34th Annual Linguistics Spring Colloquium
Saturday, April 30 2011
8:15 AM – 3:00 PM
ROOM SS-1500
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
[8:15 AM – 9:00 AM] – A light breakfast will be served for morning attendees and presenters.

[9:00 AM – 9:30 AM] – Anaphoric Demonstratives in Spoken and Written Japanese Discourse (Mariko Taki, Applied Linguistics)

This study offers insights into how Japanese anaphoric demonstratives, ko-, so-, and a-, operate in authentic discourse of both spoken and written modes. It attempts to move away from the traditional analysis based on the concept of proximity and applies an English-based interactive framework of Focus introduced by Strauss (1993; 2002). The study shows that the ko- and so-series have different degrees of desired attention that they signal to the audience, with so- as the unmarked series, while the a-series, which prototypically must be Hearer Old in the sense of Prince (1992), lies outside of the Focus framework. These findings are illustrated through an analysis of referents that each demonstrative form marks and with the guidance of previous studies that describe the rules of anaphoric demonstrative use. Furthermore, the findings lead to a factor that applies to all three demonstratives that is at work as speakers and writers produce language: the degree of control the speaker/writer exhibits over the referent in question differs in each demonstrative form. The study brings forth the importance and significance of the role of the addressee with regards to the choices speakers/writers make in using anaphoric demonstratives.

[9:30 AM – 10:00 AM] – Discourse Markers in the University Classroom (Jessica Quinn, Applied Linguistics)

Discourse markers, words generally thought to have no meaning, have been shown to contribute to discourse in a number of ways. Words like ‘well’, ‘right’, ‘ok’, ‘so’, and ‘oh’ actually convey information about the structure, meaning, and interpersonal aspects of the discourse in which they occur. Recent studies have explored a variety of discourse markers in a number of settings, but university classrooms have been largely overlooked. This study examines how university instructors use ‘ok’ and ‘so’ to indicate both the structure of the lesson and their role in the classroom. Three instructors were recorded teaching four different classes so that differences between level, interactivity, and content of the classes and how these factors affect discourse marker use could be examined in greater detail. The results show that instructors use ‘ok’ and ‘so’ differently depending on the interactivity and content of the classes. In virtue of their functions within classroom interaction, ‘ok’ is more likely to be used in more interactive classes, while ‘so’ is used in more lecture-style classes.


Research shows that ESL learners’ understanding of rhetorical structure influences text comprehension and recall. A comparison of TOEFL preparatory readings with university-level ESL composition course readings shows that while simple rhetorical structures are found in TOEFL readings, texts encountered in university-level ESL composition courses have much more complex rhetorical structures.

[10:45 AM – 12:00 PM] – Keynote speech (Dr. Douglas Biber, Northern Arizona University)
Applied Linguist Dr. Douglas Biber has authored and coauthored many works on corpus and discourse analysis, including the 2009 textbook “Register, Genre, and Style.” His research interests include English grammar, sociolinguistics, computational and statistical tools for linguistics, corpus linguistics, and register variation.

[12:00 PM – 1:30 PM] – Break for lunch.
Although there has been some descriptive work on Dzongkha, the national language of the Kingdom of Bhutan, there has been little analytical work on the language. Using Stratal OT (Kiparsky 2000, 2010), a constraint based approach which establishes a framework where the phonology and morphology are interwoven and there are multiple, serially occurring phonologies within the grammar, I have analyzed the different means of complex onset simplification in Dzongkha. The result is that, where a complex onset simplifies through resyllabification of the initial consonant on to the coda of a preceding morpheme, the form is functioning as a single phonological word. In contrast, where a complex onset simplifies through deletion of the initial consonant (where the preceding morpheme is coda-less), the form is functioning as a phrase made up of separate phonological words.

Recent developments in pure dependency parsers (i.e. parsers that build dependency graphs directly) has yielded some of the most accurate parsers available (Nivre 2006, McDonald et al. 2005a, McDonald 2006). All of these parsers are based on discriminative models; in other words, models of the dependence of some hidden information (parse trees) on observable information (words). In the context of natural language parsing, this means that there is no need to learn a grammar in order to produce accurate parses. Using discriminative methods can not only produce parsing models that are very accurate, but can also improve their overall efficiency. In this presentation, I will discuss an implementation of the McDonald parser, a dependency-based discriminative parser, and introduce Structural Support Vector Machines, a type of discriminative learner designed to classify structured objects like graphs and trees. Following this introduction, I will discuss the possibility of applying a transductive method to discriminative dependency parsing. Using a transductive approach, would allow us to train the discriminative model with only a small fraction of the data that would normally be required (Joachims 2002) with minimal loss in accuracy.

A venerable and appealing idea about word meaning is that it emerges from a word’s distribution. “The meaning of a word can be characterized by its distribution” -- Nida and “You shall know a word by the company it keeps.” -- Firth. This talk describes some recent experiments in automatic thesaurus building in which word distributions are used to define word similarity. The resulting notion of word neighborhoods captures semantic, syntactic, and morphological facts.