



Linguistic Society of America

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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Nation's Capital to Host Cutting-Edge Linguistic Research in January

(Washington, DC) – Research presentations on “totes” and endangered languages, panels on the role of linguistics in education and the law, and two days of meetings on Capitol Hill are among the highlights of the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), to be held in Washington, DC from January 7-10, 2016.

The 90th Annual Meeting of the LSA will bring over 1,000 linguistics scholars from across the US and around the world to Washington, DC. The meeting provides a forum for the presentation of cutting-edge research focused on the scientific study of language. The American Dialect Society, the American Name Society, the North American Association for the History of the Language Sciences, the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics, the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas, and The Association for Linguistic Evidence will be meeting concurrently with the LSA.

Members of the news media are invited to attend all or part of the meeting, which will be held at the Marriott Marquis Washington, DC. Please contact Alyson Reed, Executive Director of the LSA (areed@lsadc.org) with any questions or to express your interest in attending.

For more information, visit the Annual Meeting webpage at <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/event/lsa-2016-annual-meeting> or read through some of the meeting's highlights below.

Research Highlights

Over 300 papers and 150 research posters will be presented at the 2016 Annual Meeting, including the studies featured below:

African American English in the Construction of Intersectional Identity among Urban Middle Class African Americans

Jessica Grieser (University of Tennessee)

What does it mean to sound black and middle class? Both inside and outside the U.S. African American community, some aspects of speech styles that everyday listeners associate with African American community are (erroneously) viewed as being evidence of lower socioeconomic and educational status. Even within the field of linguistics, many studies have tended to ignore or discount the presence of middle and upper-class African Americans when evaluating African American speech.

This study examines middle-class African American speakers in a rapidly-gentrifying neighborhood of Washington, D.C. to uncover the ways in which this group employs a variety of speech styles. It finds that the speakers' use of speech styles associated with the African American community is qualitatively and quantitatively different than that of their working class peers, and that this style works together with other speech styles to enable the linguistic expression of identities of class, race, and localness.

A Morphophonological Account of 'Totes' Constructions in English
Lauren Spradlin (CUNY) and Taylor Jones (University of Pennsylvania)

'Abbrevs' aren't a new phenomenon. Their visibility has increased, however, with the popularization of social media, and they are becoming a huge part of how we communicate. Forms like *totes emosh* (totally emotional), *totes appreesh* (totally appreciate), and *Novemb* (November) are abbreviations of a new type, which Lauren Spradlin and Taylor Jones have dubbed "totes truncation". Spradlin and Jones have used data gathered from social media to describe how 'toteses' are formed, who's 'totesing', and why.

Totes users have converged on a series of phonological rules distinct from those that govern the rest of English, and the process is phonological rather than orthographic in nature, meaning that speakers make choices based on sounds and syllables rather than letters and spellings. These rules produce consonant sequences at the word's edge not otherwise seen in English. Totesed words also take optional suffixes like -z, -ie, and -o, (e.g., *jeals*, *jealsie*, *jealsies*, and *jealo*) or -sh or -zh.

Cross-linguistically, -sh and -zh sounds are used to signal smallness, cuteness, or childishness. A large proportion of totesed forms end in these sounds, and their association with totes truncation has become strong enough that forms like *maybsh*, *comftsh*, and even *totessh* are in use. This is the first time -sh and -zh have been used to convey non-linguistic information in English.

Degrees of name avoidance in Datooga: A usage-based study of an African avoidance register
Alice Mitchell (University of Hamburg)

Do you call your father-in-law by his first name? If not, why not?

In many cultures, it's seen as disrespectful to address your parents-in-law by their names. Among the Datooga of Tanzania, women go to such lengths to avoid saying their father-in-laws' names that they also avoid similar-sounding words. For example, if your father-in-law were called Tom, you'd try never to say 'Tom,' and you'd also avoid words like 'tomato' or 'tomorrow.' Datooga women have come up with a special vocabulary to replace all the words they can't say (e.g., you could say 'pomato' or 'red fruit' instead of 'tomato').

Mitchell reports on results of the first in-depth research on in-law name avoidance in Datooga based on case studies of individual women's avoidance habits.

A Quantitative Analysis of Gendered Compliments in Disney Princess Films
Carmen Fought (Pitzer College) & Karen Eisenhauer (NC State)

The Disney film company has built a multimillion dollar franchise around the Disney princesses and their corresponding movies, and little girls all over the world pretend to be Ariel or Belle. But what sort of model are they getting for what it means to be a girl or a boy?

Fought and Eisenhauer use linguistic tools to help analyze how gender is presented in the "Disney princess" movies. While the princesses are often the star of the show, male characters are more prevalent, and speak more than female characters. For example, in *Aladdin*, male characters speak eight times as much as female characters.

In addition, the researchers use discourse analysis to look at how male and female characters talk, and how they are talked about, focusing specifically on the question of compliments. They find that while male characters are more likely to be complimented on their skills or possessions, female characters are more likely to be complimented on their appearance. They also look in detail at trends over time, to analyze how the more recent films compare with the older ones on a variety of linguistic measures.

Effects of musical aural skills training on lexical tone perception
Evan D. Bradley & Janet G. van Hell (Penn State University)

Does learning to sing or play an instrument change the way you perceive sound? Can this be harnessed for any practical effect?

Bradley and van Hell trained participants with computerized musical "ear training". This is used by musicians to improve their listening skills by repeatedly listening to and naming musical structures like intervals and chords. Before training, participants were tested on their ability to hear Mandarin Chinese words. Mandarin is a "tone language": unlike in English, the pitch of a word is integral to its meaning-- something that is difficult for speakers of non-tone languages to learn.

Participants who underwent musical pitch training improved their perception of Mandarin words more than participants who received rhythmic training. This suggests that learning to hear musical pitches better helped participants in the language test, even though they hadn't studied the language. This doesn't mean that musicians can speak and understand the language, but it suggests that music can be harnessed to help learners get a faster start in learning the sounds of a new language.

In Your Own Words: Intertextuality and Witness Credibility in the George Zimmerman Trial
Grace C. Sullivan (Georgetown University)

In February 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman while walking home from a convenient store. The untimely death of Martin, and the subsequent acquittal of Zimmerman, sparked national and global outrage surrounding the treatment of African Americans in the American judicial system. This talk examines the testimony of Martin's friend and witness for the prosecution, Rachel Jeantel, who was on the phone with Trayvon the night of the crime.

Jeantel, a speaker of African American English, had her language capability challenged throughout the trial, which led to the questioning of her credibility as witness. Sullivan finds that the repetition of not only her own words, but her dialect, as well, served to portray Jeantel in a negative light, and perhaps discredit her testimony.

Documenting Variation in Endangered Languages (special session)

Kristine Hildebrandt (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville), Carmen Jany (California State University, San Bernardino), and Wilson de Lima Silva (Rochester Institute of Technology), with 13 presenters.

Traditionally, the study of language variation has focused on “major” languages with millions of speakers, such as English, French, Dutch and Spanish. Investigations on language variation in endangered and minority languages, however, are still few in number. This special session brings together researchers in the overlapping areas of variation and documentation with a common goal of addressing issues as they intersect with the description and preservation of under-described or threatened languages and dialects.

The session presents case studies with a wide geographic range, including Cameroon and Tanzania, the Peruvian Amazon, Belize, and Canada and the US. These studies cover a range of topics, including lexical and grammatical variation, language contact, speaker attitudes, and variation based on traditional variables, like gender, as well as newly considered variables, like clan membership.

A full schedule for the LSA Annual Meeting is available at <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/event/lsa-2016-annual-meeting/schedule>.

Program Highlights

The 2016 LSA Annual Meeting will also feature:

- The Linguistic Society of America’s first-ever Linguistic Advocacy Day, which will bring dozens of linguists to Capitol Hill on January 7 and 11 to speak about multilingual education, federal research funding, and other linguistic policy issues;
- The LSA premiere of *Rising Voices/Hóǵǵañjipi: Revitalizing the Lakota Language*;
- Several talks and sessions on language and the law, including John R. Rickford’s LSA Presidential Address on “Language and Linguistics on Trial”;
- A symposium on “The Significance of Linguistic Justice” in higher education;
- Panels and workshops on linguistic careers and linguistic outreach;
- A Wikipedia ‘edit-a-thon’, bringing linguists together to improve the quality of linguistics articles on Wikipedia.

Awards, Honors and Related Events

The LSA Annual Meeting also features a number of awards, including the annual designation of the “Word of the Year” by the American Dialect Society, scheduled for Friday, January 8th. The following awards will also be presented at a special ceremony on Saturday, January 9th:

- **Linguistics Journalism Award:** Arika Okrent (*Mental Floss, The Week*)
- **Linguistics, Language & The Public Award:** Michael Erard (*Schwa Fire*)
- **Kenneth L. Hale Award:** Nora C. England (University of Texas)

- **Leonard Bloomfield Book Award:** *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2014), authored by William H. Baxter (University of Michigan) and Laurent Sagart (French National Centre for Scientific Research)
- **Early Career Award:** Judith Tonhauser (The Ohio State University)
- **Excellence in Community Linguistics Award:** Valerie Switzler (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon)
- **Linguistic Service Award:** Terry Langendoen (National Science Foundation)
- **Best Paper in *Language* Award:** "Ancestry-constrained phylogenetic analysis supports the Indo-European steppe hypothesis," by Will Chang, Chundra Cathcart, David Hall, Andrew Garrett [Volume 91, Number 1 (March 2015)]
- **Victoria A. Fromkin Lifetime Service Award:** Barbara Partee (University of Massachusetts – Amherst)
- **Student Abstract Awards:**
 - 1st place: Nicholas Baier (University of California, Berkeley)
 - 2nd place: Andrew Lamont (Indiana University)
 - 3rd place: Gwynne Mapes (University of Bern)
 - 4th-10th places: Annette D'Onofrio (Stanford University); John Gluckman (UCLA); Nicole Holliday (NYU); Oana David (University of California; Berkeley); Akiva Bacovcin, Amy Goodwin Davies and Robert J. Wilder (University of Pennsylvania); Daniel Szeredi (NYU); Taylor Jones (University of Pennsylvania)

More information about LSA Honors and Awards can be found online:

<http://www.linguisticsociety.org/about/who-we-are/lsa-awards>

Members of the Society who have made distinguished contributions to the discipline will be inducted as LSA Fellows during a ceremony at the Business Meeting, on Friday, January 8th at 6:30pm. The following members will be inducted in this year's class:

- Karlos Arregi (University of Chicago)
- Robert Blust (University of Hawai'i at Manoa)
- Jonathan Bobaljik (University of Connecticut)
- Eve V. Clark (Stanford University)
- William Croft (University of New Mexico)
- Kai von Stechow (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
- Lisa Green (University of Massachusetts at Amherst)
- Sabine Iatridou (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
- Maria Polinsky (University of Maryland)
- Alan Yu (University of Chicago)

Honorary members of the LSA will also be elected at the Business Meeting.

To obtain a press badge for the meeting, please contact Alyson Reed (areed@lsadc.org).

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Founded in 1924, the Linguistic Society of America is the largest national professional society representing the field of linguistics. Its mission is to advance the scientific study of language.