

CENTER FOR COGNITIVE SCIENCE

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Wednesday, September 19, 2001

280 Park Hall
North Campus
2:00 pm –3:30 pm

“The Representation of Spatial Structure in Spoken and Signed Language”

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Linguistic research to date has determined many of the factors that structure the spatial schemas found across spoken languages. It is now feasible to integrate these factors and to determine the comprehensive system they constitute for spatial structuring in spoken language. This system is characterized by several features: It has a relatively closed universally available inventory of fundamental spatial elements that are combined to form whole schemas. It has a relatively closed set of categories that these elements appear in. And it has a relatively closed small number of particular elements in each category, hence, of spatial distinctions that each category can ever mark.

An examination of signed language shows that its structural representation of space systematically differs from that in spoken language in the direction of what appear to be the structural characteristics of scene parsing in visual perception. Such differences include the following: Signed language can mark finer spatial distinctions with its inventory of more structural elements, more categories, and more elements per category. It represents many more of these distinctions in any particular expression. It also represents these distinctions independently in the expression, not bundled together into "pre-packaged" schemas. And its spatial representations are largely iconic with visible spatial characteristics. The findings suggest that instead of some discrete whole-language module, spoken language and signed language are both based on some more limited core linguistic system that then connects with different further subsystems for the full functioning of the two different language modalities.

**Refreshments will be available
Everyone is welcome to attend!**

For information please call the Cognitive Science Office at (716) 645-3794 or check
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/cogsci>