Language Science Colloquium 2018-19

Monday, February 4th
Time: 11:00-12:30 pm
Location: Social Sciences Plaza, Building-B, Room 2214
Lunch provided.

Eve Higby, Department of Psychology, University of Riverside

"The dynamic nature of the bilingual language system"

How does the bilingual mind and brain accommodate two language systems? A common assumption among language researchers is that the native language, once acquired, remains largely the same throughout the lifespan. However, recent work on bilingualism has shown that the native language is much more dynamic than previously thought, demonstrating plasticity of the language system. My work examines both the cooperative and the competitive nature of bilingualism. I will present data from behavioral and electrophysiological studies focusing on two major subsystems of language: the lexicon and the syntactic system. First, I will examine how bilinguals choose the right words in spoken language given that lexical items in both languages are thought to compete for selection. How does this language competition lead to enhancements in cognitive control over the course of second language acquisition? Next, I explore the issue of language facilitation in bilinguals by exploring the role of translation equivalents during word retrieval. In addition, I ask how integrated the syntactic systems are for bilinguals by probing the vulnerability of the syntactic system to undergo change. Results across these studies reveal that bilinguals make use of all the linguistic tools at their disposal to efficiently produce and comprehend language. This work uncovers characteristics of the language system that are difficult to obtain from work on monolinguals – how the language system adapts to various contexts and the demands placed on it and the integral links between language and other aspects of cognition.

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