Linguistic Circle archive

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2015/2016

09 May 2016

Speaker: Gretchen McCulloch

Title: How to write pop linguistics

Abstract: Do you wish people knew more about linguistics? Explaining linguistics to the general public is what I do for a living, and it involves several learnable skills. I'll talk about explaining complex ideas without getting bogged down in terminology, the differences between teaching a class versus explaining in a one-off session, and how to make your explanations lively instead of dry. I'll also give specific advice about writing popular linguistics in media articles, book proposals, Wikipedia, and blogs/social media.

28 April 2016

Speaker: Michael Yoshitaka Erlewine (National University of Singapore)

Title: "Focus association through covert movement"

Abstract: Focus-sensitive operators such as 'only' must associate with a focused constituent in their scope (Jackendoff, 1972; Rooth, 1985, 1992; a.o.). We present new arguments in support of the view that focus association involves covert focus movement with pied-piping (Drubig, 1994; Krifka, 2006; Wagner, 2006), and against the more prominent approach which does not involve movement (Rooth 1985, 1992).

The first argument comes from Tanglewood configurations of the form in Kratzer (1991). We show that Tanglewood configurations are island-sensitive, and Kratzer's arguments to the contrary are overcome by the availability of covert pied-piping. Our results show that Tanglewood configurations must be the result of covert focus movement with pied-piping, and the focus-index mechanism proposed by Kratzer in fact is not an option in the grammar.

The second argument comes from the distribution of Beck (2006) focus intervention effects in focus association constructions. We show that certain quantifiers disrupt the interpretation of focus when above and near the in-situ focus. This pattern is predicted by the availability of covert focus movement with pied-piping, where focus intervention affects the interpretation of pied-piped constituents, but is unpredicted by the non-movement association approach. Time permitting, additional arguments from binding and parasitic gaps will be discussed.

31 March 2016

Speaker: Joanna Kopaczyk (Edinburgh/Poznań)

Title: "Fit and proper? A diachronic perspective on motivations and forms of binomials in English"

Abstract: The talk concentrates on coordinated constructions built of the same word-class, such as man and wife, grant and give, fit and proper or in and out, usually referred to as binomials. I start by outlining the structural and semantic characteristics of binomials and propose a core-and-periphery framework which captures different types and degrees of repetition involved in the formation of binomials. Against this background, I move on to discuss why binomials arise in selected genres in the history of English. The motivations range from phonological (e.g. alliteration) and semantic (e.g. complementation) to visual (e.g. the arrangement of the text on the page). Since binomials are claimed to be conspicuous in legal discourse, and therefore actively discouraged by Plain Language activists as superfluous, for present-day English I zoom in on the UK and Scottish legislation. I compare the inventories of nominal binomials in 2001-2010 acts of both parliaments and draw conclusions about the frequencies and semantics of shared and unshared binomials.

17 March 2016

Speaker: Paul Russell (Cambridge)

Title: "Latin as a minority language in late Roman Britain"

Abstract: In recent years late and post-Roman Britain have become testing (and indeed battle-) grounds for various theories of superstrate and substrate, and bi- and multi-lingualism. In some, but not all, parts of late Roman Britain Latin would arguably have been a minority language, but what did it look like? This paper, in some respects a follow-up of Russell (2011 & 2012), argues that one way of glimpsing that Latin is to consider the Latinate aspects of the Brittonic languages and to attempt to look through them to the form of Latin that lay behind. The latter parts of this paper discusses several features which might usefully be consider from this perspective.

03 March 2016

Speaker: Laura de Ruiter (Manchester)

Title: "“You’ve always got to wash your hands before you eat food” – Complex sentences in English child-directed speech"

25 February 2016

Speaker: Heinz Giegerich (Edinburgh)

Title: "Compounds in no-man's land"

Abstract: In this talk I hope to shed some light on the lexicon-syntax 'divide' assumed for example in Lexicalist formal grammar.

I argue that complex nominals of the attribute-head kind, where attribution is associative (rather than ascriptive) and/or where the attribute is a noun, are lexical in some respects while in other respects they are structurally accessible by syntactic operations and hence part of the syntax. They are hence formed in a part of the grammar where the lexical and the syntactic module overlap – a no-man's land in the grammar governed by competing sets of principles.

This analysis, which concerns the 'mainstream' NN/AdjN compounding pattern of English, settles the long-running 'compound-or-phrase' question regarding English NNs: they are both. It also makes interesting ordering predictions: ascriptive adjectival attribution is purely syntactic and hence predicted to occur 'outside' associative or nominal attribution; and it creates space for probabilistic stress predictions within a formal model.

Part of the argument will arise from an analysis of 'anaphoric' compounds found in BBC News web-site headlines such as Boat wreckage fisherman rescued; Gay clergy book row priest removed; Badger pilot cull start sparks anger, New city school plans unveiled.

11 February 2016

Speaker: Patrick Rebuschat (Lancaster)

Title: "Individual differences in implicit-statistical learning: Evidence

from cross-situational learning"

Abstract: Implicit learning, essentially the process of acquiring unconscious (implicit) knowledge, is a fundamental feature of human cognition. Many complex behaviors, including language comprehension and production, music cognition, intuitive decision making, and social interaction, are thought to be largely dependent on implicit knowledge, so it is not surprising that interest in implicit learning spans practically all branches of cognitive science. Research on this topic can be found in two related, yet completely distinct research strands, namely "implicit learning" (Reber, 1967) and "statistical learning" (Saffran, Aslin, & Newport, 1996).

In this talk, I will present the results of an experiment that brings together methodological insights from both strands. The objective was to investigate further the role of providing subjects with explicit knowledge prior to artificial language exposure and to identify cognitive variables that predict learning outcomes (working memory, declarative memory, executive function). Subjects were exposed to the artificial language by means of Monaghan et al.'s (2014) cross-situational learning paradigm. The advantage of this innovative paradigm is that it permits tracking of the learning trajectory, as opposed to only relying on post-exposure testing. We used retrospective verbal reports to determine what strategies followed in the learning task and whether they became aware of rules or patterns. Results indicate that provision of prior knowledge significantly boosts learning and that declarative memory accounts for a substantial amount of variance. Awareness of the learning target was not required, as aware and unaware subjects clearly showed a learning effect overall, but it did appear to affect the learning trajectory, with aware subjects performing above chance significantly earlier. Implications for language learning research will be discussed.

04 February 2016

Speaker: Andrew Nevins (UCL)

Title: "Moraic Onsets and Arrernte Syllabification"

Abstract: The Australian language Arrernte has been argued to present a case of VC, rather than CV syllabification (Breen & Pensalfini 1999, Evans & Levinson 2009). In this paper we demonstrate that a number of phenomena in the language are more insightfully analyzed with CV syllabification and the added proviso that onset consonants may be moraic, a possibility independently proposed for a wide range of languages by Topintzi (2010). Previous analyses had to posit an underlying fleeting initial schwa for surface forms beginning with CV at the left edge; we demonstrate that once the full range of phenomena are considered, no such schwa is desirable, and thus that these words must be CV. We review a range of prosodic morphology and external evidence that points towards CV syllabification with mora-counting, and provide an analysis for the transpositional language game 'Rabbit Talk' using moraic onsets and Itô et al.'s (1996) cross-anchoring. The proposed combination of moraic onsets and cross–anchoring, independently motivated for other languages, enables a response to Hyman's (2011) criticism that Rabbit Talk provides the strongest argument for VC syllabification in Arrernte, and neutralizes Evans & Levinson's (2009) contention that universals are a 'myth'.

21 January 2016

Speaker: Janet Pierrehumbert (Northwestern)

Title: "Representation, generalisation, and innovation in the lexicon"

Abstract: People learn words from instances of words as they are produced by different speakers and in different contexts. The words they know in turn provide the foundation for generalisations about words, supporting lexical productivity. A large and productive lexical system is a hallmark of the remarkable linguistic capabilities of human beings.

In this talk, I will review several projects that shed light on learning of words and word formation patterns. These projects use a diverse methodology, bringing together data from lab experiments, on-line

experiments that resemble computer games, and analysis of large corpora. Results indicate that lexical representations are both phonologically abstract and phonetically detailed. They include socio-indexical information. Statistical patterns matter, but sometimes in surprising ways: more is not always better or more productive. Competition within the lexicon, social factors, and individual differences all play a role in shaping lexical generalisations. I conclude by drawing some connections to historical change.

14 January 2016

Speaker: Francis Nolan (Cambridge)

Title: "Estonian Swedish voiceless laterals"

Abstract: Estonian Swedish is an endangered variety of Swedish traditionally spoken on parts of the west coast of Estonia and some adjacent islands, and now largely confined to an elderly community of WW2 émigrés in Stockholm. Of particular interest here is its liquid system, which (like some other Scandinavian varieties) includes a retroflex flap and (more unusually) a voiceless lateral fricative. An acoustic analysis of this will be presented in terms of fricative energy and pre-voicing, and the Estonian Swedish lateral will compared with voiceless laterals from Welsh and Icelandic, all three languages having contrasting voiced and voiceless laterals. The measurements and behaviour of the sounds is used to address the question of whether voiceless approximants are categorically distinct from voiceless fricatives, and, more generally, whether the notion of 'universal phonetic category' as enshrined in the IPA framework is valid. The work has been done with Susanne Schötz (Lund) and Eva Liina Asu (Tartu) in association with the project Estonian Swedish Language Structure funded by the Swedish Research Council.

03 December 2015

Speaker: Paula Rubio-Fernández (University of Oslo)

Title: "Saying too much can be efficient: A reference production/comprehension study"

Abstract: Redundancy provides a puzzle for pragmatics. In a situation where there is only one star among various other stickers: why would I ask you for 'the blue star'? In line with Grice's Maxim of Quantity, the general assumption in pragmatic models of reference production (e.g., Sedivy, 2003, 2004; Engelhardt et al., 2006, 2011) is that minimal referential expressions that determine unique reference are optimal. In this paper I challenge this assumption and argue that, at least in perceptually-grounded reference, establishing what counts as an optimal referential expression needs to take into account perceptual factors. Thus, if the star is the only blue sticker in the display, referring to it as 'the blue star' may be optimal – or at least not as redundant as if all the stickers were blue.

Following work on visual attention (Wolfe, 1994) and incremental language processing (Spivey et al., 2001), I argue that when a speaker refers to a specific entity in their physical environment, their interlocutor embarks on a 'language guided search'. An optimal referential expression should therefore maximize the efficiency of the interlocutor's visual search for the referent.

I investigated this view in a reference production/comprehension study, in which I tested the following twofold hypothesis: speakers are trying to be efficient when they produce redundant adjectives, and redundant adjectives are in turn effective for the hearer. I tested the first hypothesis in three language production experiments, and the second one in a language comprehension experiment using eye tracking with the same materials that were used in the language production work.

The results of the study supported my predictions, and I therefore conclude that in perceptually-grounded reference, redundancy responds to the pressure for efficiency in the hearer's visual search (see also Piantadosi et al., 2011; Mahowald et al., 2012; Kurumada & Jaeger, 2013). That means that redundancy can be efficient, and even optimal, if it facilitates the identification of the referent in the physical environment.

19 November 2015

Speaker: Katja Jasinskaja (Köln)

Title: "Not at issue anymore. Or what the Right Frontier Constraint has to say about the at-issue status of appositive relative clauses"

Abstract: This paper reconsiders the theoretical interpretation of an observation made by AnderBois et al. (2011) that the (not)-at-issue status of appositive relative clauses (ARCs) depends on their position in the sentence: Sentence-final ARCs are "more at-issue" and more able to be targeted by, for instance, direct denial than sentence-medial ARCs. I will show that this prediction can be derived from standard theories of discourse interpretation. In the proposed view, (not)-at-issue status of ARCs boils down to their salience in discourse and accessibility for attachment of new discourse material as regulated by standard discourse mechanisms such as the Right Frontier Constraint. The theoretical implications of this approach are far-reaching. One of them is that the (not)-at-issue status of one and the same piece of content can change in time. What is at issue at one point in discourse may not be at issue anymore at another point. This and other consequences of the proposed approach open up a new perspective on the relationship between attachment, at-issueness, and projection.

12 November 2015

Speaker: Christina Kim (Kent)

Title: "Presuppositions, locality and discourse structure"

Abstract: I will report on an ongoing study that investigates whether locality preferences observed at the sentential level appear in discourse, using presuppositions as a way to learn about discourse structure. Sentences with the focus particle also are standardly assumed to entail their propositional content and presuppose a distinct proposition having a different value from their propositional content for the focused constituent

(Horn 1969; Rooth 1985). Thus, the sentence 'Jane also got some COFFEE' entails that Jane got coffee and presupposes that she got something other than coffee. Viewing the presupposition trigger also as forming a dependency with the discourse content satisfying the presupposition (see e.g. van der Sandt 1992), we can ask whether such presupposition-triggered dependencies are constrained by locality (Hawkins 1994; Gibson 2000) and whether the relevant sense of locality is linear or relativized to hierarchically-structured constituents (Webber & Joshi 1998; Kehler 2000). Based on offline judgments and online eye-tracking data, I will argue that discourse processing favors local dependencies, with locality defined over hierarchical discourse structures.

29 October 2015

Speaker: Melanie Bell (Anglia Ruskin)

Title: "The English noun-noun construct: Prosody and structure"

15 October 2015

Speaker: Erez Levon (QMUL)

Title: "The Interactional Meanings of High Rising Terminals in London"

Abstract: In this talk, I examine the range of interactional functions High Rising Terminals (HRT) performs among young people in London. I combine quantitative and qualitative methods to demonstrate that while all of the speakers investigated use HRT as a tool for accomplishing relational work (Locher & Watts 2005), the specific interactional strategies that the feature is recruited to perform differ markedly across genders. I consider the ramifications of this finding for our understanding of “politeness” as a gendered feature, and also discuss the analytical importance of examining a variable like HRT in its discourse–functional context.

08 October 2015

Speaker: Sven Mattys (York)

Title: "Effects of cognitive load on speech perception"

Abstract: Improving the validity of speech-recognition models requires an understanding of how speech is processed in everyday life. Unlike listening conditions leading to a degradation of the signal (e.g., noise), adverse conditions that do not alter the integrity of the signal (e.g., cognitive load, CL) have been under-studied. Drawing upon behavioural and imaging methods, our research shows that CL reduces sensitivity to phonetic detail and increases reliance on lexical knowledge. Importantly, we also show that increased reliance on lexical knowledge under CL is a cascaded effect of impoverished phonetic processing, not a direct consequence of CL. A CL-related deactivation of parts of the auditory cortex associated with early phonetic analysis confirms the early, sensory locus of CL. Ways of integrating CL into the functional architecture of existing speech-recognition models are presented.

24 September 2015

Speaker: Kevin Watson (University of Canterbury, NZ)

Title: "A century of Scouse: phonological levelling, diffusion and divergence in Liverpool and its hinterland"

Abstract: Much sociolinguistic work in Britain has focused on levelling and supralocalisation, showing that socially and/or geographically marked linguistic features have been replaced by more widespread forms. Levelling and supralocalisation are widespread, and there have been few counterexamples. One variety often cited as a counter example is Liverpool English, popularly called Scouse. Scouse is one of the UK's most recognisable accents, and it has been argued that the variety is resisting levelling and diverging away from supralocal norms because certain regional features are increasing over time. It has also been claimed that Liverpool's features are likely to spread out to neighbouring localities, but this has rarely been systematically explored. In this talk I'll outline some of

the recent phonological changes that have taken place in Liverpool, and explore the extent to which they are found in two hinterland localities: Skelmersdale and St Helens. To do this, I'll use the new Origins of Liverpool English (OLIVE) corpus, a large collection of audio recordings of speakers born between 1890 and 1994, representing over 100 years in apparent time. This is the largest collection of spoken data from this region of England, and it allows us to push our understanding of these accents further back in time than has previously been possible.

I'll focus on four consonantal variables: (th), (dh), (t) and (k). The results show a complex mix of the levelling, maintenance and expansion of regionally restricted forms. TH/DH-fronting has increased across localities, and with (th) in Liverpool this is at the expense of regional TH-stopping. 'Local' Liverpool realisations of /t/ have increased, in Liverpool and elsewhere, but the supralocal glottal stop has increased substantially only in Skelmersdale and St Helens and not in Liverpool. The realisation of /k/ as [x], another local Liverpool form, has increased in Liverpool and is found in Skelmersdale but not in St Helens. I discuss these patterns in terms of the sociodemographic histories of the localities, and the different types of variable involved. I also briefly consider the homogeneity of these speech communities, and argue that levelling can only be properly understood when all these factors are taken into account.

2014/2015

08 June 2015

Speaker: Andrew Wedel (University of Arizona)

Title: "The message shapes the signal: Strong and weak patterns in phonology" (joint work with Beth Hume, Kathleen Currie-Hall and Florian Jaeger)

Abstract: A general objective of modern phonology is to improve our models of language to better account both for cross-linguistic commonalities in sound patterns, as well as idiosyncrasy at the level of the

individual language. The approach we argue for here provides an advance in accounting for a diverse group of asymmetrical phonological patterns that can be framed as being strong or weak, that is, patterns characterized by fortition/contrast expansion, versus reduction/contrast loss.

Many models of phonology make reference to biases on articulation and perception to account for phonological pattern formation (e.g. Blevins 2004: Evolutionary Phonology). We argue that inclusion of a bias toward message transmission accuracy at the lexical level provides a both more economical, and more predictively powerful account for the range and diversity of strong versus weak patterns. Previous evidence suggests (i) that speakers bias utterances to minimize lexical information transmission error, and (ii) that these biases influence the trajectory of phonological pattern development over diachronic time. In this talk I will describe a Bayesian framework that provides us structured hypotheses within this approach, and review a range of evidence that is consistent with these hypotheses.

06 April 2015

Speaker: Penelope Eckert (Stanford University)

Title: "Variation, the Stylistic Landscape, and Social Change"

Abstract: This talk will take the perspective that sociolinguistic variation constitutes a robust social-semiotic system enabling the non-propositional expression of social concerns as they unfold in interaction. Thus it is essential to social life and part of the pragmatics that links speech to the wider social system. Variation takes on meaning through its role in stylistic practice, which includes the stylistic construction of social types and personae. These types and personae are not trivial, but vivify the social distinctions that constitute the social order. They are also not static, but differ across social space and across time. I will argue that change in personae is integral to social change, making variation not just a reflection of social change, but part of what brings it about.

02 April 2015

Speaker: Joe Pater (University of Massachusetts at Amherst)

Title: "Grammatical agent-based modeling of typology" (joint work with Coral Hughto and Robert Staubs)

Abstract: What effect does learning have on the typological predictions of a theory of grammar? One way to answer this question is to examine the output of agent-based models (ABMs), in which learning can shape the distribution over languages that result from agent interaction. Prior research on ABMs and language has tended to assume relatively simple agent-internal representations of language, with the goal of showing how linguistic structure can emerge without being postulated a priori (e.g. Kirby and Hurford 2002, Wedel 2007). In this paper we show that when agents operate with more articulated grammatical representations, typological skews emerge in the output of the models that are not directly encoded in the grammatical system itself. This of course has deep consequences for grammatical theory construction, which often makes fairly direct inferences from typology to properties of UG. We argue that abstracting from learning may lead to missed opportunities in typological explanation, as well as to faulty inferences about the nature of UG.

31 March 2015

Speaker: Guillaume Thierry (Bangor University)

Title: "Sit back, relax, enjoy the ride: Philosophical lessons from fifteen years of seemingly scattered research"

Abstract: How does our brain construct meaningful representations of the world around us? Do these representations differ in speakers of one and two languages? Does language affect the perception and categorisation of things around us? Is there such thing as unconscious meaning processing? At the end of a five-year adventure investigating these kinds of questions, our research reveals the human brain as a voracious and

automatic meaning processor mostly unaware of its inner workings. On the basis of examples in domains such as bilingual comprehension and production, linguistic relativity, and executive functioning, I will propose that our conceptualisations of meaning formation and decision-making may need drastic revision. A fully interactive, non-selective account of the human brain is largely inconsistent with modular views positing some functions (such as language) as encapsulated and relatively independent vis-à-vis other specialised brain systems such as face recognition or motor control. Taken together our findings form a constellation of clues that suggest unsuspected levels of processing automaticity and substantial limitations of conscious evaluation. We only have conscious awareness to understand the nature of the mind, yet most of what defines us and our understanding of the world comes from spontaneous, unconscious information processing that is wholly impenetrable. Human conscious awareness becomes a fine translucent layer covering a mostly unknown and likely gigantic mass of cryptic processes that deterministically drive our existence: Our inner world.

19 March 2015

Speaker: Jane Stuart-Smith (University of Glasgow)

Title: "'Bring hither the fatted coo!': An acoustic study of real-time change across a century of Glaswegian dialect"

Abstract: Whilst there are now numerous sociolinguistic studies investigating sound change, the majority of these use the 'apparent-time' method, where age is used as a proxy for time depth. Real-time studies, which consider speech samples recorded at different points in time, are much less common. This paper will present some results from a new real-time study of sound change in Glasgow dialect. The twentieth century witnessed substantial demographic, social and political changes which led to far greater social and geographical mobility, with implications for language change in traditional dialects (e.g. Milroy 1992). This paper considers the evidence for change in three aspects of the sound system,

vowel quality, vowel duration, and postvocalic /r/: do these features show evidence of change consistent with shifts or norms in Anglo-English? Two sources of evidence are used. The first is a corpus of Glasgow dialect recordings covering effectively 100 years in real- and apparent-time. Recordings with time aligned orthographic transcripts are stored in an electronic, LaBB-CAT corpus, with automatic phonemic transcriptions and automatically generated segmentation of the waveform. The corpus consists of sociolinguistic interviews, oral history interviews, as well as other speech recordings such as extracts from broadcast media. The second is a handful of recordings which we believe to the amongst the earliest documenting Scottish English, from the Berliner Lautarchiv collection, made in German Prisoner of War camps in 1916/17, and now digitized at the British Library. The results for all three aspects show evidence of real-time change over the 20th century, but differently from shifts or norms in Anglo-English. For these changes at least, internal factors to the dialect appear to be more important in motivating sound change over time.

05 March 2015

Speaker: Björn Köhnlein (Leiden University Centre for Linguistics)

Title: "Fortis, lenis, and metrical structure: how laryngeal features shape prosodic oppositions"

Goal of the talk. Prosody, the structure above the individual sounds of a language (e.g. syllables, stress/feet, intonation), often interacts with segmental structure in processes of language change as well as in synchronic prosodic systems. This talk on the basis of evidence from West Germanic (Franconian, High Prussian, North Low Saxon) discusses how the laryngeal quality of post-tonic consonants (fortis vs. lenis segments) can shape prosodic systems from a diachronic and/or a synchronic perspective. From a theoretical perspective, the talk provides evidence that certain types of tonal/durational surface oppositions can best be analyzed in terms of contrastive prosodic structure (in line with e.g. Hermans 2009,

2012; Kehrein to appear, Köhnlein 2011, to appear for Franconian; Iosad 2013 for Scottish Gaelic; Morén 2005, 2007, Morén-Duolljá 2013 for Scandinavian).

Background. The importance of the fortis-lenis distinction for the structure of prosodic systems in the varieties in question mainly derives from two properties: first of all, the fortis-lenis distinction is often accompanied by durational differences in preceding vowels: fortis segments correspond to relatively short vowels (pre-fortis clipping), and lenis segments correspond to relatively long vowels (pre-lenis lengthening). Furthermore, various types of post-tonic lenition processes suggest that foot-internal onsets tend to prefer lenis consonants to fortis consonants (e.g. Harris 1997, Honeybone 2012). As we shall see, both properties can cause the emergence of metrical differences between two groups of words after the the phonological system is restructured through processes of language change (in our case: the loss of word-final schwas).

Three case studies. i.) High Prussian. In High Prussian, a (largely extinct) variety of East Central German, final devoicing is optional (Stuhrmann 1895-98, Kuck & Wiesinger 1965, Teßmann 1969, Wiesinger 1983). Some monosyllabic words with final (phonologically) voiced obstruents show devoicing, some do not, as in /haoz/ [haos] 'house-sg' versus /taov/ [taov] 'pigeon-sg'. Historically, the opaque cases derive from schwa apocope; synchronically, this can result in alternations between devoicing singulars and non-devoicing plurals, as in the opposition between [taːk] 'day-sg' and [taːg] 'day-pl'. I argue that the absence of final devoicing in some cases can best be regarded as an epiphenomenon of metrical structure: some words with word-final lenis consonants surface with disyllabic feet, including an empty-headed second syllable with a foot-medial lenis onset. ii.) North Low Saxon. The language distinguishes short lax, long tense, and overlong tense vowels. Overlong vowels derive from schwa apocope iff the intervocalic consonant was lenis. Interestingly, final devoicing in originally disyllabic items is incomplete, while final devoicing seems to be complete in originally monosyllabic items (Prehn 2012). I argue that overlong vowels derive from the presence of lenis consonants in

empty-headed word-final syllables: phonetically, the lenis quality of word-final obstruents is primarily expressed in the duration of the preceding vowel. iii.) Franconian. The genesis of tonal accent in Franconian is closely related to the voicing quality of word-final obstruents (Bach 1921, Schmidt 2002, Boersma 2006, Köhnlein 2011, 2013, to appear). Along the lines of Köhnlein (2011, to appear), the language distinguishes monosyllabic and disyllabic trochees – the latter can or cannot have pronounced nuclei in the second syllable. Once more, empty-headed post-tonic syllables commonly correlate with (underlying) lenis consonants, a pattern that has been generalized in some modern systems. I show how the structural opposition between two types of feet is reflected on the surface in terms of distinctive tonal and durational differences.

12 Febraury 2015

Speaker: Padraic Monaghan (Lancaster University)

Title: "How prevalent and influential is sound symbolism in natural language?"

Abstract: There are numerous studies demonstrating that sound symbolism, particular sounds relating to particular meanings, has an influence on judgments about words' meanings. But how prevalent is sound symbolism in natural language structure, and how does it affect language usage outside the laboratory? In this talk, I provide an assessment of how much sound symbolism there actually is in natural language (answer: not a lot), and then provide a critical investigation of the extent to which sound symbolism drives behavioural responses (answer: sometimes) or the extent to which confounds affect performance (answer: quite a bit). I will focus on sound symbolism in brand names, using corpus analysis, computational, and behavioural techniques to test how sound influences judgments about meaning.

29 January 2015

Speaker: Patrycja Strycharczuk (Queen Margaret University)

Title: "When things get fuzzy. Morphology and sound changes in Standard Southern British English"

Abstract: According to recent reports, speakers of Standard Southern British English (SSBE) have developed a contrast in the degree of /u:/-fronting in words such as rul-er (='leader of a country') and ruler (='measuring device'). Whereas the vowel undergoes fronting when it is followed by /l/ within the same morpheme, the presence of a morphological suffix triggers the use of a back allophone of /u:/. Instances of such 'fuzzy contrasts' have been previously observed in English by Harris (1994), inter alia. The case of rul-er~ruler, however, is somewhat exceptional, as it potentially involves the morphologisation of not one, but two ongoing sound changes: /l/-darkening and /u:/-fronting. In this talk, I will consider different diachronic scenarios of how /l/-darkening and /u:/-fronting might interact in their pathway to morphologisation. I will then evaluate the competing diachronic analyses using ultrasound data on the production of the rul-er~ruler contrast in SSBE.

15 January 2015

Speaker: Caitlin Light (University of York)

Title: "The pragmatics of demonstratives in Germanic"

Abstract: This talk will demonstrate, based on synchronic and diachronic data from English, German, and Icelandic, that demonstrative pronouns in Germanic are pragmatically contrastive. Using data on object topicalization, I will show that in information structurally driven operations, demonstrative pronouns pattern more like contrastive elements than like non-contrastive ones.

In various Germanic languages, an operation traditionally termed topicalization has been observed, by which various XPs may move to the left edge of the clause. This may be observed both in V2 languages, where it triggers subject-verb inversion, and in non-V2 languages as well. While the topicalization of contrastive elements is allowed across various Germanic

languages, topicalization of unstressed, non-contrastive elements is possible in German but disallowed in Dutch, Icelandic, and English (cf. Chocano 2012, for a detailed review of these claims). Frey (2006a,b) proposes that object topicalization in German is the result of two types of movement: Formal Movement (FM), which has no interpretive effect but targets only the highest XP below the C domain; and True A-Bar Movement (TAB), which results in a contrastive interpretation on the topicalized constituent. Since TAB targets only information structurally contrastive elements, non-contrastive topicalization of the sort allowed in German may occur only via FM.

Light (2012) expands this analysis to account for topicalization across Germanic. FM occurs solely to satisfy the V2 constraint; non-contrastive topicalization is entirely disallowed in non-V2 languages, like English. Furthermore, because FM is restricted to the highest available XP, possible candidates of FM are limited by the movement operations available in the Middlefield, such as scrambling. Dutch and Icelandic have more restricted types of scrambling than German, and cannot normally maneuver objects sufficiently high to be candidates of FM (cf. Holmberg 1986; Neeleman 1994). Consequently, these languages also lack non-contrastive object topicalization.

A fine-grained study of the pragmatics of object topicalization across Germanic languages further illuminates this issue. I use parallel parsed corpora of Bible translations in Early New High German (Light 2011), Early Modern English (Kroch et al. 2004) and historical Icelandic (Wallenberg et al. 2011). These include samples of Luther's first bible translation (1522), Tyndale's translation into Early Modern English (1534), and Góttskálksson's translation into Icelandic (1540). A sub-corpus of this sort allows us to look at information structural phenomena on a different level. By considering individual verses we may control for as many variables as possible, since the style and context of the utterance should be relatively fixed across the three translations. We can then examine when each language uses object topicalization, given roughly the same context.

I consider the behaviour of topicalized pronoun objects in this subcorpus. Pronouns are resistant to accent in the absence of a clear contrastive or focal interpretation, and thus ideal for distinguishing likely examples of topicalization via FM or TAB. We find that object topicalization via TAB is constant across all three texts. However, only the German translation contains topicalized personal pronouns without a plausible contrastive interpretation. This fits with the claim that only topicalization via TAB occurs in all three languages.

The surprising fact is that all three texts include topicalized demonstrative pronouns which seem to bear no plausible contrastive interpretation. This leads me to conclude that, in the case of object topicalization, demonstrative pronouns are behaving consistently like contrastively marked elements. I link this to an analysis suggested in Schwarz (forthcoming), which suggests (using situation semantics) that demonstrative pronouns in German may refer only to entities which do not occur in every alternative to the topic situation. On these grounds we argue that demonstrative pronouns are sub-informative, a label which Gast (2010) has also applied to contrastive elements, like contrastive topics. This conclusion leads us to a better understanding of the behaviour of demonstrative pronouns in discourse. Thus, a deeper look at an information structural phenomenon leads us a better understanding of other phenomena as well.

27 November 2014

Speaker: Hans-Martin Gärtner (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Title: "Approaching V2 from the North: A Macrosyntactic View on Dependent V2 Variation in Icelandic"

20 November 2014

Speaker: George Walkden (University of Manchester)

Title: "The whether forecast: English embedded questions then and now"

Abstract: In this talk I report on work in progress on the diachrony and synchrony of English whether. In the historical part of the talk I show that whether developed in Northwest Germanic from a wh-word meaning 'which of two', using comparative data from Old English, Old Saxon, Old Norse, Old High German and Old Saxon. As regards present-day English, researchers have been divided on whether to treat whether as a wh-word, in Spec,CP, or as a complementizer like if, in the C position. I argue that considering the full range of data supports the latter analysis, with the differences between if and whether attributable to their semantics. This analysis has the added benefit of making the diachronic development ofwhether consistent with the widely observed trajectory of Spec-to-Head reanalysis.

06 November 2014

Speaker: David Green (University College London)

Title: "Language control in bilinguals: exploring a theoretical conjecture"

Abstract: Bilinguals use their languages differently. In some interactional contexts, in some communities, bilinguals use a different language to each addressee in a conversation though all parties know both languages. In other contexts, bilinguals code-switch between their languages within a conversational turn. Bilinguals may also adapt their language use to suit changes in the interactional context. How is it they adapt their language use? I will explore one theoretical conjecture about the dynamics of such adaptation and the attentional states that mediate it.

23 October 2014

Speaker: Chris Cummins (University of Edinburgh)

Title: ""The unicorn does not exist": dealing with unwanted presuppositions"

Abstract: Various linguistic forms signal the presence of presuppositions

of various kinds. Words such as "stop", "start" and "still" presuppose the existence of certain prior states, "again" and "too" presuppose prior events, and factive verbs such as "realise" and "know" presuppose the truth of their propositional complements. Definite articles can be argued to presuppose the existence (and uniqueness) of their referents.

By exploiting hearers' willingness to accommodate these presuppositions, speakers can use "presupposition triggers" to convey new information. However, this is potentially problematic for several reasons. It is not always clear precisely what presupposition is being conveyed, and presupposition triggers can be used felicitously without the speaker being committed to the corresponding presupposition. Hearers appear to resolve these issues without difficulty, but the process by which they do so is still poorly understood.

In this talk, I look at some recent experimental work on the behaviour of various presupposition triggers. This line of research has, in particular, attempted to systematise the projective behaviour of various classes of triggers – that is, their ability to trigger presuppositions from embedded positions. It also raises, and attempts to answer, questions about the discourse status of presupposed content. Although at a relatively early stage, this work both supports and challenges proposed taxonomies of presupposition offered in the theoretical literature.

09 October 2014

Speaker: Yuni Kim (University of Manchester)

Title: "Prefix-suffix asymmetries in Huave morphophonology"

Abstract: It is cross-linguistically common for phonological processes to operate in a stem-plus-suffix domain, with prefixes excluded from participation. This type of prefix-suffix asymmetry is usually seen to have one of two structural sources: either the process applies only within an independently motivated morphological constituent, e.g. due to cyclicity; or the process applies within a P-word or prosodically motivated

constituent that includes suffixes only. In this talk I discuss a particularly problematic bracketing-paradox case from Huave (isolate: Mexico), where I argue that due to some unique properties of the language, the stem-plus-suffix domain is not coherent as either a morphosyntactic or a prosodic unit. I propose an analysis where morphological conditions on phonological domain formation conflict with prosodic ones, and each domain edge ends up being motivated from a different grammatical source.

02 October 2014

Speaker: Giuseppe Longobardi (University of York)

Title: "Darwin's Last challenge"

Abstract: Beyond its theoretical success, the development of molecular biology has brought about the possibility of extraordinary progress in the historical study of classification and distribution of different species and different human populations, introducing a new level of evidence (molecular genetic markers) now susceptible to quantitative and computational treatment. I argue that, even in the cognitive sciences, purely theoretical progress in a certain discipline, such as linguistics, may have analogous historical impact, equally contributing to Renfrew's 'New Synthesis', and in turn may be confirmed by such results. So, exactly on the model of molecular biology and its fruitful balance between evolutionary and theoretical concerns, I propose to unify two traditionally unrelated lines of investigation:

1. the formal study of syntactic variation (parameter theory) in the biolinguistic program
2. the reconstruction of relatedness among languages (phylogenetic taxonomy)

I argue that due to progress in parametric grammatical theories, and relying on the methodological parallelism with evolutionary genetics, we are now in a position to measure the syntactic distance among languages in

a precise fashion and to explore its historical significance through the application of clustering algorithms borrowed from computational biology. Through such formal methods, it can be shown that the distribution of actual syntactic distances provided by an elaborate parametric system is statistically highly significant (that is, non-accidental and requiring historical explanation). The empirical analysis of the languages involved in the experiment has been conducted with the particular strategy of focusing on a single module of grammar, namely nominal phrases at this stage. The properties commonly attributed to parametric variation (uniform discreteness and universality), akin to those displayed by genetic polymorphisms, make it particularly suitable for addressing the unsolved issue of comparison between remote, etymologically unrelated languages, opening the way for completely new interactions with the empirical results of molecular anthropologists.

Corroborating these results with further experimentation, I will conclude that the rate of evolution of syntax in the history of a language is lower than that of lexical replacement (syntax is more inertial diachronically) and that a proper mathematical model of grammatical diversity may test (so far negatively) the issue of a possible polygenesis of historical languages. Thus, I will suggest:

3. that a parametric model of the language faculty and language acquisition/transmission (more broadly of generative grammar) receives original support from its historical adequacy.
4. that through these new tools one can explore the possibility of testing Darwin's (1859) prediction that, when properly identified, the trees of human populations and of their languages should eventually turn out remarkably parallel.
5. that the so-called 'Galilaean style' of inquiry (based on descriptive accuracy, idealization, deductive structure of theories...), sometimes invoked as a model for the rising cognitive sciences as well as the classical natural ones, may be profitably transposed from theoretical and synchronic study to that of human (language) history.

18 September 2014

Speaker: Maciej Baranowski (University of Manchester)

Title: "On the relevance of social class: Back vowel fronting in Manchester English"

Abstract: This paper reports on patterns of sociolinguistic variation and change found in Manchester's long back vowels, i.e. GOOSE and GOAT. It is based on the acoustic analysis of 100 informants. The sample is stratified by age, gender, socio- economic status, and ethnicity. Seventy-four of the speakers identify themselves as white British; the other twenty-six informants represent the two largest ethnic minorities in Manchester, i.e., Pakistani and Black Caribbean. Five socio- economic levels are distinguished, from lower working to upper middle class.

The informants' complete vowel systems are measured in terms of F1, F2, and F3 in Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2012). For 26 speakers, the point of measurement is selected by hand, following Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006). The speech of 74 speakers is measured automatically, using the Forced Alignment and Vowel Extraction suite developed at the University of Pennsylvania (Rosenfelder et al. 2011). The acoustic measurements are subjected to a series of multivariate analyses, with factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity entered as independent variables.

The results suggest a pattern of back vowel fronting in apparent time in the dialect. There is advanced fronting of GOOSE for both coronal and non-coronal onsets, involving most social groups at similar rates; it is a change nearing completion. In contrast to most dialects of English, there is considerable fronting of GOOSE before /l/, as inschool and pool; it is a stable variable with a pattern of social class stratification. The fronting of GOAT is a more recent change, showing interaction between age and socio-economic status; it led by females and upper middle class speakers, with the working class and ethnic minorities not participating in the process. GOAT fronting is argued to be a change brought in from outside the dialect

by the highest social classes, in contrast to GOOSE fronting, an internal change.

02 September 2014

Speaker: Ann Bradlow (Northwestern University)

Title: "Linguistic experience and speech perception under adverse conditions"

Abstract: The language(s) that we know shape the way we process and represent the speech that we hear. Since real-world speech recognition almost always takes place in conditions that involve some sort of background noise, we can ask whether the influence of linguistic knowledge and experience on speech processing extends to the particular challenges posed by speech-in-noise recognition, specifically the perceptual separation of speech from noise (Experiment Series 1) and the cognitive representation of speech and concurrent noise (Experiment Series 2). In Experiment Series 1, listeners were asked to recognize English sentences embedded in a background of competing speech that was either English (matched-language, English-in-English recognition) or another language (mismatched-language, e.g. English-in-Mandarin recognition). Listeners were either native or non-native listeners of the target language (usually, English), and were either familiar or unfamiliar with the background language (English, Mandarin, Dutch, or Croatian). This series of experiments demonstrated that matched-language is substantially harder than mismatched-language speech-in-speech recognition. Moreover, the magnitude of the mismatched-language benefit was modulated by long-term linguistic experience (specifically, listener familiarity with the background language), as well as by short-term adaptation to a consistent background language within a test session. Thus, we conclude that speech recognition in conditions that involve competing background speech engages higher-level, experience-dependent, language-specific knowledge in addition to general lower-level, signal-dependent processes of auditory stream segregation. Experiment

Series 2 then investigated perceptual classification and encoding in memory of spoken words and concurrently presented background noise. Converging evidence from eye-tracking-based time-course, speeded classification, and recognition memory paradigms strongly suggests parallel (rather than strictly sequential) processes of stream segregation and word identification, as well as integrated (rather than segregated) cognitive representations of speech presented in background noise. Taken together, this research is consistent with models of speech processing and representation that allow interactions between long-term, experience-dependent linguistic knowledge and instance-specific, environment-dependent sources of speech signal variability at multiple levels, ranging from relatively early/low levels of selective attention to relatively late/high levels of lexical encoding and retrieval.

2013/2014

02 July 2014

Speaker: Dr Barbara Kelly (The University of Melbourne)

Title: "Early word learning: Influences of language, culture, cognition and gesture"

Abstract: When English-learning children begin using words the majority of their early utterances (around 80%) are nouns. Compared to nouns, there is a paucity of verbs or non-verb relational words, such as "up" meaning "pick me up". The primary explanations to account for these differences in use either argue in support of acognitive account, which claims that verbs entail more cognitive complexity than nouns and are thus acquired later, or they provide evidence on the basis of a linguistic account which challenges this view. In this talk I will put forward an additional explanation for children's noun/verb asymmetry. Presenting a multi-modal account of word-learning based on children's earliest gesture and word combinations, I will show that at the one-word stage English-learning children's gestures are construed by caregivers as

expressing verb-like elements. This allows children's early one-word utterances to express noun-like elements. It is yet to be determined how this plays out cross-linguistically but I will conclude with some preliminary cross-linguistic, cross-cultural analyses examining different caregiver responses and early verb production.

15 May 2014

Speaker: Elizabeth R. Miller (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Title: "Adult Immigrants' "Theories of Agency" as Dialogical Performatives"

Abstract: Drawing on interviews with adult immigrant small business owners in the United States, I explore how these individuals (re)produced their "theories of agency" (Ahearn, 2010) with respect to their experiences of learning and using English and other languages. Rather than determining whether or how these individuals are agentive, my study focuses on the performative effects of discursively constituting Self as (in)agentive. In this presentation, I will describe how my discourse analytic study of patterned features of these interviewees' account-giving allowed me to consider learner agency as dialectically constituted in discursive practice, over time, and in relation to normative ideologies of agency and language.

27 March 2014

Speaker: Sarah Hawkins (University of Cambridge)

Title: "On evidence for formal vs. functional phonetic categories"

Abstract: I will describe an eye-tracking experiment which shows that listeners use weak, subphonemic information to predict the morphemic status of words, and that in some cases this acoustic information can facilitate lexical access more quickly than acoustic cues to phonemes do. A preliminary report of this experiment can be found in Section 4 of the

paper. These data provide a starting point for discussing the properties of a model of how we understand speech. I will discuss the relative importance of phonetic or phonological categories that are central to linguistic theory, compared with so-called paralinguistic properties which tend to signal the communicative function rather than the phonetic category of a chunk of sound. I will conclude that though linguistic theory identifies categories that can have psychological reality, and its aim of parsimonious description is valid within its own discipline, neither property is of central importance to a biologically plausible model of how humans process the speech signal. These formal attributes of linguistic structure may emerge as part of linguistic competence, but they need not be the primary reference points for understanding speech. More fundamental is identification of acoustic patterns, over multiple time domains, which can be directly related to situation-specific linguistic and pragmatic meaning.

20 March 2014

Speaker: Rachael Jack (University of Glasgow)

Title: "Modelling dynamic facial expression signals for social communication: a data-driven approach"

Abstract: As social beings, communication is integral to the survival, functioning and evolution of human society. All social interactions critically rely on the mutual understanding of emotions, achieved primarily by exchanging a set of potent signals - facial expressions of emotion. Discovering the precise nature of these signals is fundamental to understanding the complexities of emotion communication. Recently, data-driven approaches from traditionally distinct fields (e.g., visual cognition) have been used to examine facial expression signalling. Here, I present two studies using a novel psychophysics-based 4D computer graphics platform - the Generative Face Grammar (GFG, Yu et al., 2012) - that combines subjective perception with reverse correlation to model dynamic 3D perceptual expectations of facial expression signals.

Cultural specificity in facial expressions of emotion. 'Universal' facial

expressions elicit low recognition accuracy in East Asian observers, reflecting cultural specificity in facial expression signals. To investigate, we modelled the dynamic 3D perceptual expectations of the 6 classic facial expressions of emotion - i.e., happy, surprise, fear, disgust, anger and sad - in 15 Western Caucasian (WC) and East Asian (EA) observers. Whereas WC models form six distinct emotion clusters, EA models overlap between categories. Spatio-temporal analyses reveal only EA signal emotional intensity with early eye activity. Here, we demonstrate clear cultural specificity of facial expressions and question the notion of a universal set of six basic emotion categories.

Facial expressions of emotion transmit an evolving hierarchy of signals over time. Facial expressions transmit sequences of information across time, achieving optimal signalling and decoding. Here, we show that dynamic face signalling transmits information hierarchically. We modelled the dynamic 3D perceptual expectations of the 6 classic facial expressions in 60 WC observers. Applying Bayesian classifiers across time, early face signalling produces confusions (e.g., fear/surprise), due to shared Action Units (AUs; e.g., eye lid raiser). Later diagnostic AUs (e.g., eye brow raiser) produces accurate discrimination. We conclude that the information transmitted fits evolutionary pressures: early shared AUs signal fewer, broader categories (e.g., danger), later distinguished as six categories (e.g., surprise).

06 March 2014

Speaker: Dag Trygve Truslew Haug (University of Oslo)

Title: "Backward control in Ancient Greek and Latin participial adjuncts"

Abstract: In a number of articles, Eric Potsdam and Maria Polinsky have argued that there are languages with 'backward' control and raising structures, as in (2), rather than the more usual forward case in (1):

1. I persuaded Kim-1 [Δ-1 to smile]
2. I persuaded Δ-1 [Kim-1 to smile]

If this phenomenon is real, its discovery must count as one of the major findings of last decade's work in control and raising theory, and it has important consequences for how we conceive of these phenomena, in particular whether we think of control as "identity" (as in Bresnan 1982 or Boeckx et al. 2010) or as "coindexation" (as is traditional since Rosenbaum 1967).

In my talk I present evidence from Greek and Latin for backward control strutures in adjunct participle clauses. The controller appears in the lower (adjunct) clause, but with the case corresponding to the function of the controlled position in the matrix clause.

apikomenoisi de toisi theopropoisi kai mathousi ... ouk exegeneto Kroisôi apaggeilai arriving-PTCP.DAT but the-DAT messengers-DAT and learning-DAT ... not allow Croesus-DAT announce 'Although the messengers arrived and learned... they were not allowed to tell this to Croesus' (Hdt. 1.78.2)

The evidence for backward control crucially relies on the word order, which is notoriously free in Ancient Greek and Latin. I present evidence from a corpus study of phrasal discontinuity that this is indeed backward control rather than superficial scrambling, because scrambling into or out of participle clauses does not otherwise occur. There is an interesting methodological point here, in that syntactically parsed corpora can bring something approaching negative evidence even for a dead language, provided the corpora are big enough and the phenomenon relatively common.

Finally, I discuss the implications of these examples for control theory. In particular, the Greek and Latin data support the version of "control as identity" which is assumed in non-derivational theories such as LFG, i.e. extensional identity: two syntactic objects are identical iff they have exactly the same syntactic features. This predicts that the case assigned in the matrix clause is available in the adjunct too, as is indeed the case in Greek and Latin backward control structures.

30 January 2014

Speaker: Francesca Filiaci (University of Edinburgh)

Title: "Restrictions on the interpretation of null and overt subjects: a cross-linguistic comparison between Italian and Spanish"

Abstract: This talk focuses on a cross-linguistic comparison between the interpretation of null and overt subject anaphors in two closely typologically related languages: Spanish and Italian. These languages have been assumed to instantiate the same setting of the null subject parameter with respect to not only its syntactic licensing conditions, but also the contextual factors determining the distribution of null and overt subjects. This assumption has had important implications for cross-linguistic research, particularly investigating language acquisition and loss. The first aim of this study was to test this assumption directly.

In order to do so, we run a series of self-paced reading experiments using the same materials translated in each language, so that the results were directly comparable. The data confirmed that in Italian there is a strict division of labour between null and overt subject pronouns, and that this is related to the syntactic position of the antecedent (confirming the Position of Antecedent Strategy of Carminati, 2002), while such division is not as clear-cut in Spanish.

A subsequent pair of experiments tested the hypothesis that the cross-linguistic differences attested might be related to the characteristics of the verbal morphology, namely to the relative ambiguity of the Spanish paradigm with regard to the expression of person features on the verb.

The results did not provide support for the hypothesis (in line with the results of Enríquez, 1984), although they did confirm again the presence of the cross-linguistic differences in the resolution of anaphoric subject dependencies revealed by the previous experiments.

16 January 2014

Speaker: Dan Wedgwood (Independent Researcher)

Title: "What Biolinguists could teach the rest of us -- but don't"

Abstract: This talk was originally scheduled for Hallowe'en and therefore was designed to provoke fear, or at least loathing, in the average linguist. It therefore features extended metatheoretical discussion, analogies with other sciences, and very few interlinearly glossed example sentences. It also unashamedly aims to provoke thought rather than answer straightforward questions. This should all be fine, on the grounds that Edinburgh linguists are in no sense average.

The centrepiece of the talk will be a critique of the Chomskyan kind of Biolinguistics. But don't let that put you off either; there is a much broader purpose to this critique. This is to draw out fundamental problems of approach which, I claim, afflict a considerable variety of analytical frameworks in theoretical linguistics. I will point to work in information structure and conversation analysis as well as syntax. The common flaw here is the construction of putative explanatory mechanisms from elements of superficial descriptive generalisations over the data -- a problem that has been identified and cogently critiqued in the philosophy of biology literature (in terms of empiricism and essentialism -- but this is not a philosophy talk).

As this implies, Biolinguistics already has the key to theory that avoids these problems. Biolinguists often appeal to certain debates in the biology literature which offer coherent -- and, ultimately, mutually compatible -- notions of 'formalism' and 'functionalism'. There are good reasons to believe that the mature theoretical literature on biology could enlighten theory construction in linguistics in significant ways, given certain analogous features of languages and organisms. However, while the Biolinguists have been right to invoke this model in principle, they have not always pursued the relevant parallels with biology in a coherent way, apparently because of an antecedent commitment to certain forms of linguistic analysis.

Where these ideas ought to take us is another matter. My interim conclusion is that linguistic theorists need to develop an attitude that is at

once highly pluralistic, in recognising the potential value in a wide range of analytical approaches, and highly critical, in ruthlessly assessing the limitations of these approaches and how well they fit with their professed aims. For some schools of linguistic thought, that really could be scary.

09 December 2013

Speaker: Prof Sali Tagliamonte (University of Toronto)

Title: "A trend, a peak and the evolution of linguistic systems: Tracking innovation in Toronto, Canada"

28 November 2013

Speaker: Peter Sells (University of York)

Title: "The interplay of syntax and semantics in East Asian noun-modifying clauses"

Abstract: Clauses which are internal to NP and which modify the head noun are canonically classified in familiar European languages as relative clauses and noun-complement clauses, which have distinguishing syntactic properties, including an internal gap in the case of relative clauses. In some languages, noun-modifying clauses show a wide range of semantic relationships to the head noun, yet without any overt syntactic differences. For example, in the head-final East Asian languages Japanese and Korean, relative clauses, noun-complement clauses, and gapless relative-like clauses (which have meanings like "the sound of a door closing") are form-identical even though the semantic relation between the clause and head noun is different in each case.

Based on Matsumoto's (1988, 1997) study of Japanese, Comrie (1995) proposed that there may be a type of language which has a "generalised noun-modifying clause construction", generalised across all the types mentioned above, with no further specialisation and none of the attendant expected syntactic properties or differences. Japanese and Korean are

strong examplars of such a language type, though other Asian languages show quite similar properties (e.g. Chinese, Khmer, Kannada). On the other hand, there are arguments in the literature – e.g. from island constraints – that Japanese does have gap-type relative clauses, and that such relative clauses show a different syntax from the the other noun-modifying clause types (Whitman 2012). Similar arguments hold for Korean.

In this talk I will suggest that both approaches are correct, and that they complement each other. I will argue that languages such as Japanese or Korean clearly show a generalised semantic relation between a modifying clause and a head noun, but also that, nevertheless, clear syntactic constructional properties will be detectable under certain conditions. Based on these and other languages, these accumulated observations allow us to make some plausible conclusions about how (far) languages may differ with regard to the syntax of noun-modifying clauses.

21 November 2013

Speaker: Gillian Ramchand (University of Tromsø)

Title: "Minimalism and Cartography"

Note: Joint work with Peter Svenonius, CASTL

Abstract: While many current syntacticians have felt queasy about embracing the full extent and number of the functional decompositions as proposed in classic cartography (e.g. Cinque 1999), we believe that cartography in the broad sense is essential for any generative theory - it consists in establishing what the category labels of the symbolic system are, how they are hierarchically organized, and how rigidly. We too find it implausible that extremely fine-grained functional sequences of highly abstract heads with no deterministic relationship to compositional semantics is either universal or innate.

However, we do think that the parts of the functional sequence that are

universal and driven by innate mechanisms are directly related to pressure from the interfaces, and in particular to the facts about human concept formation. So we will push a strong semantically grounded thesis about why templatic effects of a certain sort emerge. It is an empirical question how fine-grained the universal spine is (cf. also Wiltschko, to appear), although we suspect with Wiltschko that it is rather abstract. In this talk I will first outline the basis for a methodological reconciliation between the practice and results of cartography, and more minimalistic pressures to explain and ground the complex ordering effects we see on the surface. Secondly, I will exemplify with a case study. Using the domain of English auxiliary orders, I argue that one cannot ignore the detailed mapping evidence, and that understanding it is crucial to making progress on the more theoretical questions of universality vs. language particularity, locality effects/phases, and the mapping to the cognitive-intentional systems of mind/brain.

In this talk therefore, I will offer entertainment both for those who like to talk about the 'big picture' and for those who like to get their hands dirty: (i) an articulation of distinctive kind of research programme which many are actually embarked on but which needs a name and some more visibility, and (ii) a brand new analysis of 'affix'-hopping.

14 November 2013

Speaker: Valerie Hazan (University College London)

Title: "The development of clear speech strategies in 9 to 14 year old children"

Abstract: Communication between speakers is often difficult due to the presence of 'acoustic barriers' such as noise or signal degradation, or 'linguistic barriers', such as a mismatch in native language. Adults are adept at continuously adapting the clarity of their speech to counter the effects of such barriers but less is known about the development of this complex skill in children. In our ESRC-funded study, we have been investigating such speech adaptations in a group of around 90 children

aged between 9 and 14 years. We use the 'diapix' spot-the-difference picture task to elicit spontaneous speech dialogues between two age- and gender-matched friends; in order to naturally-elicit clear speech strategies on the part of one of the interlocutors, we place an acoustic barrier on the other speaker in certain test conditions. The analyses of the child corpus are compared to those of our adult LUCID corpus recorded in the same conditions. I will present our analyses of the acoustic-phonetic characteristics of the children's speech and will focus on the differences between adults and children in the range and extent of clear speech strategies used. I will also present findings of a connected study with the same children on the development of within-category dispersion and cross-category distance for two phoneme contrasts. Overall, we find evidence of ongoing development in speech production skills until mid-adolescence at least.

23 October 2013

Speaker: Professor Jan Terje Faarlund (University of Oslo)

Title: "English as a North Germanic Language"

Hosted jointly with Scandinavian Studies

Abstract: It is well known that Middle English (and its descendent Modern English) has a large number of words of Scandinavian origin. This is conventionally attributed to language contact and heavy borrowing of Scandinavian words into Old or Middle English. However, this alleged borrowing was not limited to lexical words, as is the normal case in contact situations; grammatical words and morphemes were also borrowed. This is unusual, and calls for an explanation. Even more problematic is the fact that Middle English and Modern English syntax is Scandinavian rather than West Germanic. The explanation that I will argue for is that the roots of Middle English (and therefore Modern English) are North Germanic, with large borrowings from the Old English lexicon, rather than the other way around, as generally assumed. I will discuss several syntactic properties, among them verb-object order, preposition stranding, split

infintive, the use of auxiliary verbs, raising constructions, the phrasal genitive. Those reflect a deep and typologically significant relation of Scandinavian with Middle/ Modern English. With respect to all these characteristics Middle/ Modern English groups with North Germanic rather than West Germanic.

17 October 2013

Speakers: Lauri Karttunen and Annie Zaenen

Title: "The multiple interpretations of be lucky to VP"

Abstract: The construction be lucky to VP can be understood in two ways. You were lucky to get a response in reasonable time commits the speaker to the view that the addressee got a response in reasonable time. We call that the **literal** reading of lucky. The event described by the complement happened and it was a good thing for the protagonist.

Changing the tense from past to future has a surprising effect. You will be lucky to get a response in reasonable time suggests that the addressee probably will not get a response in reasonable time. That is the **idiomatic** reading of lucky.

The idiomatic reading is brittle, it is favored or disfavored by a diverse set of structural features. They include tense, negation, type of subject, polarity items, embedding verbs, and adverbial modification as well as many non-structural factors such as whether the sentence is in a context that triggers the expectation of good or bad news.

The literal interpretation of lucky in negative sentences is also problematic. Some English speakers interpret She was not lucky to get a table at that restaurant to mean that she got a table but something bad happened, others take it to mean that she was unlucky and did not get a table.

To explore these issues we have conducted a systematic survey on Amazon's Mechanical Turk with nearly a thousand informants and hundreds of test sentences. We think we understand the reason for the

variation in the literal interpretation of lucky. The idiomatic interpretation of lucky is still a puzzle.

10 October 2013

Speaker: Bethany Lochbihler (University of Edinburgh, LEL)

Title: "Person Licensing and the Absence of Case in Ojibwe"

Abstract: This paper discusses how DP arguments can be licensed in different languages, looking first at the status of Case cross-linguistically, and second claiming that arguments in some languages are licensed by Person. I claim that there is a universal principle ofArgument Licensing that underlies Case, but that can also be realized as Person Licensing, and that both Case and Person Licensing are subject to a version of the "Case Filter," but exhibit different bundles of properties.

I show that Ojibwe does not have evidence for Abstract Case (see Chomsky 1981) since this language lacks Case marking and A-phenomena correlated with standard Case (Ritter & Rosen 2005, see also Ritter & Wiltschko 2010). Further, recent work on Bantu languages (e.g. Lubukusu, Zulu) shows that these languages also lack Case, and indeed allow constructions that should be banned by the Case Filter (Diercks 2011). The distribution of arguments in these languages indicates that the notion of Case, in some standard sense, is not universal.

I argue that Ojibwe arguments are still syntactically licensed to satisfy Argument Licensing, but that this function is fulfilled by the checking of Person features instead of the valuation of Case (similarly, Bantu may license arguments by Class features, Carstens 2011; Halpert 2011). I explore the notion of Person Licensing, which exhibits different bundles of features from Case: Many-to-one and one-to-many licensor-argument relations, and the grammaticality of unlicensed personless DPs.

Ojibwe is further connected to Person Restrictions in many unrelated languages (e.g. French, Spanish, Basque, Icelandic) that share sensitivity to

Person Licensing, although they can exhibit Case Licensing (related approaches found in Anagnostopoulou 2005; Béjar & Rezac 2003; Adger & Harbour 2007; Heck & Richards 2010).

03 October 2013

Speaker: Vera Demberg (Saarland University)

Title: "An information-theoretic perspective on discourse relations and discourse connectors"

Abstract: In this talk, I will propose an information-theoretic view of discourse relation processing. I will start out by discussing discourse expectations and optionality of discourse markers in the light of the uniform information density hypothesis, based on data from the Penn Discourse Treebank.

In the second part of my talk, I will focus on the role of discourse connectives and discuss what kind of discourse-relevant information is conveyed by discourse connectors. I will also present a recent series of experiments, addressing the question whether discourse connectors are processed quickly enough to affect expectations about upcoming discourse content. The experiments show that discourse connectors are integrated incrementally into the discourse representation and can even give rise to lexical predictions. When comparing causals ("therefore") to concessives ("even though"), we furthermore find that concessives are more difficult to process than causals, and, similar to negation, give rise to a search for alternatives.

12 September 2013

Speaker: John R. Rickford (Stanford University)

Title: "Relativizer Omission, the Independence of Linguistic and Social Constraints, and Variationist "Comparative Reconstruction""

Abstract: A linguistic variable that has been the focus of many

quantitative, variationist analyses of English over the past two decades (cf. Guy and Bailey 1995, Lehmann 2001) is the omission of the relativizer (that or WH-forms like what, who, or which] in restrictive relative clauses, as in "That's the man Ø (who/ that/what) I saw." In recent work, (Rickford 2011) I've examined the occurrence of this variable in the vernacular/creole varieties of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, African America, Appalachia and Southwest England (Dorset, cf. Piercy et al 2011), considering, among other things, the evidence it provides on the creole origins hypothesis of AAVE. In this paper, I extend the data set to a total of nine varieties, including relativizer data from "Northern English" varieties in Ireland, Scotland and Northern England kindly made available by Sali Tagliamonte (cf. Tagliamonte et al. 2005).

A key change in my analysis, following suggestions from colleagues and a re-reading of Johnson (2009), was the use of logistic regression with R, rather than Goldvarb pr Varbrul, as it offers several advantages, including mixed effects modeling, and better ability to detect interactions in the data. Additionally, I included social variables: class and/or gender. This allowed me to look for interactions between social factors and linguistic constraints and test Labov's important generalization about the independence of linguistic and social constraints. Finally, I combined the data from all nine varieties in a big mixed effects regression analysis, controlling for differences by variety by entering them as factors in a "Language Variety" factor group.

The results were intriguing. To begin with, the values ("factors" in variable rule terminology) that turned out to be most significant for relativizer omission across all nine individual language varieties were those that matched Wasow et al.'s (2011) predictability hypothesis, like Superlative NP antecedents and occurrence in existential, possessive, or cleft structures, all of which have general processing explanations that make them less useful for recovering historical relationships. Moreover, although gender and/or class turned out to have significant effects on the rate of relativizer omission in several cases, they did not show any interaction with the effect of linguistic constraints, confirming Labov's more general

(2010) hypothesis about the independence of linguistic and social constraints. Finally, in the big regression runs, there were very few significant interactions with language variety, suggesting that the widely separated language varieties I compared were essentially behaving alike with respect to relativizer omission. This calls into question the viability of variationist "Comparative Reconstruction" (Poplack 2000) for detecting prior diachronic relationships, especially when, as in this case, the variation is governed by general sentence processing constraints.