



**Middlesex
University**



**INSTITUTE OF
LANGUAGES
CULTURES AND
SOCIETIES**

**SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED STUDY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON**

Call for Papers

8th Middlesex Roundtable on Signs, Language and Communication

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Middlesex University London

Language and Communication Research Group

22-24 April 2026

The *Middlesex Roundtable on Signs, Language and Communication* is an annual conference launched in January 2019 to encourage discussion between three paradigms of language and communication theory: the Integrationism of Roy Harris and his followers, Biosemiotics and Philosophy of Communication. The Roundtable takes place at [Middlesex University London](#).

These areas of thought and scholarship share assumptions regarding the fundamental role played by communicative interaction in the emergence of signification, meaning and relationality. They also share views of communication and language that are not limited to the understanding of language as a code-based domain.

As usual, the Roundtable is a small-scale workshop, with 10-minute presentations and long conversations (flipped conference style). This format allows for an in-depth exchange of ideas, open questions, speculations and considerations and makes the Roundtable an ideal environment to present and discuss work at the frontiers of research in our disciplines.

This year's theme will be *The Concept of Language in the 21st Century*.

It is an exciting time in linguistics and philosophy of language. Developments in the leading paradigms for linguistic research have generated fundamental questions

regarding the (multi-)modality of language, and developments in computer technology, mainly the exponential growth of AI in recent years, have brought foundational questions about the concept of language to the centre of attention. The relationships between language and cognition, language, social structure and social interaction, language and non-human communication systems, language and normativity, as well as the place of the study of language in the humanities, are all being re-drawn because of the waning of once dominant theorisations of the nature of language, and the emergence of new perspectives. Large Language Models present opportunities to rethink the nature of syntactic explanation and linguistic structure while the decolonisation of the humanities opens questions on the ontology of language. Advances in animal communication studies, the biology of consciousness and genetics suggest that the boundaries between human language and other communication systems may be more porous than previously thought, while also urging renewed reflection on what, if anything, makes human language a unique phenomenon in an egalitarian world of coexisting and interdependent species. The question, “What do you mean by *language*?” has, once again, become unavoidable. The Roundtable will offer a space for reflection and exchange of ideas regarding this question and its impact on language study.

We invite abstracts considering this question, from all theoretical and philosophical orientations. Please send your abstract (250 words max) to j.siebers@mdx.ac.uk, by 27 February 2026.

Pre-Roundtable Workshop

Posthumanist linguistics: challenges and pitfalls

The Roundtable will take place on 23 and 24 April and will be preceded by a Workshop at the [Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies of the School of Advanced Study, University of London](#), on 22 April, from 13:00-17:00.

This half-day meeting aims to critically engage with the ‘posthumanist turn’ in linguistics, which seeks to decentre language by rethinking key issues such as agency, anthropocentrism and semiotic complexity. We are interested in contributions that critique the language-philosophical foundations of posthumanist thinking, its philosophies of communication, as well as its practical implications for empirical research, including research paradigms and methodology.

We also invite abstracts discussing this topic. Please send your abstract (250 words max) to j.siebers@mdx.ac.uk, by 27 February 2026.

Both events are in-person only. The definitive programme will be circulated by mid-March.