

The Second NLP Research Conference

Cardiff University

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

It's natural to want reassurance and studies and research can help provide it. Sadly, there hasn't been much available in the field of NLP so it's exciting to learn about some of the research now being carried out.

At the second bi-annual NLP and Research Conference at Cardiff University this July, there were plenty of people happy to share their research with a wider audience.

Covering everything from research techniques and the way musicians create to looking at how NLP can be used to help at risk teenagers society has already given up on, each presentation was thought provoking.

Here are some of the highlights from presenters, organisers and delegates:

Senior Lecturer in Management at Surrey University, Paul Tosey has been an academic inspiration to many in the field of NLP. He says, "I attended my first training course in 1989 and was convenor of the 2008 conference."

“There is some very good work being carried out in education and it is a promising area for further research for me” - Nancy Keranen

A meeting with Karen Moxom, Charles Faulkner and then Suzanne Henwood sowed the seeds for the now biennial NLP and Research Conferences. It comes from "a desire to help improve the quality of inquiry in the field, to continue to build a research community. It provided a forum for people researching in the field to share their work."

Paul's highlights were seeing new people involved with presentations and there as delegates who hadn't been involved in 2008. As far as future conferences go, he'd like to see "a broader theme for the conference so that it encompasses NLP and related practices (e.g. Clean Language) though I'm not yet clear what the common factor would be."

"We need to both gather an evidence base for NLP and also question and challenge some of the assumptions," says **Lisa Wake, Director of Awaken Consulting and Training Services** (www.awakenconsulting.co.uk).

Her tips for people considering starting their own research are to "be

clear about what you're measuring. Be clear about what your process is. Be passionate about it and open to critique at the same time. Look at what works for you and your practice. See if you can measure it and then think about the research bit. Richard Church's notion of Action Based Research is probably the most useful way to start for a beginner."

Lisa had looked forward to the conference for the chance to hear, discuss and challenge ideas but while she enjoyed it, like many, she wished there had been more time (there is talk of extending it for future conferences). "There was a great paper on eye patterns given in 2008 that really did question and review all the evidence so far on eye patterns. We need more like this."

Blane Savage came from the University of the West of Scotland to present on how musicians create. He enjoyed having the "opportunity to meet like minded individuals who had the same passion for NLP as myself." Blane was also very appreciative of the support he'd received from colleagues and world authorities on NLP on the paper he presented.

Nancy Keranen came all the way from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in Mexico to present on expert performances. "After reading an article written by Paul Tosey in *Humanising Language Teaching*. I wrote to Paul and he pointed me towards his website which has a lot of material available. So I read those and even had an article published in the *IATEFL's* (English Language Teaching Organisation) Journal associated with a small study I carried out." That paper formed part of her presentation at this conference.

"There is some very good work being carried out in education and it is a promising area for further research for me. Hopefully there will be some areas for international collaboration. My presentation was very successful. All of the presentations I went to were excellent. The organisers were very helpful and really pleasant people. Lunch was great and even seeing a presentation that was not in my area (it was 'business') was an eye-opener. Overall, I thought it was a brilliant conference and is one that I hope has been instrumental in steering



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to have conversations about NLP above the basic level so common in discussions with those not trained in NLP. It challenges me to step up my descriptions and explanations, it urges me to search for meanings and explanations, to fit together disparate parts of my intellectual experience. The effect is highly motivating.

“Professionally, the conference is vital for the development of NLP and possibly its survival too. NLP needs credibility from within academia if it is going to be tested thoroughly and, therefore, developed,

the course of my future research.”

Melody Cheal from the Gwiz Learning Partnership

(www.gwiztraining.com) has been involved since before the Surrey University conference two years ago.

“NLP has lacked credibility in some circles due to its lack of empirical research,” she says. “I experienced this first hand while taking an Masters Degree in Applied Positive Psychology. One of the lecturers was very dismissive of NLP in a very emotional non-academic way. It became clear to me that there was a need to transform this attitude. As a result of this I decided to focus my dissertation on how NLP helps people improve their self esteem and well being.”

Tim Lyons has been interested in NLP and research since the conference two years ago. “I liked Frank Bourke’s report on the American NLP Research and Recognition project (as this went some way to fulfilling my first hope) though I did not get the impression that the same was true outside the USA. I found Paul Tosey’s research into Gregory Bateson’s real alignment with NLP interesting and thought-provoking.” For future conferences, Tim hopes to see something like “a ‘Results Zone’ to understand how NLP research is actually changing the world.”

“I have known Paul Tosey since 1999 and so was aware of the development of the research conference from sometime in 2005,” says **David Allaway from the University of East Anglia**. “I presented at the first conference and so was invited to take part in the second. Originally, I was attempting an NLP-based PhD, started in 1998, and so Paul was the only ally that I could find in the country at that time (within the HE system in the UK). Selfishly, it gives me the opportunity

refined, advanced. If the confidence is there, let’s test it and learn from it. Advances in research methods allow us to explore NLP in ways that were not possible in the rigid positivism of the 1970s. It is unsurprising that the positivist paradigm could not cope with Bandler and Grinder’s experimental approach and, recursively, that Bandler and Grinder, once bumped out of the academic system at Santa Cruz, became embittered.”

“Working at ANLP means that I am lucky enough to be surrounded by the fantastic and dedicated people who make the NLP Research Conference a reality,” says **Lala Ali Khan** (www.anlp.org). “We need academic research-based evidence to give people hard-proof that it is a reliable, credible and applicable set of tools.”

ANLP’s aim in co-ordinating the Research Conference, and subsequent Research Journal is to create a supportive forum where both academic and non-academic NLP professionals can develop, discuss, share and grow academic research projects, which will put NLP on the map.

Karen Moxom (www.anlp.org) adds “The day itself was fantastic. The papers were interesting and diverse, a community spirit filled the air and there was a great sense of achievement and movement in the right direction. There was an opportunity to meet other members of the NLP community and share the collective excitement about the enormous potential of academic research.”

“As soon as the new academic year starts, ANLP will be galvanising the Conference Committee into action and making plans for the 2012 Conference, including reviewing the feedback received about the day, and of course how the event can be even better next time.” ■

Are you interested in researching your area of NLP?

What’s your area of NLP? What makes you feel passionate when you think about its potential applications? Could you do a study? Measure the results and share them with a wider audience?

Check out www.nlpresearchconference.com for more information about what’s going on, what’s being planned and find out how to get involved.

The next International NLP Research Conference is currently being organised and will take place in 2012 at the University of Hertfordshire.