Mayfest
Welcome to Mayfest, a two-day workshop dedicated to language. Mayfest brings together leading researchers from a variety of disciplines and perspectives to present their work in relation to the theme, leaving ample time for active discussion to foster new insights and collaboration. This year, the University of Maryland, College Park, officially joined the Committee on Institutional Collaboration (CIC) as a part of its broader integration with the Big Ten. Beyond the football conference affiliation, our schools also share expertise in language science. Nearly every member institution offers a department or program in linguistics, representing a wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, and CIC schools’ programs in speech-language pathology and other communicative disorders are among the best in the nation. We would like to draw on this wealth of experience and knowledge for Mayfest 2014, which we hope will provide a springboard for collaboration between language scientists across the CIC institutions.

Mayfest is supported by the Departments of Linguistics and Hearing and Speech Sciences, the Program for Neuroscience and Cognitive Science, and the Maryland Language Science Center. This event is funded in part by your Graduate Student Activities fee and is open to all graduate students at the University of Maryland.

We are happy to have you all here.

Practical notes
All talks and discussions on Friday will be located in 1400 Marie Mount Hall. All talks and discussions on Saturday will be located in the Maryland Room (see the attached sketch of the building).

It is extremely important that no food or drinks be brought into the Maryland Room, other than water.

All talks will be 30 minutes long, plus an additional 15 minutes for questions.

A light breakfast and lunch will be available both days. It will be served in the Marie Mount Atrium. Please do not take any of your food or drinks into the Maryland Room.

We will try to have coffee available throughout the day.

Mayfest Program
Friday May 2
- 9:00-9:30 Registration and Breakfast [Marie Mount Atrium]
- 9:30-10:15 Judith Kroll (Pennsylvania State University)
  "How the Mind and the Brain Negotiate Competition for Selection in Bilingual Speech"
- 10:15-11:00 Acrisio Pires (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
  "The (In)Completeness Paradox: Bilingual acquisition and ultimate attainment"
- 11:00-11:15 Break [Marie Mount Atrium]

- 11:15-12:00 Yoshihisa Kitagawa (Indiana University)
  "Avoiding Look-ahead and Look-across"

- 12:00-12:45 Duane Watson (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
  "Prosody, Production, and Prominence"

- 12:45-2:00 Lunch [Marie Mount Atrium]

- 2:00-2:45 Diane Brentari (University of Chicago)
  "Variance and Invariance in Sign Language Prosody"

- 2:45-3:30 Casey Lew-Williams (Northwestern University)
  "Learn like a baby: The power of language input on statistical learning"

- 3:30-3:45 Break [Marie Mount Atrium]

- 3:45-4:30 Amanda Seidl (Purdue University)
  "To pat the bunny or the baby: Cross-modal cue use by caregivers and infants"

- 4:30-5:15 Jan Edwards (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
  "Phonological development: The acquisition of a (really) complex system"

- 5:15-6:00 Discussion
  Discussion chair TBD

- 7:00 Party with dinner

Saturday May 3

- 9:30-10:00 Breakfast [Marie Mount Atrium]

- 10:00-10:45 Kristen Syrett (Rutgers University-New Brunswick)
  "Challenges in the Interpretation of Quantities and Comparison in Language Acquisition"

- 10:45-11:30 Laura Wagner (Ohio State University)
  "Children’s Understanding of Regional Dialect Variation"
4 Abstracts

Variance and Invariance in Sign Language Prosody
Diane Brentari, University of Chicago

In this talk I will provide a brief overview of the prosodic cues used in sign language phonology. The following claim about the roles ascribed to the movements of the hands (i.e., the manual cues) vs. those of the face and body (i.e., the non-manual cues) will then be investigated: Manual movements are the primary ones used to divide the stream of signing into constituents; they are the scaffolding upon which prosodic constituency is based. In contrast, specific non-manual cues, such as those of the upper or lower face, contribute to prosody by adding meaningful content or by aligning in specific ways with the cues of movement. The division of labor just described is relatively invariant, as is the relative consistency of the manual cues vs. the non-manual cues themselves. Several empirical studies will support this claim: a crosslinguistic study, one involving first language acquisition, one involving second language acquisition, and one involving dialect variation. Potential parallels with current work on spoken language prosody (including audiovisual prosody) will be discussed.

TBD
Tom Carrell, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

TBD

Great expectations: How speech rate- and rhythm-based prediction affects language processing
Laura Dilley, Michigan State University
Recent research has demonstrated that context speech rate and rhythm within an utterance influences which words, and how many words, listeners hear later in the same utterance (Dilley & McAuley, 2008; Dilley & Pitt, 2010). Contra to prior findings that speech recognition is fairly robust under time-compression or expansion (e.g., Dupoux & Green, 1997; Gordon-Salant & Fitzgibbons, 2001), under controlled conditions speeding up or slowing down the context speech rate influences how many words and/or syllables (and thus how many phonemes) listeners hear. These findings pose primarily two challenges for traditional theories of language processing. First, such findings are difficult to explain with respect to traditional feed-forward models of spoken language comprehension that assume that listeners map acoustic patterns onto more abstract representations (e.g., words, phonemes, and morphemes). Second, these findings suggest that language processing is influenced by information spanning a wider temporal integration window than statistically assumed. The roles of context speech rate- and rhythm-based expectations in language processing will be situated within the broader context of neurocognitive, neurolinguistic, and clinical speech-language literatures.

Phonological development: The acquisition of a (really) complex system
Jan Edwards, University of Wisconsin-Madison

In the first few years of life, most children learn to talk. Children acquire language whether they are learning to speak English, or Korean, or both at once. Perhaps because most children learn to talk so easily, the traditional view of phonological development has focused on children’s acquisition of abstract phonological categories such as phonemes, distinctive features, or markedness and faithfulness constraints, depending on the linguistic theory that is in vogue. Such a view of phonological development makes many assumptions: for example, it assumes that children’s phonological learning is best described in terms of alphabetic transcription and that patterns of phonological development are similar across different languages. In this talk, I will present analyses of data from the paidologos project (http://ling.osu.edu/~edwards) in support of a more nuanced view of phonological development. The paidologos project is a cross-linguistic examination of first-language phonological development across a number of languages, including American English, Cantonese, Greek, Japanese, and Mandarin. In this talk, I will argue that phonological knowledge is a complex system that involves many different levels of representation. The child’s task, as a language learner, is to learn these different levels and the mappings among them. Clinical implications of this view of phonological development will also be considered.

[Supported by NIDCD grant #02932 and NSF grant #BCS-0729140 to Jan Edwards]

Second Language Acquisition As a Window onto the Development of Linguistic Expectations
Thomas Farmer, University of Iowa

Based on information available in linguistic and social contexts, Native speakers (NS) generate predictions about various aspects of unfolding linguistic input during on-line comprehension, aiding in the ability to quickly and accurately interpret an incoming linguistic signal. Predictive processing, however, presupposes the existence of prior knowledge about language, and about how language is used in multiple contexts. Motivated by frameworks that view learning and processing as deeply intertwined, such that processing of an input simultaneously shapes the representations that are learned, I present data from an experiment designed to examine the on-line processing patterns of Spanish learners (L2ers) who span the proficiency spectrum. Examining patterns of processing in learners at different points in the learning process provides a window onto the underlying developmental time-course of L2 learning, and more generally, also affords the ability to investigate the learning mechanisms that instill knowledge about language.

Focusing on a long-distance dependency in Spanish (Clitic Left Dislocation), where earlier-occurring contextual information sets up a strong expectation for a downstream grammatical element (a clitic), I first demonstrate that NSs are sensitive to the absence of the predicted clitic when it is not present, relative to a condition where it is (thus, an expectation violation effect). For Native-English speaking learners of Spanish, a strong positive relationship existed between proficiency in Spanish and sensitivity to the expectation violation (intermediates demonstrated little sensitivity to the missing clitic, whereas advanced L2ers demonstrated an effect quite similar in magnitude to the NSs).

L1 and L2 processing appear to be at least partially contingent upon the ability to accurately generate predictions that can be subsequently assessed on the fly. Additionally, the correlation data demonstrate that L2 proficiency and predictive ability are inter-related, and suggest that learning to comprehend L2 can be characterized as the progressive learning of statistical relationships between linguistic units in the L2 input over time. These results will be discussed in relation to statistical learning mechanisms that support language learning, and will be considered in the broader context of both linguistically- and psychologically-grounded literatures on L1 & L2 learning and processing.
Probabilistic learning as a probe of primitive grammatical mechanisms
Tim Hunter, University of Minnesota

A grammatical formalism constitutes a hypothesis about the toolkit of grammatical mechanisms with which a child approaches the language acquisition task. Speaking "extensionally", the choice of a particular toolkit just determines the sets of expressions that can be characterized by a grammar built from that toolkit. It is possible to formulate learning algorithms based on this simple "good sentence versus bad sentence" conception of what a grammar is (e.g., Gibson and Waxler 1994), but (1) such approaches provide no traction for distinguishing between hypothesized toolkits that are extensionally equivalent despite invoking different grammatical mechanisms, and (2) many more recent learning algorithms adopt some sort of probabilistic standpoint, according to which a particular sentence/expression can be not just "in or out" but "likely or unlikely" (given a currently hypothesized grammar). In this talk I will investigate ways in which learning algorithms that involve computing likelihoods of sentences/expressions, as opposed to simply binary grammaticality, could provide empirical traction for distinguishing particular choices of grammatical mechanisms that syntacticians work with even when they are extensionally equivalent.

Avoiding Look-ahead and Look-across
Yoshihisa Kitagawa, Indiana University

This talk begins by surveying several experimental studies that have identified a synchronization between the prosody and the semantic-pragmatic interpretation of Wh-interrogative sentences in Japanese. It then deals with two kinds of problems that such sound-meaning associations pose for a theory of syntax as namely look-ahead and (what I call) look-across. After arguing for a proposed solution to these problems, the talk attempts to extend this solution to the analysis of look-across problems involving more familiar phenomena in syntax. It is argued that by adopting a theoretical device for capturing sound-meaning associations and deploying multiple transfer to both PF and LF interface representations (cf. Grohmann (2000), Platzack (2001)), we can properly describe the precise correspondences between the physical aspects of linguistic expressions (such as morphological case, syntactic positions, or intonation) and their logical aspects (such as thematic interpretation, predication, or information packaging). The empirical phenomena discussed include the subject-object asymmetry for case drop in Korean (and Japanese):

   who - {NOM/*Æ} milk-ACC bought-Q
   'Who bought milk?'
   b. YungHee-la mwues-{ul/*Æ} sass-ni?
   YungHee-NOM what-ACC bought-Q
   'What did YungHee buy?'

the subject-object asymmetry in Case adjacency in English:

(2) a. John probably [T has] read the letter.
   b. *John read V carefully the letter.

and the adjacency effect involving forCOMP in English, as in (3), and, if possible, that involving diCOMP + PRO in Italian, as in (4) (Rizzi 1997:301):

(3) a. I would prefer for John to leave tomorrow.
   b. *I would prefer for, tomorrow, John to leave.

(4) a. Penso, a Gianni, di PRO to have to speak to him.'
   b. *Penso di, a Gianni, PRO to have to speak to him.'

How the Mind and the Brain Negotiate Competition for Selection in Bilingual Speech
Judith Kroll, Pennsylvania State University
Although proficient bilinguals are able to speak fluently in each of their two languages, recent studies suggest that both languages are continually active, to the point where the unintended language is often on the tip of the speaker’s tongue. In this talk, I describe recent behavioral, ERP, and fMRI evidence on bilingual speech planning that suggests that alternatives in each language are planned but that the native or more dominant language is inhibited to allow the weaker language to be spoken. The goal of the research program is to identify the time course and scope of the inhibitory processes that enable language production to proceed with skill. I consider the consequences of native language inhibition for the cognitive benefits that have been identified as a result of bilingualism and for the earliest stages of second language learning.

Learn like a baby: The power of language input on statistical learning
Casey Lew-Williams, Northwestern University

Babies and toddlers have a prodigious ability to find structure (such as words) in patterned input (such as language), a phenomenon known as 'statistical learning.' Learning regularities between sounds and words often occurs seamlessly in early development, leading many to conclude that statistical learning launches and enables language in the first place. This might be true, or alternatively, it might be an irrelevant artifact of distilled, simplified laboratory tasks. Here I ask: Can statistical learning scale up to explain natural language acquisition? I will present a series of studies that exploit various dimensions of variability inherent in real language environments to test how babies and toddlers learn when presented with complex and simple sentences, multiple talkers, and social/communicative cues. I will also address the question of scalability by turning to an important product of early statistical learning — the ability to process language efficiently in real time — which, as it turns out, falls by the wayside when you don’t accumulate language input like a baby.

The (In)Completeness Paradox: Bilingual acquisition and ultimate attainment
Acrisio Pires, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Bilingual language acquisition and bilingual competence have often been argued to show effects leading to instability in bilingual speakers’ competence in one or both languages at play, specifically as compared to monolinguals. This has been argued especially regarding heritage language speakers, child learners of a language that is not the dominant language of the larger society. The competence of heritage speakers is commonly taken to show deficits which have been identified in the literature as evidence of incomplete acquisition and/or attrition of the heritage language. I argue that there are methodological difficulties concerning their formalization arguments for incompleteness (the Incompleteness Paradox). I propose a different perspective on these phenomena, by arguing that the first language grammar of so-called heritage speakers (the grammar of their home language, in the usual case) should not be treated as deficient, but rather as corresponding to independent grammatical systems (I-languages) that are qualitatively equivalent to, yet potentially distinct in different respects from monolingual grammars. I consider aspects of the acquisition of null arguments in Mandarin Chinese by bilingual English-Chinese speakers in light of this proposal.

To pat the bunny or the baby: Cross-modal cue use by caregivers and infants
Amanda Seidl, Purdue University

Much recent work has explored the impact of early infant speech perception on later language. This work has the potential to have great societal impact since it may help to pinpoint early predictors of speech and language delays and disorders (and hence lead to the creation of early interventions). However, the degree to which studies aimed at predicting language outcomes should be limited to examining within the domain of speech alone, as opposed to other factors both internal (e.g., attention) and external to the child (e.g., the input) is still unknown. To wit, natural speech is rarely perceived in a lab, but for young infants occurs most often with face-to-face caregiver interaction and attentiveness. Along with speech cues, these interactions bring a myriad of non-speech cues to the task of language learning which may be exploited by the child and may to a greater or lesser extent impact their language outcomes. In this talk we examine the use of one such cue, touch, by caregivers and by infants. For caregivers, we ask whether caregivers use touch in a way that would help their infants with some basic speech perception tasks such as word segmentation and mapping segmented words to referents. For infants, we ask whether the infant can make use of tactile cues provided by caregivers to help them both to segment the speech stream and to learn word-to-world mappings. In addressing these questions we are not only able to expand the ecological validity of basic speech perception tasks, but also to learn more about how infants may integrate multi-modal cues during the course of language development. Furthermore, this investigation may also help to explain the order of acquisition of lexical items that we see emerging during the first-year of life.
Challenges in the Interpretation of Quantities and Comparison in Language Acquisition
Kristen Syrett, Rutgers University-New Brunswick

Among the challenges a young child faces in language acquisition is determining how to interpret utterances involving quantities and comparison. This task can be particularly vexing, because of the variability in the interpretation of certain lexical items, which depends on the syntactic and semantic context in which they appear. For example, a child who learns that one means "exactly one" will surely be led astray if they expect this meaning to remain consistent across pre-nominal measure phrases, differential comparatives, and environments in which a numeral interacts scopally with a modal. Moreover, knowing which interpretations are licensed in utterances involving quantifiers or comparative constructions relies upon having in place certain abstract mechanisms and representations, which themselves interact with principles of economy and aspects of the context. In this talk, I will present a range of studies illustrating how four- to six-year-olds face these challenges. At times, their ability to access certain meanings seems so sophisticated, it's striking. At other times, their inability to access the correct interpretation is downright perplexing. I will argue that these ups and downs may be predictable, and are best accounted for by appealing to theoretical accounts of these linguistic phenomena.

Children’s Understanding of Regional Dialect Variation
Laura Wagner, Ohio State University

For adults, a speaker’s regional dialect is a rich source of information about that person, suggesting not only where the person is likely to be from, but also supporting a variety of cultural stereotypes. Previous research with infants has found that they can perceive at least some distinctions among dialects, including British and American English (Butler et al., 2011; Nazzi et al. 2000) but paradoxically, preschool aged children appear to have difficulty categorizing talkers into dialect-based groups – including British vs. American English talkers – although they can use foreign accents as a basis for such judgments (Flocia et al., 2009; Girard et al., 2008). This talk will discuss recent studies from my lab examining the ability of pre-school aged children use regional dialect information to categorize talkers into social groups and link them to culturally specific information. I will consider these developing abilities in the context of general language acquisition processes.

Prosody, Production, and Prominence
Duane Watson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Traditionally, linguists have assumed that acoustic prominence, i.e. pitch accenting, is a unitary phenomenon. Prominence in conversation is used by speakers to signal the focus structure of an utterance for a listener. In this talk, I will present evidence from a computational model and a series of behavioral experiments that will demonstrate that prominence is not a unitary phenomenon. Data from referential communication tasks will suggest that the relative prominence that occurs on a word is partly the result of priming in the production system and partly the result of signaling information structure to listeners. Thus, the degree to which a word is emphasized is the result of multiple sources: predictability, information structure, and production processes.

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Your organizing committee is:

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Thank you for coming!