging from EFL teaching to discourse analysis, while conference participants and poster organisers discussed their research findings.

As a biennial event in corpus linguistics, the 2009 Liverpool conference successfully demonstrated the strength of corpus linguistics in many newly applied domains. At the same time, many international corpus researchers presented their research projects and findings on non-English corpora analyses, thus drawing attention to the advantages of corpus research in wider contexts. Participants from all over the world greatly appreciated and benefited from this event, which promises to advance corpus research in the future.