

The 32nd Annual Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English, Warsaw, 27-29 June 2024

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The 32nd annual conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English was hosted by the SWPS University in Warsaw on 27-29 June 2024. The Organizing Committee was composed of Prof. Agnieszka Pantuchowicz, Dr Thomas Matusiak, and Dr Małgorzata Waśniewska. The Advisory Board was constituted by Prof. Hanna Komorowska, Prof. David Malcolm, and Prof. Piotr Skurowski.

The theme of the conference was “Interspecies Friendships and Non-human Companionships.” In the call for papers, the organizers invited participants “to de-center traditional humanisms by addressing the problem of being with, rather than in, the world from a broad spectrum of fields and methods.” They noted that our world is shaped by “a network of (in)organic and (im)material agencies,” including “animals, plants, and fungi,” as well as “ecosystems, machines, and algorithms.” The conference sought to examine the various affective relationships that humans forge with such non-human entities. Among the many proposed research areas, conference organizers included human, animal, and plant entanglements; queer kinships; deep time and the temporality of kinship; decolonial critiques of humanism and nature; philosophies of friendship and enmity; biopolitics and disability aesthetics; post-nature and critiques of ecology; applications of AI models in the humanities; learning analytics and computer-assisted pedagogy; corpus tools for linguistic research; digital literacies and computer-mediated communication.

The conference gathered 34 participants from three countries: Poland, the United Kingdom, and Greece. There were twelve parallel sessions: three titled “Posthuman Relations,” two called “Beyond the Anthropocene” and “Literature, Visual Culture, and the Non-human,” and one each of the following: “Archives and Justice Beyond the Human,” “Translating/Communicating Beyond the Human,” “Friendship and Companionship in the Americas,” “Speculative Kinships” and “Interspecies Kinships.” There were also three plenary lectures. Prof. Andreas H. Jucker (University of Zurich), the outgoing President of the European Society for the Study of English, delivered a lecture titled “Courtesy Request Markers in the History of English: The Long Diachrony.” Prof. Jucker presented the history of courtesy request markers

“pray” and “please” and explicit performative speech acts such as “I beg you” and “I beseech you.” He concluded that current forms are rooted in a more egalitarian politeness system. The second linguistic plenary – “Learning English in the Age of AI: Will Dictionaries Become Obsolete?” – was delivered by Prof. Robert Lew (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań). The talk examined the effectiveness of various new chatbots in assisting language learners and speculated on the capacity of Generative Pre-trained Transformers to successfully replace traditional dictionaries. Finally, Prof. Tadeusz Rachwał (SWPS University, Warsaw) gave a lecture titled “All Critters Great and Small: On Terrapolis and Crittership.” Prof. Rachwał considered Donna Haraway’s decategorization of a humanist vision of the world in the Anthropocene as an indication that it is possible to exit the Anthropocene while avoiding self-destruction. The organisers also scheduled a literary reading by Prof. David Malcolm (SWPS University, Warsaw), who read several of his short stories to the audience’s great applause. When he finished, many conference participants gathered around him to purchase copies of his collected stories.

At the end of the first day of the conference, there was a General Assembly of PASE members, which was held both at the SWPS University and online (via Google Meet). All members listened to the reports presented by PASE President, Prof. Jacek Fabiszak, the Secretary, Dr Izabela Curyłło-Klag, and the Treasurer, Prof. Wojciech Drąg. Afterwards, the financial report on the Association’s activities in 2023 was unanimously accepted by the members. The final part of the meeting involved the election of the new President and Board for the term 2024-2027. PASE members decided unanimously that Prof. Drąg would act as the Association’s new President. It was voted that the Board should be expanded to include new members: Dr Anna Cholewa-Purgał (Jan Długosz University, Częstochowa), Prof. Katarzyna Więckowska (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń) and Dr Ewa Wiśniewska (University of Lodz). On the other hand, Prof. Ryszard Wolny (University of Opole) and Prof. Michał Lachman (University of Lodz) decided to step down from the Board. During the conference dinner, which followed directly after the General Assembly, Prof. Drąg presented the outgoing President Prof. Fabiszak and Deputy President (as well as long-term Treasurer) Prof. Wolny with little tokens of gratitude for their service to the Association.

During the official closing ceremony, Prof. Fabiszak thanked the organisers – especially Prof. Agnieszka Pantuchowicz – for their excellent preparation of the conference and announced that next year’s conference would be hosted by the University of Białystok.