



Cukier-Goldstein-Goren Center for Mind, Cognition and Language,  
School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies,  
Department of Linguistics

## THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 01/12/2022

16:15-17:45

Athulya Aravind, MIT

### Alternatives in word learning

The meaning and use of a linguistic expression  $S$  is often determined in part by properties of its alternatives, unpronounced linguistic objects that relate in specific ways to  $S$ . In this talk, I will discuss two case studies illustrating how alternative-sensitive computations interact with lexical acquisition. First, I will offer a new theory of the well-established mutual exclusivity inference in novel noun learning (joint work with Gabor Brody & Roman Feiman). I will suggest that children derive the inference by reasoning over alternatives invoked by information-structural markers (instead of learning biases, as universally assumed in the literature). Second, I will show how we can use theories of alternative-sensitive computations to predict when lexical acquisition might be hard (joint work with Frank Staniszewski & Rachel Stacey). Focusing on the domain of modal verbs (*have to*, *is allowed to*), I suggest that specific failures in children's behavior with such expressions result from them entertaining a non-adult set of alternatives.

Click [here](#) to see the colloquium program.



Sagol School  
of Neuroscience  
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