

DAMIÁN EZEQUIEL BLASI



CONTACT INFORMATION

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POSITION

Maury Green 2019-2020 fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, Harvard University (2019-2020)

Research affiliate at the Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History (2016-)

Faculty at the International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) for the Science of Human History (2018-)

Research associate at the Human Relations Area Files, Yale University (2018-)

Research associate at the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Language, University of Zürich (2018-)

EDUCATION

Dr. Rer. Nat. in Computer Sciences, *Summa Cum Laude*
University of Leipzig

Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

Leipzig, Germany (Jul 2012- Sep 2015, defended Mar 2018)

M.Sc. in Interdisciplinary and Statistical Physics

Instituto Balseiro

Bariloche, Argentina (2009-2010)

Licenciatura in Physics (*five-year undegrad program*)

Instituto Balseiro

Universidad de Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires & Bariloche, Argentina (2004-2009)

PREVIOUS ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Comparative Linguistics and the Psycholinguistics Laboratory, University of Zürich
Zürich, Switzerland (Sept 2015- Aug 2019)

Research assistant at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences Chennai
Chennai, India (Nov 2011 - May 2012)

Research assistant at the Language and Cognition Development Group, International School for Advanced Studies
Trieste, Italy (Apr-Aug 2011)

VISITING
SCHOLAR
POSITIONS

Santa Fe Institute
Santa Fe, USA (Mar 2016)

University of Edinburgh, Language Evolution and Computation Research Unit
Edinburgh, UK (Nov 2014)

Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Evolutionary Processes in Language and Culture Group
Nijmegen, The Netherlands (Feb-Jul 2014)

State University of São Paulo, Mathematical Biology Group
São Paulo, Brazil (Feb 2011)

SCHOOLS &
COURSES
ATTENDED

CIFAR Deep Learning + Reinforcement Learning Summer School
Online (Aug 2020)

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Summer School on Neurobiology & Genetics of Language
Long Island, USA (Aug 2018)

Kavli Summer Institute in Cognitive Neuroscience
Santa Barbara, USA (Jun 2017)

Language documentation and linguistic fieldwork summer course
Jerusalem, Israel (Feb 2016)

Graduate School of Linguistics Summer School
Groningen, Netherlands (Jun 2013)

Okinawa Institute of Technology Integrative Biology Course
Okinawa, Japan (May 2013)

Summer School on Random Motion and Random Graphs
Berlin, Germany (Jun 2011)

Santa Fe Institute Summer School on Complex Systems
Santa Fe, USA (May-Jun 2010)

GRANTS,
AWARDS AND
SCHOLARSHIPS

Branco Weiss Fellow
2020

Maury Green Fellow of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University
Sept 2019 - May 2020

Glushko Dissertation Prize, awarded by the Cognitive Science Society
and the Glushko-Samuels Foundation
2020

Research Academy Leipzig Doctoral Prize in STEM research
2019

Doctoral Summa Cum Laude (highest distinction)
Mar 2018

Swiss National Foundation grant (along with Sebastian Sauppe)
2017

European Science Foundation grant via the NetWordS program
2014

International Max Planck Research School Fellowship
Jun 2012 - Aug 2015

Indian Department of Science and Technology Fellowship
2010

National Commission of Nuclear Energy Fellowship
Aug 2007 - Dec 2010

JOURNAL
PUBLICATIONS

Panpipes as units of cultural analysis and dispersal.

G. Aguirre-Fernández, D. E. Blasi, M. Sánchez-Villagra
Evolutionary Human Sciences (2020)

Meaning before grammar: A review of ERP experiments on the neurodevelopmental origins of semantic processing

E. U. Morgan, A. van der Meer, M. Vulchanova, D. E. Blasi and Giosuè Baggio,
Psychonomic Bulletin Review (2020)

Human sound systems are shaped by post-Neolithic changes in bite configuration

D. E. Blasi, S. Moran, S. Moisiuk, D. Dediu, P. Widmer and B. Bickel,
Science (2019)

Adjective Selection and the Grammatical Gender of Inanimate Nouns: An Information-Theoretic Investigation of Neo-Whorfian Claims

A. Williams, R. Cotterell, L. Wolf-Sonkin, D. E. Blasi and H. Wallach,
Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics (2019)

Studying language evolution in the age of big data

T. Bhattacharya, N. Retzlaff, D. E. Blasi, W. Croft, M. Cysouw, D. Hruschka, I. Maddieson, L. Müller, E. Smith, P. F. Stadler, G. Starostin, H. Youn
Journal of Language Evolution (2018)

A universal cue for grammatical categories in the input to children: frequent frames

S. Moran, D. E. Blasi, R. Schikowski, A. C. Küntay, B. Pfeiffer, S. Allen and S. Stoll
Cognition (2018)

Grammars are robustly transmitted even in extreme situations:
the emergence of creole languages

D. E. Blasi, S. Michælis and M. Haspelmath
Nature Human Behaviour (2017)

Universal sound-meaning associations across thousands of languages

D. E. Blasi, M. Christiansen, S. Wichmann, H. Hammarström and P. Stadler
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2016)

Language evolution and climate: the case of desiccation and tone

C. Everett, D. E. Blasi and S. Roberts
Journal of Language Evolution (2016)

D-PLACE: A global database of cultural, linguistic and environmental diversity

K. R. Kirby, ..., D. E. Blasi et al.
PloS One (2016)

Arbitrariness, iconicity and systematicity in language

M. Dingemanse, D. E. Blasi, G. Lupyan, P. Monaghan and M. H. Christiansen
Trends in Cognitive Sciences (2015)

Climate, vocal folds and tonal languages: connecting the physiological and geographical dots

C. Everett, D. E. Blasi and S. Roberts
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2015)

BOOK
CHAPTERS

Beyond binary dependencies in the structure of the world's languages

D. E. Blasi and S. Roberts

In Enfield (ed), *Dependencies in Language*, Language Sciences Press (2017), pp. 117-128

Assessing transitivity prominence from a statistical perspective

D. E. Blasi

In Valency Classes in the World's Languages, Comrie & Malchuknov eds, Brill press (2015), pp. 149-153

Cross-linguistic comparison of complexity measures in phonological systems

S. Moran and D. E. Blasi

In Newmeyer and Preston (eds), *Measuring Linguistic Complexity*. Oxford University Press (2014), pp. 217-240

CONFERENCE
PROCEEDINGS

On the distribution of deep clausal embeddings: A large cross-linguistic study

D. E. Blasi, R. Cotterell, L. Wolf-Sonkin, S. Stoll, B. Bickel and M. Baroni,

Association for Computational Linguistics (2019)

Meaning to Form: Measuring Systematicity as Information

T. Pimentel, A. McCarthy, D. E. Blasi, B. Roark and R. Cotterell,

Association for Computational Linguistics (2019)

Is Word Segmentation Child Play in All Languages?

G. R. Loukatou, S. Moran, D. E. Blasi, S. Stoll, A. Cristia,

Association for Computational Linguistics (2019)

PROFESSIONAL
SERVICE

Associate editor of Open Mind (MIT Press) (2020-present)

Associate editor of the Journal of Language Evolution (Oxford University Press) (2016-present)

Ad hoc reviewer (journals):

- Multidisciplinary: Nature, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, Nature Scientific Data, Journal of the Royal Society Interface, BioEssays, PloS One, Physical Review E, Scientific Reports
- Linguistics: Linguistic Typology, Lingua, Computational Linguistics, Diachronica, Language Dynamics and Change, Linguistics Vanguard, Journal of Logic, Language and Information, Laboratory Phonology
- Anthropology: Evolutionary Human Sciences, Evolution and Human Behaviour, Cross-Cultural Research, Interaction Studies
- Cognitive science: Cognition, Cognitive Science, Cognitive Neuropsychology, iPerception, Frontiers in Psychology

Ad hoc reviewer (other): Association for Computational Linguistics, Peter Lang, Springer-Verlag, Practical Handbook of Corpus Linguistics, Societas Linguistica Europæa, EVOLANG, Cognitive Sciences Society, Linguistic Society of America

External referee: European Research Council (ERC), Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), French National Research Agency (ANR), Israel Science Foundation (ISF)

TEACHING

Courses

- Biology of language
University of Zürich, Autumn semester 2015, 2016, 2018
- Quantitative methods in linguistics
University of Zürich, Spring semester 2016
- First language acquisition
University of Zürich, Spring semester 2017
- Semantics and Pragmatics
University of Zürich, Spring semester 2018

Schools and seminars

- Quantitative typology
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru, Peru, 2019
- A primer on language evolution
Escuela Lingüística de Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2019
- Studying language from observational data: inference, causality and limitations
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway, 2018
- A crash course in the biology of language
University of Sonora, Mexico, 2017
- Data science applied to language: a bag of methods to wrangle with linguistic data
Societas Linguistica Europea I summer school, Switzerland, 2017
- Introduction to BEAST and phylogenetic inference
Pontificia Universidad Católica, Peru, 2016
- Fundamentals of statistical reasoning
Jena Spring School in Quantitative Methods, Germany, 2016
- Phylogenetic inference in historical linguistics
International workshop on language typology and documentation, Mexico 2015

INVITED
SEMINARS &
KEYNOTES

- University of Buenos Aires (Argentina), Meetings in Artificial Intelligence (2020)
- University of Kyoto (Japan), Evolving linguistics meeting (2020)
- University of Tokyo (Japan), Evolutionary Anthropology Lab (2020)
- Santa Fe Institute (USA), workshop “Impersonal trends, big ideas and great leaders” (2020)
- St. Petersburg State University (Russia), keynote “III Language, music and computation international conference” (2019)
- Princeton University (USA), Department of Psychology (2019)
- Harvard University (USA), Language and Cognition seminar (2019)
- Stanford University (USA), Language and Cognition seminar (2019)
- Berkeley University (USA), Department of Linguistics (2019)
- University of Chicago (USA), Department of Psychology (2019)
- Higher School of Economics (Russia), Department of Linguistics (2019)
- University of New Mexico (USA), Department of Linguistics (2018)
- Santa Fe Institute (USA), workshop “Lexical semantics, language change, and universal translators” (2018)
- Yale University (USA), Department of Linguistics (2018)
- University of Marburg (Germany), keynote “Parallel text analysis in diachronic research” (2018)
- Hong Kong University (Hong Kong), Department of Linguistics (2018)
- University of Sonora (Mexico), seminar keynote “Syntactic Complexity 2017” (2017)
- Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics (Netherlands), keynote “Many paths to language” (2017)
- École Normale Supérieure (France), Cognitive Sciences and Psycholinguistics Laboratory (2017)
- Paris-Sorbonne (France), keynote “Sound Symbolism and Crossmodal Correspondences” (2017)
- Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, keynote “II International Colloquium on Amerind Languages Typology” (2016)
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA), Department of Cognitive and Brain Sciences (2016)
- Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (Germany) (2016)
- University of Cambridge (UK), Department of Phonetics (2015)
- Max Planck Institute for Complex Systems (Germany) (2015)
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Mexico), keynote at the “I binational workshop on language typology and documentation” (2015)
- University of Olomouc (Czech Republic), conference keynote “Informational fundamentals of life - genomes and languages” (2014)
- University of Tübingen (Germany), Department of Linguistics (2013)
- University of Zürich (Switzerland) (2012).

EVENTS
ORGANIZED
(ONLY AS MAIN
ORGANIZER)

Cognitive explanations in linguistic typology: contemporary insights from language processing and language acquisition (2017)

Workshop at the Association for Linguistic Typology, Australia

Linguistic diversity meets the brain (2017)

Conference at University of Zürich, Switzerland

First language acquisition in the languages of the world: similarities and differences (2017)

Workshop at the 50th Societas Linguistica Europaea meeting, Switzerland

Triggers of language change (2017)

Conference at the Université of Lyon, France

Causality in the Language Sciences (2015)

Conference at Max Planck Institute for Mathematics in the Sciences, Germany

STUDENT
SUPERVISION

Olena Shcherbakova (Linguistics Ph.D. co-supervisor), Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Germany
The evolution of linguistic complexity [2019-]

Camila Scaff (member of Cognitive Sciences Ph.D. advisory committee), Cognitive Sciences and Psycholinguistics Laboratory, École Normale Supérieure, France
Beyond WEIRD: An interdisciplinary approach to language acquisition [2017-2019]

Trudie Strauss (Statistics Ph.D. co-supervisor), Department of Statistics, University of the Free State, South Africa
Word frequency distributions - empirical and cross-linguistic insights [2017-]

Manuel Rüdishüli (Linguistics B.A. supervisor), Department of Comparative Linguistics, University of Zürich, Switzerland
Language acquisition and the evolution of language [2017-2018]

Eric Szabo Felix (Linguistics B.A. supervisor), Department of Comparative Linguistics, University of Zürich, Switzerland
Stability of Typological Features in High-Contact Varieties [2018-2019]

SELECTED
MEDIA
COVERAGE

Blasi, Moran, Moisić, Dediu, Widmer and Bickel (2019)

- Did dietary changes bring us f-words? Study tackles complexities of language's origin, *The New York Times*
- A change in our diet might have changed human language, *National Geographic*
- Mind Your Fs and Vs: Agriculture May Have Shaped Both Human Jaws and Language, *Scientific American*
- We Can Thank Agriculture and Soft Food for the 'F' Word, Claims Provocative New Study, *Gizmodo*
- The Science Behind Why We Use 'F' Words, *The Wall Street Journal*
- The Guardian view on language: the flesh made word, *The Guardian*
- The Ability to Pronounce 'F' and 'V' Sounds Might Have Evolved Along With Diet, *Smithsonian Magazine*

Blasi, Michælis and Haspelmath (2017)

- The painful origins of many creole languages, *The Economist*
- Humans learn complex grammatical patterns even in extremely challenging circumstances, *Eurek! Alert*
- No creoles?, *Language Log*
- Creoles (featuring Damián Blasi), *Talk the Talk podcast*

Blasi, Christiansen, Wichmann, Hammarström and Stadler (2016)

- Distant languages have similar sounds for common words, *The Economist*
- The hidden sound patterns that could overturn years of linguistic theory, *The Guardian*
- Linguistics: Sound and meaning in the world's languages, *Nature*
- "R" Is for Red: Common Words Share Similar Sounds in Many Languages, *Scientific American*

Everett, Blasi and Roberts (2015)

- Climate influences language evolution, *Scientific American*
- Soggy climate affects language, *Nature*