Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English

Title of case study: Separated by a common language: changing understanding of language origins and use through public engagement

1. Summary of the impact
Research on lexis, semantics and pragmatics underpins a public engagement that allows ordinary English users to learn about and discuss national varieties of English. Lynne Murphy's online forums and live events accessibly examine how American English and British English suffer transatlantic misconceptions about their origins, use and interactions. This creates a public discourse (involving learners, teachers, translators, editors, expatriates) on how linguistic research illuminates the dialectal differences and on-going linguistic changes that puzzle or frustrate. People enter these forums because they are curious or uncomfortable about linguistic variation; they leave with their assumptions challenged and their prejudices altered.

2. Underpinning research
Murphy's research takes a broad range of approaches to lexical (word-level) and pragmatic (talk-in-interaction) phenomena. Her work in the past decade at Sussex [see Section 3, R1–R5] has focused on the question of how semantic relations, such as synonymy and antonymy, affect word meanings and the structure and interpretation of discourse. Murphy investigates problems such as how words and meanings are organised in the mind [R1, R2], how particular words come to be associated with each other in speech and writing [R2, R3, R5], how semantic relations vary across cultures and how this reflects differing cultural values [R4 and on-going collaborations and doctoral supervision].

Earlier (psycho)linguistic models of words, meanings and their relations relied largely on linguists' intuitions about language and on experiments such as word-association tasks. Murphy argues that these types of evidence are *metalinguistic* – they rely on conscious access to what we know and believe *about* words, rather than to the subconscious linguistic knowledge *of* words that we use when constructing sentences and meanings. Murphy's model holds that the human mind is not like a thesaurus that represents fixed relations among words; instead perceived relations among meanings are generated by speakers exploiting linguistic contrasts that are relevant to the communicative context. Her work has developed to take into account the role of linguistic experience in 'entrenching' particular relations among words [R2, R3].

Exploring the incongruities between linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic beliefs, Murphy contrasts how people actually use words with the assumptions made by lexicographers in writing dictionaries and thesauruses [e.g. R5, R6]. She [R2–R6] promotes the use of corpus evidence – the qualitative and quantitative analysis of real-world speech and writing. These themes and methodologies are carried through in her public engagement: addressing widely-held myths about how language works and is used, and offering theory-driven and evidence-based ways of addressing language, language differences and language attitudes. For example, on *Separated by a Common Language*, she uses historical evidence to show that nearly 25 per cent of the 'Americanisms' identified by *BBC Magazine* readers are not Americanisms at all. She has used corpus evidence to show, among other things, that Britons refer to babies as 'it' far more often than Americans do. She introduces readers to Prototype Theory in order to explain how British and American concepts of 'soup' are differently constructed (and why many American soups are 'stews' in the UK), and uses Politeness Theory to explain why the lesser use of *please* in America is a matter of different, not absent, manners.

Murphy's public-engagement work has an increasingly reciprocal relationship with her academic research. Her most recent publication [R6] takes as its starting point the metalinguistic commentary of English speakers and learners in blogs and online forums – precisely the type of forum that she has created through her blog. The data she collected led to a consideration of 'What we talk about

when we talk about synonyms' and how this kind of evidence can inform user-oriented lexicography for future dictionaries and thesauruses [R6].

3. References to the research

R1 Murphy, M.L. (2003) *Semantic Relations and the Lexicon.* Cambridge University Press.

R2 Murphy, M.L. (2006) 'Antonyms as lexical constructions, or why *paradigmatic construction* is not an oxymoron', *Constructions All Over: Case Studies and Theoretical Implications.* Special issue of *Constructions*, SV1: http://www.constructions-online.de/articles/specvol1/

R3 Jones, S., Murphy, M.L. Paradis, C. and Willners, C. (2007) 'Googling for "opposites": a web-based study of antonym canonicity', *Corpora*, 2(2): 129–55.

R4 Murphy, M.L., Paradis, C., Willners, C. and Jones, S. (2009) 'Discourse functions of antonymy: a cross-linguistic investigation of Swedish and English', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(11): 2159–2184.

R5 Jones, S., Murphy, M.L., Paradis, C. and Willners, C. (2012) *Antonyms in English.* Cambridge University Press.

R6 Murphy, M.L. (2013) 'What we talk about when we talk about synonyms', *International Journal of Lexicography*, 26(3): 279–304.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

4. Details of the impact

The impact of Murphy's work has been to engage thousands of people in a public discourse on linguistic issues that transforms participants' understanding of language change, intercultural communication and the nature of language itself. Impact in this context is achieved through social media and speaking events. Murphy's blog Separated by a Common Language – SbaCL – [see Section 5, C1] identifies and describes differences between British English and American English that are often overlooked in dictionaries and language teaching. The blog, Twitter feed [C2] and public talks [C3.1, C3.2] address the general public, but their quality has led to use by language professionals, including lexicographers, translators, teachers and editors.

As well as creating forums for public discourse about language, these activities change minds. Many participants come to these forums immersed in myths about English and how language changes. Murphy confronts these myths, and we see evidence [C1, C3] that she leads people to turn away from them and look for research-based information, rather than introspection and hearsay. For example, a reviewer of a talk in which Murphy examined the British media's prejudiced treatment of American English admitted originally sharing these biases, relating a number of examples that shook her beliefs. It ends 'I'm sold' [C3.1].

The online community created and developed through Murphy's blog is substantial, with posts typically attracting between 40 and 150 comments. With Murphy's moderation, readers engage with their own ideas and experience and with one another's [C1]. This empowers language users to share their views about variation and standards in English internationally. Klout, which tracks social-media influence based on the amount of internet traffic generated by tweets, rates Murphy as a Top 10 'influencer' in linguistics, indicating that @lynneguist's tweets generate conversations [C5].

Murphy's SbaCL blog covers the British/American linguistic divide, with more than 420 posts from 2006 to July 2013 [C1]. Her Twitter account @lynneguist posts a UK/US 'Difference of the Day' and links to research about English – over 17,000 tweets since May 2008 [C2]. Since 2011, Murphy has given 14 popular talks, contributing to the cultural life of the South-East. These include the tongue-in-cheek 'How America Saved the English Language' and attract audiences ranging from 30 to 60 in Skeptics-in-the-Pub events to 1,500 delegates at the 2012 Brighton SEO (Search Engine Optimization) conference [C3.1]. Her 2012 TEDx talk on linguistic politeness has been viewed 20,000+ times online, and her Numberphile videos on *math*/*maths* and ways of saying numerals have been viewed over 500,000 times, inspired 15,000+ YouTube 'likes' and thousands of comments [C3.2]. Her attention to these issues has made them more interesting to mainstream media. Between 2009 and 2013 she has appeared on Radio 4's *Today* Programme, in the *Sunday*

Times, and the *New York Times* discussing Britishisms in the US, *Fry's English Delight* (Radio 4), on Webster's spelling reforms and on Alan Yentob's *Imagine*, discussing the linguistics of Scrabble (BBC1) [C3.3].

SbaCL's influence is demonstrated by the growth of its audience through word-of-mouth and media attention. Google Analytics reports that SbaCL achieved nearly 80,000 page views per month during 2013 [C3.4]. It is consistently in the Top 10 linguistic blogs according to Blogmetrics.org, has been Yahoo.com's 'Pick of the Day' [C4], and repeatedly placed in babla.com's language blog awards (50 per cent jury/50 per cent popular vote) [C6]. The Twitter feed has gone from 0 to over 7,700 followers in four years [C2]. It was placed second in babla.com's 'Top Language Twitterers 2011' [C6].

In addition to engaging the general public, Murphy's work has impact on the applied-language professions, including translation, publication, natural language processing and lexicography. On the babla.com blog awards, SbaCL has been categorised under 'Language Professionals' and, in 2009, it was ranked first in that category [C6]. It is nominated there by language professionals – translators, editors, EFL teachers – who value its in-depth treatment of dialectal differences that don't make it into dictionaries, which they can use in their professional practice. Murphy's work was cited by the Chartered Institute of Linguists – the professional translators/interpreters organisation – as 'best practice' in the use of social media for language professionals [C8]. Her work is regularly reproduced or linked-to in translators' blogs or newsletters as a resource that can aid in understanding English dialectal differences and semantic fine points [C3.5]. Emphasis Training, a corporate writing-skills consultancy, has engaged Murphy as a consultant in producing resources for business people aiming to improve their communication skills and language awareness. Murphy's work (particularly C1) is also often cited in the applied fields of Natural Language Processing and in lexicography [C8]. Murphy's in-depth treatment of word meanings has influenced dictionary treatments of words, for example the most recent update of the *Oxford English Dictionary* has added a new sense of *hot dog* in reaction to her post on the term [C10]. Lexicographical interest in her work is also evidenced by her invited participation in the 2013 symposium on the future of the *Oxford English Dictionary* [C9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1 Murphy, M.L. (2006–) *Separated by a Common Language*.
http://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com
C2 @lynneguist (2009–) https://twitter.com/lynneguist
C3 Links to online sources of corroboration compiled at:
http://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/knowledge-transfer-activities-lynne.html
    C3.1 Talks
    C3.2 Videos and podcasts
    C3.3 Media appearances
    C3.4 Google Analytics
    C3.5 Use of SbaCL in applied language professions
C4 Yahoo.com Language and Linguistics Blogs.
C5 Linguistics Influencers. *Klout*. http://klout.com/#/topic/linguistics
C6 Top Language Twitterers (2011) http://en.babla.com See, for example:
http://en.bab.la/news/top-10-language-professionals-blogs-2009.html and
http://en.bab.la/news/top-25-language-twitterers-2011
C7 Stelmaszak, M. (Chartered Institute of Linguists) (2012) Presentation at Language Show Live, Olympia, London. http://www.slideshare.net/MartaStelmaszak/handout-social-media-for-language-professionals
C8 Citations: *Semantic Relations and the Lexicon* by M.L. Murphy.
http://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=18153810111695152643&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en. Note that many (if not most) of the citations are in applied-linguistic fields, including, and particularly, Natural Language Processing.
C9 OED Symposium (1 August 2013) http://www.oedsymposium.com/about-the-symposium/
C10 Email communication from New words editor, Oxford University Press. Provided on request.