

# LING NEWS

MAY 15, 2008

Department of Linguistics

SPRING ISSUE

## THE FIRST SIGNTYP CONFERENCE (JUNE 26-28)

BY **Harry van der Hulst**

For the last two years (AYs 2006-2007 & 2007-2008) I had a grant from the National Science Foundation (together with Rachel Channon, an independent sign language researcher living in Washington). The goal of our work was to build a database (which we called Signtyp) that would allow us to store phonetic/phonological encodings of individual signs in a variety of sign languages. With such a tool (which will be made available on the web), sign language researchers (ourselves included) can do cross-linguistic, comparative research into resemblances and differences in the phonological properties of different sign languages. Each record in the database is a sign (in some sign language) followed, in a variety of fields a indication of its 'handshape properties', 'movement properties', and so on. The data that we will store in this database are coming from other researchers who have encoded collection of words of specific languages (such as Sign Language of The Netherlands, Japanese Sign Language, American Sign Language etc.) for whatever reason (usually to do a phonological analysis of that language, or to test some specific hypothesis). As might be expected, different researchers have developed different coding or feature systems so our first objective was to develop a general 'ontology' (i.e. set of codes) into which we could 'translate' the different coding systems. Secondly we had to find a sensible format for the database as a whole, coming up with one that combines relational and non-relational techniques. We now have a prototype of Signtyp and are in the processes of converting the data into the signtyp format. A spin-off of our work comes in the form of an article about notation systems (including transcription and writing systems) for sign and speech which will appear in a forthcoming handbook about sign languages.

We had promised the NSF to conclude the project (at least for the time being; we do wish to continue this work and find additional funding) with a conference for which we would invite a number of renowned sign phonology linguists (who we had 'appointed' as our 'panel of advisors' at the beginning of the project) so that we could demonstrate the results of our work. At the same time we wanted this conference to be a kind of state of the art display of current research in sign phonology and phonetics. In addition to inviting our panel members, we also put out a call for papers which resulted in additional talks and poster presentations. The program of the conference is posted in various places in the department and whoever (from within the department) is interested in attending some of the talks, or the whole conference, is welcome to do so (free of charge, except for the meals). We also welcome volunteers who can help us with some of the practical matters just before and during the conference.

*Have a happy  
summer  
vacation!!!*



*Editor:*

**Pei-Jung Kuo**

*Contributing Writers:*

**Jonathan Bobaljik**

**Jean Crawford**

**Harry van der Hulst**

*Photographer:*

**Yi-An Lin**

## FACULTY PROJECT OVERVIEW

BY Jonathan Baboljik

An Integrated Morphosemantics of Agreement (Jonathan Bobaljik and Uli Sauerland, funded by NSF and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation).

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*"In addition to the presenters, UConn was very well represented in the audience."*

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The highlight for our project this past year was the workshop on Markedness and Underspecification in the Morphology and Semantics of Agreement, held at Harvard University, Feb 29-Mar 2, organized in collaboration with Andrew Nevins (Harvard). One of the major aims of the workshop was to stimulate discussion among researchers representing a variety of disciplines (morphology, semantics, typology) and orientations. By constraining the topic rather narrowly, and including commentaries on all ten of the invited speakers, we hoped to foster fruitful exchanges, and avoid simply having a diverse collection of people talking at cross-purposes. The feedback we received from participants and audience members alike was very positive, and we think the workshop was quite successful. It certainly advanced my understanding in these areas.

Members of the NSF project who participated in the MUMSA workshop included Cynthia ('Ellipsis and Markedness'), Uli (commentary on paper by G. Chierchia), Miloje (session chair), and me (commentary on paper by M. Cysouw). Other UConn Linguists in the workshop were Andrea ('On the shyness of the first person: investigations on markedness and underspecification in morphology') and Zhanna (session chair). In addition to the presenters, UConn was very well represented in the audience. In total, more than a dozen members of the department braved a sudden snowstorm to provide a significant UConn presence at the workshop. Thanks to all who came along to make this a success!

Over the course of the year outside of MUMSA, project members from UConn were also visible, presenting project-related work at BLS and PLC (Cynthia) and MIT, Leipzig and Chicago (Jonathan); and at the time of writing Oksana is conducting research related to the project in Russia.

Closer to home, one line of the project research (work on comparatives and superlatives) was highlighted in this semester's "LING 360 – Degrees" seminar, which Yael and I co-taught. A seminar of this sort presented a rare opportunity to move the research forward by allowing for extended discussion of some key ideas, but even more importantly (in my view) in opening up new lines of inquiry in the student papers and presentations. This work nicely complements the ongoing work by project research assistants, including over the course of the past year: (Carlos, Cynthia, Natasha, Oksana and Miloje). There is one year left to run on the NSF and AvH grants, and I'm looking forward to seeing the momentum from this year carried through 2008-2009.



*UConn @ Spring*

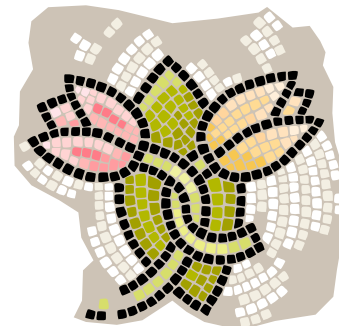
## NOTES

We have the following changes for the coming academic year:

The new ECO5 liaison: **Miloje Despic**

The new Ling Lunch coordinator: **Jeff Bernath**

And thanks to Natasha for doing these two jobs for us in the past academic year!!! ☺



## STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Publication

Aihara, Masahiko. To appear. Two Types of Japanese Yes-No Questions and Their Implications for Wh-licensing. Proceedings of the 17th Japanese Korean Linguistics Conference. CSLI Publications.

Aihara, Masahiko. To appear. (Un)biased Negative Yes-No Questions in Japanese. Proceedings of the 38th Annual Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society. GLSA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V (in review). A Close-Up of Russian N-words. Journal of Slavic Linguistics.

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. (accepted). N-Words and Negative Heads in Russian. Proceedings of FDSL-7

Otaki, Koichi. 2008. The acquisition of numeral quantifiers by second language learners. In Tetsuya Sano, Mika Endo, Miwa Isobe, Koichi Otaki, Koji Sugisaki, and Takeru Suzuki (eds.) An Enterprise in the Cognitive Science of Language: A Festschrift for Yukio Otsu. 217-227. Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo.

Runic, Jelena. To appear. The Acquisition of the Location of Adjectives in the Romanian DP by Serbian Speakers. In Proceedings of the Novi Sad Generative Syntax Workshop. University of Novi Sad, Serbia.

### Service

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. 2008. Organizer of the East Coast Workshop in Syntax (ECO5) meeting at UCONN, March 8, 2008. Participating Linguistics departments: UCONN, UMASS, MIT, Harvard, UMD

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. 2008 Ling Lunch coordinator and volunteer for the panel discussion on teaching at UCONN for the new TAs orientation in January 2008.



## STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Conference Presentations

Cheng, H.-T. Johnny. 2008. Attitude Phrases and the Puzzle of Reconstruction. Paper presented at the 20th North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL). OSU, Ohio.

Crawford, J. and Snyder, W. 2008. On the relationship between causatives and applicatives: evidence from child Sesotho. Presented at the Acquisition of African Languages Conference, Stellenbosch, South Africa, January 21, 2008.

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. 2008. "Phonologically null licensors of negative concord items in the syntax of Russian, Serbo-Croatian and Spanish." Paper accepted for presentation at FASL 17, Yale University, May 9 – 11, 2008

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. 2008. (with Yael Sharvit and Jon Gajewski) "Plural superlatives and distributivity." Poster presented at SALT 18, March 21 - 23, UMASS, Amherst

Fitzgibbons, Natalia V. 2007. "N-Words and Negative Heads in Russian" Paper presented at Formal Description of Slavic Languages FDSL - 7 conference, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 30 November - 2 December, 2007

Otaki, Koichi. 2007. A note on children's acquisition of comparative morphology in English. Presented at the International Symposium of the Consortium for Linguistics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, December 15-17.

Villa García, Julio. 2008. Are Women and Men Treated Differently in the Press? A Quantitative Sociolinguistic Study. Presented at the First Annual Graduate Human Rights Conference: Debates and Dilemmas, University of Connecticut, Storrs, April 19.

Zocca, Cynthia. 2008. "Like French or Chinese? Optional Wh-movement in Brazilian Portuguese" – talk at the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) 2008 Annual Meeting, Chicago

Zocca, Cynthia. 2008. Gender and Markedness" – talk at the Berkeley Linguistic Society (BLS) 34th Meeting, Berkeley University

Zocca, Cynthia. 2008. "Knowing a Language Doesn't Make You a Linguist!" – poster at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Meeting, Boston

Zocca, Cynthia. 2008. "Three Types of Gender Markedness in Predicative Nouns" – talk at the Penn Linguistics Colloquium (PLC), February 2008, UPenn

Zocca, Cynthia. 2008. "Ellipsis and Markedness – talk at the Markedness and Underspecification in the Morphology and Semantics of Agreement Workshop (MUMSA), Harvard University

### Awards and Grants

Villa García, Julio. 2007-2009. "la Caixa" Full Graduate Fellowship. Awarded by the Spanish savings bank "la Caixa", Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain.

Runic, Jelena. 2007-2008. The Outstanding Scholar Program Award, University of Connecticut, Storrs.





## *Linguistics Rules!*

### *Department of Linguistics*

337 Mansfield Road  
Storrs, CT 06269

Phone:  
(860) 486-4229

Fax:  
(860) 486-0197

## **GALANA 2008**

**BY Jean Crawford**

What do exotic places like Honolulu, Hawaii, Montreal, Quebec, and Storrs, CT have in common? They are all hosts of the Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition North America (GALANA) conference! UConn is hosting GALANA 3, and it will take place from September 4-6, 2008. The theme of this year's conference is "Language Acquisition and Cross-Linguistic Variation". Paula Fikkert (Radboud University), James Huang (Harvard University), and Lydia White (McGill University) will be our invited speakers. We received many abstracts for talks and poster presentations, which are currently under review. Notice of acceptance will go out by May 15. Thanks to Carole for all her work on the abstract submission and review process!

Students have already begun preparations. We have formed committees, and Pei-Jung has created a great website (<http://linguistics.uconn.edu/galana3/>). Be sure to look for updates there. Students will continue to work through the summer to make this year's GALANA a success. Anyone who is interested in volunteering for the conference should contact Jean.

*We're on the Web!*

See us at:

<http://linguistics.uconn.edu>

