Ecological Language: A Multimodal Approach to the Study of Language Learning and Processing

Prof. Gabriella Vigliocco
University College London
Date: November 1, 2019 (Friday)
Time: 3:30pm - 5:15pm
Venue: Rm214, Li Dak Sum Building,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

The human brain has evolved the ability to support communication in complex and dynamic environments. In such environments, language is learned, and mostly used in face-to-face contexts in which processing and learning are based on multiple cues both linguistic and non-linguistic (such as gestures, eye gaze, mouth patterns and prosody). Yet, our understanding of how language is learnt and processed - as well as applications of this knowledge - comes mostly from reductionist approaches in which the multimodal signal is reduced to speech or text. I will introduce our current programme of research that investigates language in real-world settings in which the listener/learner has access to -- and therefore can take advantage of -- the multiple cues provided by the speaker. I will then describe studies that aim at characterising the distribution of the multimodal cues in the language used by caregivers when interacting with their children (mostly 2-4 years old) and provide data concerning how these cues are differentially distributed depending upon whether the child knows the objects being talked about (allowing us to more clearly isolate learning episodes), and whether objects being talked about are present. I will then move to a study using EEG addressing the question of how discourse but crucially also the non-linguistic cues modulate predictions about the next word in a sentence. Throughout the talk, I will highlight the ways in which this real world, more ecologically valid, approach to the study of language bear promise across disciplines.

Speaker

Professor Gabriella Vigliocco is Professor of the Psychology of Language in the Department of Experimental Psychology at University College London. She received my PhD from University of Trieste in 1995, was a post-doc at University of Arizona, and after being at University of Wisconsin as Assistant Professor and the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics as a visiting scientist (1999-2000) she moved to UCL.

She leads a team composed of psychologists, linguists, computer scientists and cognitive neuroscientists sharing the vision that understanding language and cognition requires integration of multiple levels of analysis and methodological approaches. The overarching goal of her work is understanding how language and other aspects of cognitive functioning relate to each other.

The main research focus of her research at present is on understanding natural language. This is funded by grants from ERC and ESRC. Professor Vigliocco is also the Director for the Leverhulme Doctoral Training Programme in the Ecological Study of the Brain. The DTP is a 4-year PhD programme providing cutting-edge interdisciplinary training in the study of brain and behaviour in the real-world.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Enquiries
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages. CUHK.
Tel: (852)3943 7911/7025 Fax: (852)2603 7755 E-mail: lin@cuhk.edu.hk
Parking is available – Please contact the General Office at 3943 7911 for parking coupons.