Linguistic Society of America

<u>MEDIA ADVISORY</u>

For Immediate Release
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Austin to Host Cutting-Edge Linguistic Research in January

(Washington, DC) – Research presentations on slang, texting habits, vocal fry, political speaking styles, and the discovery of a new language family are among the highlights of the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), to be held in Austin, TX from January 5-8, 2017.

The 91st Annual Meeting of the LSA will bring over 1,000 linguistics scholars from across the US and around the world to Austin. 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, and the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas will be meeting concurrently with the LSA.

The meeting will feature the debut of two events of particular interest to the public and the news media:
1) **The Five-Minute Linguist**: A speaking contest to judge the ability of presenters to adapt their research into a lively five-minute presentation for a lay audience.
2) **Public Lectures on Language**: a series of four presentations by nationally prominent linguists addressing topics of significant public interest. The presenters will be:
- James Pennebacker "Using Language Analysis to Read Minds"
- Eve V. Clark, "How Babies and Young Children Learn Language: Why You Should Talk to Your Kids"
- Ben Zimmer, "Traveling Among the New Words: Lexical Adventures in the Digital Age"
- John McWhorter, "Words on the Move: Why English Won't – and Can't – Stand Still (Like, Literally)"

Members of the news media are invited to attend all or part of the meeting, which will be held at the JW Marriot. 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-2017-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 2017 Annual Meeting,
including the studies featured below:

"It's not slang, it's just the way I speak": Language variation, race, and ethnicity in a multi-ethnic secondary school
[Shivonne Gates, Queen Mary University of London]

We all know that teens often speak differently from adults, as well as from younger children. But is this
just slang, a passing fad that ultimately goes out of fashion? Or is there something more to it? In order
to examine this, Gates' study looked at language variation and change among adolescents in a
secondary school in East London.

The East End of London is of particular interest; over the past 50 years the demographics there have
shifted dramatically, so it is now one of the most diverse areas in the UK. Moreover, the area is
associated with the traditional white working class Cockney dialect, which appears to be disappearing as
part of the demographic shift. In its place, a new dialect that includes tangible shifts in grammar,
pronunciation, and vocabulary has emerged and been termed Multicultural London English (MLE). This
includes features such as the new first person singular pronoun "man", and changes in the
pronunciation of the vowels in words like MOUTH, FACE, and PRICE. However, many national newspapers in
the UK have questioned whether MLE is in fact a new dialect or just a kind of slang; terms such as
"Jafaican" have been coined to describe the changes.

For this study, Gates spent twelve months in a secondary school in East London closely observing the
language of the adolescents there. This analysis sheds light on our understanding of MLE, confirming
that it is in fact a true dialect but also suggesting that there are complex ethno-racial dynamics at play.

Lol! I didn't mean that! Lol as a marker of illocutionary force
[Michelle McSweeney, Columbia University]

What does 'lol' really mean? Most people will say that it means 'laugh out loud', but that probably isn't
quite right because it appears in text messages that simply are not funny like this one: A: "Want to go to
the mall?" B: "Go with Maria, I'm sick lol." Being sick isn't that funny, so it must be communicating
something else.

To better understand why 'lol' appears in so many situations, McSweeney collected a corpus of 44,597
text messages written by bilingual young adults in New York City. She categorized both the messages
where 'lol' does appear, and those where it doesn't. Much to her surprise, McSweeney found that 'lol'
appears where the literal meaning and the intended meaning of the messages don't quite match, and it
never appears in texts where they do match. For example, while people will text 'lol' when flirting, they
never send "I love you lol." In formal terms, this is a mismatch between the 'locutionary' (literal) and
'illocutionary' (intended) forces of the message. Another way to think of this is that, when B says "I'm

sick, lol" she's not trying to be funny, she's really asking A to rbtl (read between the lines) and understand that she doesn't want to go.

The Perception of Creaky Voice: Does Speaker Gender Affect Our Judgments?
[Kaitlyn Elizabeth Lee, Indiana University]

The voices of celebrities – like the Kardashians, Brittany Spears, Zooey Deschanel, and others -- are driving a new vocal trend among young, American females. You may have heard this low pitch, gravelly, creaky, seemingly disaffected voice pattern sweeping across the nation (riiiight?). This pattern, *creaky voice*, or *vocal fry*, has received a lot of attention both from linguists and the media alike. While young women's use of creaky voice is criticized and sometimes condemned, linguistic research is split on the motivation and the effects this voice pattern has on speakers and listeners.

Lee hypothesizes that young women's creaky voice is motivated by the idea of *iconic masculinity* and *indexing*. Low-pitched voice has been tied to masculinity, which iconically represents confidence, intelligence, and education. Young women are trying to associate themselves with these positive characteristics by manipulating their pitch lower, thus appearing more socially confident and intelligent.

However, Lee's results have shown that their efforts are unsuccessful. College students perceive young female voices as less confident, intelligent, and educated when using creaky voice compared to their normal (*modal*) speaking voice. This was also found for male voices. These results question the idea of creaky voice as an *iconic masculine index* and casts doubts on the reasons young women are adopting it when social perceptions seem to be so negative.

Soon, creaky voice will fade from the media much like *valley girl speech* did, only to be replaced by a new trend. As long as these negative perceptions exist, young women will continue to innovate language, and that's like totally cool, riiiiight?

Southern Vowels & Shifting Appalachian Identities
[**Kirk Hazen, West Virginia University**]

 The 2016 presidential election highlighted a stark divide between more rural voters without a college education and others. How deep do these divisions go? Hazen's paper explores language patterns affected by these social divisions in a region popularly thought to be uniform, West Virginia.

West Virginia has long been considered a part of the rural South. As part of the South, it should have fully adopted the wide-spread pattern called the Southern Vowel Shift. The Southern Vowel Shift is part of what marks the language of Cletus from the *Simpsons* as Southern. In reality, West Virginians have only partially implemented the Southern Vowel Shift, and its spread has declined in most areas. The same divide from the 2016 presidential election can be seen with how extensively speakers have adopted the Southern Vowel Shift.

By scientifically analyzing vowels taken from interviews with native Appalachians, Hazen describes several trends in how speakers have altered their pronunciations over the 20th century and discusses how these changes speak to emerging Appalachian identities in the face of the new political realities of the 21st century.

Semantics, variation, and the English definite article
[Eric K. Acton, Eastern Michigan University]

The definite article *the* has received a good deal of popular attention of late, largely due to Donald Trump's use of phrases like "the African-Americans," "the Muslims," and "the Hispanics." Some journalists have claimed that such uses of *the* sound "exclusionary" and mark the group being referred to as "monolithic."

This study shows that these effects are real, and are reflected quantitatively in political discourse. Examining the full proceedings of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1992 to 2012, Acton found that representatives were over 75% more likely to use *the* in naming their opposing party than in naming their own, as in, "Had the Republicans followed regular order, Democrats would support this rule" (A. Hastings, D-FL). At the same time, in statements encouraging common ground between the two parties, representatives tended to *avoid* using *the* in naming their opposing party, as in, "We all agree – all of us, Republicans and Democrats alike – that cuts in wasteful spending are vital" (W. Keating, D-MA).

Speech on the talk show *The McLaughlin Group* enriches the picture. Seven of the eight most talkative pundits on the show used *the* more in talking about their opposing party than in talking about their own. Moreover, compared to members of the House, pundits' rates of *the* were generally higher and tended to show less bias toward one party over the other. These patterns are consistent with *the*'s distancing effect, and reflect two key differences between the separate contexts: namely, unlike House members, the pundits (i) spoke as outside observers of events (hence higher rates of distancing *the*); and (ii) faced pressure to exhibit journalistic objectivity (hence less biased use of *the*).

In addition to providing quantitative evidence for these effects, Acton shows that the source of the effects lies in the core, everyday meaning of *the* and its relationship to other expressions.

Jodï-Sáliban, a New South-American Language Family
[Jorge Emilio Rosés Labrada, University of British Columbia]

The Jodï are a small group of hunter-gatherers living in relative isolation in the Sierra de Maigualida in Venezuela. With only a few reports of their existence, they remained a mystery to outsiders until the 1960s when contact with the larger Venezuelan society increased. Their language, also called Jodï, has generally been left unclassified in the language classification literature because of how little is known about it. There have been, however, four different proposals attempting to group it with other local language families, namely, Yanomaman, Cariban, the putative Makúan, and Sáliban. These classification attempts have put forward very little supporting evidence. In this paper, Rosés Labrada briefly reviews the different proposals and investigates in-depth the proposed Jodï-Sáliban relationship. To do so, he compares both lexical and grammatical material. Based on numerous regular sound correspondences as well as grammatical correspondences—some of which are too idiosyncratic to be anything but the product of inheritance from a common ancestor—Rosés Labrada shows that Jodï is related to the Sáliban languages, namely Sáliba, Piaroa and Mako, demonstrating the existence of a Jodï-Sáliban language family. Sáliban is a small independent lineage that is most likely a remnant of the original inhabitants of the area, who lived along the Middle Orinoco River before the Carib and Arawak expansions that saw speakers of languages in those larger families settle in the region. Rosés Labrada's research contributes to our understanding of the prehistory of the Jodï people and of the Sáliban peoples of the Venezuelan-Colombian border.

A full schedule for the LSA Annual Meeting is available at
http://www.linguisticsociety.org/node/6725/schedule.

Program Highlights

The 2017 LSA Annual Meeting will also feature:

- Several talks and sessions on endangered languages and revitalization efforts.
- A plenary address on "Linguistic Accommodation: Critical Strategies in Public Engagement," by Walt Wolfram, North Carolina State University.
- A symposium on "Language and Educational Justice."
- An all-day pre-conference workshop for students and faculty from tribal colleges and universities designed to enhance their capacity to conduct linguistic research.
- 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 6th. The following awards will also be presented at a special ceremony on Saturday, January 7th:

- **Linguistics, Language & The Public Award**: Anne Curzan (University of Michigan)
- **Kenneth L**. **Hale Award**: Melissa Axelrod (University of New Mexico)
- **Leonard Bloomfield Book Award**: Brad Montgomery-Anderson (Northeastern State University) and the University of Oklahoma Press for *Cherokee Reference Grammar*
- **Early Career Award**: Jeffrey Heinz (University of Delaware)
- **Excellence in Community Linguistics Award**: Bessie Ejai and Jessie Sampi (of the Bardi language community of the Kimberley region of Northwestern Australia)
- **Best Paper in *Language* Award**: (to be announced)
- **Victoria A. Fromkin Lifetime Service Award:** Roger Shuy (Georgetown University, Emeritus)
- **Student Abstract Awards**:
  1st place: Emily Moline (University of California, Davis)
  2nd Place: Jon Ander Mendia (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
  3rd Place: Chantal Gratton (Stanford University)

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 x[th] at 6:30pm. The following members will be inducted in this year's class:

- Marlyse Baptista, University of Michigan
- Greg Carlson, University of Rochester
- Nora C. England, University of Texas at Austin
- Gregory Stump, University of Kentucky
- Sali Tagliamonte, University of Toronto
- Anthony C. Woodbury, University of Texas at Austin

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).

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.