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<u>MEDIA ADVISORY</u>

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

(Washington, DC) – Research presentations on topics as diverse as whether climate affects the sounds in your language, what TM means in texting language and why, and whether black American court transcribers are better at transcribing Black English, are among the highlights of the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), to be held in New Orleans, LA from January 2-5, 2020.

The 94th Annual Meeting of the LSA will bring over 1,000 linguistics scholars from across the US and around the world to New Orleans. 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 Hilton New Orleans Riverside 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-2020-annual-meeting or read through a selection of the meeting's highlights below.

<u>Research Highlights</u>

Over 200 papers and 225 research posters will be presented at the 2020 Annual Meeting, including the studies featured below:

African American English in the Judicial Linguistic Marketplace: Do Black Court Reporters Transcribe AAE Better Than Their Nonblack Counterparts?
Jessica Kalbfeld (NYU), Taylor Jones (University of Pennsylvania), Ryan Hancock (Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity), and Robin Hancock (University of Pennsylvania)

Recent research has demonstrated that African Americans are not always understood or correctly transcribed in the courtroom. While linguists have known for decades that African American English constitutes a highly systematic, rule-governed dialect, this fact has not fully penetrated the mainstream, and many people hold negative attitudes about AAE. We might naively think that a solution to mistranscription of African Americans is to have more African American court reporters -- however, in this study, we found that this is not necessarily the case. Rather, court reporter exposure to African American English and attitudes about the language variety predict transcription performance. African American court reporters who held strongly negative views about "Ebonics" did not perform as well as those who did not hold such views.

Variation in grammaticality ratings of reflexive singular *they*
Evan Bradley (Penn State Brandywine)

Singular *they* as a personal pronoun has recently come to greater public attention as a part of wider language reform efforts aimed at gender inclusivity. Most English speakers today use and understand singular *they*, but some still struggle with fluency, especially regarding less-frequent variants, such as reflexives (e.g., *me -> myself*). We wanted to investigate whether English speakers prefer 'they' pronouns which align with the plural version (*themselves*) or with other singular pronouns (*themself*), and whether this varies with characteristics of the speaker or their experience using singular *they*. We asked English speakers to rate the grammaticality of sentences containing reflexive pronouns referring to a third-person referent, expressed in two versions: *themself* vs. *themselves*. *Themselves* was consistently rated lower than *themself* in all conditions. Trans and nonbinary participants rated *themselves* higher than cisgender participants, but still preferred *themself*. These results suggest *themselves* still conveys plural number for the majority of speakers in a way that *they* does not. This finding adds further evidence that objections to the use of singular *they* likely stem more from concerns about gender than about grammatical number.

Tamazight baby talk in Ettounsi: language contact and stability of a register
Soubeika Bahri (Queens College, CUNY)

Around the world, mothers change their speech patterns to communicate to their babies. Tunisian mothers do the same except that most of the vocabulary they change when talking to their babies is found to be originally Tamazight, the indigenous language of Tunisia. The findings beg the question on whether Tunisian babies listen to an indigenous language first to learn Ettounsi, the dialect of Arabic that is the mother tongue of Tunisians, or to a baby-talk register that maintained its stability in Ettounsi despite Tamazight intensive language contact with several other languages across history. We need to query the author here to express more clearly what she is even asking. Two things necessary – it must be clear that Ettounsi means "Tunisian Arabic," and also, she shouldn't use the "beg the question" expression. But overall, I genuinely don't understand what the question here even is.

Pragmatic Extension in Computer-Mediated Communication: The case of ™ and
Emily A. E. Williams (University of Texas at Arlington)

Debates about language change are nothing new—whether it's someone correcting your use of a preposition at the end of a sentence or bemoaning the use of popular abbreviations like *lol*. Internet language (emojis, abbreviations, hashtags, misused capitalization/punctuation) has often been decried as a corruption or degradation of the English language. But that outcry misses the point. On the contrary, Internet language isn't an abandonment of language structure; it is an innovative new take on it. A close look at text messages or social media posts reveals complex, sophisticated meaning of those same elements which have often been criticized. Symbols like the hashtag (#) and the trademark (™), for instance, go far beyond their original functions to emphasize, mark information as familiar, or affect sarcasm. This study explores the nature of these meanings, describing the relationship between the original functions of these symbols and their new contributions to online dialogue.

Spanish is easy, Chinese is hard, Japanese is fun: What languages do undergraduates choose to study, and why?
Mary Hudgens Henderson (Winona State University); Miho Nagai (Winona State University); Weidong Zhang (Winona State University)

Are some languages "easier" or "harder" to learn than others? Does it depend on what your native language is? What do college students think, and do those perceptions impact the language they decide to study? College students in first-semester language classes (Chinese, French, Japanese, or Spanish) completed a survey asking them about attitudes towards the languages they were studying and why they chose to study those languages. Perceptions of the difficulty of the languages were related to the respondents' own native languages—native English speakers believed Spanish to be an "easy" language to learn, while for native speakers of Asian languages, Japanese was perceived to be easy. Previous exposure to the language (in high school or via popular culture) was crucial to students' attitudes and beliefs about the languages—students who had studied a language in high school were more likely to study that language in college. This study is important for understanding students' decisions to enroll in language courses at the university level. Are we sure this one says anything a person wouldn't have guessed already? It's less interesting than the promise of the title.

Confusability of unfamiliar languages and linguistic bias
Evan Bradley (Penn State Brandywine)

Listeners make aesthetic judgments about languages (and accents), but this is based more on judgments about their speakers than on objective qualities of the languages themselves. Individuals make judgments even about languages they don't speak, meaning they must identify languages based on factors such as words or phonetic qualities, which is prone to error. We wanted to determine whether we could manipulate language identification error to expose linguistic/cultural prejudices about speakers of foreign languages. We asked English-speaking participants to rate the emotional content (happy, sad, mad) of speech recordings in a variety of languages (including languages of European, Asian, and Africa). Sometimes, speakers were told the true identity of the language they were hearing, while other times, they were told they were hearing a different, related language (e.g., Czech instead of Russian). We also asked

participants about their attitudes about ethnic groups associated with these languages. The results showed that speakers sometimes rated the same speech sample differently depending on what language they thought it was. For example, participants who regard Muslims unfavorably rated the Arabic speaker as more intelligent when they thought they were hearing Amharic; those with more favorable views rated the speaker as equally intelligent regardless of label. Among those who regarded Russians unfavorably, those who knew they were hearing Russian rated the phrase as more angry than those who thought they were hearing Czech; participants with favorable views did not rate the utterance differently. Our study confirms that aesthetic judgments about languages are based on cultural attitudes, rather than phonetic/prosodic features.

Climate shapes language
Ian Maddieson (University of New Mexico)

Researchers on language are taking more seriously the idea that how languages sound is shaped in part by where they are spoken. Earlier work had shown that languages indigenous to places with higher average temperature, more rainfall and more tree cover (which tend to go together) were likely to have fewer consonants and simpler syllables than languages elsewhere. Follow-up work has identified average temperature as perhaps the most important factor. The proportion of sonorous sounds in short samples of recorded speech from over 100 languages was measured and a significant correlation was found between higher temperature and more sonorous speech. Sonorous sounds are vowels and consonants like "m", "n", "l", "r" as in English "animal" or "millennial", non-sonorous sounds are like the consonants in English words such as "sticks" or "facts". Why would higher temperature favor more sonorous speech? Hotter air distorts sound as it passes through it, so simpler sounds that don't have rapid changes are heard more faithfully under these conditions. This selective pressure may have affected the basic sound pattern of languages, especially during the many centuries when sedentary agriculture was the dominant human life-style.

A full schedule for the LSA Annual Meeting is available at:
https://www.linguisticsociety.org/node/17104/schedule

Program Highlights

The 2020 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 the conclusion of UNESCO's **International Year of Indigenous Languages** 2019, focused on endangered languages and revitalization efforts. This includes an opening-night plenary address by jessie little doe baird on the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project.
- A plenary presentation on Fostering a Culture of Racial Inclusion in Linguistics: **For the Children of the 9th Ward Circa 2005**, by Anne Charity Hudley

- A Special Session on Historical Sociolinguistic Approaches to **Louisiana's Multilingual Past**

<u>Awards, Honors and Related Events</u>

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 3rd. The following awards will also be presented at a special ceremony on Saturday, January 4th:

- **Linguistics, Language & The Public Award**: Jessica Coon (McGill University)
- **Kenneth L. Hale Award**: Patience L. Epps (University of Texas at Austin)
- **Leonard Bloomfield Book Award**: Vsevolod Kapatsinski (University of Oregon) for his book *Changing Minds Changing Tools: From Learning Theory to Language Acquisition to Language Change* (MIT Press, 2018).
- **Early Career Award**: Gabriela Pérez Báez (University of Oregon)
- **Excellence in Community Linguistics Award**: Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling for his work with the endangered Southern Tangkhulic language Uipo in the Indian State of Manipur
- **Best Paper in *Language* Award**: "The noun-verb distinction in established and emergent sign systems" by Natasha Abner, Molly Flaherty, Katelyn Stangl, Marie Coppola, Diane Brentari, and Susan Goldin-Meadow
- **Linguistic Service Award**: Pop-Up Mentoring Program (PUMP)
- **Student Abstract Awards**:
    - **First Place:** Unifying Prosodic and Segmental Repair: Metathesis and Epenthesis in Uab Meto, Kate Mooney (New York University)
    - **Second Place:** Case properties of Complex Event Nominalizations in Lithuanian, Milena Šereikaitė (University of Pennsylvania)
    - **Third Place:** Linguist-speech pathologist collaboration as service-in-return to speakers of minority languages, Anna Bax (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Including three new awards to be given for the first time in 2020:
- **C.L. Baker Award**: Jon Sprouse (University of Connecticut)
- **Mentoring Award**: Monica Macaulay (University of Wisconsin)
- **Elizabeth Dayton Award**: Valentyna Filimonova (Indiana 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 3rd at 6:00 pm. The following members will be inducted in this year's class:
- Raul Aranovich (University of California, Davis)
- Juliette Blevins (The Graduate Center, CUNY)
- Claire Bowern (Yale University)
- Mary Bucholtz (University of California, Santa Barbara)
- Ives Goddard (Smithsonian Institution)

- Nina Hyams (University of California, Los Angeles)
- Sharon Inkelas (University of California, Berkeley)
- Monica Macaulay (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
- Miriam Meyerhoff (Victoria University of Wellington)
- Rena Torres Cacoullos (The Pennsylvania State University)
- Georgia Zellou (University of California, Davis)

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.