International Conference on Modern Trends in Applied Linguistics

The International Conference on Modern Trends in Applied Linguistics was held on 30th November 2023 at COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore campus, to provide a platform for intellectual debate on the current trends in applied linguistics. The Humanities Department organized this event to bring together researchers, academics, and professionals to discuss and explore emerging trends, developments, and challenges in the field of applied linguistics. The conference was a prelude to the launch of MS in English Linguistics by the Department of Humanities in Spring 2024.

The one-day International Conference featured opening and closing sessions, plenaries with four keynote speakers, and concurrent sessions on Emerging Trends in Applied Linguistics, Language Representation and Power, and English Language Teaching. The inaugural session began with reciting a few verses of the Holy Quran. Dr. Saima Akhtar, the conference convener, delivered the welcome note, emphasizing that the conference's main objective was to provide a platform for professionals and researchers to discuss the latest trends in applied linguistics research. She also informed the audience that the Humanities Department would launch the MS English Linguistics program in Spring 2024.

Prof. Dr. Nizamuddin, Pro-Rector of Superior University, Lahore, and Former Chairperson of Punjab Higher Education Commission, graced the inaugural session as the chief guest. In his address, he highlighted the importance of language in constructing identity by transmitting cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs. He emphasized the need to investigate the linguistic features of the indigenous languages for the preservation of cultural identity, contribution to linguistic diversity, and documentation of endangered languages.

Dr. Julie Flowerday, Professor of Anthropology at Forman Christian College University, Lahore, in her keynote address on "From Ethnology to Ethnography in Linguistic Anthropology," discussed that the evolution of Linguistic Anthropology has witnessed a profound shift from the broader lens of ethnology to the more focused and immersive approach of ethnography. She delved into this evolution, explaining its implications and the

pivotal role it plays in the contemporary landscape of applied linguistics. Linguistic Anthropology is a journey toward a more holistic understanding of language—one that is deeply rooted in the intricate interplay between culture and communication.

During his keynote address, Dr. Saqib Mahmood, the Head of the English Department at the University of Lahore, discussed the role of technology in enhancing L2 proficiency. Drawing insights from English Language Teaching (ELT) research, he highlighted that technology is reshaping the landscape. He then explained the various benefits of using technology in the classroom and emphasized the crucial role of teachers in integrating corpus-informed approaches into teaching pedagogical grammar.

During the event, two international speakers delivered their keynote addresses virtually. Dr. Vahid Nimehchisalem, Associate Professor at the University of Putra Malaysia, shared his insights about the evolution of language assessment techniques in his keynote address on "The Course of Language Assessment: From Past Traditions to Future Innovations." He discussed how language assessment techniques have transitioned from summative and norm-referenced approaches to formative and criterion-referenced evaluation, with an emphasis on enhancing students' critical and creative thinking skills. Dr. Nimehchisalem also highlighted the importance of human-AI collaboration in developing equitable and effective language assessment practices for the future.

Dr. Manjet Kaur Meher Singh, Associate Professor at the University of Science Malaysia, shed light on the emerging trends in applied linguistics in her keynote address titled "Current Trends in Applied Linguistics." She shared her insights about recent developments in research related to pedagogical practices, communicative issues, and social problems resulting from language-related issues. She elaborated on how the changing face of native speakers, i.e., language competence, language ownership, and social status, has been problematized by researchers arguing that monolingual norms and assumptions are flawed or inequitable in a global super-diverse world. She emphasized the need to investigate various contexts and challenges that native speaker constructs by adopting poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives.

After the keynote addresses were delivered, the Director of CUI, Lahore, Dr. Syed Asad Hussain, congratulated Dr. Musferah Mehfooz, the Head of Humanities Department, for taking the initiative to organize this event that brought together scholars and researchers from around the world. He emphasized the significance of exploring new avenues of research by utilizing advanced research tools. At the end of the inaugural, Dr. Musferah Mehfooz delivered a vote of thanks. She expressed her gratitude to the chief guest and keynote speakers who graced the occasion with their presence and shared their insights on the conference theme. She also lauded the organizers' efforts, who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this event. In the end, the chief guest along with the director, presented souvenirs to the keynote speakers and the conference convener, Dr. Saima Akhtar, and co-organizers, Dr. Umara Shaheen and Dr. Memoona Idris.

The conference was divided into three symposia, each of which had two concurrent sessions. The sessions of the first symposium on "Emerging Trends in Applied Linguistics" were chaired by Dr. Muhammad Islam, Head of the ELT and Linguistics Department at Punjab University, and Dr. Shafqat Zaidi, Assistant Professor at Riphah International University. While providing feedback on the conference presentations, Dr. Muhammad Islam appreciated the researchers' work and emphasized the importance of using robust methodology with a larger sample size to increase the generalizability of their findings. Dr. Shafqat Zaidi complimented the presenters for their enlightening research work and stressed the significance of exploring various avenues of computational linguistics.

The second symposium on "Language, Representation and Power" was chaired by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, English Programs Regional Manager at the U.S. Consulate General, and Dr. Hasnat Ahmed, Riphah International University, Lahore. The chairs appreciated the researchers' efforts in investigating the relationship between language and power. Dr. Iqbal suggested integrating corpus analysis to expand the scope of research based on critical discourse studies. Dr. Hasnat Ahmed shared his views on developing researchers' critical insight to ensure rigorous investigation of the subject of study.

The sessions of the third symposium on "English Language Teaching" were chaired by Dr. Zafar Iqbal Bhatti, Associate Professor at the School of English (Language and Literature), Minhaj University, Lahore, and Dr. Umer Azeem, Assistant Professor of English. They appreciated the researchers' passion for enhancing the teaching and learning of the English language. Dr. Zafar Iqbal delved into various aspects of English language teaching, ranging from innovative pedagogical approaches to the integration of technology in the classroom. Dr. Umer Azim shared valuable insights about the in-depth investigation of corpus approaches to ELT and how they can improve pedagogical practices.

During the closing ceremony, Dr. Musferah Mehfooz expressed her gratitude to the Director of CUI Lahore for his unwavering support. She also thanked Dr. Sohail Riaz, the In-charge of Media Communication Studies, and his team for their invaluable contribution. Additionally, she acknowledged the presenters for their enlightening research, the organizers for their untiring efforts, and the audience for their active participation.

To sum up, the conference provided a platform for linguists, researchers, and language educators to exchange ideas and share their experiences. It helped to foster collaboration and networking among the participants and also provided an opportunity for the attendees to learn about the latest trends and techniques in the field of applied linguistics.