

Workshop ID : 32

Workshop Duration : Workshop - 1 Day

Workshop Title : **Acoustics and Language Variation**

Workshop Leader : Erik Thomas, North Carolina State University

Acoustic analyses have become increasingly important to studies of variation in language over the past few decades. Sociolinguists today who deal with any aspect of pronunciation have to know how to conduct acoustic analyses, and the proportion of studies of variation in pronunciation that utilize acoustic methods has increased inexorably. Moreover, the application of acoustic techniques in sociolinguistics has expanded from vocalic variables to intonation, other prosodic variables as in rhythm and lexical tone, consonantal variables, and even voice quality. Simultaneously, phoneticians and laboratory phonologists have been taking an increasing amount of interest in linguistic variation and have exploited variation for the purposes of showing what sorts of factors can vary across dialects, the importance of subtle variations to explaining how sound change progresses, and how language variation is processed cognitively.

Language variation studies can still benefit from greater integration of cutting-edge, current techniques. Acoustic work (and not just with well-studied variables), social network analyses, and cognitive study need to be knitted together more forcefully. Extensive previous work has focused on one of those three areas in language variation, but far fewer investigations combine the most advanced methods of even two of them, and studies that unite the latest methods of all three are virtually non-existent. Demonstration of the links among these three areas, however, is necessary to show how integral variation is to language and thus to understand language itself.

In addition, previous work has been skewed toward Europe and North America, and societies elsewhere require more study in order to reduce empirical biases. This workshop will welcome presentations both from well-studied parts of the world and from less-studied parts. It will feature a special focus on South African work by Ian Bekker, DaanWissing, and several young scholars. South Africa includes a unique mixture of European-origin English and Afrikaans speakers, numerous African groups speaking indigenous languages, immigrant groups of Indian origin, and the so-called Coloured people, which together provide a diverse window not available in most Western nations.