

Vera Tobin

Department of Cognitive Science
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Appointments

Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH

Associate Professor, Department of Cognitive Science. 2018-present.

Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH

Assistant Professor, Department of Cognitive Science. 2012-2018.

University of California, Santa Barbara

Arnhold Faculty Fellow (Postdoctoral) in Cognitive Approaches to Literature. 2010-2012.

Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH

Lecturer, Department of Cognitive Science. 2008-2010.

Education

Ph.D., English Language and Literature, University of Maryland, College Park. 2008.

M.A., English Language and Literature, University of Maryland, College Park. 2002.

B.A., English, Brown University. 1997.

Publications

Books

Tobin, Vera. 2018. *Elements of Surprise: Our Mental Limits and the Satisfactions of Plot.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Honorable mention, Thomas J. Wilson Memorial Prize

Short list, Christian Gauss Award (Phi Beta Kappa)

Translated into Turkish and Korean

Parrill, Fey, **Vera Tobin**, and Mark Turner, eds. 2010. *Meaning, Form, and Body.* Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

Articles and Chapters

Yadavalli, Aditya, Alekhya Yadavalli, and **Vera Tobin.** Forthcoming. "SLABERTA Talk Pretty One Day: Modeling Second Language Acquisition with BERT." *Proceedings of ACL 2023: Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics.*

Tobin, Vera. 2022. "Narrative and Plot: Unreliable Feelings and the Risks of Surprise." In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Emotion.* Ed. Patrick Colm Hogan. Routledge.

- Tobin, Vera.** 2021. "Where Irony Goes: Routinization and the Collapse of Viewpoint Configurations." *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, 17(2).
- Tobin, Vera.** 2020. "Experimental Investigations of Irony as a Viewpoint Phenomenon." In *The Diversity of Irony*. Eds. Angeliki Athanasiadou and Herbert L. Colston. DeGruyter Methuen.
- Tobin, Vera.** 2017. "Viewpoint, Misdirection, and Sound Design in Film: *The Conversation*." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 122.
- Tobin, Vera** and Todd Oakley. 2017. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Texts." *Semiotica*, 215.
- Tobin, Vera.** 2016. "Performance, Irony, and Viewpoint in Language." In *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*. Eds. Amy Cook and Rhonda Blair. Methuen.
- Cappelle, Bert, Edwige Dugas, and **Vera Tobin.** 2015. "An Afterthought on *Let Alone*." *Journal of Pragmatics*. 80.
- Tobin, Vera.** 2014. "Readers as Overhearers and Texts as Objects: Joint Attention in Reading Communities." *SCRIPTA*, vol. 18, no. 34
- Tobin, Vera.** 2014. "Where Do Cognitive Biases Fit Into Cognitive Linguistics? An Example from the 'Curse of Knowledge.'" *Language and the Creative Mind*. Eds. Barbara Dancygier, Mike Borkent, and Jennifer Hinnell. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Oakley, Todd, and **Vera Tobin.** 2014. "The Whole is Sometimes Less than the Sum of Its Parts: Toward a Theory of Document Acts." *Language and Cognition*, vol. 6, no. 1
- Tobin, Vera,** and Michael Israel. 2012. "Irony as a Viewpoint Phenomenon." In *Viewpoint in Language: A Multimodal Perspective*. Eds. Eve Sweetser and Barbara Dancygier. Cambridge University Press.
- Oakley, Todd, and **Vera Tobin.** 2012. "Attention, Blending, and Suspense in Classic and Experimental Film." In *Blending and the Study of Narrative*. Eds. Ralf Schneider and Marcus Hartner. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tobin, Vera.** 2010. "Joint Attention, *To the Lighthouse*, and Modernist Representations of Intersubjectivity." *English Text Construction*, vol. 3, no. 2
- Tobin, Vera.** 2010. "Grammatical and Rhetorical Consequences of Entrenchment in Conceptual Blending." In *Meaning, Form, and Body*. Eds. Fey Parrill, Vera Tobin, and Mark Turner. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Tobin, Vera.** 2009. "Cognitive Bias and the Poetics of Surprise." *Language and Literature*, vol. 18, no. 2
- Tobin, Vera.** 2006. "Ways of Reading Sherlock Holmes." *Language and Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1
Winner of the 2006 Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) Prize.
- Israel, Michael, Jennifer Riddle Harding, and **Vera Tobin.** 2005. "On Simile." *Language, Culture and Mind*. Eds. Suzanne Kemmer and Michel Achard. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

Essays and Reviews

- Review of *Flashbacks in Film*. 2022. In *Journal of Pragmatics*.
- "The Art of the Plot Twist." 2021. Essay in *AEON Magazine*.
- Review of *New Insights into the Language and Cognition Interface*. 2020. In *LaMiCus*.
- "The Elements of Surprise." 2019. Essay in *The Neat Review*.
- "The Science of the Plot Twist." 2018. *The Conversation*. Reprinted in *El Pais, Salon*, and elsewhere.

“Projection” and “Blended Space.” 2010. Entries in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences*. Ed. Patrick Colm Hogan. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Invited talks

Invited lecture, Mystery Writers of America, online for Boston, MA. “Engineering Surprise: How Stories Conspire with Our Minds and What Happens in Second (or Seventeenth) Readings.” March 2022.

Plenary public lecture, Humanities in Cognitive Science series, Vassar University. “Cat Scares and Slow Burns: The Cognitive Science of Cinematic Surprise” February 2022.

Public lecture, Abrialin ao Vivo - Linguists Online. “Irony is Difficult: But How, When, and Why?” April 2021.

Plenary lecture, 2020 International Conference on Intercultural Multimodal Communication, online for Changsha, China. “The Case of Disappearing Ironies: A Multimodal Story.” December 2020.

Seminar lecture, International Multimodal Communication Centre, online for Oxford, UK. “Vanishing viewpoints in films' image, language, and sound.” November 2020.

Plenary lecture, Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image Conference, online for Grand Rapids, MI. “Looking Back/All There Is to Know About *The Crying Game*?” June 2020.

Invited lecture, Indiana University. “Retrospection, Forgetting, and the Elements of Surprise.” March 2019.

Public lecture, Litteraturhuset, University of Oslo, Norway. “Looking Back with Surprise.” February 2019.

Invited lecture, Fiction and Other Minds Seminar, Oxford University. “Shifting the Blame: Some Surprising Cognitive Elements of Narrative Surprise.” October 2018.

Colloquium lecture, CogSci Forum, University of Zagreb, Croatia. “Susceptibility to Surprise.” May 2018.

Invited lecture, Cognitive Poetics Symposium, University of Bayreuth, Germany. “What is a Reader? Thoughts on Addressees, Observers, Overhearers, and Side Participants.” June 2017.

Visiting Research Fellow in Cognition and Poetics, Universität Osnabrück, Germany. Blockseminar on “Elements of Surprise,” December 2014.

Invited speaker and panel discussant for workshop on “Can Cognitive Scientists Help Computers Recognize Irony?” 2014 Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society (COGSCI 2014), Quebec City, Canada, July 2014.

Keynote speaker, Cognitive Science in the Arts and Humanities: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook NY, March 2014.

Invited panel discussant, “Looking Forward,” a forum about the future of cognitive linguistics. International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, Edmonton, Canada. June 2013.

Selected presentations

“The Inadvertence of Being Earnest: Is Habituation the Enemy of Irony?” Rhetoric Society of America. Baltimore, MD. May 2022.

- “Speech-Language Pathologists Make Good Snacks: Estimating The Effectiveness of Decontextualized Ambiguous Language” (with Leah Beekman, presenting author). American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Convention. Boston, MA. November 2018.
- “Madder Music and Stronger Wine: The Curse of Knowledge, a Narrative Arms Race, and the Problem of Surprise.” Cognitive Futures in the Humanities. University of Kent, UK. July 2018.
- “Experimental Investigations of Irony as a Viewpoint Phenomenon.” International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. Tartu, Estonia. July 2017.
- “The Artifacts Project” (with Todd Oakley). Introduction to co-organized theme session on Artifacts and Joint Attention. International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. Tartu, Estonia. July 2017.
- “Narrative Surprise and Your Lying Eyes.” Narrative 2017 Conference, Lexington, Kentucky. March 2017.
- “Triangles of Social Cognition, Suspense, and Viewpoint in Experimental Film.” Narrative 2016 Conference, Amsterdam, Netherlands. June 2016.
- “Viewpoint and Sound Design in Film.” Thirteenth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference, Newcastle, UK. July 2015.
- “Viewpoint and the Pragmatics of Unstable Empathy” (with Michael Israel). Twelfth Conference on Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language. University of California, Santa Barbara. November 2014.
- “The Case of the Cursed Clue.” First Conference on Cognitive Futures in the Humanities. Durham University, UK. April 2014.
- “Old Unreliable: Character Narration, the Curse of Knowledge, and Elements of Surprise.” Department of English, CWRU. November 2013.
- “Grammar and Compression: Instructions for (Not) Unpacking a Blend.” International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. Edmonton, Canada. June 2013.
- “Shrinking Poems and Fickle Women” (with Todd Oakley). Conference on Cognition and Poetics, Osnabrück, Germany. April 2013.
- “Where Do Cognitive Biases Fit into Cognitive Linguistics? On Perspective Taking, Presuppositions, and the Curse of Knowledge.” Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language Conference 2012. University of British Columbia, Vancouver. May 2012.
- “Surprised at the Source: Unreliability, Cognitive Bias, and the Pleasures of Misdirection.” Culture and Mind Speaker Series. University of California, Santa Barbara. February 2012.
- “Revising Fictional Worlds: The Readerly Urge to Repair Narrative Gaps.” The 33rd Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society. Boston. July, 2011.
- “Old Reliable: Unreliable Narrators, the Curse of Knowledge, and Implausible Surprise.” Invited lecture. Stanford University. April, 2011.
- “Playing Fair in Fiction and Cognition.” Colloquium on Literature and Mind. University of California, Santa Barbara. October, 2010.
- “Rhetorical, Conceptual, and Grammatical Entrenchment with Expressions of Change.” Ninth Conference on Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language, Case Western Reserve University. October, 2008.
- “When the ‘Curse of Knowledge’ is a Blessing: Egocentric Biases and the Organization of Literary Discourse.” Tenth Conference of the International Cognitive Linguistics Association, Krakow, Poland. July, 2007.

“Joint Attention in Reading Communities.” Eighth Conference on Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language, UC San Diego. November, 2006.

University Service

Director of Graduate Studies (Cognitive Linguistics), Department of Cognitive Science. 2021-present.

University Faculty Senate. Elected representative. Fall 2022-present.

Research Committee, College of Arts and Sciences. Fall 2022-present.

Faculty Development Committee, College of Arts and Sciences. Spring 2020.

College Strategic Planning Steering Committee. College of Arts and Sciences. Member: 2017-2020.
Chair: 2020.

Committee for Curriculum and Educational Programs, College of Arts and Sciences. Member: 2014-2017. Chair: January 2016-August 2016.

SAGES Fellow Search Committee. 2014.

Department service since 2012:

- Committee for evaluating visiting scholar applications, 2012-present.
- Committee for evaluating applications to the MA in cognitive linguistics, 2013-present.
- Committee for drafting strategic plan, 2016-2018.
- Undergraduate program self-study, as part of external review, 2018.
- Department representative for drafting/developing learning outcomes and assessment plans for HLC accreditation process 2014-2015. Administrator of annual assessment survey, 2016-2020.
- Undergraduate advising and recruitment.

External Service

Reviewed monographs for Cambridge University Press; Oxford University Press; Bloomsbury Press; SAGE.

Reviewed articles for *PMLA*; *Cognitive Linguistics*; *Lege Artis*; *Text & Talk*; *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*; *Journal of Pragmatics*; *Art & Perception*; *Language Matters*; etc.

Member, International Association for Cognitive Semiotics (IACS) Scientific Committee, 2018, 2019

Member, International Scientific Board, International Conference on Multimodal Communication. 2017.

Mentor, Google Summer of Code 2017, 2018, 2019: Red Hen Lab.

Member, Scientific Committee, Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics, 2013.

Faculty, Summer School on Empirical Methods in Cognitive Science. Cleveland, OH. August 2012.

Organizer, Conference on Entrenchment and Plasticity. Santa Barbara, CA. April 2011.

Co-organizer, Ninth Annual Conference on Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language. Cleveland, OH. October 2008.

Outreach

Con Girl. On-screen interview for documentary mini-series. Paramount Plus (UK and Ireland). February 2023

Scholarly consultant for playwright in residence (Jessica Dickey, *The Ghost Tour*), Cleveland Play House. April and May 2022.

“How a Good Scam Can Bypass Our Defences,” interview with Bruce Grierson. *The Walrus*. 11 February 2020. Digest versions published in *Reader’s Digest* (Canada) and *Reader’s Digest* (USA).

“Spoiler Alert! The Psychology of Surprise Endings.” *Hidden Brain*, National Public Radio. Featured guest. 3 December 2018. Rebroadcast December 2019.

Speaker, InsideCPH multimedia program preceding performances of *The Woman in Black* at the Cleveland Play House. September–October 2018.

“Thinking Aloud.” BYU Radio. Featured guest. 24 August 2018.

“Inquiry” with Mark Lynch. WICN Public Radio. Featured guest. 25 July 2018.

“The Hub on Books” with Claire Nichols. ABC Radio National (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). Segment guest. 26 June 2018.

“Afternoons” with Jesse Mulligan. Radio New Zealand. Segment guest. 21 May 2018.

“Take It Apart by the Seams: Vera Tobin on Your Brain on Fiction,” by Jenny Bhatt. *PopMatters*. 15 May 2018.

“A Book of Revelation,” review of *Elements of Surprise* by Gail Marshall, with profile by Matthew Reisz. *Times Higher Education*. 10 May 2018.

“Frydefult bedrag” (“Joyful deception”). Feature article on *Elements of Surprise* by Anders Boas. *Weekendavisen*. 4 May 2018.

“Elements of Surprise: What Fiction Plots Tell Us About Our Minds,” review of *Elements of Surprise* by Simon Ings. *New Scientist*. 2 May 2018.

“Books in Brief,” review of *Elements of Surprise* by Barbara Kiser. *Nature Books & Arts*. 24 April 2018.

Professional Associations

Modern Language Association
Poetics and Linguistics Association
International Cognitive Linguistics Association
Cognitive Science Society