Dr. Lise Menn, Professor Emerita, CU Department of Linguistics

Jill Duffield, Ph.D. Candidate, CU Department of Linguistics

Title: Coming to Agreement: The Integration of Hierarchical and Sequential Structure in a Language Production Model

Abstract: What is happening in our brains when we create the utterances that come out of our mouths? What enables us to (usually) find the words we need and to get them in the right places in coherent structures that convey our intended meanings? Classic psycholinguistic models of language production emphasize how hierarchical structure constrains and determines the lexical choices that speakers make while they are creating an utterance. Almost no attention is paid to the role of sequential structure, and how the production of one lexical item in a linear sequence can predict the likelihood of surrounding lexical items. Conversely, computational models that rely on sequential structure make hierarchical structure hard to see, and they sidestep the encoding of meaning. We propose a new model of utterance production that integrates both hierarchical and sequential structure in the process of putting a speaker’s meaning into an appropriate form. The integration of these two types of information is illustrated through subject-verb agreement patterns in spontaneous and experimentally-elicited utterances. We also suggest how the model may be further developed by computational and psycholinguistic methods.