Linguistic Society of America

<u>MEDIA ADVISORY</u>

For Immediate Release
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Salt Lake City to Host Cutting-Edge Linguistic Research in January

(Washington, DC) – Research presentations on transgender identities, the #yesallwomen twitter campaign, the rootedness of Appalachian English, and the many others provided below are among the highlights of the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah from January 4-7, 2018.

The 92nd Annual Meeting of the LSA will bring over 1,000 linguistics scholars from across the US and around the world to Salt Lake City. 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 Computation in Linguistics, and the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas 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 Grand America Hotel. 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 https://www.linguisticsociety.org/event/lsa-2018-annual-meeting or read through a selection of the meeting's highlights below.

<u>Research Highlights</u>

Over 300 papers and 150 research posters will be presented at the 2018 Annual Meeting, including the studies featured below:

More than Pitch Perfect: A Longitudinal Acoustic Study of a Male-to-Female Transgender Video Blogger
Andrew Cheng (University of California, Berkeley)

Transgender visibility is increasing in the public sphere, as celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, and the Wachowski siblings come out and speak out. It is important to many individuals who transition from one gender to another to adopt speech patterns that allow them to pass as their chosen gender. Female-to-male transgender individuals can undergo testosterone treatments that will lower their vocal pitch, but a change in the opposite direction is not generally considered achievable for male-to-female transgender individuals without invasive surgery. However, pitch alone isn't the only vocal cue for gender identity.

This study examines the speech patterns of two female YouTube video bloggers, a Vietnamese-Canadian transwoman and a White transwoman from New York, who have documented their transitions over nearly a decade. We identify the ways in which they have successfully attained female voices without medical intervention. The results of this study show that the pitch differences between human genders are not purely biologically-based and that other vocal characteristics that reflect gender identity may be socially learned and vary depending on the speech context.

Investigating a possible "musician advantage" for speech-in-speech perception
Michelle Cohn (University of California, Davis)

Musical training might influence how listeners perceive speech. Cohn asks whether the "musician's advantage" for speech perception *increases* in challenging listening conditions. For example, does musicianship improve your ability to understand your friend in a crowded restaurant? In the UC Davis Phonetics Lab, Cohn tested whether musicians and non-musicians varied in their ability to tease apart speech from multiple, competing talkers (known as the "cocktail party effect") on the basis of pitch.

Listeners use pitch in speech to help identify different speakers – with higher pitches associated with female talkers and lower pitches associated with male talkers. Cohn's research asks (1) whether musicians are better at teasing apart two competing voices on the basis of this vocal pitch encoding; and (2) if age and musicianship interact to confer a benefit for musicians in more accurately perceiving speech over their lifespan. This work provides evidence that *musical experience* does affect speech perception. Musicians have an advantage for speech perception in noisy situations (such as during a conversation in a crowded bar, airport, etc.), but this advantage is lost as we grow older.

Musical Evidence for Patterns of Syllabification in English
Joselyn Rodriguez, Sara Ng, and Abby Kaplan (University of Utah)

Do you think the word "fire" has one syllable or two? If you said "two", you're in good company with Billy Joel, John Mayer, and Ben Folds; if you said "one", you can join Bob Dylan and James Taylor. Researchers at the University of Utah analyzed recordings of American singer-songwriters and found that some are far more likely to sing words like "fire," "while," and "conspire" on two pitches (e.g., "We didn't start the fire") rather than one ("I've seen fire, I've seen rain"). Since people sometimes find it hard to count syllables explicitly, this study used music as a tool to study speaker perception of syllable structure. The results show that

there are real differences across speakers for words like these, and that music is a viable method for exploring people's linguistic intuitions indirectly.

Gender, Power, and Princesses: A qualitative and quantitative study of directive use in children's movies
Carmen Fought (Pitzer College)

Being "the boss" and a woman is a notable challenge in our society, where little girls grow up with the pressure to be "polite" and not too bossy. In our research, we looked at Disney and Pixar movies, and analyzed how those in power gave commands. We found that "good" female characters are expected to be more polite when giving commands, while male characters can do whatever they want. No surprise, then, that the children who watch these movies are receiving a biased message about who can and cannot be a boss.

#NotAllMen accommodate: intraspeaker variation and male feminist allyship on Twitter
Nora Goldman (The Graduate Center, CUNY)

In 2014, a misogyny-motivated shooting in California inspired a viral social media campaign marked with the hashtag "#yesallwomen". The message of the #yesallwomen movement was that yes, of course, not all men perpetrate violence against women, but *all women* live in daily fear of male violence all over the world. The hashtag was tweeted millions of times over a matter of days. Nora Goldman analyzed thousands of these tweets to identify how the authors' language changed when they were tweeting about gender issues as compared with their other tweets. She found that when using #yesallwomen in a tweet, female twitter users were more likely to swear and less likely to use overtly polite language, nonstandard abbreviations like "wanna" or "gonna", and words that weaken the force of their statements ("I guess", "maybe", "it seems"). While certain linguistic choices appear to be meaningful to women participating in feminist discourse on Twitter, emulating how women use language is not part of men's expression of support. This study helps us understand how gender politics can affect how we speak and write, and more generally how people use linguistic tools to express their political opinions.

Pokemonikers: A Study of Sound Symbolism and Pokémon Names
Jordan Ackerman (UC Merced), Noah Hermalin (UC Berkeley), Sharon Inkelas (UC Berkeley), Darya Kavitskaya (UC Berkeley), Stephanie Shih (UC Merced)

Many languages exhibit sound symbolism, in which particular sounds (consonants or vowels) tend to show up in words with a particular kind of meaning. In English, for example, the sound sequence "gl" shows up in many words with light-related meanings like "glitter," "gleam," "glow". Are these associations random and arbitrary, or are they predictable from some common human source that would lead them to be similar across languages spoken in different places by different people? Since languages have such different kinds of words, it's hard to answer this question for sure. But there is one domain in which a direct comparison is possible: names of the 802 creatures in the Pokémon game franchise. Pokémon have clearly identified

properties (strength, speed, visual appearance, etc.), but have different names in different languages. This provides a perfect test ground for the association between sound and meaning.

Our results show that English and Japanese agree in correlating name length with weight and evolutionary stage, but differ in other ways: shorter, weaker Pokémon are likely in Japanese, but not English, to have labial sounds like "m" or "b", while larger, heavier Pokémon are likely in English, but not in Japanese, to have vowels like "o" or "a". That English and Japanese use different sound symbolic mechanisms for the same Pokémon creatures shows that while sound symbolism may conform to some cross-linguistic tendencies, its nature can also be highly language-specific.

Implicit bias weakens perceptual adaptation to non-native speech
Rebecca Laturnus (New York University)

People usually get better at understanding non-native ("foreign-accented") speech when they hear more of it, especially when they've heard multiple, different accented speakers. This study trained people on different non-native accents, then tested their ability to understand a new accented speaker they hadn't heard before. The results show that people with a strong, unconscious bias for perceiving non-native speech as negative were less likely to understand non-native speech compared to those who associated it with a positive perception. The results speak to issues surrounding linguistic discrimination, and in particular to the issue of poor teaching reviews for non-native educators, where students often complain their instructors were too difficult to understand because of their accent.

Appalachian Place-based Identity: A case-study in Rootedness and /ay/ monophthongization
Paul E. Reed (University of Alabama)

Appalachia, the mountainous region in the eastern US, has a very noticeable production of the vowel /ay/, as in words like PRICE, PRIZE, or PRY. This sound is notable because there is stigma attached to when the vowel sounds more monophthongal (like one sound) rather than diphthongal (more like two sounds) - think of how comedians on Saturday Night Live mimic Southerners in their skits.

This study looks at a single speaker with Appalachian roots at two time points. I scientifically analyzed a recording of a speech from her senior year of high school and a recently recorded interview. In the high school speech, her /ay/ productions were all monophthongal (sounding like 'ah'), while her interview tokens were all diphthongal (sounding like two vowels). In the interview, she talked about how her feeling of connection to home and her identity changed over time, and her speech reflected this change. These findings show that how a person relates to place over time can change, and their speech can change as well to reflect this.

The Third Dialect Shift: A Change in Progress in Vancouver, BC and Seattle, WA
Julia Swan (San José State University)

Have American and Canadian speech been viewed as more different than they actually are? This isn't to say that Americans and Canadians don't have different identities (they do and will happily tell you about them if you ask!), but at least as far as speech goes among urban centers on the West Coast, there may be more similarities than linguists have previously represented. Swan's study is one of the first to look carefully at speech on *both* sides of the border in two West coast urban centers: Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, British Columbia. Part of her study found that Vancouver talkers were more likely to believe they spoke *similarly* to Americans, while Americans were more likely to believe that Canadians spoke *differently* from them. This ideology might explain how this perceived separateness of the dialects has continued as long as it has. It could also show that North America has a dialect region spanning a national border, something researchers had previously thought to be unlikely or impossible in the context of the eastern U.S.-Canadian border. Variation exists within any dialect region, but a more united view of urban Canadian and American dialects in the West may call attention to the way geopolitical borders and social networks shape our preconceptions of the world.

A full schedule for the LSA Annual Meeting is available at https://www.linguisticsociety.org/node/8208/schedule .

Program Highlights

The meeting will feature events of particular interest to the public and the news media:
- **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.
- Several talks and sessions on endangered languages and revitalization efforts.
- Plenary addresses on the neurobiology of sign languages and the history of research on African American English from the last fifty years.
- A symposium on "Linguistics and Race: An Interdisciplinary Approach Towards an LSA Statement on Race."
- An all-day pre-conference workshop for students and faculty from Native American community members 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 5th. The following awards will also be presented at a special ceremony on Saturday, January 6th:

- **Linguistics, Language & The Public Award**: John McWhorter (Columbia University)
- **Kenneth L. Hale Award**: Tucker Childs (Portland State University)
- **Leonard Bloomfield Book Award**: *The Price of Linguistic Productivity: How Children Learn to Break the Rules of Language*, Charles Yang (University of Pennsylvania)
- **Early Career Award**: Kristen Syrett (Rutgers University)

- **Excellence in Community Linguistics Award**: Dehe Wang (Xichang College; Ersu Tibetan language community)
- **Best Paper in *Language* Award**: "Competing models of liaison acquisition: Evidence from corpus and experimental data," Angelica Buerkin-Pontrelli (University of Pennsylvania), Jennifer Culbertson (University of Edinburgh), Geraldine Legendre (John Hopkins University), and Thierry Nazzi (Université Paris Descartes)
- **Victoria A. Fromkin Lifetime Service Award:** Sally Thomason (University of Michigan)
- **Linguistics Journalism Award:** Lane Greene ("Johnson" column, *The Economist*)
- **Student Abstract Awards**:
  1st **place**: Daniel Duncan (New York University)
  2nd Place: Milena Šereikaitè (University of Pennsylvania)
  3rd Place: Carol-Rose Little and Mia Wiegand (Cornell)

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 5th at 6:00pm. The following members will be inducted in this year's class:

- Rusty Barrett, University of Kentucky
- Patrice Beddor, University of Michigan
- Patrick Farrell, University of California, Davis
- Andrew Hippisley, University of Kentucky
- Salikoko S. Mufwene, University of Chicago
- Colin Phillips, University of Maryland
- Joe Salmons, University of Wisconsin
- Gillian Sankoff, University of Pennsylvania

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.