

Meet the Speaker: An Interview with Bodo Winter

Bodo Winter is a featured speaker for the International Conference this year. The following is an interview that he gave to *The English Connection*.

TEC: Could you tell us a little about yourself and how you became involved in English language education?

Bodo Winter: I became interested in studying language on my first visit to South Korea in 2005. When I started learning Korean as a second language, I realized for the first time that languages can be quite different from what I was used to, being a native speaker of German and an L2 learner of English. I started studying general linguistics (Magister, MA) but quickly became disenfranchised by



the science of language due to its over-emphasis on abstract structures and formal grammars. This led me to pursue a degree in cognitive science (PhD), with a focus on embodiment – how language is interconnected with perceptual processes and

relates to real physical interactions. In my own research, I focus on those aspects of language that are involved in meaning-making with other human beings, including metaphor and gesture.

Now, being at the University of Birmingham, which has successful MA and PhD distance learning programs in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, I connect my research on foundational issues of language and cognition with topics relevant to the classroom.

TEC: What is the focus of your presentations, and how will they be useful to the EFL teacher new to Korea as well as to the veteran practitioner?

Winter: I will give two presentations at KOTESOL. The first talk is focused on my research and will highlight the many ways in which the English language makes it possible to talk about perception. How do English speakers talk about tastes and smells? How do they use metaphor to convey sensory perceptions? These questions are highly relevant for language learners – after all, talking about what we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell forms a frequent focus of communicative

activity. In my second talk, I will discuss some recent debates surrounding academic practices in linguistics and how these pertain to practices in the classroom. As an advocate of open and reproducible research, I hope to make clear that linguistics as an academic discipline needs to become more open and share data and tools right away to close the gap between theory and practice. In this methods-oriented talk, I also hope to demonstrate some freely available datasets and toolkits that can be incorporated into the classroom.

TEC: A conference theme-related question: What skills – teacher skills and/or learner skills – are needed to best prepare our English language students for their future?

Winter: The Internet is an ocean of data, a lot of which is relevant for language teaching and language research. In order to traverse this ocean, however, one needs the appropriate navigation skills! To best prepare our students for the future, we need to empower them to make the best out of the wealth of freely available language resources on the web. And we need to make students creative and efficient about seeking the tools for their needs.

At the same time, we should not forget that the prime venue for language use will always remain real face-to-face interactions with other human beings. There are many things that cannot ever be learned outside the context of human interactions, such as gesture and prosody. Despite a wealth of automated online language learning apps, I firmly believe that physical interactions with teachers are irreplaceable. This is precisely what follows from the embodied position I adopt in my own research. For example, numerous studies have shown that teachers' gestures facilitate their students' learning. In addition, the frequency with which students gesture themselves is correlated with their learning success. Moreover, due to their genuine interactional nature, gesture frequency is increased when two people can actually see each other. These studies on gesture are just one piece of evidence demonstrating that we cannot and should not take the body out of the classroom.

TEC: Would you share with us a little about your life outside of ELT?

Winter: I'm a lover of language, statistics, science, and Korean culture. Outside of ELT and linguistics, I'm a movie buff, an electronic sports aficionado, a coffee connoisseur, and a Twitter addict (@BodoWinter).