

Symposium on Diversity in Language and Cognition

15-16. July 2022

**FRIAS (Freiburg Institute for Advances Studies)
University of Freiburg**

Workshop topic

Language use is greatly influenced by a variety of individual characteristics of the communication partners, such as age, gender, or the linguistic and/or cultural background. A better understanding of the impact of such diversity dimensions on language processing is crucial, since institutions strive for creating an inclusive environment, but struggle with the challenges posed by the resulting diversity. This research focus aims to explore how the experimental language sciences can be enriched by including individual person characteristics. Neuro- and psycholinguistic research on the respective diversity dimensions has been conducted in rather separate research communities. In contrast, scholars in gender studies have stressed the importance of integrating the dimensions and considering them in concert. Intersectionality, as this approach is termed, has been applied in qualitative studies on inequality and discrimination in society, but its potential for quantitative studies on language has not yet been discussed. By bringing together researchers from linguistics, cognitive science and gender studies we aim to promote the interdisciplinary exchange about diversity in language.

Organizers:

Prof.Dr. Evelyn Ferstl

JProf.Dr. Adriana Hanulíková

Prof.Dr. Alice Blumenthal-Dramé

Prof.Dr. Anelis Kaiser

Programme

Friday, 15.07.2022

9:00-9:30	Registration
9:30-10:00	Welcome
10:00-11:00	Nicole Else-Quest (University of North Carolina) Doing intersectionality in psychological science: Origins, debates, & praxis
11:00-11:20	Coffee break
11:20-12:20	Evelyn Ferstl, Adriana Hanulíková, Alice Blumenthal-Dramé, Anelis Kaiser (Freiburg University) Diversity in psycholinguistic research: A systematic review
12:20-13:00	Ethan Kutlu (University of Iowa) Socially-gated speech perception
13:00-14:00	LUNCH
14:00-15:00	Rachel Elizabeth Weissler (University of Oregon) What makes a voice sound black? Findings from psycholinguistic perception studies
15:00-15:30	Valentina Canessa-Pollard (University of Chichester) What the voice reveals: the role of sex - related voice variation in stereotype attributions
15:30-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-17:00	Round table discussion with Shiri Lev-Ari (Royall Holloway, University of London), and Bettina Braun (University of Konstanz)
18:00	WORKSHOP DINNER

Saturday, 16.07.2018

9:30-10:30	Florian Hintz (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen) Individual differences in language skills
10:30-11:15	Jana Reifegerste (University of Potsdam) Language processing across the lifespan: What changes, what doesn't, and why?
11:15-11:45	Coffee break
11:45-12:45	Sarah Schimke (University of Dortmund) Processing in school children
12:45-13:45	LUNCH
13:45-14:15	Susanne Gahl (University of California at Berkeley) Tracing the overdiagnosis of stuttering in bilingual children through demographic data
14:15-15:15	Savithry Namboodiripad (University of Michigan) Experimental typology: Accounting for individual differences while making crosslinguistic comparisons
15:15-15:45	Coffee break
15.45-17:00	Final discussion on Challenges and future of diversity in experimental research with Shiri Lev-Ari (Royall Holloway, University of London) and NN (University of Freiburg)
18:00	Farewell reception

Abstracts

Doing intersectionality in psychological science: Origins, debates, & praxis

Nicole Else-Quest (University of North Carolina)

With deep historical roots in 19th century Black feminism, the critical theory and approach of intersectionality has traveled across disciplines, though its transformative and generative potential across psychological science remains largely untapped. In focusing attention on the inequities embedded in multiple interconnected social categories like gender, race, and class, it can be deployed to identify phenomena, think differently about similarity/difference, build coalitions among diverse groups, and examine how institutions perpetuate disparities. In this presentation I will discuss some of the debates within intersectionality scholarship around what intersectionality is, who it is for, and how it can be implemented.

Socially-gated speech perception

Ethan Kutlu (University of Iowa)

Listeners use visual cues in speech perception when available. However, it is not clear whether racialized identities impact listeners' judgments, and to what extent everyday experiences contribute to this. American, British, and Indian English varieties were paired with white and South Asian faces to test listeners' intelligibility and accentedness judgments. Listeners' ability to transcribe sentences decreased and their accentedness judgments increased when speech was paired with South Asian faces. Moreover, listeners' everyday experiences impacted both their intelligibility performance and accentedness judgments. The impacts of racialization of different language varieties on speech perception will be discussed.

What makes A voice sound black? Findings from psycholinguistic perception studies

Rachel Elizabeth Weissler (University of Oregon)

In this research, I seek to better understand how American listeners cognitively interact with Black and White voices. Focusing on participants' varied experiences with African American English, measured through exposure, familiarity, and usage measures, this study investigates how individuals process visual and linguistic input through eye-tracking to test the relationship between emotional prosody and racial stereotyping. The usage measure result aligns with the findings which show that by operationalizing the Angry Black Woman trope, we can see perception of race influences perception of emotion (Weissler & Boland 2019). This work contributes to further understanding of how social information and stereotypes interface with cognitive processing within a multidialectal frame, and leaves open questions to explore regarding which (if any) parts of the prosodic signal indicate emotion and race.

What the voice reveals: the role of sex-related voice variation in stereotype attributions

Valentina Canessa-Pollard (University of Chichester)

Like many other vocalising vertebrates, humans convey information about themselves through the sounds of their voice. I will review the role of key nonverbal components of human speech (e.g., voice pitch, resonances) in communicating physical and physiological traits of speakers, as well as social traits. Drawing from my research with children and adults, I will show how humans' vocal control abilities, commonly assumed to subserve speech, extend to these nonverbal dimensions, focusing on the expression of gender. Furthermore, I will present findings suggesting that vocal flexibility in humans can be used to study psychological processes such as stereotyping.

Individual differences in language skills

Florian Hintz (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen)

Individual differences in language processing are prevalent in our daily lives. However, for decades, psycholinguistic research has largely ignored variation in the normal range of abilities. Recently, scientists have begun to acknowledge the importance of inter-individual variability for a comprehensive characterization of the language system. In spite of this change of attitude, empirical research on individual differences is still sparse, which is in part due to the lack of a suitable research tool. I will present a novel battery of behavioral tests for assessing individual differences in language skills in younger adults. Furthermore, I will describe analyses from the first application of the battery, in around 650 individuals aged between 18 and 30, to shed light on the principal dimensions of language skills.

Language processing across the lifespan: What changes, what doesn't, and why?

Jana Reifegerste (University of Potsdam)

Over the last century, the average human lifespan has nearly doubled, rendering the effects of aging on cognition, including language, a vital research topic.

In this talk I will present research on language processing across the adult lifespan. This work suggests striking variability both in the extent to which aging affects language processing, and in the shape of these developmental trajectories, yielding age-related declines and improvements, as well as age invariance.

Some recent evidence suggests that age-related declines in language typically occur when the involved processes depend importantly on other cognitive functions that are themselves affected by aging, such as working memory or processing speed. Conversely, age-related improvements may reflect lifelong exposure and experience.

L1 and L2-processing of noncanonical sentences in children and adolescents

Sarah Schimke (University of Dortmund)

In this talk, I will present studies that deal with the processing and interpretation of noncanonical sentences in L1 and L2 German and English. Noncanonical sentences are defined as sentences that refer to an action performed by an agent on a patient, and in which the patient is mentioned before the agent, such as in object-initial and passive constructions. These sentence types have been found to be harder to process and understand across different languages and populations than canonical sentence types starting with the agent. It has been assumed that this is because hearers have to overcome an initial "agent-first" expectancy to successfully process these sentences. The studies to be presented ask whether there is evidence for such an agent-first preference in English- and German-speaking children and adolescents, and how learner type (monolingual or multilingual), age, working memory and inhibitory control as well as language-specific properties of the different noncanonical constructions influence the strength of the preference and the difficulties in reaching the target-like interpretation.

Tracing the overdiagnosis of stuttering in bilingual children through demographic data

Susanne Gahl (University of California at Berkeley)

Stuttering is a disability occurring in an estimated 1% of adults worldwide, with a childhood incidence of about 5%. Stuttering has been claimed to be far more common among bilingual vs. monolingual children. Although evidence for that claim is largely absent, there is a persistent view of bilingualism as a risk factor for stuttering. Prior research (Byrd et al., 2015) has demonstrated that certain diagnostic criteria for stuttering systematically put bilingual children at risk of overdiagnosis. The extent to which bilingual children are overdiagnosed with stuttering is unknown, however. This talk describes two lines of investigation: The first considers how the claim about bilingualism as a risk factor for stuttering is perpetuated. The second uses government survey data about children's language background, sex, and age among other demographic factors to shed light on the claimed connection between bilingualism and stuttering.

Experimental typology: Accounting for individual differences while making crosslinguistic comparisons

Savithry Namboodiripad (University of Michigan)

How and why do languages vary? This is a question central to many fields of linguistics, and models which take mechanisms of variation and change into account inevitably intersect with big questions in psycholinguistics, such as how processing and production are influenced by different contexts of language experience. This talk presents an approach, Experimental Typology, using psycholinguistic experiments as a way to not only document and compare individuals and languages, but also in an attempt to understand mechanisms of contact-induced change. This talk covers some results from this emergent research program, investigating in particular typology and contact of flexible constituent order. In addition, I ask how individual differences approaches can be employed to capture emergent patterns within languages, as well as more accurately capturing differences in language experience.
