IN THE LOOP: LGCS

Updates from the Department of Linguistics and Cognitive Science Department at Pomona College

LGCS students with Faculty after a department event.

An Update from the Chair

Hello Linguistics and Cognitive Science (LGCS) alums! When I previously contacted you about our Career Speaker Series and Alumni interviews, I was thrilled to get so many responses back, so thank you! Many of you also wrote that you would love to hear about happenings in the department, so we have put together a newsletter to share those with you. Read on to learn more about Professor Megan Zirnstein (our newest faculty member in cognitive science), our Career Pathways project, our Linguistics Mentor program, some of our students' accomplishments and conference presentations, and two alumni's perspectives on conducting research at Pomona, which recently culminated in a publication. I am also excited to announce our new partnership with social media. Please check out the department on our Instagram page, as we are frequently posting happenings in the department: @pomonalgcs.

Now that you are up-to-date on us, we would love to hear more from you. Do you have a key encounter guided by a faculty member, as part of your academic experience? Is there some idea, fact, or domain of knowledge from your time at the 5Cs that unlocked the future for you by dramatically changing who you were, how you saw the world, or the path you took in life? Dust off your memories of LGCS and share them with me at lise.abrams@pomona.edu.

Lastly, if you are returning to Pomona for Alumni Weekend (April 28-May 1), please come by our LGCS Senior Thesis poster presentations and Alumni Reception, and say hello - we would love to see you.

Warmly,
Lise (Abrams), Peter W. Stanley Chair of Linguistics and Cognitive Science

Discovering Life After the 5Cs

By Kat Peterson, SC' 23

The LGCS Career Pathways Project gives the department an opportunity to keep in touch with Ling and CogSci alumni, and follow their post-grad journeys to gain insight into what types of career paths are out there for majors. I started on the project as a volunteer, which allowed me to contact alumni and ask questions like how they became interested in Ling/CogSci, what steps they took in college towards a career, and how the work they currently do is related (or not!) to the knowledge they gained as an LGCS student. Interviewing my first alum was nerve-wracking, but the more I saw interviewing as a chance to learn from someone who has gone through what current students are going through, the more fulfilling and comfortable the experience became. I never thought I'd learn so much from the interviews I conducted; for example, talking to alums exposed me to a variety of degree applications, internship opportunities, and graduate programs I hadn't heard of before. Once I started working on transcribing more and interviewing less, I found that I was still connecting to alumni even though I had never actually talked to them. It's reassuring to hear the similar struggles that alumni go through and how they pull through or pivot to other interests. It's clear that this project is about much more than just seeing what alumni are up to; it's about normalizing undergrad and post-grad experiences, sharing advice, and giving thought to all the doors that an LGCS degree can open. Through the Career Pathways Project, I was able to meet a number of wonderful alumni, consider a range of career pathways, and gain soft and hard skills that I can use for future projects!

LGCS students gather during mentoring hours.

Mentoring in LGCS

By Eliza Grisanti, PO '23

In our first year on campus after virtual learning, each department is combating unique challenges. In the Linguistics major, we want to know: How do we reach students who declared majors during quarantine and wish to find department community on campus? How do we engage students who have only known a pandemic-framed campus where isolated studying can seem the most appealing option? The Linguistics mentoring program aims to provide academic guidance and community by offering students a space to collaborate on coursework with both classmates and students who have taken the course before them. As of January 2022, we have 11 linguistics mentors who host mentor sessions two hours a day, five days a week. Mentor sessions are a hub for intra-course, inter-grade interaction: classmates can work together out of class, and everyone can meet mentors and fellow students across class years. The mentoring program provides space for all students grappling with their Linguistics coursework, including those who may not have had the resources to ask for help before or never had reason to do so. We are excited to see the Linguistics mentoring program continue to forge connections between students throughout this coming year.

THE BEACON LAB

By Prof. Megan Zirnstein

My research lab (the Bilingual Experience and Cognitive Neuroscience or BEACON Lab) has recently started a collaborative project with Dr. Natsuki Atagi and her research team in the Child and Adolescent Studies department at the California State University, Fullerton. This project, dubbed the Heritage Literacy Project, aims to understand how bilingual speakers of heritage languages engage when reading narrative excerpts from books ranging from Antoine de Saint- Exupéry's "The Little Prince" to Haruki Murakami's "The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle." Heritage bilinguals are those who often grown up speaking one language in the home, but then switch to using another language more frequently outside the home, such as at work and at school. Student collaborators in my lab (Alex Werner '22, Sarah Wang '23, and Lucy Pan '24) and Dr. Atagi's lab will be investigating whether

Prof. Zirnstein instructing during one of her courses.

"THE HERITAGE LITERACY PROJECT, AIMS TO UNDERSTAND HOW BILINGUAL SPEAKERS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGES ENGAGE WHEN READING NARRATIVE EXCERPTS"

heritage bilinguals engage with reading differently in their heritage and non-heritage languages. Data collection will be occurring both online (via Zoom) and in person with eye-tracking methods starting this year. We hope to further our understanding of how a diverse set of literacy experiences, such as early exposure to story-telling, affects eye movement reading comprehension, physiological engagement, and recognition memory when reading for pleasure.

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Alumni Continue Researching

*By Kristine Chang, PO '21 and Pengbo (Ben) Hu, PO '21*

Back in 2019, we began a project during Dr. Lise Abrams' office hours. At the time, we both worked in her lab studying the tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) phenomenon (those moments when you know a word but just can't remember it). As Mandarin speakers, we wondered: how might Mandarin extend our understanding of the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon, and therefore language retrieval in general? With Dr. Abrams' guidance, we subsequently came up with an experimental design that built on

Dr. Abrams' previous work on English TOTs. Over the past three years, we've flown to China to collect data from over 100 participants, spent the pandemic writing and re-writing a manuscript, and finally published an article in Language, Cognition and Neuroscience in early 2022. Fast forward to now, we're both pursuing different paths: Pengbo is getting his Master's degree in philosophy, while Kristine works as a User Experience Researcher at a software company. However, the process of our project with Dr. Abrams, as well as delving into the field of cognitive science, has influenced the ways in which we think and learn with our work now. Pengbo currently studies

how scientists create models and the implications of scientific methods. Our project on Mandarin TOTs has helped Pengbo draw from his own experiences doing scientific research and apply it to his current studies. Meanwhile, Kristine's biggest takeaway from her research with Dr. Abrams and Pengbo is the importance of asking the right questions, with an intentionally set scope and level of specificity. At work, this mindset helps her take questions from her team and drill down into the most important factors to research before a software product is launched.

You can check out at our article here: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23273798.2022.2033803!
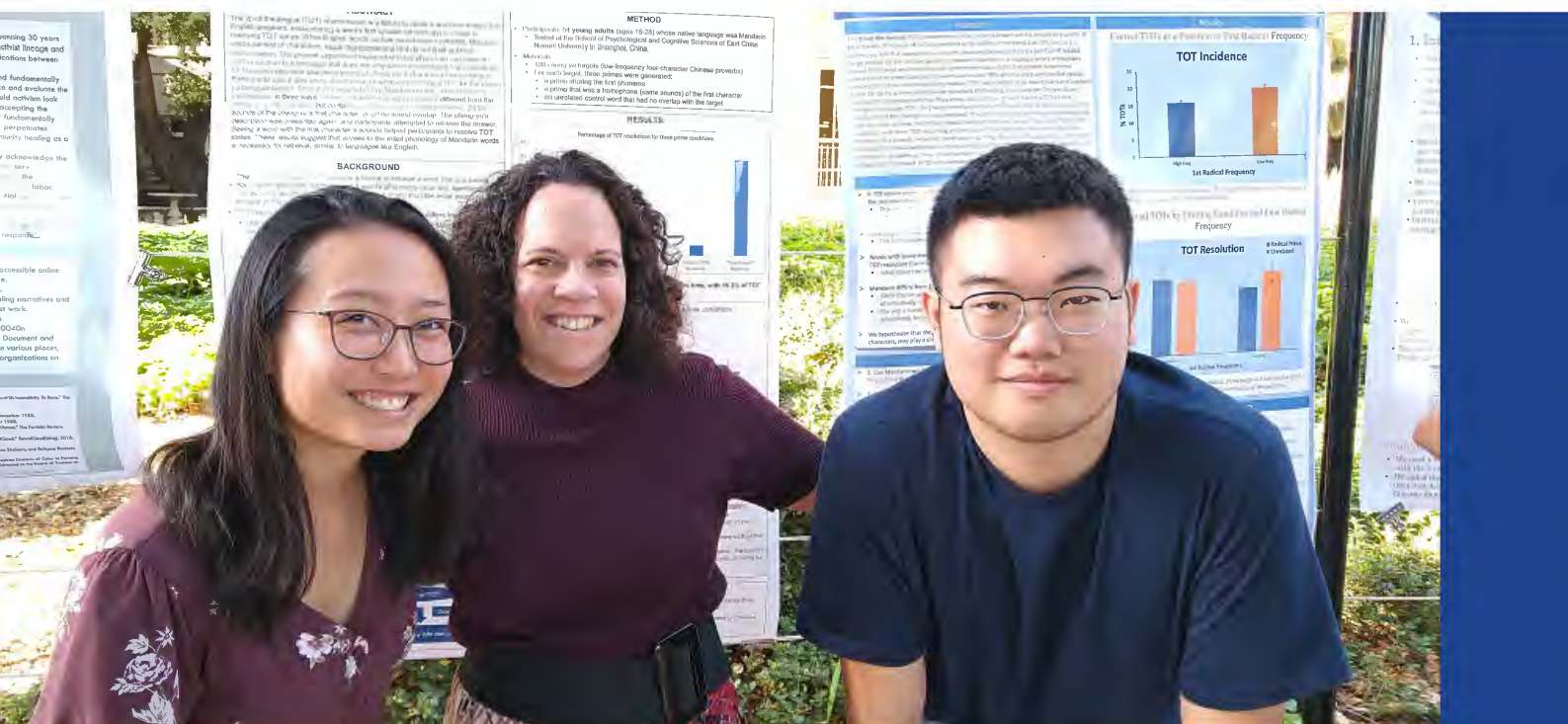
Krtistine, Prof. Abrams, and Ben at the Pomona SURP presentations.
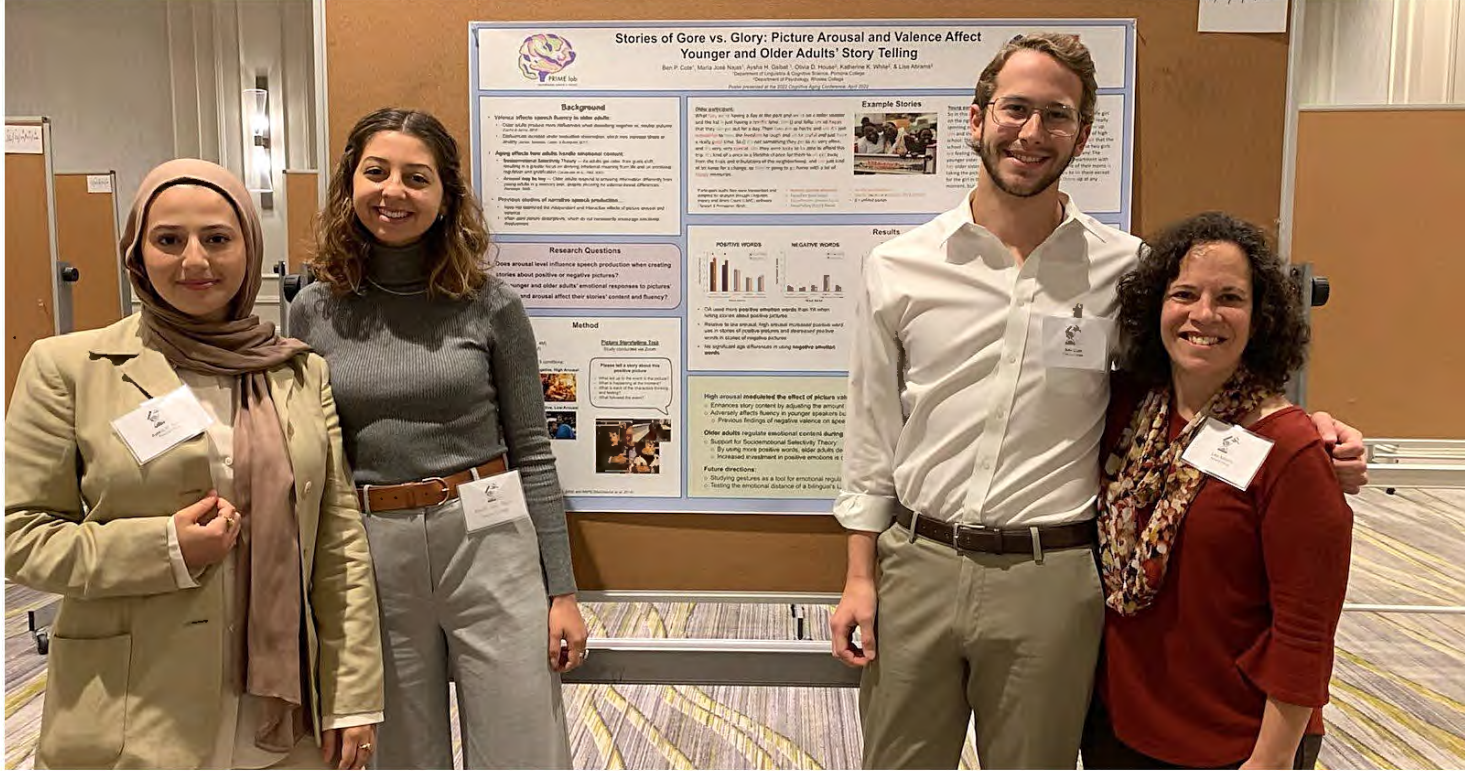
Aysha, Majo, Ben, and Prof. Abrams at the 2022 Cognitive Aging Conference.

Students Present at the Cognitive Aging Conference

By Prof. Lise Abrams

Three cognitive science majors, Ben Cote (PO '23), Aysha Gsibat (PO '24), and Majo Najas (PO '24), presented their research at the 2022 Cognitive Aging Conference, which was held April 7-10 in Atlanta. The biennial Cognitive Aging Conference is the premier conference for presentation of research about aging and cognition based on experimental cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience of aging, human factors and ergonomics, and longitudinal studies of age-related cognitive change. These students have been working as research assistants in Professor Abrams's PRIME (Psycholinguistic Research in Memory) laboratory on a research project involving storytelling about pictures and the degree to which speakers' emotional responses to the pictures affect their choice of words and their fluency in producing them. Conducted over Zoom, younger and older adults were shown pictures and asked to create a story about each picture, including information about what led up to the event in the picture, what is happening at the moment, what each of the characters is thinking and feeling, and what followed the event. Analyses of the stories revealed that older adults regulate emotional content during speech production differently from younger adults, shown by older adults using more positive words, more first-person pronouns, and more present- and future-focused words. Older adults were also less disfluent than younger adults, especially when describing highly arousing, negatively-valenced pictures. Contrary to other research emphasizing declines in speech production with healthy aging, these findings suggest that older adults' increased investment in positive emotions is beneficial for producing language and may contribute to them telling more enjoyable stories.

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mellon Interdisciplinary Humanities Initiative Fellowship, Summer 2021

Kat Peterson, Linguistics, SC '23

Last summer, I was fortunate enough to work on an independent research project titled "At a Crossroads: Investigating Spanish-influenced English, English-influenced Spanish, and Latinx Identities in SoCal's San Gorgonio Pass Area" with the mentorship of Professor Franny Brogan. My research looked at the ways in which language, culture, and identity intersect. I interviewed bilingual heritage speakers of English and Spanish and compared their usage of specific sound features to answer research questions surrounding how speakers' perceptions of their own identities is reflected in their language use. In this way, I considered how cross-linguistic feature borrowing can be a function of fluctuating and multiplicitous identities that are shaped by personal experiences and language ideologies.

Primary Author

Nathaniel Braswell, Cognitive Science, CMC '23

I work under Dr. Felipe Brigard at Duke, who assigned me to a project on retention of episodic counterfactuals. Over the summer, I designed the early stages of a survey for one of the lab's first ever fully online experiments. This fall, I was named primary author and have been designing and coding a survey autonomously. I just finished survey design and am almost ready to start running participants!

Two Conference Presentations, Fall 2021

*Ellen Wang, Cognitive Science, SC '25*

I presented on my gap year independent research project, "Video Games to Live and Learn Better Through COVID-19" at the Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research 2021 and the 2021 Sigma Xi Annual Meeting & Student Research Conference. I gave a live oral presentation for SCCUR and submitted both an oral presentation and a poster for the Sigma Xi conference.

Presentation at the Linguistics Society of America Conference

Elyse Endlich, Linguistics, PO'22 and Prof. Robin Melnick

On Friday, January 7th, senior Linguistics major Elyse Endlich and Prof Melnick presented their joint work at the 96th annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in Washington, D.C. Representing their larger research team at the conference, their talk looked at bot activity within the broader vaccination discourse on Twitter, including the range of pro/anti-vax stances taken, and linguistically, how bots differ from humans in how they may craft or express these stances. You can see their slides at tinyurl.com/lsa22vaxbots.

Put your LGCS knowledge to the test!
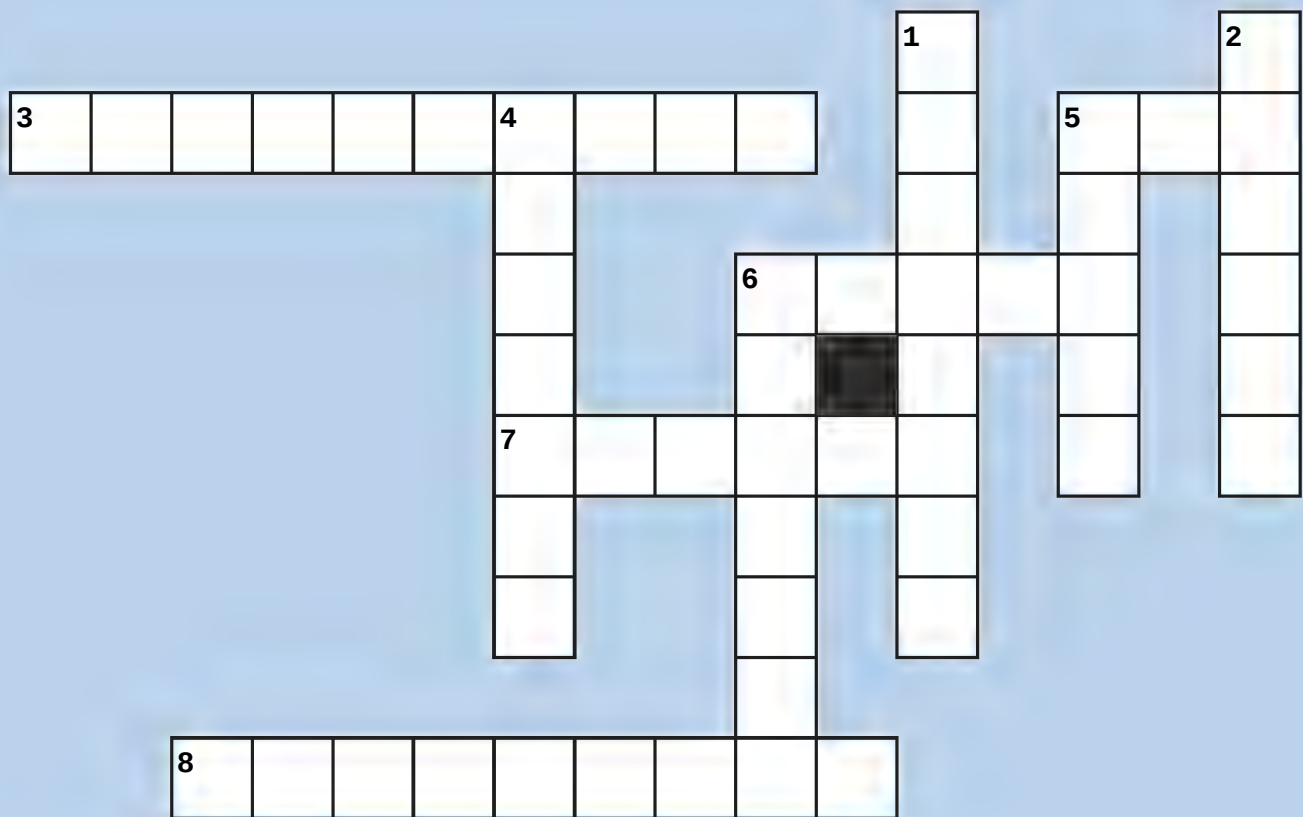
Across

3. An interruption in the smooth flow of speech, as by a pause or the repetition of a word or syllable.

5. A temporary inability to retrieve a known word.

6. Duplicitous, accepting, inventive, insightful morpheme (or is it?)

7. A grayish or reddish granular cell that is the fundamental functional unit of nervous tissue.

8. Using or able to use two languages especially with equal fluency.

Down

1. Velar and alveolar nasal in pronunciation of -ing, seesaw and teeter-totter, omicron and delta

2. The delay in reaction time between automatic and controlled processing of information.

4. The location of our wonderful LGCS suite.

5. Graphical, hierarchical representations of sentence structure.

6. Electronically readable bodies of "real-world" language in use.

Department of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at Pomona College