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Race, Culture, and Language: A SPARK-Sponsored Symposium

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Overview

In this Symposium, we seek to highlight ongoing research in the cognitive sciences that addresses issues of race and cultural perception and bias, as well as linguistic diversity. These research questions are critical to ensuring that our theoretical understanding of different cognitive processes encompasses the diversity of the world we live in.

Part 1: Race and Culture

In the first half of the symposium, there will be two speakers discussing the perception of race and culture, and the impact of that perception on the cognitive processes of bias and attention.

The Neuroscience of Racial Bias

Dr. Jennifer Kubota, Associate Professor, University of Delaware, USA Currently and historically, there exists an inequitable and unfair division of burdens and rewards based on social group membership. Major barriers that contribute to these disparities include prejudice and stereotyping. In this talk, I will focus on neural mechanisms that give rise to these disparities and may mitigate them, drawing from research in cognitive science, social psychology, and neuroscience. In the first part of the talk, I will review the neuroscience of racial bias, emphasizing that race is processed quickly and in a similar manner to other salient and emotionally laden stimuli in our environment. I will then conclude with a discussion of how meaningful interracial contact may diminish racial bias and shape how individuals perceive social injustice.

Does Culture and Race Shape Social Attention?

Ronda Lo, PhD Candidate, York University, Canada We created a novel fully online, multi-face gaze-cueing task to investigate whether cultural background (East Asian vs. Euro-Canadian participants) and race (Asian vs. White foreground faces) impact gaze-cueing. When foreground and background faces gazed in mismatched directions, East Asians experienced a gaze-cueing effect with Asian foreground faces but not with White foreground faces, suggesting an own-race bias. Euro-Canadians did not exhibit an own-race bias. To reduce noise in our online reaction time task and to replicate Study 1, Study 2 will be conducted in an online, Zoom-directed format with a larger sample size.

Part 2: Language

In the second half of the symposium, there will be two speakers discussing linguistic diversity through the lens of heritage speakers and word etymology.

A heritage speaker by any other name: Diversity in speech fluency

Onur Özsoy, Doctoral Researcher, Leibniz-Centre General Linguistics (ZAS), Germany, with Frederic Blum, Master's Student, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany Heritage language research carries a bias by design: Heritage speakers are defined as such because of where they live rather than how they cognitively perform. They are compared to monolinguals who are also not homogeneous across speakers. This reproduces nativespeakerism and monolingualism. Our focus object is speech fluency in a semi-naturalistic narration corpus. We explore the variation between and within groups using Bayesian Linear regression. By focusing on variation across rather than between groups, our study-design destigmatizes prevalent nativespeakerism and questions common research practices. This approach allows us to unravel the diverse cognitive nuances in heritage, mono- and multilingual speakers.

On the bidialectal nature of English

Dr. Arturo Hernandez, Professor, University of Houston, USA Word etymology has been found to differentiate between registers of English language use. The current talk will present data that look at word etymology's effect on lexical access in English. The findings support a bidialectal view of English in that Germanic words serve as the base of lexical processing during childhood, whereas Latin-based words fill in the lexical space across adolescence and into early adulthood in native speakers. L2 speakers, on the other hand, appear to acquire English via more advanced Latin-based vocabulary relative to native speakers. These results carry implications for theories of word recognition and the

processing of lexical items in populations that come from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Acknowledgments