

Thursday Interdisciplinary Colloquium
Winter 2014-Spring 2014
Thursdays, 16:15-17:45, Webb 103

12.06.14

Noa Brandel

Tel Aviv University

***Parameters (or Lack Thereof) in L2 Acquisition:
The Null Subject Parameter***

Several hypotheses have been proposed concerning the initial state in second language (L2) acquisition and the role of UG in the acquisition process. The current study aims to reinforce the Full Access Full Transfer Hypothesis, according to which initially, L2 learners inherit parameter values from their L1 (*full transfer*), but in the course of acquisition, when faced with the relevant (contradicting) L2 input, the learners can reset these values, due to the *full access* they have to UG (Schwartz and Sprouse 1994, 1996).

In order to check whether such transfer and resetting occur (i.e., whether the L2 learner indeed has access to UG), I conducted a study that focuses on the Null Subject Parameter among native Hebrew-speaking children (L1: Hebrew) acquiring English as a second language (L2: English). The two languages differ in their values of the Null Subject Parameter, with English being a non-null-subject language and Hebrew being a (partial/mixed) null-subject one. A resetting is thus required in order for the acquisition to take place. I further sought to unveil the influence of explicit instruction of one of the features associated with the parameter upon its resetting to the L2 value.

106 Hebrew-speaking 6th-graders, who have been learning English as an L2, were tested on three of the properties associated with the Null Subject Parameter: (i) Thematic pronominal subject omission; (ii) Expletive pronominal subject omission and (iii) Post-verbal subjects (Rizzi 1986). They were first tested via a translation-choice task from Hebrew to English. 69 of these participants were then divided into two groups, both of which were exposed to the feature of expletive elements (i.e., the pronouns *it* and *there*). In one of the groups an emphasis was put upon these expletive pronouns via explicit instruction. The two groups were tested again, using the same task, in order to compare the performance of the group that was explicitly instructed with the performance of the group that was not. In this talk I will present results from both experiments and will suggest possible explanations to account for them.

05.06.14

Thomas Groß
Aichi University, Japan
Catena-based Dependency Grammar

Dependency grammars (DGs) are characterized by the following properties: they take words as the basic syntactic unit, and dependencies between words as the basic syntactic relation; they acknowledge a one-word-to-one-node-ratio, which results in a strict mother-daughter relation; they thus necessarily reject the binary division of the sentence into a subject NP and predicate VP, preferring instead to position the finite verb as the root of all sentence structure.

Catena-based DG views the *catena* as the principal unit of syntactic and morphosyntactic analysis. Meaning is assigned to catenae, which may or may not qualify as constituents. The *catena* is defined informally as *a node or a combination of nodes that is continuous with respect to dominance*.

After a brief introduction to dependency grammars, catena-based theoretical notions will be explained. Empirical evidence that a grammatical unit such as the *catena* must exist comes from several areas: displacement, ellipsis, predicate-structure, idioms, and other CxG-type constructions. The talk attempts to present English data involving displacement, ellipsis, predicate-structure, and idioms. However, for time reasons, the discussion will be limited to two example types for each area. In every single example, a catena-based analysis is preferable to a constituent-based analysis.

The talk will then proceed to data morphosyntax. The *catena* is a scalable unit of form that can operate in the entire spectrum from syntax to morphosyntax to morphology proper. English, German, Japanese and Hebrew data will be provided in order to show that periphrasis often cuts into words, and as a result periphrastic construction are often neither words, nor constituents. They do, however, qualify as catenae.

Finally, the talk will briefly address catena-based analysis within morphology proper. There are reasons to assume that such an analysis can, even though it is piece-based, successfully operate on non-concatenative morphological data.

For those not familiar with dependency grammar, or the *catena*, I suggest a look at the following Wikipedia pages:

Dependency Grammar: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dependency_grammar

Catenae: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catena_%28linguistics%29

For those who would like to look at our work in more detail, here is a (non-exhaustive) list of references:

G., T. 2014. Clitics in Dependency Morphology. Hajičová, Eva et.al. *Linguistics Today* Vol.215: *Dependency Linguistics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John

Benjamins Publishing. 229–252.

G., T. and Timothy Osborne. 2013. Katena und Konstruktion: Ein Vorschlag zu einer dependenziellen Konstruktionsgrammatik. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 32(1): 41-73.

Osborne, Timothy, Michael Putnam, and T. G. 2012. Catenae: Introducing a novel unit of syntactic analysis. *Syntax* 15(4). 354-396.

Osborne, Timothy and T. G. 2012. Constructions are catenae: Construction Grammar meets dependency grammar. *Cognitive Linguistics* 23(1), 163-214.

G., T. 2011. Catenae in Morphology. *Proceedings of Depling 2011*. Barcelona. 47-57. [pdf](#)

Osborne, Timothy, Michael Putnam, and T. G. 2011. Bare phrase structure, label-less trees, and specifier-less syntax: Is Minimalism becoming a dependency grammar? *The Linguistic Review* 28, 315-364.

G., T. and Timothy Osborne. 2009. Toward a practical dependency grammar theory of discontinuities. *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 22, 43-90. [pdf](#)

29.05.14

Tal Linzen

NYU

***Uncertainty and Prediction in Language Comprehension
as a Platform for Studying Linguistic Representations***

Probability and frequency are often perceived as irrelevant or even antithetical to the study of abstract representations, which is the main concern of theoretical linguistics. Yet, the dichotomy between probability and abstract representations is a false one: linguistic knowledge may well involve representations that are probabilistic and abstract at the same time. This is particularly likely in light of the pervasive effects of frequency in language processing: it is increasingly clear that speakers use their statistical experience with language to make probabilistic predictions about upcoming linguistic elements before they are encountered.

In this talk I will present data from a series of experiments, both neural (MEG) and behavioral (self-paced reading), showing that speakers use both surface forms and abstract representations to inform their predictions during language comprehension. When reading a sentence, people predict both specific words and syntactic structures; when listening to a word, they make predictions at both the phonemic and morphological levels. I will argue that probabilistic prediction can serve as a useful probe into the nature of linguistic representations, and that deepening our understanding of the mechanisms of predictive processing is essential to both linguistics and psychology.

15.05.14

Avi Mizrachi

Tel Aviv University

Voicing Assimilation in Hebrew, Voice Hert Zich?

Voicing assimilation (VA) in Hebrew is described as a mostly regressive process, optional in casual speech and obligatory in rapid speech. These characteristics are based on casual observations (Bolozy 1978, 1997, 2002, 2006, Barkai and Horvath 1978). In a more recent study (Kreitman 2010), acoustic phonetic evidence concerning VA was provided with respect to word-initial clusters, by method of word-list reading.

The present study focuses on the production of utterance-medial obstruent sequences which differ in their underlying voicing specification, i.e. on obstruents in a context prone to voicing assimilation, as in /izkir/ [iskir] 'reminded' and /isgir/ [izgir] 'extradited.' I provide qualitative and quantitative evidence of voicing assimilation and investigate its *degree*, its *direction* (regressive or progressive) and its *type* (voicing or devoicing). Effects of place of articulation, of manner of articulation, and of the morphemic position of the sequence are also examined.

The empirical basis of the study is drawn from an acoustic analysis of natural elicited data, in which three acoustic correlates of voicing were examined: closure duration, closure voicing, and release duration.

With regard to its *degree*, the results support earlier claims that VA is an optional process in Hebrew. Also with regard to *directionality*, the results show that VA is indeed mostly regressive. However, progressive assimilation is also observed, in more cases than suggested in previous work. The interesting results are those related to the type of assimilation, suggesting that VA in Hebrew should not be given a unified analysis with relation to voicing and devoicing, as the preference for devoicing is overwhelming.

I will attempt to analyze these findings with reference to positional faithfulness constraints within the framework of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993/2004).

08.05.14

Lior Laks, Evan Cohen and Stav Azulay

Bar-Ilan University, Tel Aviv University and Oranim Academic College

What Are We Faithful to?

On Vowel Epenthesis and Variation (or Lack Thereof) in Hebrew Verbs

We examine vowel epenthesis in Hebrew verbs with stem-medial glottals. The stem-internal epenthetic vowels of these verbs colloquially display variation in some verbal templates, (e.g. *nivhala/nivhela* 'become scared-3rd-fem.sg) and

respectively involves P-stranding. In this talk I will argue that this cannot be the case: additional data from Slavic languages show that both these constructions are, in fact, possible in non-P-stranding languages. Furthermore, they indicate that these phenomena are constrained prosodically rather than syntactically. An alternative source of the correlations in (1) and (2) should therefore be established. To this end, I will review the prosodic properties of English prepositions as well as PF-approaches to P-stranding (Aoun et al. 1987, Tokizaki 2010, Hirata 2011) and discuss how the apparent prosodic conditioning of the aforementioned phenomena informs us about the nature of P-stranding.

03.04.14

Rama Novogrodsky

Haifa University

***The Case of Every and Each in Child Language:
Evidence from English and Hebrew***

How do children grasp the subtle distinctions between the quantifiers *every* and *each* (כל כדור ו-כל הכדורים)?

While *each* requires a specific set and distributivity, *every* allows both distributive and collective readings. This talk will present findings from English and Hebrew speaking children providing new insights on the developmental path of quantification.

27.03.14

Noa Shuval

Tel Aviv University

***The Processing and Representation of
Negated and Repaired Constituents***

In 9 experiments we tested the accessibility of intended negation, and repair. While in negation, negated information is deliberately mentioned; in repair, erroneously uttered material is immediately replaced by the intended material.

Our goals were to find out:

- To what extent does negated material influence comprehension processes for upcoming information?
- To what extent does a pragmatic factor such as perceived "intent" play a role for the comprehension of negated material?
- What role does the position of the negated concept play for its accessibility?

Firstly, we tested the lingering effect observed offline for repairs. We suspected that this effect was more related to the experimental setting load than to the

repair construction itself. This turned out to be the case: when the cognitive system was not loaded and the linguistic material highly reliable, repaired information was actually suppressed.

Then, we tested whether concepts introduced via negation are suppressed or considered for pronoun resolution. Results show that negated information is backgrounded rather than suppressed. Thus it is still accessible for anaphor resolution.

Lastly, using anaphor resolution to compare the accessibility of negated concepts introduced through repairs and negations, we tested the extent to which position and intent interact with negation to influence the accessibility of concepts within its scope. Results suggest that while position and intent affect the accessibility of negated concepts, the pragmatic factor plays a more important role in doing so.

We suggest a pragmatic explanation for the processing differences obtained for negation and repair.

20.03.14

Ilona Spector-Shirtz
The Hebrew University
Hebrew Nonverbal Sentences Revisited

In this talk I will discuss simple verbless sentences in Modern Hebrew of the type XP (pronoun) XP, where the pronoun is either *hu* or *ze*. As was extensively discussed in the literature, there are major differences between the two types in terms of agreement, semantic properties and distribution of elements in the predicate position. Relying on the ability of some languages, including Hebrew, to allow multiple specifiers, I will propose to analyze both of them as Broad Subject constructions (or Multiple Subject sentences), where the initial XP is a Broad Subject, followed by and forming a predication relation with a whole sentence with a subject of its own – a Narrow Subject. The differences between *hu* and *ze* sentences are reflected in different structures; for *hu* sentences, *hu* is argued to be a pronominal clitic on T, while the Narrow Subject is *pro*; for *ze* sentences, *ze* is argued to occupy the Narrow Subject position, being a weak pronoun. With further subdivision of *ze* sentences into two types and a general new typology of the pronoun *ze* in Hebrew, my analysis will account for all the differences between *hu* and *ze* sentences, and, in addition, will explain cases where the pronoun is absent or optional (predicational sentences) versus sentences with obligatory pronoun (equatives).

06.03.14

Aynat Rubinstein

The Hebrew University

A Few Lessons Hebrew Can Teach Us about Gradable Modality

The ability to compare possibilities and to designate some as "better" than others in a given context is a fundamental aspect of our use of modals and verbs of propositional attitude. When placed under an obligation or when expressing our desires, we call attention to certain ways the world could be: those possible worlds in which the obligation is met and the desire is fulfilled as closely as possible. In an influential paper, Sloman (1970) proposed that certain modal expressions in fact have a more pronounced comparative semantics than others. 'Ought', in particular, was analyzed as invoking comparison of possibilities in a way that other modals, in particular, 'must', do not. Leading semantic analyses of necessity have blurred this distinction since Sloman.

My goal in this talk is to support the connection between 'ought' and comparison ('better'), advancing a proposal to model normative ideals in a way that makes room for non-comparative, strong, normative necessity. My evidence comes from Hebrew which, I argue, lacks direct translations of weak necessity 'ought/should' in its modal inventory. The way weak necessity claims are expressed in Hebrew exposes the semantic-pragmatic ingredients of gradable necessity, and, in turn, may illuminate our understanding of the relation between weak and strong necessity in languages that do grammaticize these distinctions.

27.02.14

Lyle Lustigman

Tel Aviv University

***Interfaces between Linguistic Systems:
Evidence from Hebrew Child Language***

The study examines interfaces between linguistic systems as manifested in the early speech of Hebrew-acquiring children. Previous research on interfaces in child language (e.g., Brown, 2008; Demuth et al, 2011; Marchman & Bates, 1994) is reviewed in relation to two criteria defined by linguistic structure and analytical procedures respectively: **Structural contiguity** – where the systems in question are in constant and obligatory contact (e.g., syllable structure and morphology, thematic roles and argument realization), in contrast to systems that can function independently (e.g., inflections and clause-linkage, intonational contours and lexical growth); and **Concurrent evidence** – with two or more linguistic systems being analyzed "online," on the basis of each and every child utterance in which they co-occur, in contrast to *post hoc* correlations based on temporal overlap identified separately for children's use of each system.

Concern here is with a particular sense of the notion of interfaces, manifested in online analyses of systems that are **non-contiguous** in Hebrew: (1) verb inflection and realization of non-subject constituents; and (2) verb inflection and prepositional marking. Analysis was applied to all predicating utterances

occurring in weekly speech samples of three Hebrew-acquiring children (age range: 1;3-2;6) from their earliest verb productions up to the point when all the verbs they used were structurally transparent, that is, they had clearly unambiguous targets (e.g., the verb-form *barti* is transparent since it corresponds to a single target *dibarti*, whereas the form *ber* is opaque since it is ambiguous between *diber*, *medaber*, *yedaber* etc.) (Lustigman, 2012, 2013). Findings revealed that all three children start out with pervasive opacity in their verb usage and, moreover, even when their use of verb inflection becomes productive, they continue to use opaque forms alongside productively transparent verbs for several more months. During this transitional period, two statistically significant patterns emerged for all three children. Opaque verb forms tended to favor elaborated syntactic contexts (i.e., with associated objects/adverbs) compared with their transparent counterparts. And objects/adverbs were explicitly marked by prepositions significantly more when they followed inflectionally transparent compared with opaque forms of verbs.

These inter-domain convergences in grammatical development are discussed in terms of the fresh light they shed on the role of between-domain interfaces in language acquisition, possibly, in linguistic structure in general.

20.02.14

Einat Shetreet

Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard University

Scalar Implicatures in the Brain: Implications for Language Acquisition

The logical meaning of weak quantifiers like *some* (i.e., *some* and *possibly all*) is typically enriched via a scalar implicature to exclude stronger members of the same scale (i.e., enriched *some* winds up meaning *some but not all*). This has been shown in several studies with adults (e.g., Guasti et al., 2005; Huang & Snedeker, 2009; Noveck, 2001). For example, when presented with the statement "some rabbits jumped over the rock", in a mismatch context where all the rabbits jumped over the rock, adults usually reject the statement. By contrast, children tend to interpret *some* logically and accept such statements as true.

However, recent investigations have shown that certain experimental manipulations (training, enriched context or a three-scale judgment task) improve children's rate of adult-like responses (e.g., Guasti et al., 2005; Katsos & Bishop, 2011; Papafragou & Musolino, 2003). It is, thus, an open question why children typically fail to present adult-like behavior with scalar implicatures. Some argue that children lack the competence to generate scalar implicatures, and they compute them only with support from context or task. Others argue that children compute scalar implicatures like adults, but use a different response strategy. In this talk, I will present an fMRI study with adults and children that aims to decide between these approaches.