



Linguistic Society of America

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

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New York City to Host Cutting-Edge Linguistic Research in January

(Washington, DC) – Research presentations on topics as diverse as sounds systems, endangered languages, computer-mediated language, and modes of communication developed by deaf-blind communities are among the highlights of the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), to be held in New York, NY from January 3-6, 2019.

The 93rd Annual Meeting of the LSA will bring over 1,000 linguistics scholars from across the US and around the world to New York. 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 North American Research Network in Historical Sociolinguistics, the Society for Computation in Linguistics, 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.

Members of the news media are invited to attend all or part of the meeting, which will be held at the Sheraton NY Times Square 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-2019-annual-meeting> or read through a selection of the meeting’s highlights below.

Research Highlights

Over 200 papers and 225 research posters will be presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting, including the studies featured below:

Two centuries of spreading language loss: A visual animation

Gary F. Simons (SIL International)

The language endangerment crisis has gotten the attention of the media in the past two decades. The claim that “one language dies every 14 days” has been picked up as fact and spread widely in reporting—an exact Google search for that sentence yields thousands of

hits. The present research, using a global dataset from Ethnologue (ethnologue.com) of over 7500 languages, investigates the actual patterns of language loss, which reveal that the prevalence of language death has been overstated but also that the pace of language loss is rising at an alarming rate.

Phonologically-motivated phonetic repair strategies in Siri- and human-directed speech

Michelle Cohn (University of California, Davis), Bruno Ferenc Segedin (University of California, Davis), Georgia Zellou (University of California, Davis)

We're in a new digital era: humans are talking to voice-activated "smart" devices, like Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa, that are increasingly naturalistic and interactive. Linguistics research has outlined the speech "rules" we use when speaking to other humans, for example, talking slower and louder when someone misunderstands us. Researchers at the UC Davis Phonetics lab, who specialize in the science of speaking, tested whether these same speech "rules" apply when Siri misunderstands us. They found that we change our speech in similar ways when correcting Siri and a human — a finding that contrasts with older studies using robotic computer voices. This research suggests that as these "smart" digital assistants become more human-like, our speech behavior toward them reflects that.

Tactile Phonology: the emergence of grammatical patterns in protactile communities in the United States

Terra Edwards (St. Louis University) and Diane Brentari (University of Chicago)

You may be familiar with the story of Anne Sullivan taking Helen Keller to the water pump repeatedly, each time spelling w-a-t-e-r on her hand before Keller finally understood. A question that is rarely asked about this scene is: why did it take so long? It wasn't because Helen Keller was DeafBlind—it was because Sullivan took an unnatural approach. As a hearing person, it felt intuitive to Sullivan to communicate with a DeafBlind person using a written representation of a spoken language. But imagine what would happen if a community of DeafBlind individuals applied their own intuitions; what kind of language might emerge? In 2007, DeafBlind leaders in Seattle, Washington started asking questions like this, and over the next 12 years, new norms, values and practices were established that allowed members of their community to explore the full potential of communicating in a tactile modality. This shift has become known as the "protactile movement".

Peaches and eggplants or... something else? The role of context in emoji interpretations

Ben Weissman (University of Illinois)

Emojis are an interesting case for theories of meaning, especially because they may mean vastly different things in different contexts. This study investigates the contextual factors that lead people to treat peach and eggplant emojis as foods or as... something else. In this study, the wink emoji was found to be a significant factor that guides food emojis in the direction of non-food interpretations. Previous discourse in the conversation also helps people figure out what the sender means – talk of groceries leads to a literal interpretation while talk of "weekend plans" leads more to a figurative interpretation. As emojis become increasingly popular and

society is faced with important emoji-related issues, such as how to deal with differing emoji interpretations in the courtroom or how to train computers to understand emojis like humans do, studying the variability that drives these interpretations can help us to better understand it.

Iconicity, corrections, precision. The social meaning of pragmatic detail.

Andrea Beltrama (University of Chicago)

We constantly form impressions of others based on how they use language. Some linguists, in particular, suggested that many such impressions are *iconic*: they arise because we see the identity of the speaker as a transparent reflection of the way in which they speak. For example, people who fully articulate *ts* and *ds* are perceived as normally precise and thorough in life; people who drop them, instead, come across as more casual and laid back. But just how often do we apply this type of reasoning? Beltrama's study tested if, and how, listeners infer the social identity of speakers based on how precisely they recount facts. On the one hand, speakers who use sharp numbers — e.g. 69 MPH — are perceived as being more articulate, hard-working, and educated than those who use round ones — e.g. 70 MPH; on the other, they also come across as being more uptight, annoying and pedantic. These findings suggest that being very precise is somewhat risky: besides overwhelming our interlocutor, it could also be detrimental to how come across to them. In conclusion, be precise, but at your own risk!

A full schedule for the LSA Annual Meeting is available at <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/node/9647/schedule>.

Program Highlights

The 2019 LSA Annual Meeting will also feature:

The meeting will feature events of particular interest to the public and the news media:

- **The Five-Minute Linguist:** A popular speaking contest to judge the ability of presenters to adapt their research into a lively five-minute presentation for a lay audience.
- A series of events tied to UNESCO's **International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019**, focused on endangered languages and revitalization efforts.
- A Special Session on "**Linguistics and the City: Reflections on New York City and the History of Linguistics.**"
- A plenary panel on "Fostering a Culture of Inclusion in Linguistics" reporting **results of a major climate survey** for the discipline.
- A presentation by "**Natives4Linguistics 2018 – Sharing Our Findings**, reporting on the results of a workshop on increasing Native American participation in linguistic scholarship that took place at the previous Annual Meeting.
- A session for **high school teachers** on the benefits of incorporating linguistics content into their course curricula.

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 4th. The following awards will also be presented at a special ceremony on Saturday, January 5th:

- **Linguistics, Language & The Public Award:** Anne H. Charity Hudley (UC Santa Barbara)
- **Kenneth L. Hale Award:** Judith Aissen (UC Santa Cruz)
- **Leonard Bloomfield Book Award:** *Language Contact in Europe: The Periphrastic Perfect through History* by Bridget Drinka (University of Texas at San Antonio)
- **Early Career Award:** Andrea L. Berez-Kroeker (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)
- **Excellence in Community Linguistics Award:**
 - Nancy Richardson Steele, Karuk Tribe and the Advocates for California Indigenous Language Survival
 - The Khumuno Wá'ũ Kotiria Indigenous School Association (ASEKK) in the Brazilian Amazon region.
- **Best Paper in *Language* Award:** to be announced at the meeting
- **Student Abstract Awards:**
 - **First Place:** Robert Xu, Stanford University - Placing Social Types Through Prosodic Variation: An Investigation of Spatial Meanings in Mainland China
 - **Second Place:** Colin P. Davis, MIT - English Possessor Extraction
 - **Third Place:** Emily Clem, UC Berkeley - The cyclic nature of Agree: Maximal projections as probes

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 4th at 6:00 pm. The following members will be inducted in this year's class:

- Karen Emmorey, San Diego State University
- Heidi Harley, University of Arizona
- Dan Jurafsky, Stanford University

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.