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*"On the role of experience and evidence: Experimental investigations"*

In this talk I present a series of psycholinguistic experiments exploring how we interpret linguistic expressions involving different kinds of subjective experiences. It has been noted that some subjective expressions trigger an Acquaintance Inference, i.e., that the speaker has direct firsthand experience with the object of predication. So, if someone says 'This cake is delicious,' we infer that they have tasted the cake. Our work explores three facets of the Acquaintance Inference, with the aim of exploring how it interfaces with other linguistic and cognitive phenomena. First, is the Acquaintance Inference influenced by the nature of the experience – namely, its sensory modality? Subjective experiences in different sensory modalities differ in perceived subjectivity (e.g. vision is argued to be more 'phenomenally objective' than taste or smell) and in how the relevant perceptual experience is accessed (e.g. vision is a distal sense; taste is a very proximal sense). We explore whether and how differences between sensory modalities – as signaled by adjectives and verbs – influence the strength of the Acquaintance Inference. Second, we test whether the Acquaintance Inference influences how we interpret another dimension along which a speaker's experience can vary – namely its (in)directness. We do this by investigating a language with evidential marking, Korean, which allows us to test consequences of direct, hearsay and inferential evidential markers on how we interpret sentences describing subjective experiences. Third, we ask whether properties of the speaker reporting their firsthand experience (e.g. wine experts or meteorologists vs. laypeople) influences how we interpret subjective language, and if so, what the implications are for the status of the Acquaintance Inference. Put together, these experimental investigations point to a highly context-sensitive process, yet one that is constrained in principled ways by semantic and real-world factors.