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THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 07/04/2022
16:15-17:45
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Frontal lecture in Webb 103
transmitted through zoom

Learning to associate a specific speaker with their specific 'style'

Inter-speaker variability in language use does not necessarily bear a direct link to variability in interpretations or to establishing common ground for referential communication. For example, the sentences "Dan gave Ruth a flower" and "Dan gave a flower to Ruth" refer to the same event, though different in form. This type of variability has received little attention, and so far, with mixed results (Kroczek & Gunter, 2017; Ostrand & Ferreira, 2019). Based on these previous findings, I hypothesize that learning speaker-specific language use in cases where it does not link to meaning variation is facilitated by the degree of deviance from common language use (i.e., unexpectedness), such that unexpected linguistic input raises the odds of this input to be stored in a speaker-specific manner. This information, in turn, could assist online speaker-specific adaptation, as well as alignment in production.

In this talk, I will discuss the results from two implicit learning tasks, where we used the weak adjective ordering preferences in Hebrew to create inter-speaker stylistic variation. In a previous study (Trainin & Shetreet, 2020), we showed that Hebrew speakers display great variability with regards to their adjective ordering preferences. We found that for Hebrew speakers, unlike English speakers, the same object could be naturally described using different adjective orders, making this phenomenon more 'stylistic' in nature. While all different orders were considered natural for Hebrew speakers, two of these orders were produced at higher rates, and were consistently preferred in a forced-choice task, and two orders were rarely produced and consistently dispreferred. In our implicit learning study, we show that when both speakers used common and natural orders, participants could not reliably assign an order to a speaker. However, when at least one speaker produced an uncommon order, participants performed better at associating each speaker with their 'style'. Participants' performance was better when the different orders were also substantially different in form. Thus, our results suggest that – while also heavily impacted by differences in form – detecting inter-speaker variability is facilitated by higher degrees of unexpectedness.

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