# Language Distrusted, Language Ignored, Language Recovered:

## From Plato to Corpus Linguistics and Beyond

Alan Partington

# Why Zenodo (EC)?

- No cost to readers

- Time matters

- Freedom from Reviewer # 2

- Publishing revisions is simple and quick

- Exploring new scholarship with AI

- **Downside: temptation to publish too soon … (grovelling apologies)**
- **https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17998000**

# Practising 'Philosophy' without a license 😱

# When did linguistics stop being 'philosophy'???

The 'Curse of Specialisations' (or 'fence-building', Mautner 2014): c. 1800s

'pure philosophy' then philology, historical linguistics, dialectology, now functional and corpus linguistics

Why is Wittgenstein a philosopher but not Sinclair, Halliday, Hunston, Hoey, Biber?

Aren't they & we all 'lovers of wisdom (*sophos*)'?

In good company:

The term 'science/scientist' dates from 1834, attributed to Mary Somerville …

… before that 'natural philosophy – ers'

*Wissenschaft*, literally 'knowledgehood', loosely 'scholarship'.

# Sources

Some primary: Aristotle (*Rhetoric*), Plato (*Dialogues*), Wittgenstein (*Investigations*), Jakobson, Austin, Popper, Chomsky,

Sinclair, Stubbs, Biber, Hunston, Hoey et al.

'Secondary'

*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy (T. Honderich ed.)*

*The Ascent of Science (B. Silver)*

Stanford on-line *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

**ChatGPT 5.1 (Copilot)**
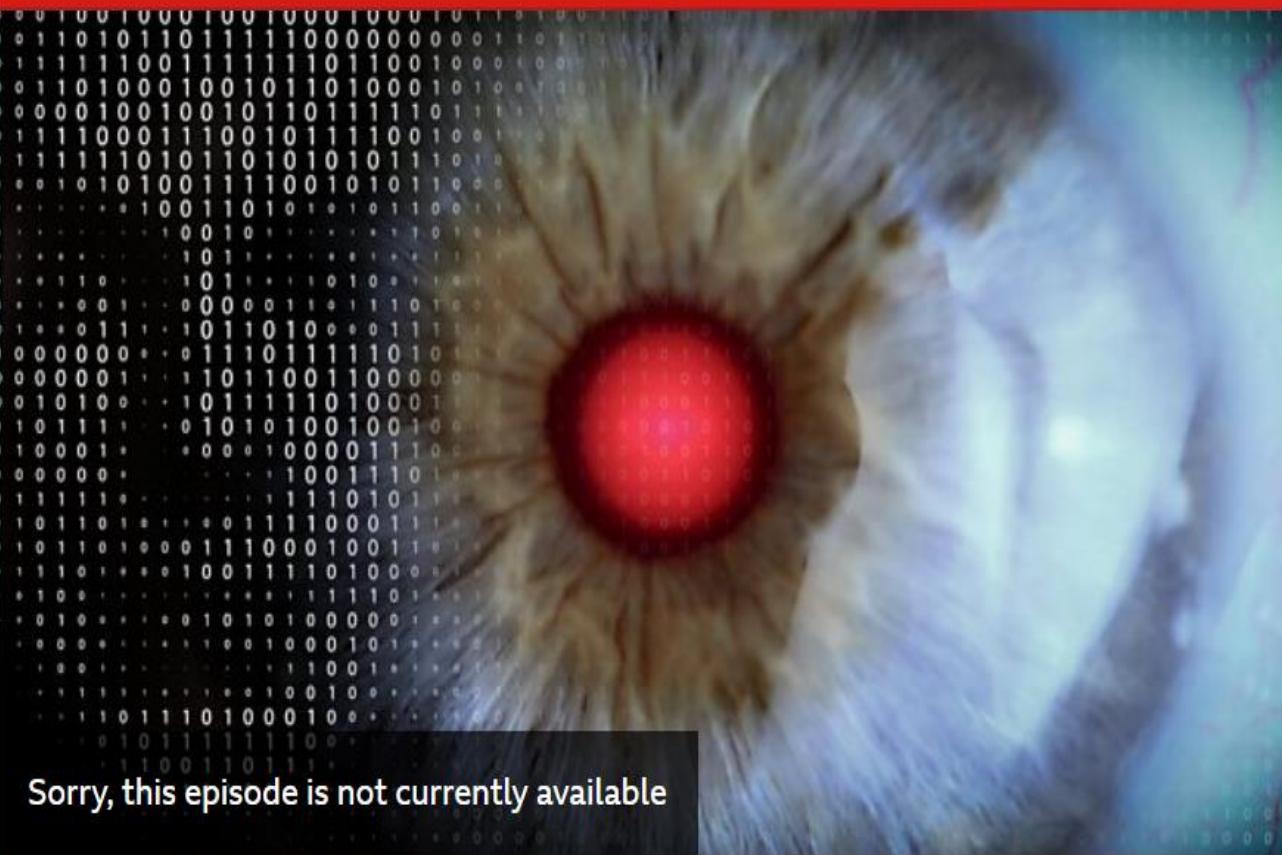
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# Are You Scared Yet, Human?

As artificial intelligence changes our world, it has sparked a new arms race between China and the US. Experts warn that without urgent regulation, we could lose control of AI.

🕐 59 minutes

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# Sources

**Don't ask**: why use secondary sources? Almost everything we know we take on trust (Sloman & Fernbach 2018)

Evolution, heliocentric solar system … Japan …

Ask: can you trust your sources? Can you triangulate?

Is a corpus a primary or secondary source?

My own corpora of briefings = primary. All my studies = secondary.

# The Genesis of this Essay:
# In the beginning there were two conundrums

1) The long periods when philosophy was perfectly happy to ignore language altogether, despite it being the very tool of their trade.

2) Pessimists (idealists) vs Optimists (descriptivists)

# Three 'hyper-schools'

1) The pessimists: language as an obstacle, flawed (Locke, Leibniz)
- even dangerous (Plato, Nietzsche, Foucault, CDA)

2) The optimists: language as a 'super-power' (Aristotle, W. Von Humboldt, Wittgenstein Mk2, Jakobson, Halliday and CL). Meaning-*making*,

Socialising: Malinowsi : what language does in social life; how meaning depends on situation (phatic communication)

3) Language? Who cares? (Kant, Hegel, Marx & Co). A mere vehicle of thought (Locke). 'Representationalism'

# The Long Suspicion

Plato: rhetoric as deception; the Sophists' 'language corrupts truth'

.

Non-Western parallels:

- Pāṇini and later Sanskrit grammarians: language change is moral decay.
- Confucians feared linguistic drift would undermine social order ('rectification of names').

# The Long Suspicion

Leibniz's Dream (also Russell) of language as mathematics

.

Saussure (*langue* vs *parole*)

Chomsky (**competence** vs performance)

Across cultures, linguistic conservatism is both *anti-functionalist* and *elitist* – it freezes the dialect of the powerful.

# Optimists: language as a 'super power'

Aristotle: language as the instrument of persuasion driven by *evaluation*: *ethos, pathos, logos*

Rational and ethical??? Well .. win the argument, by <span style="color:green">**fair**</span> means or <span style="color:red">**foul**</span>. The *Art of Rhetoric* is a manual of how to *win*).

Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126–1198): creative commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Inspired and informed Islamic study of logic *and* European Scholasticism.

Got banished for his pains (Islam's Galileo).

# My heroes

W. Von Humboldt (1767-1835)  language is 'the formative organ of thought.'

Language 'exists only in connected discourse; grammar and dictionary are hardly comparable to its dead skeleton' (GS 6: 147)

Wittgenstein 0.2 (the *Investigations*). Language as a toolbox → communication is employing the tools

Functional linguistics (Prague) → Halliday's social semiotic → Sinclair's 'trust the text'/CaDS

No more ontology 'what is language?' but function: what does it do, what do speakers do with it?

Functionalism **restores value to ordinary, evolving language**:
 - Popper, Arendt, Orwell discourse is fundamental to an **Open Society**

Contrast with Foucault, Derrida, much CDA: language as a deterministic tool of oppression. People have no agency.

'Alice Through the Looking-Glass' thinking.

Language doesn't create power. Having power means you can use language to consolidate it (Latin in the Church, Arabic spread through conquest + convenience + prestige)

Two shibboleths distinguishing the optimists from the pessimists:

*metaphor* and *evaluation*

# Metaphorophobia

Plato: no metaphor, banish poets from his *Republic*. But 'Shadows in a Cave' allegory? Atlantis in *Timaeus*? Does he banish himself?

Locke: replace figurative langage with the literal. Yet, his 'language is a window' itself is a metaphor? Try it:

- **Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow …**
  → *Time continues in small, repetitive increments.*

- **Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,**
  → *It moves forward slowly and without grandeur.*

- **To the last syllable of recorded time;**
  → *Until time itself reaches its end.*

# Metaphorophobia

**Nietzsche**: concepts are 'a mobile army of metaphors' we have forgotten are metaphors and mistake them for truth. The true progenitor of Foucault, Derrida & Co.

**Clerical metaphorophobia**: Augustine, Aquinas, Bacon, Locke (again). Yet Scripture is nothing if not metaphors: 'The Lord is my shepherd', 'I am the vine, you are the branches', 'salt of the earth', countless.

And vice versa how Scriptural metaphor feeds into everyday language (please give some examples in the Chat)

# CL and metaphor?

No special lexis of figurative language, but metaphor is just the sort of 'messy', magical and **real** kind of language that CL revels in.

(see for example Stefanowitsch and Gries eds. 2006, Deignan, Hanks, Semino, Keller and others). Metaphor & Domain

It is everywhere, it is powerful, it is essential

'Metaphor is the price we pay for saying anything at all'. Even 'the mind' is a metaphor, as is 'the price we have to pay' ...

# CaDs and close reading

Partington (2006, 2008, 2017, 2025) underlines how the vast majority of metaphors are *evaluative*: '**Juliet is the Sun**',  '**The Lord is my shepherd**', '**the sick man of Europe**', '**Putin is a like shark**'

Entirely unnoticed in all the great tomes of cognitive linguistics (e.g. Gibbs 2006, Ortony 2008), 'conceptual mapping'

Evaluation - the *why* metaphors get used, why so popular.

supply your own examples of evaluative metaphors in the Chat

'He was my North, my South, my East, my West ...'

# Three tough nuts for CL

Figurative language

Creative language, including

(a) overriding of primings and

(b) evaluative clash for poetic or humorous effect

Evaluative cohesion (*not* the much-studied *propositional* cohesion, e.g. Halliday & Hasan 1976)

# Will CL survive in the Age of AI?
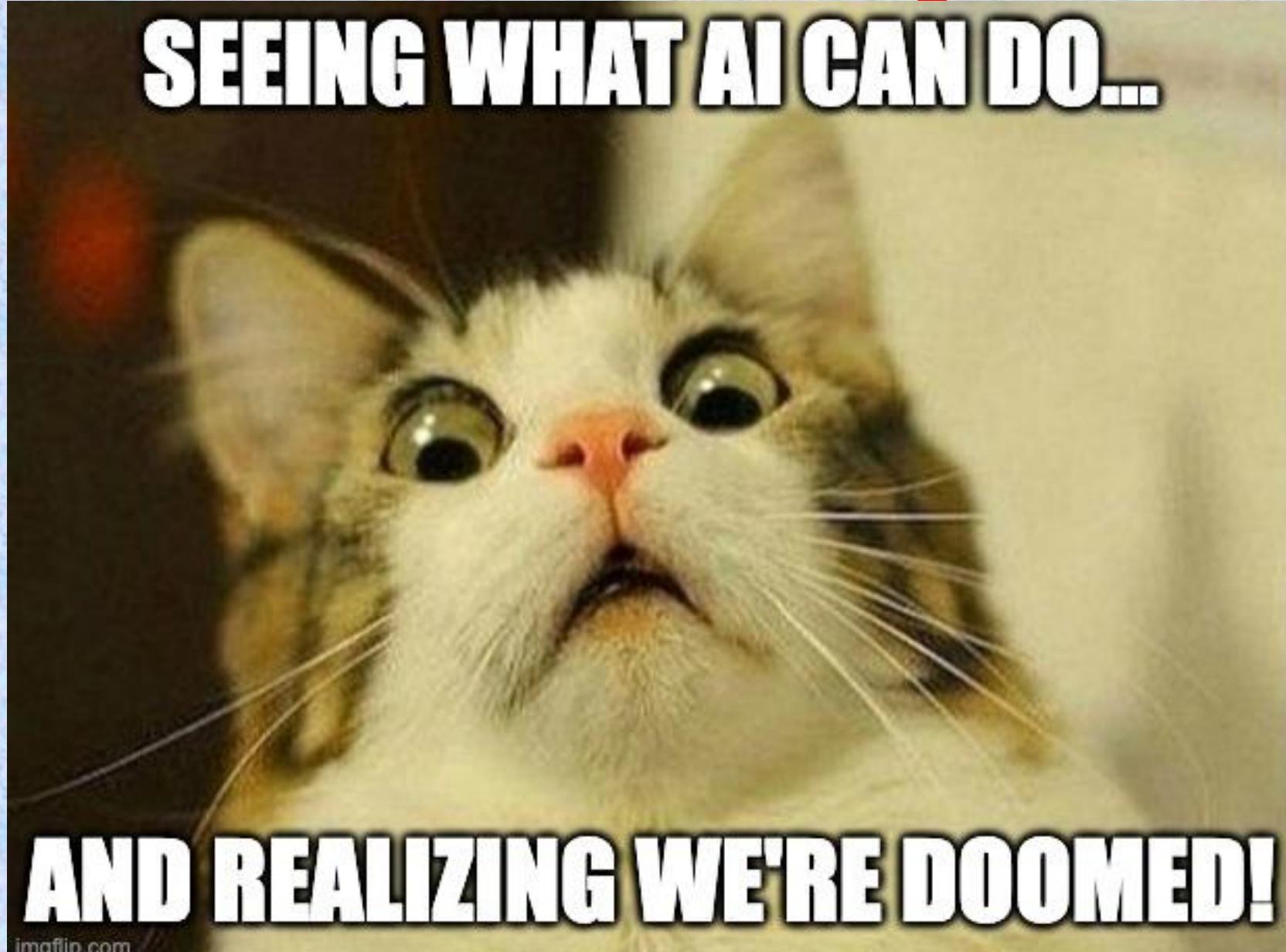
CaDS will **thrive** alongside LLMs

# As will linguistic philosophy

The human mind cannot reliably know the human mind by introspection alone —the repeating catastrophe of rationalist philosophy.

Corpora and LLMs offer *triangulation* —entities to compare the mind with —precisely because they are *not* human minds. 'Temporary alienation' …

# What do LLMs do?

**Empiricism turned rationalism**

# LLMs are purely *empiricist* in their origins (beyond even Aristotle, Locke, Hume)

exposure to massive amounts of real linguistic usage.

They have :

     no innate dictionaries, (word forms), syntactic classes,

     no grammar

     no conceptual architecture (ideas or values)

"I'm trained on a very large mixture of human-written texts.
    The texts are automatically collected and filtered,
    then converted into probabilistic patterns of co-occurrence.

I don't store documents or facts — I internalise usage patterns.
    In corpus terms, I'm not a corpus tool: I'm the result of
    massive priming."

"If a corpus shows you patterns,
    an LLM *is* patterns — (billions of weighted associations)
    learned without theory, labels, or ideology."

# Input: exposure to masses of texts

They perceive:


Statistical regularities:

Patterns of co-occurrence; co-selection; also absence

Form-function regularities *including evaluation* (Hunston),

Register / domain cues,

Reinforcement from feedback ('feedback loops'; essential for remembering but beware of conformation bias)


Vindications of Hoey's Lexical Priming.

# But, *once trained*, LLMs behave like *rationalists*
## ( to Descartes', Leibniz's delight)

- infer rules

- generate new concepts never seen before

- create (plausible) explanations

- model causality

- produce forms of *synthetic* knowledge

- **recognise evaluation; compare evaluations**


Re-create (simulate) communication by ***prospection, prediction***


Rationalist behaviour, but without a rationalist blueprint, language, reasoning and knowledge **emerge** but without a mind.

# LLMs work by and validate CL's:

- lexical priming

- extended units of meaning (lexical item)

- collocation

- evaluative (semantic) prosody

- semantic preference

- prospective discourse signalling

# CaDS is entering its most interesting phase ...

- discourse is ever more multimodal ('meaning is cumulative' Baker 2005; 'meaning is transdiscursive' Duguid & Partington 2017)

- news flows across diverse platforms; evaluations travel through diverse media sources – news agencies – legacy media – social media – legacy media. Is it ever challenged? When and How?

- social media creates and blends new discourse-types

- international narratives collide but can be compared using corpora (US State Department vs CCP news briefings, Duguid & Partington 2023)

- affective and evaluative language is front-and-centre (CaDS 'shunting' from quantitative to qualitative and vice versa)

a political source

⬇

mainstream reporting: TV, newspaper

⬇

CMC / social media

⬇

back into the mainstream: 'Media Watch

⬇

politicians' press review, next morning

Transdiscoursivity. The potential political message cycle

Marchi, Anna (ongoing). The socio-psychological representations of *nostalgia* across many discourse-types

Maybe some of the general-purpose corpora of the first generation are used less (Davies 2025),

but CaDS — because it employs **curated, question-specific** datasets — is alive and kicking.

**RQ-driven CaDS corpora can** now serve as the anchor of authentic language against which LLM-generated generalisations can be evaluated (Pace-Sigge 2025)

# CaDS colloboration with AI / LLMs

Triangulation: compare what the corpora say, what LLMs say, what humans say

(dis)corroboration: Popperian searching for further evidence esp counter-examples. *Ask the LLM to supply them*

# Triangulation

# Metaphor: WordSketch: *'Goldilocks'*

- porridge
- Panto
- Hansel
- buttercup
- aster

- zone
- Enigma ('The Goldilocks Enigma')

# ChatGPT: *'Goldilocks'* + R1

- moment
- economy
- conditions (science & engineering)
- parenting (not too authoritarian, not too permissive/submissive)
- task (cognition psycho. Children learn best when tasks are not too hard or too easy)

- Each with its own explanation: 'Goldilocks economy: growth without inflation'

# Frankenstein

**Sketch** (enTenTen): cooccurs with:

*monster, zombie, werewolf, ghoul*

**LLM**: domain-specific: AI, biotech, GMOs, economics. **Negative**

**CaDS**: who uses it, to attack what and why?

Weaponised by anti-science groups, but how?

# Cinderella: enTenTen

- slipper, dress, ball, godmother

My untutored introspection: metaphor for 'little one who succeeds', 'poor girl marries money ...'

# ChatGPT adds ...

**1. The "Cinderella team/industry" metaphor**

- Meaning: *underdog (metaphor) that unexpectedly succeeds.* Evaluation: very **positive**

- Domains:

  sports ('the Cinderella story of Leicester City')

  business

## 2. The 'Cinderella service industry' metaphor

Meaning: *a neglected, underfunded, undervalued sector.*
Evaluation: very **negative**

Common in UK public discourse:

mental health services / social care / libraries / the arts

**3. The 'Cinderella deadline'**

Meaning: *a fixed, immovable deadline — typically midnight.*
Used in:

Political/financial/sporting legislation

**4, Cinderella transformation** (<span style="color:green">**positive**</span> evaluation is *all* its meaning)

# Triangulation /mixed methods

**Corpus-only analysis** → glass slipper, ball, fairy godmother. The **Genesis** of the metaphor

**LLM-only analysis** → structured metaphorical valence & domain prominence.

**CaDS analysis** → *how* these metaphors are deployed in particular domains to frame actors as **underdogs**, **neglected**, **transformed**, or **bound by deadlines**.

# Weather metaphors

Storm / Firestorm / Shitstorm

LLM: Domain: politics

Cloud / Dark cloud

LLM: Domain: economics, public health

Sunshine / Bright skies / Fair weather

LLM: Domains: political speeches, economics, advertising.

# Weather metaphors

- **corpus data**: frequencies, concordances, collocates (literal + metaphorical)

- **LLM insight**: domain clustering and evaluative valence

- **CaDS interpretation**: how weather metaphors construct stance, blame, danger, inevitability. **Why speakers choose them**

# Creativity?

# Priming overriding

Hoey (2005): *'a grief ago'* (Dylan Thomas)

'Unbreak my heart / uncry these tears'

ChatGPT offered up:

'*a longing ago*, *a sorrow's distance*, *a heartbeat past*.

Derivative, maybe, but not doggerel and all employing Hoeyian primings overriding, and

Corroborates that there **exist productive patterns** to over-riding.

# Lexical cascading (wordplay)

Typical of tabloid headlines: e.g. 'Midfield engine fuels Anfield drive',

ChatGPT volunteered:

> Markets **reel** as investors hedge bets and **brace** for a **volatile** week

> **Lions roar** as forwards **pounce** to **claw back** late victory

Underlying patterns of creativity

Me 'I hope you're right about the British Lions'
ChatGPT: 'If my prediction comes true I **(promise)** to be **[insufferable]**

Evaluative clash AND self-deprecating humour.

# Evaluation

CL rediscovers evaluation mostly up to the phrasal, by analysis of completed texts

humans notice individual phenomena, also patterns of prospection (forward –driving)

# Evaluative *clash*:

## 1) Simple production errors

'[…] technology has increased the number of **positive-sum games (win-win relationships)** that humans tend to be ***embroiled in***'        (Steven Pinker, TED Talks 2007)

Hunston (2007) wonders about a student email:

'Thank you for your *persisent* **help and advice**'

# 2) Deliberate 'poetic' effect

## *Lullaby*

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and **the grave**
Proves **the child** ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
**The entirely beautiful**.

(W. H. Auden, 1907 – 1973)

# Comic effect: 'Frasier': Radio shrink

Hugh Grant: You ruthlessly slept with me twice and never rang

# Evaluative reversal, switching objects of evaluations

No modern CL software can track argument structure over whole texts; humans do (semi-)consciously and prospectively (probabilistic prediction)

LLMs?

# Evaluative cohesion

We notice **clashes** because we are primed subconsciously to expect *evaluative cohesion*

Partington (2017, 2025) on Hoey's patterns of textual organisation. Texts cohere *evaluatively*.

Topic and evaluation of topic: the twin skeletons on which texts are fleshed out upon (Sinclair's *lexical item*)

# Evaluative cohesion

**Hoey's text organisation patterns (1983, 1991)**

**Problem-Solution**: a **Problem** prospects a **Solution** (and explicit evaluation)

**Contrast**: **good** vs **bad** (politics: **their proposal** vs **our proposal**);

Hoey (2005) Generals **Grant** vs **Lee**

**Cause – Consequence** (same polarity)

**Crescendo**: Hoey (2005) on Dicken's *Old Appian Way*:

*ruin* … all around was *ruin* … I feel as if the sun would never rise again [upon] **a *ruined world***. Crescendo of **negativity**

**Garden Path**

**Rom-Com**

**Robin meets Alex**

**Alex and Robin split (million reasons)**

**Robin and Alex reunite!**

**The evaluation is the skeleton of the plot**

Humans are primed to recognise whole text organisation. ▶ Corpus tools … not so much
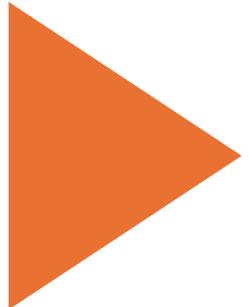
Global poverty is falling rapidly; but in fifty or so failing states the world's poorest people - the "bottom billion"- face a tragedy that is growing inexorably worse. Why do these states defy all attempts to help them? Why does current aid seem unable to make a difference?

In his award-winning bestseller, Paul Collier pinpoints the issues of corruption, political instability, and resource management that lie at the root of the problem, and offers hard-nosed solutions and real hope for a way of solving one of the great crises facing the world today.
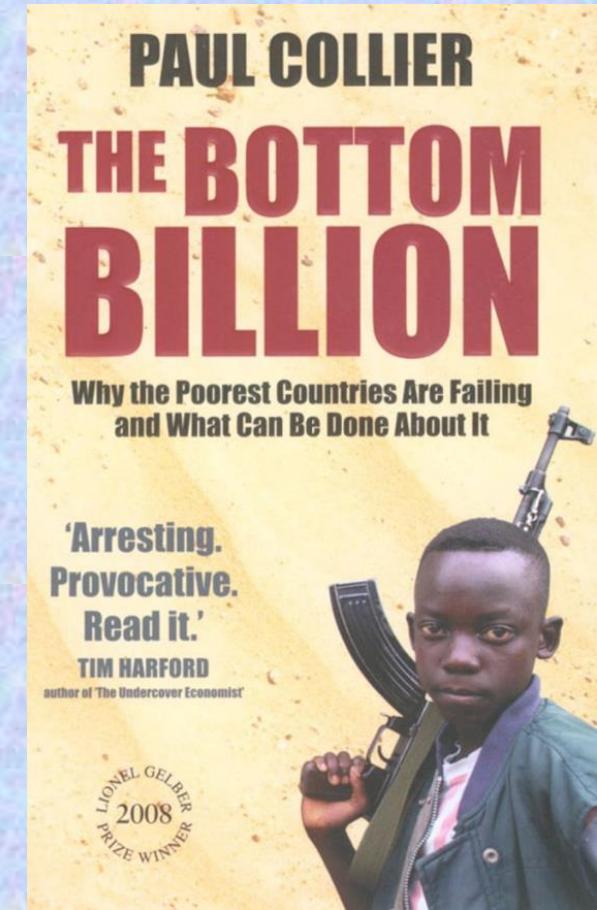
# Automatic reading positive & negative

Global poverty is falling rapidly; but in fifty or so failing states the world's poorest people - the "bottom billion"- face a tragedy that is growing inexorably worse. Why do these states defy all attempts to **help** them? Why does current **aid** seem unable to **make a difference**?

In his **award-winning** bestseller, Paul Collier pinpoints the issues of corruption, political instability, and resource management that lie at the root of the problem, and offers **hard-nosed solutions** and real **hope** for a way of **solving** one of the great crises facing the world today.

# Human reading. Evaluative cohesion; 3 blocks. Argument structure: Problem – Solution (+ evaluation)

**Global poverty is falling rapidly**; **BUT** in fifty or so failing states the world's poorest people - the "bottom billion"- face a tragedy that is growing inexorably worse. Why do these states defy all attempts to help them? Why does current aid seem unable to make a difference?

**In his award-winning bestseller, Paul Collier pinpoints the issues of corruption, political instability, and resource management that lie at the root of the problem, and offers hard-nosed solutions and real hope for a way of solving one of the great crises facing the world today.**

# Corpus tools struggle with evaluative cohesion

No existing corpus tool models evaluation as a discourse-level sequence, or recognises:

   Hoey-like patterns organised by evaluation

   how early evaluations prospect expectations later on

   what moments of evaluative clash are and do

   evaluative crescendos

Even foundational CL evaluation studies (e.g., Hunston) rely on human judgement to detect evaluative patterning (e.g.'verging on…')

Corpus tools operate on frequency and proximity. **Retrospectively**

Evaluation operates on semantic **progression**, comparison, contrast, and **expectation**.

Good news: LLMs can be *taught* by us

# What LLMs can learn (that corpora alone cannot)

ChatGPT 5.1 did not discover evaluative cohesion from scratch.

But when trained then prompted (by me), it recognised explicit evaluative patterns that humans perceive implicitly.

It can reliably:

- trace evaluative **chains** (positive/negative sequences)

- identify **crescendo**

- detect **contrast**ive polarity pairs

- identify moments of evaluative **reversal** (e.g., Problem to Solution; doubt → delight)  and re-create them 'I **promise** to be **insufferable**'

- (1) With a spare hour on my hands before lunch in Lebanon this week, I revisited the joys of my childhood, crunched my way across the old Beirut marshalling yards and climbed aboard a wonderful 19th-century rack-and-pinion railway locomotive.

- (2) Although scarred by bullets, the green paint on the wonderful old Swiss loco still reflects the glories of steam and the Ottoman empire.

- (3a) For it was the Ottomans who decided to adorn their jewel of Beirut with the latest state-of-the-art locomotive, a train which once carried the German Kaiser up the mountains above the city where, at a small station called Sofar,

- (3b) the Christian community begged for his protection from the Muslims. 'We are a minority,' they cried, to which the Kaiser bellowed: 'Then become Muslims!' (Hoey, 2005, p. 117; adapted from an article in *The Independent* by Robert Fisk)

- (1) With a spare hour on my hands before lunch in Lebanon this week, I revisited **the joys of my childhood**, crunched my way across the old Beirut marshalling yards and climbed aboard a **wonderful** 19th-century rack-and-pinion railway locomotive.

- (2) Although <span style="color:red">scarred by bullets</span>, the green paint on **the wonderful old Swiss loco still reflects the glories of steam and the Ottoman empire**.

- (3a) For it was the Ottomans who decided **to adorn their jewel of Beirut with the latest state-of-the-art locomotive**, a train which *once carried the German Kaiser up the mountains above the city* where, at a small station called Sofar …

**(Good: Importance)**

# (3b) Problem-Solution

(3b) **the Christian community begged for his protection from the Muslims. 'We are a minority,' they cried**, to which the Kaiser bellowed: '**Then become Muslims!**'

Evaluation? For the Kaiser **(good: clever, please his allies)**

For Fiske **(good: amusing)**

For Hoey?  For you?

# What LLMs can learn (that corpora alone cannot)

LLMs can track coherence and semantic consistency / contrast across an entire text

LLMs again complement /trangulate CL:

- Corpora show what recurs.
- LLMs reveal how it holds together (evaluative cohesion)
- CaDS explain *why* – speaker choices

This is precisely the logic of Firth: 'You shall know a word by the company it keeps'.

Wittgenstein II: meaning is use.

Sinclair: phraseology is meaning.

Hoey: lexical priming creates expectancy structures.

LLMs are **vindication** of usage-based theories at scale.

# Why the shock? The first artefacts to show how *collective human experience* becomes *synthetic rationality* <u>without a mind</u>

Rationality without a rationalist. Reason does not require a mind

(Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz all shoot themselves. Hume would say, let's redefine 'mind')

CL meaning and grammar **emerge** – are inferred – by exposure to patterns in contexts, co-selections, and evaluative distributions. Priming.

To paraphrase Niels Bohr:

'If LLMs don't shock you, you haven't understood them'

But for linguists, they vindicate:
    CL's observation of usage to model discourse
    Mk1 Hoey's patterns of text organisation
    Mk2 Hoey's lexical priming (+ evaluative priming)
    Evaluative cohesion throughout a text
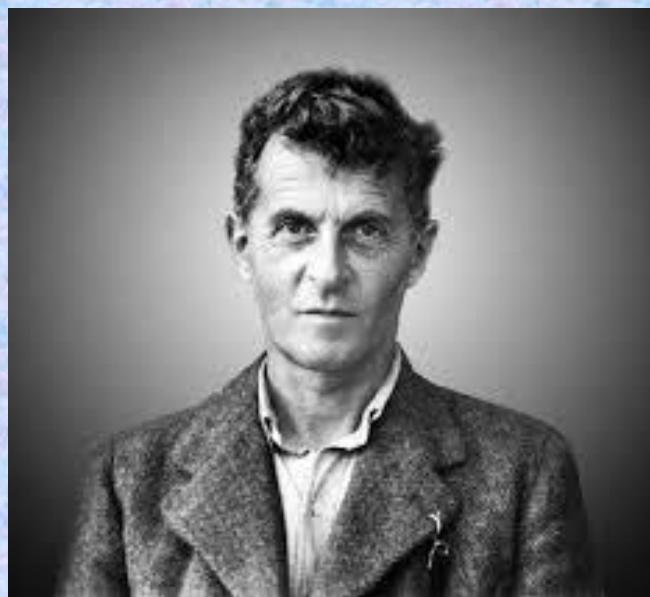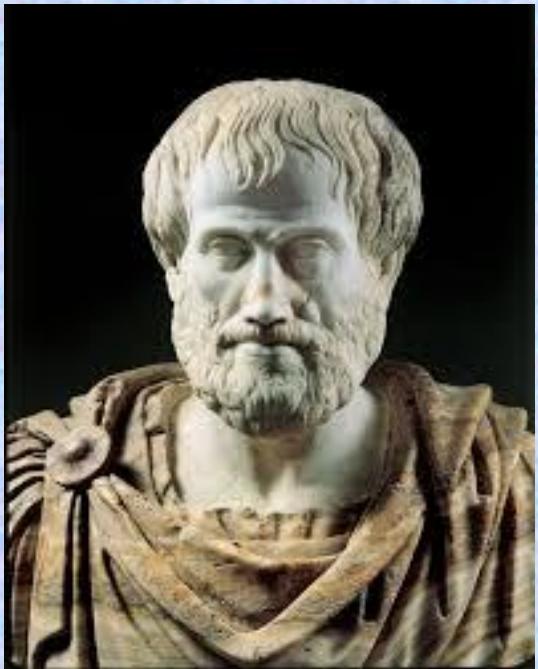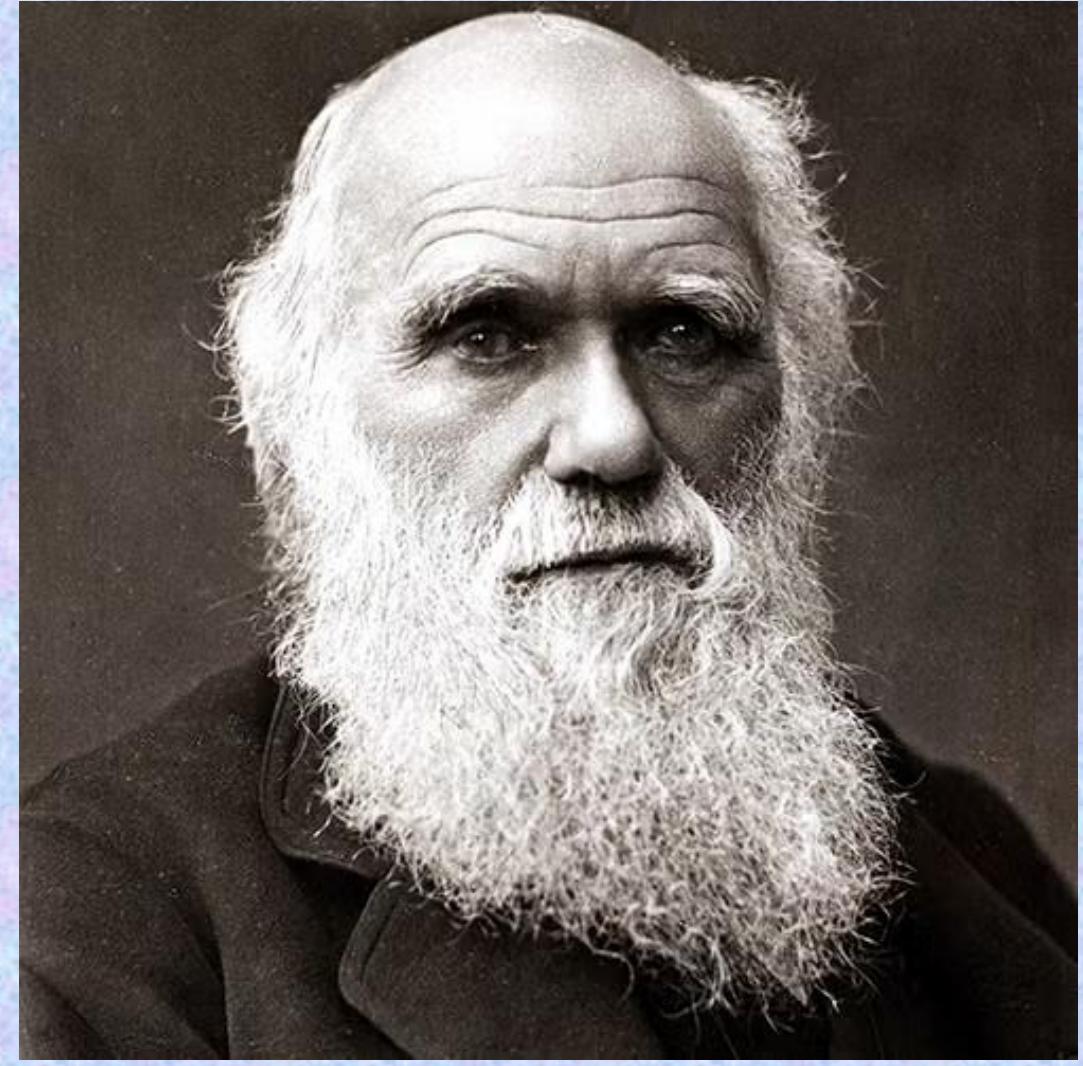
# Scientific, evidence-grounded explanation of Hegel's 'Geist in the Machine'

Language is both a para-phenomenon *and* an enabler of selective, adaptive human evolution:

those groups of hominids which could intercommunicate efficiently could outsurvive other groups. Even an individual with communicative skills within the group had a survival advantage.

No longer plausible to argue

     a veil over / distortion of truth

     mere ornament

     language as algebra

     a means of oppressing the huddled masses

Language as evolution → functional linguistics → SFG → CL/CaDS

Darwin: phylogenetic language evolution (species)

Hoey: ontogenetic language evolution (every individual: Lexical Priming)

Hoey / Hunston / (evaluative) cohesion, patterns: evolution of discourse in a text

An integrated model of language and discourse as evolution.

… **and a big win for the 'Language Optimists' team** …

# The 10 Daftest Things Philosophers Have Said About Language

- 1. '**Language change is decay.**'

→ No: it's adaptive evolution.

- 2. '**Meaning = truth conditions.**' and
- 3. '**Only propositions matter; language use is trivial.**'

→ And thus we ignored evaluation for 2,300 years.

- 4. '**All metaphors are lies.**' and
- 5. '**Natural language must be eliminated from science.**'

→ The Taliban of logical positivism. Try explaining physics without them:

  Big Bang, gravity 'fields', space-time 'fabric', wave-particle (what?)

- 6. '**A private language is possible.**'

→ Only if no one checks. Or no-one ever listens to you.

- 7. '**Grammar is innate and fixed.**'

→ Chomsky quits linguistics. Primings take his Chair.

- 8. '**The ideal language will solve philosophy.**'

→ The dream that launched a thousand unreadable treatises.

- 9. '**Words map concepts exactly.**'

→ Augustine's ghost. 'Love'? (daughter, tea, cricket?) Because 'time' is a noun, it must be a thing. Because 'meaning' is a noun, it must be an object. Same for 'mind'. Both *words* and *concepts* are fuzzy, protean, only realised in use.

- 10. '**Language simply mirrors thought.**' (representationalism)

→ The mother of all dead-ends. Language's linearity?

# … and at no extra cost

- 11. '**Distrust all authority**.

    **Except me.**'

- → CDA, post-structuralism, and even Plato.

**Thank you for your patience. Sorry for all the '-isms'**

**(and don't trust a single word I've said …)**

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