Linking sociolinguistic variation and strategic action with game theory and video games

Heather Burnett (joint work with Gabriel Thiberge)
LLF & Université Paris Cité

In this presentation, we present new formal and experimental methods to investigate the link between language and human behavior, in particular, the relationship between sociolinguistic variation and strategic action. Much research in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology has shown that people take into account sociolinguistic variants (grammatical alternatives that are used by different subgroups of a speech community (Labov 1972)) in deciding how to act in a strategic context; in other words, people act differently towards others depending on how they talk. This is a very general phenomenon, but it has been most closely studied in the context of linguistic discrimination, i.e. the observation that speakers of non-standard linguistic varieties are often treated worse by people in positions of power than those speaking standard/prestige varieties (see Baugh 2017, Craft et al. (2020), among many others). In this talk, we present a formal model of linguistic discrimination building on recent approaches to social meaning in game-theoretic pragmatics (eg. Burnett 2019, 2023) and then we test this model using an experimental paradigm based on video games.

References