

Semantic/pragmatic universals and variation via crosslinguistic experimentation
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Formal theoretical approaches to semantics and pragmatics have for most of their history tended to focus more on universals than variation, with several notable exceptions in areas such as definiteness, tense, modals, quantificational structures, and expressions of gradability. Similarly, experimental approaches to meaning -both in psycholinguistics and experimental pragmatics- have tended to rely on data from a small number of well studied languages. In this talk I will present three recent studies in our lab that use experimental methodologies to directly probe crosslinguistic semantic variation and the related crosslinguistic variation in available pragmatic alternatives (comparing and contrasting among both signed and spoken languages), highlighting the value to linguistic theory of directly applying insights from semantic fieldwork to experimentation and bringing experimental methodology to semantic fieldwork, and how we have dealt with both linguistic and logistical challenges in collecting this data.