LING279 Psycholinguistics Seminar
Animacy: Attention, Accessibility, Argument Interactions, Et Al.

Department of Linguistics - UC Santa Cruz - Fall 2019

Description
This seminar will be about animacy in language processing. In linguistic theory the notion of animacy plays a role, either directly or indirectly, in explanations of many patterns -- from lexical organization to morphology to argument realization to syntactic structure, word order, and so on. In cognitive science more broadly, animacy is an important and pervasive topic. The animate-inanimate distinction emerges very early in development. And visual cues to animacy seem to irresistibly recruit selective attention; as do just words whose referents are animate. Indeed some have argued that we perceive animacy directly (Scholl & Tremoulet, 2000).

This raises familiar kinds of question about how (much) do core grammatical mechanisms reference animacy, whether it should be referenced directly, whether it gets encoded as a proprietary linguistic feature, scale, etc. For example, Aissen (2003) shows how patterns of differential argument marking can be modeled with OT principles that translate a prominence scale on animacy into formal markedness constraints. Others have eschewed the formalization of animacy -- or more precisely, the influence of animacy on acceptability -- and have instead suggested we look for “a processing explanation” for the apparent relevance of animacy and prominence (Clemens & Coon, 2018, Minkoff, 2000, i.a.).

The goal of this seminar is to understand what could, and could not, constitute such processing explanations. In psycholinguistics animacy is routinely manipulated as an independent variable, though largely within a few relatively circumscribed domains (active v. passive voice, object relative clauses, and scrambling). We will explore the designs, findings, and implications of those experiments, and see if we can integrate them with more recent findings about memory and attention (“adaptive memory theory”; cf. Nairne et al. 2013).

I’d like to especially highlight emerging research on languages with lots of verb-initial clauses, where animacy is often assumed to play an important role. And, depending on interest, we will think about some new findings on resumptive pronouns.

Contact details

Meetings
Thursdays, 1:30PM - 4:55PM, Stevenson Library 102 (The Cave)
(We will take two 10-minute breaks.)

Instructor
Matt Wagers <mwagers@ucsc.edu>
Office Hours Wed 2:00 - 3:00pm, & by app’t
Materials
The syllabus and schedule will be shared via Google Drive, and PDFs provided there as a courtesy. For asynchronous discussions, you will be invited to a Slack channel. Course participants may upload accessory or supplementary readings for their presentations.

Requirements
For enrollees, your participation will be judged Satisfactory if you fulfill the following course requirements:

Presentations.
Course participants are expected to lead the seminar regularly throughout the quarter, primarily by giving four presentations.

1. **Discussion leader** (x1). A long-format (40 min) presentation of a major paper or papers. Requires carefully reading and leading the discussion around 1 or 2 articles, and likely also reviewing some key background references.
2. **Data digest** (x2). A brief (15 min) “data blitz”-style presentation of 1-3 related experiments. Data digests will follow a stereotypical format and be compiled into a cumulative shared slide-deck.
3. **Paper preview** (x1). A presentation of your seminar paper topic (beginning in later weeks).

Seminar paper.
You are required to write a final paper that connects with the ideas of the course.
- 10-20 pp, single-spaced, 12-pt font. material.
- November 21: submit a 1-pg proposal. Meet with me before then.
- December 12: final due-date
Must relate a theoretical issue in psycholinguistics to an experimental approach (mere empirical curiosity is not sufficient). A design proposal for a series of experiments is acceptable, though it’s much better if you’ve collected some data -- of any stripe; e.g., acceptability judgment, preference judgment, corpus data, etc.

Engaged presence.
Evidence that you have prepared for our weekly meetings -- engaged with the material, come ready to talk about it, question it, relate it to your own interests, etc.

Week-by-week Plan
(v. 1.0, 9/19/2019)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Mtg</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[1]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>[2]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lessons from Perception (&amp; Development?)</td>
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<td>[3]</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Memory and Attention</td>
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Accessibility and production
[4] 4 17 Accessibility and production
[5] 5 31 Accessibility and production, cont’d.
[6] 6 November 7 Relative Clauses
[7] 7 14 RCs cont’d.; Zapotec exp’t results
[8] 8 21 … TBD
[9] 8.5? 26 2:30 - 4pm Project proposals
[9] -- 28 Thanksgiving
[10] 9 December 5 RPs and Animacy

Topic linkages, and readings, negotiable and determined in class.

**Reading Source List**

* denotes a secondary/supporting reading

**Development and Perception**


**Memory and Attention**


**Argument alignment, word order and markedness**


**Relative clauses**


**Varia (Person, Individuation, Noun Classes; TBD)**

Foley & Toosarvandani 2019
Hopper & Thompson 1980