Lexical storage of pronunciation variation in casual speech: evidence from French

Radboud University Nijmegen
Mirjam Ernestus

In many languages, words show substantial variation in how they are pronounced in formal and informal situations. For instance, French *ministre* is mostly pronounced as /ministr/ in formal speech, but can be reduced to /minist/ and /minis/ in informal speech. In this talk, I will discuss this variation and discuss the factors that favour speech reduction in casual speech. I will argue, on the basis of two word recognition experiments in French, that many word pronunciation variants are stored in our mental lexicon. This has consequences for our models of speech production and comprehension.

Synchronic knowledge of phonetically unnatural classes

Gillian Gallagher
New York University

Phonological patterns are stated over classes of sounds, usually defined based on a shared phonetic property. Phonetic sound changes, however, are common, and easily result in a language showing a phonological pattern over a class of segments that cannot be easily defined given the synchronic phonetic system. In this talk, I look at such a case in South Bolivian Quechua, where the etymological plain uvular stop /q/ has lenited to a sonorant [ʁ].

I present the results of two experiments that suggest that Quechua speakers have learned distributional restrictions on stops, including the sonorant uvular, despite its anomalous phonetics. The results support a view of phonological feature learning that integrates phonetic and phonological information. Bottom-up construction of sound classes from phonetic properties is needed to allow phonological learning at all, as phonological patterns do not emerge from analysis of segmental distributions. Top-down information in the form of phonological patterning is needed to support classes that are not phonetically homogenous.

Unexpected Nasal Effects

Nancy C. Kula
University of Essex

The paper will investigate two phonologically unexpected nasal effects from two disparate language families – Indo Aryan and Bantu. The first involves a case of non-myopic nasal spread in Saraiki, within a system that contrasts progressive non-myopic nasalization and myopic regressive nasal spread. The two processes can also apply simultaneously in bi-directional spread and are blocked by stress and obstruents with all sonorants and vowels being targets. The second process from Bantu is illustrated by Yaka nasal consonant harmony which targets both local and non-local voiced obstruents, with voiceless consonants and prenasalized stops being transparent. In both cases the process applies in centrally morphologically complex forms. An analysis that treats the feature nasal, more precisely element |L|, as part of hierarchical structure that allows it to occur in a sub-syllabic position will be used to account for the global and non-local effects seen in Saraiki and Yaka.

Jamais trois sans deux? Arguments for ternarity from some lesser-known languages

Mary Paster
Pomona College

It is widely accepted that phonological rules/constraints do not 'count' past two. This is said to follow from locality restrictions, which do not allow anything to intervene between the target and trigger of a rule. In the domain of stress, it also follows from foot binarity. However, as I will discuss, there exist some phenomena that are problematic for these standard assumptions, especially in Bantu tone systems. In this talk I will give an overview of some phonological systems that count to three, focusing on a particularly challenging case from Manyika. I will argue that ternarity is more common than people realize because the best cases happen to be found in lesser-known languages, and that an adequate theory of phonology should account for ternarity in its own right rather than as a byproduct of binary structures.