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Linguistic Science
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Peter Sells

Professor

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Profile

Biography

Peter Sells' research is primarily concerned with comparative aspects of grammar, from a theoretical standpoint. His expertise is primarily in syntax, as well as its interfaces to morphology and semantics, with a particular focus on Japanese and Korean linguistics.

Having grown up in Sheffield, he studied for his BA at the University of Liverpool, and then received his PhD in Linguistics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He spent many years at Stanford University in California before returning to the UK in 2007.

Career

- Stanford University
Assistant Professor 1989-1995
Associate Professor 1995-2002
Professor 2002-2007
- School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
Professor and Head of the Department of Linguistics
2007-2011

Departmental roles

- Head of Department

University roles

- Member of University Council
- Member of Humanities Research Centre Steering Committee

Research

Overview

My primary research interest is in the nature of grammatical theory, in particular what the components of morphology, syntax and semantics look like, and how they relate to each other. In the past have worked in a variety of theoretical frameworks on a variety of languages, primarily Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Philippine languages, and Swedish.

My current work on Korean involves aspects of syntax and semantics, in joint work with [Shin-Sook Kim](#), primarily involving negation, scope, and licensing. We are also working on Korean noun-modifying clauses as part of a project funded through Stanford University. In addition, I work on aspects of Korean and English syntax with [Jong-Bok Kim](#).

My current work on Japanese is largely related to a study of [verb semantics and argument realisation in Pre-modern Japanese](#) as part of an AHRC-funded project on this topic, based in Oxford (2008-2013). This is a study of the syntax of Old Japanese (c. 8th century). One outcome of this project is the [Oxford Corpus of Old Japanese](#), which will be developed over the coming years, and has recently received recognition from the British Academy as an Academy Research Project. The partners in this project are Oxford, York, and the [National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics](#).

A secondary interest of mine is the use of linguistic approaches to an analysis of the language and design of advertising. I have some earlier work online. I hope to offer classes on this topic in the future.

Current projects

- Negation at the syntax-semantics interface in Korean and Japanese
- NPI licensing in Korean
- The syntax of Old Japanese
- Syntax and information structure in Korean

Research group(s)

[Syntax and semantics research group](#)

Grants

[Verb semantics and argument realisation in Pre-modern Japanese](#)

Collaborators

- [Bjarke Frellesvig](#) (University of Oxford)
- [Jong-Bok Kim](#) (Kyung Hee University)
- [Shin-Sook Kim](#) (University of York)
- [Yoshiko Matsumoto](#) (Stanford University)

Available PhD research projects

I would be happy to supervise research projects in morphology, syntax, or semantics, especially involving comparative aspects.

Supervision

- Elaine Lopez (PhD committee member; *The role of explicit instruction on article acquisition in L2 English*)
- Rashidah Albaqami (PhD co-supervisor, with Heather Marsden; *Second language acquisition of motion verbs: A bidirectional study of learners of Arabic and English*)
- Aiqing Wang (PhD supervisor; *The Syntax-Morphology Interface in Classical Chinese*)

External activities

Editorial duties

I am on the editorial boards of several journals: *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, *Nordic Journal of Linguistics*, *Korean Linguistics*, *Journal of Japanese Linguistics*, *Language Research*, and *Studies in Modern Grammar*. I served on the board of *Linguistic Inquiry* for the usual maximum 20 years.

Invited talks and conferences

- Unpredicated Particles. Invited colloquium, Nanzan University, Nagoya, August 2012.
- On Null Pronouns in Old Japanese. NINJAL/Oxford Joint Symposium on Corpus-Based Study of Japanese

Language History. National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics, July 2012.

- NPI Licensing by Covertly Negative Verbs in Korean. [With Shin-Sook Kim]. Poster presentation. Workshop on Formal Altaic Linguistics 8. University of Stuttgart, May 2012.
- Formal Conditions on the Licensing of True Resultatives. [With Ryosuke Shibagaki]. Poster presentation. Workshop on Formal Altaic Linguistics 8. University of Stuttgart, May 2012.
- Provisional and Conditional clauses in Old Japanese. [With Bjarke Frellesvig, Stephen Horn and Kerri Russell]. Workshop on Formal Altaic Linguistics 8. University of Stuttgart, May 2012.
- Workshop commentator, Workshop on Scandinavian Object Shift. University of Gothenburg, March 2012.
- The Flexibility of Negation Scope in Korean. Invited syntax workshop presentation. UCL, February 2012.
- Words Have Properties But No Syntax. Invited presentation, Workshop on Categorization and Category Change in Morphology. University of Tromsø, December 2011.
- The English Binominal NP as a Nominal Juxtaposition Construction. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. NP2 Workshop on the Structure of the Noun Phrase in English: Synchronic and Diachronic Explorations. Newcastle University, September 2011.
- A Declarative Perspective on Agreement and Government. Conference on Explorations in Syntactic Government and Subcategorisation. University of Cambridge, September 2011.
- The English Binominal NP Construction: A Construction-Based Perspective. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. HPSG-11, University of Washington, Seattle, August 2011.
- Genitive Subjects in Adnominal Clauses. Invited seminar, Heinrich Heine Universität Düsseldorf, May 2011.
- The English Binominal NP as a Nominal Juxtaposition Construction. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. 37th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, University of California, Berkeley, February 2011.
- Negation at the Syntax-Semantics Interface. 9th workshop on Inferential Mechanisms and their Linguistic Manifestation (Kyunghee Korea-Japan workshop on linguistics and language processing). Kyoto, Japan, December 2010.
- Complex Voice Systems and the Mapping from

Semantic Roles to Syntax. Syntax Workshop at Kyung-Hee University, Seoul, Korea, December 2010.

- Reconstruction and Scope of Negation in Korean (and Japanese). [With Shin-Sook Kim]. WAFL 7, University of Southern California, October 2010.
- Scoping in Relation to Base Order in Japanese and Korean. [With Shin-Sook Kim]. Linguistics Association of Great Britain, University of Leeds, September 2010.
- Symmetries and Asymmetries in Voice Systems. Workshop on Morphological Voice and its Grammatical Interfaces: Theoretic Modelling and Psycholinguistic Validation. University of Vienna, June 2010.
- The Big Mess Construction: Interactions between the Lexicon and Constructions. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. NP1 Workshop on the Structure of the Noun Phrase in English: Synchronic and Diachronic Explorations, Vigo, Spain, October 2009.
- Structures of Modality in Korean. [With Shin-Sook Kim]. Linguistics Association of Great Britain, University of Edinburgh, September 2009.
- Teaching Linguistics: What, How, Why? Symposium on Teaching Linguistics. University of Konstanz, July 2009.
- Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory. Plenary lecture. 3L Summer School on Language Documentation and Description, SOAS, June 2009.
- Form and Function in Negative Imperatives. Invited presentation, Ten Years After conference, University of Frankfurt, June 2009.
- Dimensions of Syntactic Analysis in Toba Batak. Paper presented at Austronesian Languages and Linguistics 4. SOAS, June 2009.
- Aspects of Case-Marking in Japanese: An LFG Perspective. Invited seminar, University of Stuttgart, May 2009.
- What do Genitive Subjects Tell us About Adnominal Clauses? Oriental Institute Seminar, Oxford University, February 2009.
- Voice and Extraction in Tagalog. Invited seminar, Queen Mary University London, January 2009.
- Korean Copular Structures with Nominalizer *kes* as (Pseudo-)Clefts. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. Cleft 2008 Workshop, Berlin, November 2008.
- How Negation Scopes in Japanese and Korean. Invited plenary presentation, Japanese/Korean Linguistics 18. New York, November 2008.
- Oblique Case Marking on Core Arguments in Japanese

and Korean. Invited seminar, Kobe University, October 2008.

- What do Genitive Subjects Tell us About Adnominal Clauses? Invited presentation, Kobe Conference on Typology: English, Japanese, and other languages. Kobe University, October 2008.
- Korean Nominalizer kes and Its Information Structure Properties. [With Jong-Bok Kim]. UCL Information Structure workshop, September 2008.
- Morphology and Clausal Force in Italian Imperatives. Linguistics Association of Great Britain, University of