Getting High School Students into Linguistics: Current Activities and Future Directions
JW Grand Ballroom 7
9:00-10:30AM

Organizers: Moti Lieberman (The Ling Space)
Gretchen McCulloch (All Things Linguistic)

Participants: Moti Lieberman (The Ling Space)
Pat Littell (University of British Columbia Role)
Suzanne Loosen (Milwaukee School of Languages)
Gretchen McCulloch (All Things Linguistic)
Julie McGory (The Ohio State University)
Wayne O'Neil (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)
Colin Phillips (University of Maryland)

Encouraging high schoolers to develop an interest in linguistics is directly beneficial in the short term for recruitment to college-level linguistics classes, majors, and graduate programs. However, in the long term, even if students do not directly continue with linguistics, they can take with them a higher degree of linguistic awareness into positions in media, government, technology, and education, and contribute to a generally improved level of discourse around linguistics. Working with high school students also raises a set of unique challenges, among them how best to navigate the existing school system; how to work with students in a longer-term setting; how to keep material engaging, using cultural references different from those of teaching; and how to account for differing levels of base knowledge.

Using a short, 5-minute PechaKucha datablitz format, the speakers on this panel will present a wide variety of ways that linguists are already engaging with high school students, and then both panelists and the audience will contribute to a more informal discussion on outreach to high schoolers during the extended 45-minute discussion period. Wayne O’Neil will discuss his decades of experience and research regarding using linguistics to educate students in different age groups about language and science. Suzanne Loosen will then present her experiences as a linguistics teacher at a school for languages in Milwaukee. Following this, Julie McGory will discuss intensive linguistic teaching at a dedicated summer camp, from logistics to activities.

We will then move away from the classroom setting to discuss different ways of conducting outreach to students in this demographic. Colin Phillips will introduce a number of different activities currently underway at the Maryland Language Science Center, including linguistics clubs, lab internships, and competitions. Pat Littell will focus on one such competition, the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad, and how to write appropriate problems for an audience of students with differing levels of knowledge. Our final two speakers will look at using online media to conduct outreach and build communities around linguistics: Gretchen McCulloch will discuss using Wikipedia and the popular blogging website Tumblr to help budding linguists stumble into the field and nurture their interest before they can study it formally, while Moti Lieberman will talk about using YouTube videos and associated materials to draw new young people into the field and engage them in linguistics projects.

Linguistics outreach to the general public is a topic of growing importance, especially at recent LSA annual meetings. This includes the 2013 keynote by David Pesetsky, as well as multiple organized sessions at the 2015 LSA annual meeting. However, these sessions have largely focused on outreach to a general, often adult, audience, and for brief periods of engagement — the time it takes to read a news article or scan an interactive display. This session continues the trend of linguistic outreach but extends it to focus on engaging young people, particularly high school students, over longer periods of time.

Abstracts

Colin Phillips (University of Maryland)
Beyond brief contacts: sustaining broader engagement with linguistics clubs, internships, and competitions

A pair of panels at the 2015 LSA Annual Meeting addressed effective ways for linguists to make brief initial contacts with broad audiences, via festivals, museums, schools, print or social media, etc. These approaches can reach very large audiences, but with a low probability of follow up. It is important to turn these initial contacts into sustained engagement, in order to build greater
understanding and interest, and in some cases to build a greater pool of participants and advocates for our work. In my remarks I will talk about various ways of pursuing that goal, via schools (clubs, internships, competitions) and “citizen science”. I will also talk about training that can help linguists to be more effective advocates to broad audiences.

**Suzanne Loosen** (Milwaukee School of Languages)

*High school linguistics class in Milwaukee Public Schools of Languages*

Linguistics has been an elective course in the English Department of the Milwaukee School of Languages - an urban, public school with a language immersion focus - since 2010. This semester-long course introduces 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students to the field of linguistics through units on phonetics, morphology, language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and language change. To date, 197 students have taken the class. I will discuss highlights of the class, including guest speakers, high interest activities, and student feedback, as well as challenges in teaching the class, such as student recruitment, translating advanced materials for younger learners, and working with minimal financial resources. Looking forward, I will talk about teaching linguistics in Milwaukee Public Schools through telepresence and through the new LSA committee working to create an Advanced Placement Linguistics course for high school students.

**Julie McGory** (The Ohio State University)

*Summer Linguistics Institute for Youth Scholars (SLIYS)*

SLIYS, Summer Linguistics Institute for Youth Scholars, is a weeklong summer camp held by the Department of Linguistics at The Ohio State University. This outreach program attracts high school students interested in linguistics and the study of language. Our aim is to provide high school students with greater linguistic awareness and understanding along with a deeper appreciation for all aspects of language study. SLIYS continues to grow, and we expect over 40 students from to attend in 2015. I will discuss the nature of the program including recruitment, content, foreign language consultants, cost, and the positive outcomes for both the department and participants.

**Pat Littell** (University of British Columbia)

*North American Computation Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO)*

The North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad, is a puzzle competition in which U.S. and Canadian secondary-school students solve self-contained problem sets in linguistics and computational linguistics. Among science olympiads, NACLO and its international sibling contests are unusual in that they do not (and could not) require any prior experience in linguistics or computational linguistics to compete; for most students, this is their first encounter with these fields. Writing problem sets for this audience is not necessarily difficult, but it requires some care; it is easy to overestimate what they know, and easy to underestimate what they can do.

Over nine years of contests and tens of thousands of students served internationally, we are coming to understand what students already know about language, what they are capable of learning without significant teacher scaffolding, and what works and what does not work to take them between these points. While each of our organizations here today has different kinds of access to and interaction with students, NACLO’s conclusions may be valuable to other educators: that the more we have tried to guide students down a particular path, the more trouble they encounter, and the more we allow them self-directed discovery, the more success we see.

**Wayne O’Neil** (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

*Bringing linguistics into English and science classes*

Maya Honda, Wayne O'Neil, and David Pippin have developed a rationale for the study of mental grammar, focused on triggering the ‘science-forming faculty’: the human capacity to inquire and create and explain. We have designed an ever expanding series of problem sets that enable a teacher and a class of students to construct a connected story about language through the investigation of English and other languages. These problem sets motivate students to approach language descriptively and analytically, with the primary goal being the development of a way to think about language – a means of expression that all students should acquire.

Our work proceeds from the evidence that the study of mental grammar can develop in students an understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry, as well as an appreciation of the complexity, diversity, and universal features of human languages. Working in
language arts and science classrooms, in public schools and independent schools, with fourth-graders through adults, we have observed that the phenomena of language are conceptually accessible to investigation and explanation at significant depth.

**Gretchen McCulloch (All Things Linguistic)**

*Stumbling across linguistics online: Tumblr and Wikipedia*

In a world where many educated adults don't really know what linguistics is, most people who get here have stumbled into linguistics by chance. But you can't stumble across something if it isn't there in the first place, so how can we place resources in easily-stumble-able locations? I discuss two places where young people are found online and where they're open to discovering new ideas: Tumblr and Wikipedia. Although culturally the two sites are very different — Tumblr is a microblogging site that delights in the absurd, while Wikipedia is a crowdsourced encyclopedia that takes itself far more seriously — both are the type of site where a few clicks can lead you down a rabbit hole of new information. I'll talk about several practical approaches, from the importance of memes in explaining linguistics to improving Wikipedia articles as an assignment for linguistics courses. (For a hands-on intro to editing Wikipedia, please bring your laptop to the editathon on Friday afternoon!)

**Moti Lieberman (The Ling Space)**

*Using online video for linguistic community building*

The availability of quality educational videos for free on websites such as YouTube has changed the way that students, especially younger students, approach learning new material. As a tool for linguistic outreach, a YouTube channel can reach a wide audience that is often unfamiliar with linguistics, and form a community of interested people around the topic. I will discuss our video making process, our efforts to build ties within our base of subscribers, associated activities for our project, and future plans for working with our viewership to further linguistic education and research.