Western Interdisciplinary Student Symposium on Language Research

MARCH 4TH, 2023

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WISSLR 2023 Schedule

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17:15-17:25	Closing Remarks

Abstracts

Keynote Presentation:

Cross-linguistic semantics: Case studies in universality and diversity

Dr. Lisa Matthewson | University of British Columbia

In this talk I present three case-studies from my research on cross-linguistic semantics. The overarching goal of the research program is to find out which elements of semantics are uniform across languages, and where languages vary in their semantics. Often we find that underlying similarities between languages are hidden beneath surface differences. And often, the examination of understudied languages leads to new insights about more familiar languages.

The first case study is on the future in Gitksan (Tsimshianic). Here we see very parallel patterns between Gitksan and English, and Gitksan helps settle a debate about how best to analyze English futures. The second case study is on modals in St'át'imcets (Lillooet Salish). Here we see that while the languages' modal elements cover the same semantic space, the modal systems are organized differently, with each language making different lexicalization choices. The final case study is on yes-no questions in Gitksan. I illustrate some striking differences between Gitksan and more well-studied languages in how biased vs. neutral questions are expressed. However, there is also an interesting point of semantic similarity: I argue that Gitksan expresses via a morpheme a piece of meaning that English expresses using rising intonation.

You Know What I Mean? Analysis of Discourse Markers in Storytelling

Niamh McKenna | University of Western Ontario

Discourse markers have been previously investigated in discourse analysis and literature has shown definite links to functioning as a way to facilitate interaction between speaker and listeners. The present study argues that young women use the discourse marker "you know" or "you know what I mean" as a storyteller to engage the listener to provide feedback during the act of storytelling. Previous evidence suggests that "you know" is used in interactional discourse as a storytelling strategy, in which the discourse marker calls upon the engagement of the listener. By analyzing a 10-minute transcript of a naturalistic conversation, the results found that speakers use the discourse marker "you know" to elicit listener participation through requests for information, to confirm understanding, and to determine listeners stance and affiliation. Future research should focus on individual and cultural variation within the use of discourse markers in conversation. Overall, this research contributes to literature in the field by further understanding the role of discourse markers in storytelling and listener participation.

A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Syrian Refugees in Canadian Newspapers

Nasim Omidian | Carleton University

This paper examines the representation of Syrian refugees in the Canadian press, from December 2015 to December 2017, in four English-language major newspapers. Using methods of Corpus Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study found three prominent themes, namely intake, integration, and concern, through which Syrian refugees are depicted across the political spectrum. The results indicate that adopting a more inclusive immigration policy did not totally negate the biased and discriminatory representations entrenched in the media coverage of refugees, but it can set the stage for more empowering and sympathetic treatment of refugees in the media. This analysis speaks to the importance of media discourse in producing and maintaining particular depictions of refugees among the Canadian public,

highlighting the role of ideological and political stances in the portrayals of refugees across news outlets.

A project documenting Chinese dialects

Kang Xu | University of Calgary

This paper introduces an ongoing project on documenting the phonetics, phonology and sentence structure of several different Chinese dialects. In the first part of the paper, a dialect spoken in the city of Qixia will be discussed. Specifically, the discussion will be focusing on speakers' attitude towards the Qixia dialect. Moreover, interestingly, speakers living in different areas of Qixia city also demonstrate variations in how they speak Qixia dialect. For example, speakers living in Miao's village pronounce huanggua "cucumber" as /hwang gu/ while speakers living in Xiang Kuang pronounce huanggua "cucumber" as /hwang gua/. This paper discusses how speakers from Miao's village and speakers from Xiang Kuang speak Qixia dialect differently.

In the second part of the paper, it reports the findings of a preliminary study on the tonal system and two-word tone sandhi of Huangpi dialect using PRAAT. The results indicate that earlier reports on the six distinct tones are not completely reliable. For example, yu should not be categorized as a Yangping tone with a value of (213). Based on the observed pitch contour through the course of the production of yu, it should be characterized as a Yinqu tone with a value of (45). In connected speech, the tone value of a Yinping tone (33) bearing word will change when it forms a two-word compound. For example, when two words both bear a Yinping (33) tone value, the tone value of the first and the second word both change.

Huangpi dialect is spoken in the city of Wuhan in the central part of China. Supposedly, Huangpi dialect has more than one million speakers. However, until today, there has been no documentation or scholarly articles attempting to study the tone system of Huangpi dialect. Buiding on the findings of the current study, follow-up studies that aiming for a much more detailed and in-depth analysis of Huangpi tone system can be conducted.

The current paper introduces an ongoing project which aims to document the linguistic features of understudied Chinese dialects such as Qixia and Huangpi. The goal of project is twofold: first, it documents features of dialects that are not frequently taught in schools and therefore it helps to

preserve local dialects. Second, by documenting features of uncommonly taught local dialects, this project contributes to the general study of dialectology.

Vowel Epenthesis in Neverver: An OT Analysis

Jem Burch | Yale University

In this paper, I conduct an OT-based analysis of the environments that trigger vowel epenthesis in Neverver. Neverver is an Austronesian language spoken by approximately 500 people on the island of Malekula in the Vanuatu archipelago. Vowel epenthesis in Neverver is typically applied to break up complex onsets and codas, which the language tries to avoid, but in certain instances the expected repair does not occur (Barbour 2009). I argue that inconsistencies in the application of vowel epenthesis arise due to Neverver's preferential application of phonological processes to certain morpheme junctures over others.

(1)   Neverver (Barbour 2009:157)

        imb-ru

        IRR-two

        'two'

(2)   Neverver (Barbour 2009:157)

        imbi-sɣam

        IRR-one

        'one'

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, which detail realizations of the irrealis numerals, Neverver epenthesizes to break up complex onsets and codas. That the attested outputs feature epenthesis reveals a crucial ranking of Markedness over Faithfulness for the language. Additionally, the precise location of the epenthetic vowel relative to the surrounding consonants can be explained using a relatively high-ranking contiguity constraint, which ensures that the epenthetic process targets the boundary between distinct morphemes (Kenstowicz 1994, Lamontagne 1997, Kager 1999).

(3)   Neverver (Barbour 2009: 318)

        k:ur-mbɣas

        clean-waste

        'to clean away waste'

Figure 3 reveals an environment wherein the expected epenthetic repair to an illicit onset sequence does not occur. This example is one of several nuclear serial verbs in the language which incur fatal violations to the high-ranking markedness constraint that blocks complex segments. Previous work on compounds demonstrates that languages may exempt them from certain phonological processes (Nespor & Vogel 2007, Martin 2011). I argue that Neverver permits the exemption of compounds from epenthesis due to a high-ranking constraint that treats verb stems as prosodic words. This constraint ensures that the juncture between a content and a function morpheme is targeted for epenthesis, as seen in Figure 2, while the juncture between the content-carrying component morphemes of a compound is not, as seen in Figure 3 (Nespor & Vogel 2007). The conclusions drawn in this paper suggest that vowel epenthesis in Neverver is regulated not merely by the phonological demands of the language, but morphological categories as well. Thus my analysis offers additional support for existing research on the ability of languages to develop phonological processes capable of distinguishing between distinct types of morpheme junctures.

Measuring Semantic Range and Semantic Bleaching in South Asian Languages With Special Focus to Verb 'lag'

Harjit Singh | Indira Gandhi National Tribal University

The paper shows some interesting aspects of grammaticalization process based on collecting primary data sets into three parallel languages (e.g. Punjabi, Hindi and Bangla). The whole study is divided into two kinds of initial observations related with a polysemous verb 'ləg'. In Punjabi, a verb (ləg) gives various interpretations (e.g. attend, give, use, wear etc.) due to grammaticalization. It also happens with Hindi and Bangla as well. Punjabi is selected as source language here. The verb 'ləg' is noticed in V1 and V2 position in all three languages where it supports de-semanticization rather than de- categorization. On the other hand, Bangla comparatively gives different results under semantic range. In future, de-categorization will also be studied in Punjabi, Hindi and Bangla.

On the syntax and semantics of secondary predicates in Vedic Sanskrit

Anabelle Caso | Harvard University

Puzzle: Secondary predicates are nonverbal expressions which share an argument with the finite matrix verb in a clause (Heidinger 2022). Resultative secondary predicates signal an eventuality which is obtained as a result of the action of the primary predicate (Irimia 2012). Depictive secondary predicates describe the state of their subject at the time when the action of the primary predicate occurs (Milway 2019).

Vedic Sanskrit is a language with a tendency to scramble, front, and/or topicalize multiple arguments in a given clause; such processes can make it difficult to distinguish between secondary predication and attributive XPs. A primary means of disambiguating between the two is found in the distinction between individual-level (permanent) and stage-level (transient) properties and predicates (Carlson 1977; Simpson 2005; Casaretto 2020).

Notably, (1) and (2) form stage-level predicates, and have resultative (1) and depictive (2) secondary predication readings, respectively (Casaretto 2020).

(1)   utá médhaṁ   śṛtapākaṃ   pacantu

        and ritual.offering.acc.sg.m cooked.acc.sg.m cook.3pl.imp

        "and let them cook the ritual offering cooked" (RV 1.162.10d)

 (2)   purutrā   vṛtró   aśayad   vyàstaḥ   in.many.places Vṛtra.nom.sg.m.
        lie.3sg.pst fling.apart.ptcp.nom.sg.m.

        "Vṛtra lay (there), flung apart in many places" (RV 1.32.7d)

In (1), the cooking event results in the achievement of the state of doneness for the ritual offering, and in (2), the state of being flung apart is concurrent with the action indicated by the matrix verb śay.

Proposal: Following Kratzer (1995), individual-level and stage-level predicates differ in argument structure–stage-level predicates have an extra argument position for events and are therefore "Davidsonian" (Kratzer 1995: 126, citing Davidson 1967). This additional structure correlates to a secondary predication phrase that itself contains a small clause (Kratzer 2005;

Pylkkänen 2008). (3) [CP utá [TP [Foc/TopP médhaṁresultee [Foc/TopP śṛtapākaṃresult [VP resultee pacantu [resP resultee [SC resultee result]]]]]]]

Kratzer (2005)'s account of resultative secondary predicates ensures that event expressed by the verb is identical to the event of causing the result state. An analogous structure may be assumed for depictives, such that the event expressed by the verb and the state of the subject at the time of the event are identical (Milway 2019: 105). Applying this analysis to Vedic yields a description of possible and impossible positions for secondary predicates as compared to attributive XPs.

Analyzing the structure of secondary predicates as complex further accounts for the prop- erty of prosodic isolation demonstrated by Vedic secondary predicates to the exclusion of attributive XPs (e.g. the line-final position of the depictive predicate in (2)). Vedic prosodic isolation is encoded via proximity to caesura and line-boundaries (Hale & Kissock 2021), which demonstrates sensitivity to the intonational boundary of the secondary predication phrase.

This proposal can account for the distributional tendencies of Vedic secondary predicates, which is not easily distinguishable from those of attributive XPs based on surface distribution alone.

Pronominal Possession in Blackfoot

Priscilla Ehrgood | Yale University

Introduction

Pronominal possession in Blackfoot1 can be marked with two different sets of prefixes: one set is used for dependent (obligatorily possessed, or inalienably possessed) nouns and the other for independent nouns. Dependent nouns can never occur without a possessor, unlike independent nouns. As Ritter and Thomas Rosen note, possessors must be sentient. In (1) and (2), we see that the form of the possessive is different, with n- in (1b) and nit- in (2b).

(1)   Dependent nouns

    (a)   *iksisst-a

         mother-PROX.AN

         Intended: 'mother'

    (b)   n-iksísst-a

         1-mother-PROX.AN

         'My mother'

         (Frantz 2017:76)

(2)   Independent nouns

    (a)   ohkáksaakin-a

         axe-PROX.AN

         'axe'

    (b)   nit-ohkáksaakin-a

         1-axe-PROX.AN

         'my axe'

         (adapted from Frantz 2017:77)

I argue that this alternation between dependent and independent forms is an instance of allomorphy. Bobaljik (2000) tells us that allomorphy is always and only inwardly sensitive to phonological features and outwardly sensitive to morphosyntactic features. The central question of this paper is whether the Blackfoot data discussed truly poses a challenge to Bobaljik's (2000) theory.

Proposal

If we take (in)dependency to be a feature of the root and assume that this alternation is an instance of allomorphy, it would follow that a possession node would have to look inward to the root for the presence of a [DEP]/[INDEP] feature to determine how it is exponed. This would pose a challenge to Bobaljik's analysis since it would require that a possession head be inwardly sensitive to morphosyntactic features.

We know that the alternation is not conditioned by phonological features. In example (3), we see that despite two phonologically similar stems, there is still an alternation between n- and nit-. This suggests that phonological features do not affect the allomorphy between dependent and independent forms.

(3)   Phonologically similar stems

    (a)   Nit-á'tsiksikahkss-iisti

        1-arch-PL.IN

        'My arches'

        (Frantz and Russell 2017:21)

    (b)   N'-atsikin

        1-shoe

        'My shoe'

        (from the Blackfoot Lab, similar to Frantz and Russell 2017:153)

It is also important, however, to consider that (in)dependency could simply be a property of the root, rather than a feature. Derived relational stems, i.e. nouns which take independent pronominal possessive forms but are obligatorily possessed, could be key in determining this.

Conclusion & Future Directions

Future research includes further investigation into derived relational stems and how an analysis which involves Late Root Insertion – the idea that late insertion applies not only to vocabulary items but also roots – might capture the data. Ritter and Thomas Rosen (2011) also suggest that independent possessed nouns have a different structure from dependent ones where possessors of independent nouns are external arguments, which could also provide further insight into how possessive affixes enter and operate in the derivation. Regardless of whether this phenomenon is a true challenge to Bobaljik's (2000) theory, the data discussed pose interesting and important questions about allomorphy, agreement, and roots in Distributed Morphology

Towards a syntactic view of voice: evidence from Ilocano

Zlata Odribets | University of Manitoba

In much existing work, the choice between two alternative constructions in grammatical structures that present such a choice has been argued to be conditioned by pragmatic factors. Therefore, it is commonplace to view voice systems as being crosslinguistically governed by pragmatics (Givón 1994). More recent literature, however, has presented objections to a pragmatic account of the conditioning of voice contrasts (Quesada & Skopeteas 2010).

In this presentation, I support the claims made by Quesada & Skopeteas 2010 by putting forth additional evidence for a syntactic rather than pragmatic view of voice, using fieldwork data from the Philippine language Ilocano. Ilocano has a rich voice system, which, most notably for the purposes of this presentation, includes Agent Voice and Patient Voice. Patient Voice is characterized by absolutive case being assigned to the patient, with the agent receiving ergative case, as shown in (1); meanwhile, an Agent Voice construction involves an absolutive agent acting on an oblique patient, as shown in (2).

(1)   ag-botuŋ nak ti aso

         AV-fear 1sA of dog

         'I'm afraid of dogs.' (Agent Voice)

(2)   ka-botuŋ ko dajta ŋa aso

         PV-fear 1sE that LK dog

         'I'm afraid of that dog.' (Patient Voice)

Despite the data above making it seem like referentiality, a pragmatic factor, is conditioning the choice between the two voice constructions, the presentation shows that the Ilocano voice system is obligatorily governed by syntax and not pragmatics. I draw upon three pieces of evidence. In wh-questions that are headed by the subject, the use of Agent Voice is obligatory due to the agent being extracted, explained by the Ergative Extraction Constraint (EEC), a phenomenon observed in ergative languages (Aissen 2017). The formation of relative clauses involves a similar kind of extraction to wh-questions, and, thus, in relatives headed by agents, the EEC is also at play, necessitating the use of Agent Voice. Lastly, existential constructions are another

environment in which the use of Agent Voice is obligatory. The conclusions about the nature of voice constructions arising from the elicitation data gathered – that the choice between Agent Voice and Patient Voice is ultimately made by syntax – may have crosslinguistic implications.

Stigmatized Varieties: A Closer Examination of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican Spanish

Gabriela Martinez Loyola | University of Western Ontario

The accent prestige theory posits that individuals tend to make unconscious judgements on the speech of others, and those belonging to a 'prestigious' language variety are typically rated higher on measures of education, income, occupation, and personality attributes such as likeability, among others (Fuertes, Potere & Ramirez, 2002). As such, the overarching goal of this study is to investigate the perceptions associated with Spanish varieties of the Caribbean, with an emphasis on Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. More specifically, this study will examine whether (i) speakers with differing levels of proficiency and exposure to Spanish are able to correctly categorize where the speaker is from, (ii) there is a predominant stigma attributed to one or more of the varieties, and (iii) gender of the speaker plays a role in modulating accent perceptions. To analyze these perceptions, the study will include both speakers and listeners. The speakers will be composed of native Spanish speakers from Cuba (Havana), Puerto Rico (San Juan), and the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo), while the listener group will consist of native Spanish speakers, second language (L2) Spanish learners, and monolingual English speakers. The methodological design will include the administration of a background questionnaire in addition to a survey intended to gauge at listeners' unconscious attitudes. These specific varieties were chosen in part because they are largely underrepresented in the literature which is surprising given the fact that speakers from these varieties are typically stigmatized and marginalized due to the high prevalence of 'non-standard' speech forms.

Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition through Watching Movies with Bimodal and Standard Subtitles: The case of L2 Swahili learners

Afua Hyiah Kwarteng | Ohio University

Technology, specifically multimedia technology like TV, computers, and laptops, has played a key role in second language teaching and learning. It has allowed accessibility and portability so that it is very easy for students to watch movies. Movies are authentic materials, and their visuals

often provide a lot of comprehensible input. Studies show that the video content provided by movies provides language learners with authentic input that gives them a long-lasting mental representation by providing a high degree of immediacy and reinforcement through subtitles of new and old lexical items, making it a highly comprehensible and accessible tool for vocabulary teaching. This study aims to identify the level of vocabulary that can be acquired by L2 Swahili learners after watching a single Swahili movie with either Swahili or English subtitles. 40 University of Ghana L2 Swahili students, ranging in age from 18-30 were divided into two groups. The groups watched the same movie in Swahili with either bimodal (BM) or standard (SD) subtitling. Those in the bimodal group watched the movie with Swahili subtitles and those in the standard group watched the movie with English subtitles. English is the medium of instruction at the University of Ghana and the official language of Ghana. Participants were tested on vocabulary taken from the movie both before and after watching the movie. Preliminary results from the post-tests suggest a significant increase in all participants' vocabulary levels after watching the movie, with those in the bimodal group making the most gains. The study shows that listening and visually experiencing the movie all in Swahili has a greater effect on vocabulary acquisition than listening in Swahili and reading the subtitles in the participants' L1.

Language Frequency: Computer-Mediated Trials to Criteria of Spanish Syntax
Ciara O'Neill | Florida Atlantic University

Second language acquisition is a subfield of linguistics that focuses on how second language learners process, store, and access language. Previous research has suggested that learners have default strategies to process language syntax in a certain way, some of which are non-optimal (VanPatten, 2020). By exposing learners to certain types of language input, they may be pushed to alter these pre-set strategies and begin to process language correctly (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1996). The proposed research aims to investigate how many exposures to a certain grammatical form are necessary in order for learners to consistently provide the correct response, indicating that their processing strategies have been altered. Referencing previous research, the study will focus on Spanish direct object pronouns and the First Noun Principle, which states that learners typically process the first noun or pronoun they encounter as the agent in the sentence or utterance. This research will fill in the gap of previous studies by incorporating an open source

web application that will track the moment-to-moment behavior of participants as they are exposed to a large amount of language input. The findings from this study will contribute to the design of language-learning activities integrated into various learning environments and will further the field's understanding of the underlying processes involved in language acquisition.

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