

MaLT 2015

Methods and Linguistic Theories Symposium

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Workshop description

Experimental methods in discourse processing

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Experimental research on language has largely focused on levels of language, which are not at the core of everyday language use, e.g. approaches on lexical retrieval or comprehension of often unusual syntactic constructions. In typical psycholinguistic experiments, people are tested on single isolated words or sentences, which have little to no relation to the situation or context. It has long been believed that this is the best we can do, because of concerns about experimental control and technical limitations. However, in the last years, technical and analytical advancements excelled and opened the stage for experimental research on comprehension and production of more natural language in reasonably controlled settings.

The focus of this two part workshop is on experimental approaches towards the question how people make meaning in natural situations of language processing. First, I will give a comprehensive overview over classical experimental methods such as behavioural measures (e.g. reaction times, memory performance) and eye tracking, but also neuroimaging such as EEG and fMRI. In the second part, I will show you how we can make use of them on a discourse levels like narrative or conversation. Some of the ground-breaking experiments, and several experiments of my own or colleagues will be used as demonstrations.

There will be plenty of room to discuss the general approach and its relevance as well as your own ideas. If you have a related experiment or idea of your own, please contact me beforehand, so that we can include it in the workshop.

The workshop is open to anyone interested in different experimental methods, natural language processing and especially to people who are sceptical towards experimental investigation of situated language. The main goal of the workshop is to provide you with a good understanding of different experimental methods applied in linguistic research, to make you a competent and confident reader of language-related research articles from all disciplines. In addition, I hope to spark some enthusiasm about experimental research on naturalistic language.