Cambridge Linguistics Forum
Lent 2017

4-5.30pm.
Sidgwick Site

January 19th Dr Mareike Keller (University of Mannheim)
Morphological characteristics of Medieval Code Switching
Venue: GR06/07, English Faculty Building

January 26th Dr Michael Ramscar (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)
The discriminative nature of human communication
Venue: GR 06/07, English Faculty Building

February 9th Professor Dustan Brown (University of York)
Canonical morphological complexity: a balancing act between lexicon and grammar
Venue: GR 06/07, English Faculty Building

February 23rd, Professor Hedde Jeijlstra (University of Göttingen)
TBC
Venue: GR06/07, English Faculty Building

March 9th, Dr Chris Montgomery (University of Sheffield)
English dialects: Geographical perceptions, language regard, and listener reactions
Venue: GR06/07, English Faculty Building

For abstracts please visit http://talks.cam.ac.uk/show/index/42263

ABSTRACTS

Morphological characteristics of medieval code-switching
Mareike Keller, University of Mannheim
Code-switching as a contact phenomenon has been studied for several decades from the point of view of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and structural linguistics, among others. Different theoretical models have been proposed, all building on modern, mostly oral data. However, code-switching is by no means confined to modern language communities. Intricate intrasentential mixes of two languages can already be found in manuscripts from the middle ages.
This talk will focus on the morpho-syntactic characteristics of two datasets, Macaronic Sermons from 15th-century England and Martin Luther's Table Talk from 16th-century Germany. We will assess how well Myers-Scotton's *Matrix Language Frame Model* of code-switching holds for historical written texts, then consider possible interpretations of systematic discrepancies between the predictions of the model and the actual realization of grammatical morphemes, especially Latin case markers. The aims are twofold: to show how historical data can test a theoretical model based on modern code-switching, and to advocate using such a theoretical model to identify constant features of code-switching through the centuries.

The discriminative nature of human communication
Michael Ramscar, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
Information theory has shown that exponential distributions are beneficial to the design of efficient communication systems, because they are both optimal for coding purposes and memoryless. It has recently been shown that family names in two Sinosphere languages are exponentially distributed, and I will show how consistent with this, the empirical distributions of names -- and other classes of lexical items -- that English speakers and hearers engage with in moment to moment communication are exponential. I will illustrate the detailed workings of the communicative process that this distributional structure supports by presenting a full account of the incremental, discriminative syntactic and semantic properties of personal names. I will further show that the distributional structures supporting this process are universal to the world's major languages, and that the Zipfian distributions long thought to play a functional role in language are an artifact of the mixing of these empirical distributions. Finally I will describe the implications that the phenomena identified here have for theoretical understandings of human communication and cognition.

Canonical morphological complexity: a balancing act between lexicon and grammar
Dustan Brown, University of York
Broadly construed, morphological complexity involves distinctions in form that are not justified by syntax, including such things as inflectional classes. As with other areas where the term 'complexity' is used it is important to examine why it applies, and what is understood when it is used. Entropy is perhaps the most well known notion associated with the analysis of

complexity in morphological theory. It is associated with uncertainty about exponence. In this talk I focus on a different notion, called 'central system complexity', making reference to three idealized paradigm types (Baerman, Brown and Corbett, forthcoming): cross-classifying systems, grid systems and hierarchical systems. In their maximal form cross-classifying systems must rely entirely on lexical listing, because implicative relations between paradigm cells are non-existent. (This means they have high entropy.) In grid systems, for any cell of the paradigm each inflectional class has a form unique to it, and therefore the forms in one cell predict every other form of the lexeme. (This means that grid systems are very low in entropy.) If one construes complexity in terms of entropy, cross-classifying systems and grid systems are completely opposed. However, from the perspective of central system complexity they are very similar, because they can be characterized simply: either there is a reliance solely on lexical listing (cross-classifying systems), or there is a reliance solely on the morphological grammar. In both cases central system complexity is low. In contrast, it is at its highest when the contribution of lexical listing and implicative relations (the morphological grammar) is in balance. Hierarchical systems are high in central system complexity, because they can only be characterized in terms of a compromise between lexical stipulation and rules based on implicative relations. I illustrate each of the abstract types and show how three measures provided by (Stump and Finkel 2013) can be used to understand their effect. I then consider a real-life example, using data available online (Feist and Palancar 2015) to model the verbal system of Tlatepuzco Chinantec and show how hierarchical patterns can also be recapitulated by structures intermediate between individual paradigm cells and the whole paradigm, termed 'inflectional series' (Palancar 2014). These patterns can only be observed if one is prepared to abandon the 'continuity hypothesis', the reductive assumption that the properties of the component parts are contained within the larger scale object (an hypothesis critiqued in Blevins, Ackerman, Malouf, & Ramscar 2016). In a separate model of the Tlatepuzco data I show how default class assignment can be used to exploit the viable implicative relations associated with larger classes and those smaller ones related to them.

English dialects: Geographical perceptions, language regard, and listener reactions

Chris Montgomery, University of Sheffield

This paper will focus on non-linguists' regard (Preston 2010) of English dialects. It will start with a discussion of the perceptual dialectology of the country, and briefly cover the main factors governing the perception of dialect areas amongst non-linguists (e.g. proximity, cultural prominence, and the impact of borders (Montgomery 2012)).

The remainder of the paper will examine salience and real-time reactions to speech amongst non-linguists, with a focus on samples from the South West of England. Using a new tool for capturing, visualising, and querying listeners' real-time reactions to voice samples, we will explore the relationship between actual language production and how language forms are perceived.

I will show that different language features function to mark different kinds of social meanings and that some language features carry more weight when it

comes to identifying a locale. In particular, the paper will demonstrate that the same linguistic features are perceived differently dependent upon the wider 'guise' in which they appear.

This complex way in which topic, regard, and feature recognition interact supports Clopper and Pisoni's (2004:44) assertion that "the process of speech perception involves not only the segmentation of the speech signal into meaningful linguistic units (e.g., words, sentences) and the recovery of the structure of the sound patterns, but also the processing and encoding of indexical information about the talker." These results are, of course, entirely in line with the findings of Campbell-Kibler (2009), Pharao et al. (2014), and Podesva et al. (2015), although note that these studies focus on one linguistic feature, whereas this study shows how a number of linguistic features can work synergistically in this perceptual process.

References

Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2009. The nature of sociolinguistic perception. Language Variation and Change 21(01). 135–156. doi:10.1017/S0954394509000052.

Clopper, Cynthia G. & David B. Pisoni. 2004. Some new experiments on perceptual categorization of dialect variation in American English: Acoustic analysis and linguistic experience. Research on Spoken Language Processing 26. 29–46.

Montgomery, Chris. 2012. The effect of proximity in perceptual dialectology. Journal of Sociolinguistics 16(5). 638–668. doi:10.1111/josl.12003.

Pharao, Nicolai, Marie Maegaard, Janus Spindler Møller & Tore Kristiansen. 2014. Indexical meanings of [s+] among Copenhagen youth: Social perception of a phonetic variant in different prosodic contexts. Language in Society 43(01). 1–31. doi:10.1017/S0047404513000857.

Podesva, Robert J, Jermay Jamsu & Patrick Callier. 2015. Constraints on the social meaning of released /t/: A production and perception study of US politicians. Language Variation and Change 27(1). 59–87.

Preston, Dennis R. 2010. Variation in Language Regard. In Peter Gilles, Evelyn Ziegler & Joachim Scharloth (eds.), Variatio delectat: Empirische Evidenzen und theoretische Passungen sprachlicher Variation (für Klaus J. Mattheier zum 65. Geburtstag), 7–27. Frankfut am Main: Peter Lang.