



Linguistic Society of America

Linguistic Society of America
Archibald A Hill Suite
1325 18th Street, NW #211
Washington, DC 20036-6501

Phone: 202.835.1714
Fax: 202.835.1717
Email: lsa@lsadc.org
Web: www.lsadc.org

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

Contact: Alyson Reed, LSA Executive Director, areed@lsadc.org

Linguists to Gather in Boston for National Conference

(Washington, DC) – Hundreds of linguistic scholars from across the U.S. and around the world will convene in Boston, Massachusetts for the 87th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) this January. Members of the news media are invited to observe and report on the proceedings.

The meeting is scheduled for January 3-6, 2013, at the Marriott Copley Place. The meeting provides a forum for the presentation of cutting-edge research focused on the scientific study of language. In addition to the LSA program, the meeting also features concurrent programs sponsored by 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.

The meeting typically attracts more than 1,000 linguists who attend various sessions and workshops. Over 300 papers and 150 research posters have been approved for presentation at the meeting. For a detailed listing of all meeting sessions, please visit the LSA website: http://www.linguisticsociety.org/files/LSA2013Handbook_0.pdf

Program Highlights

The LSA is co-sponsoring a series of joint sessions with the Modern Language Association (MLA), which will also hold its annual meeting in Boston at the same time:

- Tuning In to the Phoneme: Phonetic and Phonological Nuances in Second Language Acquisition (Friday, 4 January, 1:45 – 3:30 PM)
- Spanish in the United States: The Unique Case of Los Angeles Spanish Vernacular (Saturday, 5 January, 9:00 – 10:30 AM)
- Linguistics beyond the Walls: Applied How, Exactly? (Saturday, 5 January, 3:30 – 4:45 PM)

The LSA will also sponsor a Symposium on “Open Access and the Future of Academic Publishing” (Thursday, 3 January, 4:00 -7:00 PM), featuring Kathleen Fitzpatrick, MLA Director of Scholarly Communications.

Research Highlights

New study finds teenagers grow up linguistically

Title: The shifty vowels of African American English youth: A longitudinal study

Authors: Charlie Farrington and Mary Kohn, North Carolina State University

Teenagers are thought to use more new speech forms than adults and young children, leading many linguists to believe that they are the ones primarily responsible for historical changes in the language, including changes in pronunciation. Unless these teens are studied into adulthood, however, linguists cannot be sure that they keep their innovative forms. A recent study by Charlie Farrington and Mary Kohn of North Carolina State University tracked the speech of 22 African American youth from fourth grade until early adulthood and found that they tended to have more of these new forms in their pronunciation during middle school years compared to their earlier childhood and adult years. Although some of them kept these innovative forms into adulthood, most retreated to the pronunciations they had earlier as young children after they entered adulthood. Parents and teachers who despair that teenagers are adopting ways of speaking they disapprove of may be given some comfort. Apparently not everything they do.

Women “um” and men “uh” new study shows

Title: Gender differences in the duration of filled pauses in North American English

Author: Eric Acton, Stanford University

Previous research on men's and women's speech show that their overall rates of using the pause fillers *um* and *uh* in conversation are quite similar, although men use these fillers slightly more. A new study by Eric Acton at Stanford University shows that when *um* and *uh* are analyzed separately, there is a stark difference between women and men. Women say *um* rather than *uh* at a much higher rate than men, and this a pattern that is found across a variety of dialects of English. This difference may be due in part to differences in the way that *um* and *uh* are pronounced. An acoustic study of conversation shows that women dislike long, open-ended vowels in their pause fillers in general, causing them to opt for *um*, which ends in the consonant *m*.

Title: How are y'all/you guys/yinz going to vote?

Author: Natalie Schrimpf, affiliation?

Many linguistic studies have found that social characteristics influence speech, but a study just carried out in Middle Tennessee is the first investigation of how individual speakers' political views may be correlated with their speech. This study found that 70 speakers who voted in the 2008 presidential election showed just such a correlation

with certain Southern speech features, including those of the Southern Vowel Shift. This vowel rotation includes the well-known pronunciation of the long-i vowel (as in “time”) as “ah” (sounds like “Tom”) and less well-known Southern pronunciation facts as the reversal of long a (as in “day”) and short-e (as in “bet”). In this reversal “day” sounds like “die” and “bet” sounds like “bay-ut.” Speakers who voted for McCain tended to show more effects of this Southern Vowel Shift than speakers who voted for Obama. The study suggests that the more Southern-oriented a speaker’s vowel system is, the more likely they were to vote for McCain. The red-state orientation of the South makes this an unsurprising correlation, but the fact that Democrat voters who live in the same areas show fewer Southern speech features is an interesting new finding and reveals the subtlety of pronunciation features as they correlate with features of not just local but also personal social identity.

How low do you have to be to be male?

Title: Perceived gender in context: Gendered style among transgender speakers

Author: Lal Zimman (University of Colorado, Boulder)

We usually take for granted that a person’s gender can be identified based on the pitch of his or her voice. However, a study on the speech of female-to-male transgender people by Lal Zimman of the University of Colorado suggests that the line between female- and male-sounding voices is a fuzzy one. In an experiment designed to pinpoint the precise aspects of a person’s voice that allow us to identify its gender, he shows that the way a person pronounces the sibilant sound *s* may determine how low-pitched a voice must be before it is perceived as male. A more male-sounding *s* will allow a higher pitched voice to be still identified as male while a more female-sounding *s* will allow an even deeper voice to be identified as female.

Title: Plain English Jury Instructions for Massachusetts: first steps

Author: Janet Randall, Northeastern University

You are a juror. At the end of the trial, a judge reads the "jury instructions," to explain the laws that apply to the case. In most states the instruction about jurors' memories, says something like this:

(1) Failure of recollection is common. Innocent misrecollection is not uncommon.

But in California the instruction has been revised:

(2) People often forget things or make mistakes in what they remember. California's effort to improve jurors' understanding has been spreading to other states, and the Massachusetts Bar Association's Task Force on Plain English Jury Instructions, a group of lawyers, judges, and linguists has taken on the issue. In a series of experiments on jurors' comprehension, we are exploring whether comprehension can be significantly improved by a linguistic overhaul, the first step toward rewriting the instructions in Massachusetts. The ultimate goals of this research collaboration between linguists and the legal community are broad: to make the judicial process accessible to more citizens and to make courtroom verdicts more reliable and, ultimately, more fair.

Title: Wild sounds: extragrammatical communication in Wolof

Authors: Rebekah Baglini, Lenore Grenoble, and Martina Martinovic (University of Chicago)

'Wild sounds' refers to those that stand outside the standard set used in the ordinary pronunciation of a language. In English, for example, the sounds in tsk-tsk, mhmmm, and phew! do not occur in other words. In Wolof, the majority language of Senegal, wild sounds are used very frequently in casual speech. For example, speakers often click to indicate 'yes' (which is pronounced waaw in Wolof ordinarily), or purse their lips and make an elongated chirp-like click to indicate 'no' (pronounced deedeet ordinarily). A team of researchers at the University of Chicago has identified six other wild sounds (including whistles, hissing, and repeated clicks) that are used frequently in Wolof conversation to indicate agreement, understanding, disapproval, and so on, and these sounds do not occur elsewhere in the language. Wolof is not a click language like such Bantu languages of South Africa as Xhosa and Zulu (made famous by Miriam Makeba in her popular "click song") or the Khoisan languages of southern Africa, also well-known in popular culture from the film "The Gods Must Be Crazy). In Wolof, however, clicks occur only as wild sounds, which are part of any native speaker's repertoire, but they are rarely described by linguists. Such work may help linguists establish a better understanding of wild sounds and their relation to linguistic systems as a whole.

Awards, Honors and Related Events

In addition to the research and programmatic content presented, the 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. Other LSA awards to be presented at a special ceremony on January 5th at 5:30pm are the:

- Leonard Bloomfield Book Award: *California Indian Languages*, by Victor Golla (University of California Press, 2011)
- Early Career Award: Jon Sprouse (University of California, Irvine)
- Linguistic Service Award: David Lightfoot (Georgetown University)
- Best Paper in Language 2012: to Bruce Hayes (University of California, Los Angeles), Colin Wilson (University of California, Los Angeles) and Anne Shisko (University of California, Los Angeles) for their article, "Maxent Grammars for the Metrics of Shakespeare and Milton", which appears in Vol 88, No. 4 (December 2012)
- Student Abstract Awards: 1st place, to John Sylak (University of California, Berkeley) for "The Phonetic Properties of Voiced Stops Descended from Nasals in Ditidaht"; 2nd place, to Marc Garellek (University of California, Los Angeles) for "Prominence vs. phrase-initial strengthening of voice quality;" 3rd place, to Josef Fruehwald (University of Pennsylvania) for "Differentiating Phonetically and Phonologically Conditioned Sound Change."

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

5:30pm. Those being inducted are: Edwin Battistella, Southern Oregon University; Ellen Broselow, Stony Brook University; Jane Hill, University of Arizona; Hans Henrich Hock, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Johanna B. Nichols, University of California, Berkeley; David Pesetsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Dennis Preston, Oklahoma State University; Tom Roeper, University of Massachusetts; Deborah Tannen, Georgetown 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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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.