

The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

***Most vs. the most in languages where
the more means most***

Friday, May 4, 2018

1:45 PM

Location: HUM 1 - Room 210

Abstract:

This paper focuses on languages in which a superlative interpretation is typically indicated merely by a combination of a definiteness marker with a comparative marker, including French, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, and Greek ('DEF+CMP languages'). Despite ostensibly using definiteness markers to form the superlative, superlatives are not always definite-marked in these languages, and the distribution of definiteness-marking varies across languages. Constituency structure appears to vary across languages as well. To account for these patterns of variation, we identify conflicting pressures that all of the languages in consideration may be subject to, and suggest that different languages prioritize differently in the resolution of these conflicts. What these languages have in common, we suggest, is a mechanism of Definite Null Instantiation for the degree-type standard argument of the comparative. Among the parameters along which languages are proposed to differ is the relative importance of marking uniqueness vs. avoiding determiners with predicates of entities that are not individuals.