



Language Science Colloquium 2018-19

Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>

Time: 11:00-12:30 pm

Location: Social Sciences Plaza, Building-B, Room 2214

Lunch provided.

*Stephanie Shih, Department of Linguistics, University of Southern California*

“Catching phonology in the Pokéverse: Cross-linguistic comparisons in sound symbolism”

Sound symbolism flouts the core assumption of the arbitrariness of the sign in human language. The cross-linguistic prevalence of sound symbolism raises key questions about the universality versus language-specificity of sound symbolic correspondences. One challenge to studying cross-linguistic sound symbolic patterns is the difficulty of holding constant the real-world referents across cultures. In this talk, I present a rich, cross-linguistic dataset that addresses the challenges of cross-linguistic comparison by providing a controlled reference ‘universe’: the Pokémon game franchise. Pokémon names are compared across six languages—Japanese, English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Russian. The results show that while languages have a tendency to encode the same attributes with sound symbolism, they crucially also feature differences in sound symbolism that are rooted in language-specific grammar dependence. The Pokémon findings are significant to understanding how phonology interacts with the real world, in the cueing of socioculturally-defined categories.

(This talk is based on joint work with Jordan Ackerman, Noah Hermalin, Sharon Inkelas, Hayeun Jang, Jessica Johnson, Darya Kavitskaya, Shigeto Kawahara, Miran Oh, Rebecca L. Starr, and Alan Yu.)

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