McGill Canadian Conference for Linguistics Undergraduates

Colloque Canadien de Linguistique au Première Cycle à McGill

/mɪklu/

WELCOME
BIENVENUE

Welcome to the McGill Canadian Conference for Linguistics Undergraduates 2015!

We are so pleased to welcome you to the ninth annual McCCLU, hosted by the Society of Linguistics Undergraduates of McGill (SLUM). The conference has been a wonderful opportunity for undergraduates around North America to present their original research and meet other like-minded people— we expect that this year's conference will be even better!

This weekend we will have undergraduate students from across Canada and the United States presenting their independent research in talks, covering diverse fields from syntax to sociolinguistics. We are also pleased to invite Hadas Kotek to deliver the closing keynote address.

This experience wouldn't be possible without your participation, so we would like to take this opportunity to thank you. We hope you find the conference exciting, engaging and informative, and that you enjoy your time spent in Montreal.

Malley Kline
Coordinator

Maggie LaBelle
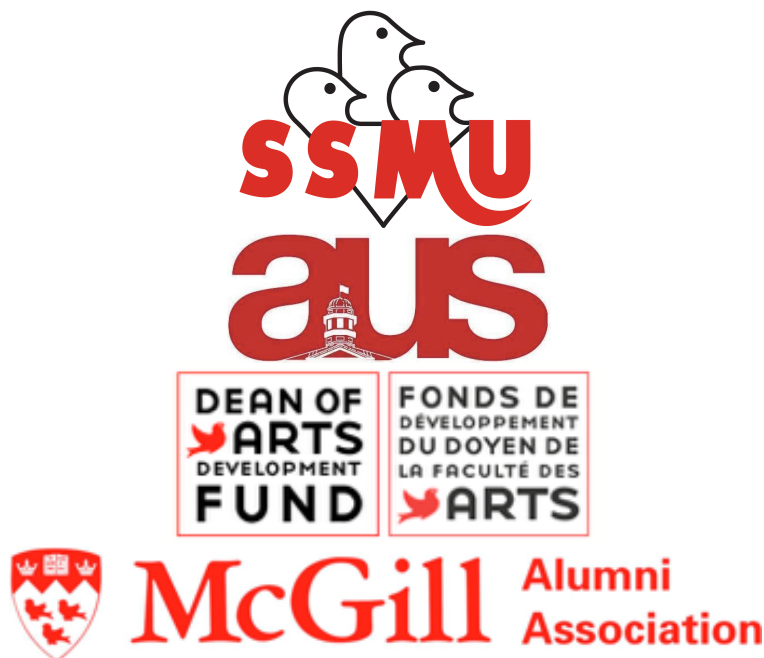Assistant Coordinator

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the McCCLU volunteers:

Conference Schedule

Friday, March 13th
Arts 160, McGill Arts Building
853 Rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Montreal

6:00 p.m. Registration

  Wine & Cheese Reception

7:00 Nick Chappel, Rebecca Wheeler, Jessica Suriano, Sarah Bellavance, Aidan Holding, and Julia Moreno University of Vermont

Saturday, March 14th
Salle du Parc, New Residence Hall
3625 Avenue du Parc, Montreal

9:00-10:00 a.m. Late registration and breakfast

10:00-10:30 Liam Rogers Bassford, McGill University

10:30-11:00 Lauren McIntosh, Concordia University

11:00-11:30 Joseph Resnik, University of Vermont

11:30-12:30 p.m. Erick Abreu, Northeastern University

12:30-2:00 Lunch

2:00-2:30 Sara Pearsell, University of Toronto

2:30-3:00 Mariana Irby, Bryn Mawr College

3:00-3:30 Louisa Bielig, McGill University

3:30-4:00 Break

4:00-5:30 Keynote speech

  Hadas Kotek, McGill University

Presentation Abstracts

The Vermont Vowel Shift
Nick Chappel, Rebecca Wheeler, Jessica Suriano, Sarah Bellavance, Aidan Holding, and Julia Moreno

Last year, a group of college students at the University of Vermont looked at vowel features of Vermonters in order to determine standard Vermont speech sounds. The group found that no Vermont speakers showed raising for the /au/ vowel, but there was /ai/ raising in some speakers. Results of the comparison with the Canadian Shift were mixed.

This year, a team of undergraduate students in the linguistics program at the University of Vermont expanded the study. Using the smartphone application, "iSLR" (Sociolinguistics Research Lab, University of Victoria), interviews were conducted with 20 native Vermont Speakers, aged 18 to 23, using a list of 220 words. The recordings were entered into the phonetics computer program, PRAAT (Boersma and Weenink), where the vowels of each word could be viewed and analyzed. The statistical program R was then used to normalize the vowels and then produce a plot illustrating the speakers' placement of these vowels. The means of these vowels were subsequently analyzed for both individuals and for the group as a whole using t-tests. Finally, the resulting vowel patterns were compared to features of other low-back-merger (LBM) dialects (i.e., California Shift and Canadian Shift.)

Results revealed that more than half of the speakers exhibited nasal raising for /æ/. In addition, the following table demonstrates several new findings about Vermonters' vowels:

	Canadian Vowel Shift	**Californian Vowel Shift**	**Vermont [Vowel Shift]**
LBM	merged	merged	merged
/ɛ/	centralized/low	centralized/low	merged with /e/
/I /	centralized/low	centralized/low	(future research)
/u/	fronted	fronted	fronted
/æ/	centralized and low	centralized and low	no /æ/ retraction
/o/	?	fronted	fronted

It is interesting to note that the nuclei of /e/ and /ɛ/ were found to be merged, which is in contrast with both the California and Canadian Shifts, but differentiated by duration (p=0.0002). These results suggest the existence of a Vermont vowel shift that can be differentiated from those present in Canada and California.

Dipthongization of Quebec Vowels
Liam Bassford

Phonetic style-shifting can be seen, under various names, in many linguistic studies. Two commonly-studied dimensions are "attention to speech" and "clear speech" or "hyper/hypospeech." The former is common in sociolinguistics papers, to highlight speakers' tendency to use fewer stigmatized variants of a stratified variable in more attentive styles, e.g. when reading a list of words in isolation--as opposed to holding an impromptu interview. The latter is common in acoustic phonetics, to describe a dimension of speech that can be "clear" (hyperarticulated, "listener-oriented," focused on the listener's comprehension) or not (hypo-articulated, "speaker-oriented," focused on the speaker's conservation of effort). Intuitively, and by many acoustic measures, these dimensions line up well with each other; for example, clearer speech and more attentive speech are both associated with lower speaking rates, less segment reduction, and a number of language-specific processes. Indeed, a number of stigmatized variants require demonstrably less articulatory effort (see Kroch 1978). However, there is a way to put the continua into conflict: by studying the behavior of stigmatized variants that require more articulatory effort than the standard. One such variable is the diphthongization of long vowels in Quebec French; the diphthongized variants require a greater energy expenditure, due to increased articulator movement when compared to the monophthongized standard. By studying the behavior of the long /E:/ in Quebec French, using corpus data collected by Milne (2013), we find that the variable shows a minor degree of style-shifting, being suppressed in some speakers in less spontaneous speech, while being expanded in clearer speech, as measured by speech rate and other determinants of speech clarity.

Pragmatics and the Loss of Pronouns in Alzheimer's Disease
Lauren McIntosh

The functions of pronouns are intrinsic to the function of language and to the function of coherence in discourse. From this we can infer that the principles A, B and C cannot be impaired like semantic memory or object classification. However, there is much evidence of pronoun impairment in Alzheimer's disease. Here I look to compare the different theories about semantic memory loss in Alzheimer's disease by looking specifically at the pragmatic principle its affect on pronouns. Use of pronouns is impaired in an early stage of Alzheimer's disease with clear indications of impairment by the middle stage. Pronouns are either misused or are missing (referents) during the discourse. Misuse or missing elements may indicate that the speaker has lost the ability to take the perspective of the listener. This misuse or missing referents can be linked to a loss of the pragmatic principle in Alzheimer's disease.

Dialectal Differences in Arabic
Joseph Resnik

The linguistic landscape of the Arabic world is one that is somewhat misunderstood by Western linguists. Often, examples of Arabic used to illustrate linguistic claims come without properly citing the dialect of Arabic from which they are drawn. This paper asked if differences across dialects of a=Arabic are significant enough to necessitate more specific citation amongst linguists. The presentation will hopefully serve to dispel common misconceptions of homogeneity and enrich even seasoned linguists knowledge of the Arabic language. Simple linguistic overview of contemporary Arabic language use reveals that « Arabic » is hardly sufficient in specificity for linguistic purposes. There are many distinct forms of Arabic that are reviewed, four to be directly compared here in contrast to one another phonologically and syntactically. Starting with an overview of the development of « Fus-ha » or modern standard Arabic, one becomes acquainted with a history of the region's attempt at language standardization and what has prevented Fus-ha from becoming a truly integrated language. The prestige nature of Fus-ha and its current use as a medium of western education are explored, as well as its place as a common linguistic ground among all Arabic language communities. General intelligibility of Fus-ha is explored in the context of Egyptian and Levantine Arabic as well. Egyptian and Levantine Arabic both posses phonological characteristics that differ from Fus-ha. The discussion of phonological differences expands to explore the direct differences between Egyptian and Levantine Arabic. This brushes briefly on specific instances of phonologically based biases held within and across these communities. These examples focus primarily on sociolinguistic prejudices. Syntactic processes are then made apparent when contrasting Fus-ha and colloquial forms of Syrian Arabic. Transcribed compressed expressions in Levantine Arabic are compared to their original versions so as to illustrate drift towards more easily expressed versions. Further syntactic discussion of verb conjugation reveals there are significant syntactic similarities comparable to those across romance languages. A study of Sudanese Arabic is then examined, highlighting original research done with a native speaker. Research shows further diversity within previously discussed realms of Arabic language, bolstering once again the claim that differences across dialects are indeed significant and therefore should be cited more narrowly.

The Development of Causative Morphology in Mesoamerican Languages
Erick Abreu

The languages of southern Mexico and Central America form a sprachbund covering a number of distinct language families, including the Uto-Aztecan, Oto-Manguean, and Mayan families. A number of these languages express causatives through verbal morphology, although that is not necessarily found in other genetically related languages. By comparing causative constructions within and across these language families, one can track the development and possible interfamily spread of causative morphology in these languages. To that end, I am analyzing data compiled from existing research.

Dual-Task Influence on Speech Motor Stability
Sara Pearsell

Speech is a complex motor skill like any other (e.g., driving), and during acquisition it was full of errors, slow, and laborious, requiring extensive attention (novice level). However, through repeated practice over time, speech can be performed with relatively minimal conscious control or thought (expert level). As a result of extensive practice, adults' speech is said to be automatic. Automaticity is inferred through the use of dual-task paradigms, wherein the interference of a secondary task (e.g., texting on a cellphone) on a primary task (e.g., driving an automobile) is evaluated; the greater the interference of the secondary task, the lesser the degree of automaticity in the primary task. In the current study, we assessed speech motor coordination and its stability (the intragestural relative phase {Intra. R.P.} and the standard deviation {S.D.} of Intra.R.P.) during the production of nonwords (primary task) at two different speech rates (normal and fast) while simultaneously performing either of two secondary tasks (1) cognitive visuospatial task (solving puzzles - Raven's Progressive Matrices),or (2) verb-generation task (coming up with verbs for nouns presented; lexical-semantic retrieval). The study was preformed on an initial session (T1) and 1 week later (T2), with participants completing a daily log form consisting of two practice sessions a day (minimum of 5 minutes per session) between T1 and T2. The difference between T1 and T2 is assumed to reflect motor practice effects and assumed to reflect increasing automaticity with a more permanent change resulting from motor learning. In the presentation, we will discuss data from 8 native Canadian English speaking participants across the baseline trials and the verb-generation linguistic secondary task. This will include a discussion of participants' advancements through the speech motor skill learning process and discuss the cost of dual-tasking (i.e. changes in speech motor coordination stability) as a function of stage of skill learning and type of secondary task. These effects will be discussed from both the domain general (central resource sharing; Baddeley, 2003), and the more recent multidimensional resource allocation models (Wicken, 2008).

Attitudes on Brazilian Portuguese: The Linguistic Identity of South America's Giant
Mariana Irby

One important issue that cannot be ignored when discussing the relationship between speakers of Spanish and Portuguese is the question of mutual intelligibility between the two languages. Most informed native speakers of either language have an opinion on this matter, and numerous jokes exist about the various, sometimes humorous, misunderstandings related to false cognates between the two. Furthermore, the fact that these two languages have a high degree of mutual intelligibility, as well as an unsystematic mixture widely spoken in South America (*portuñol)*, show that the lines dividing Hispanophone and Lusophone Latin Americans are blurred, or at least multifaceted. How does the perceived mutual intelligibility between Brazilian Portuguese (BP) and Latin American Spanish influence notions of a shared Latin American identity, or lack thereof?
In August 2014, I conducted a study in Rio de Janeiro of thirteen native speakers of BP who were asked a series of questions on their attitudes towards their native language. In one

question, the participants were asked whether or not they "feel considerably different from other [Spanish-speaking] Latin Americans". Many felt strongly that Spanish-speaking Latin Americans were indeed very different people, and considered the Portuguese language a defining feature of Brazilian cultural identity that distinguishes the country from its Spanish-speaking neighbors.

The study of Spanish-Portuguese mutual intelligibility and code-switching is of considerable importance when examining Brazil's linguistic identity, as well as broader notions of a multilingual Latin American identity. Ultimately, the data collected in this study demonstrates that a high degree of similarity between two languages that are invariably classified as distinct can, in fact, reinforce cultural barriers.

Resumptive Classifiers in Chuj High Topic Constructions
Louisa Bielig

Like many other Mayan languages, Chuj, a language of the Q'anjob'alan branch, exhibits a syntactically ergative extraction asymmetry. The extraction of transitive subjects (ergative arguments) in contexts such as wh-questions, relativization, and focus is generally disallowed (1), unless the special agent Focus marker *–an* attaches to the verbal stem (2).

(1) * Mach ix-_ø_   s-man ixim wa'il?   (2)   Mach ix-_ø_   man-**an** ixim wa'il?
      Who prfv-b3s a3s-buy cl.grain tortilla   Who prfv-b3s buy-AF cl.grain tortilla
      Who bought the tortilla?   Who bought the tortilla?

In Chuj, however, extractions without Agent Focus as in (1) seem to be permitted when a nominal classifier, which I refer to as a *resumptive classifier*, appears post-verbally. Nominal classifiers generally act as articles and pronouns in Chuj, and appear either in the predominant VOS order or in VSO order. A contrast between an Agent Focus construction and a resumptive classifier construction is shown in (3) and (4):

(3) A   waj   Petul ix-_ø_ il-**an** jun ix   ix
   Top cl.masc.name Pedro prfv-b3s see-AF one cl.fem woman
     Pedro saw a woman.

(4) A   waj   Petul ix-_ø_ y-il **<u>winh</u>** jun ix   ix.
     Top cl.masc.name Pedro prfv-b3s a3s-see cl.masc one cl.fem woman
     Pedro saw a woman.

My fieldwork on the Chuj dialect of San Mateo Ixtatan shows that constructions such as (4) permit nominal classifiers to refer to both transitive and intransitive preverbal subjects, but not to preverbal objects (5). An almost identical pattern can be found in Q'anjob'al (Fowlie 2013, ms. UCLA).

(5) A   ix   Elsa a te'   k'atzitz ix-_ø_   s-xik   (*te') **ix**.
     Top cl.fem Elsa foc cl.wood firewood prfv-b3s a3s-chop cl.grain cl.fem
     Elsa cut the firewood.

Based on this data, I propose that the preverbal subject in classifier constructions such as (4) has not been fronted, as is the case with Agent Focus constructions, but has instead been externally merged in a high topic position, following Aissen 1992's account of Tzotzil, Jacaltec and Tz'utujil. I further propose that this high topic position controls subjects, but not objects, which in preverbal constructions must appear in a focus position. Evidence for this claim is provided by the fact that SOV word order is possible (S = topic, O = focus), but OSV is not (intended: O = topic, S = focus).

Following Aissen 1992, I predict that high topic constructions should not only offer an alternative to fronting constructions with Agent Focus, but also not obey islands constraints, as high topics, in contrast to foci, can be linked to an element in an island.

Interestingly, resumptive classifier constructions only appear with subjects and therefore exhibit a pattern along nominative/accusative lines in a syntactically and morphologically ergative language.

KEYNOTE ABSTRACT

Theory and Processing of wh-in-situ
Hadas Kotek

Theories of interrogative syntax/semantics adopt one of two strategies for the interpretation of in-situ wh-phrases in multiple wh-questions (1a): covert movement (Karttunen 1977, many others) and focus-alternatives computation (Hamblin 1973, many others). The availability of covert movement is assumed to be all-or-nothing: wh undergoes unbounded, long-distance movement targeting its associated Complementizer, similar to its overt counterpart (1b), or else wh stays in-situ and is interpreted via focus-alternatives (1c).

(1) a. Pronounced: Which student did Mary say that John introduced to which professor?
   b. LF1:   [Which student]_1 [which professor]_2 C did Mary say that John introduced t_1 to t_2?
   c. LF2:   [Which student]_1 C did Mary say that John introduced t_1 to [which professor]_2?

I will argue that covert wh-movement indeed occurs in questions like (1) but that it should be thought of as a restricted, local operation, similar to *scrambling* in languages like German, not as an unbounded, long-distance operation, similar to overt wh-movement in English and German. Evidence for this proposal comes from online sentence processing of multiple wh-questions. I will show that covert wh-movement at the very least *can*, and sometimes *must*, be a short movement step targeting a position other than the one targeted by overt wh-movement in the same structure. This finding has implications for the architecture of interrogative syntax/semantics and more broadly for cross-linguistic variation in questions.