Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Is Phonetic Uniformity Phonologically or Socially Grounded?

Dr. Josef Fruehwald

Thursday, February 6, 2020
4:30 PM – 6:00 PM
B-243 Wells Hall

Diachronic Parallel Shifts are sound changes that fall outside the kind of naive physics models of chain shifts. Rather than vowels bumping and pulling against each other in a vowel space, sets of vowels all move together in parallel. At first, it is tempting to say that what unites these vowels together is a common phonological representation, connecting parallel shifts with what Chodroff & Wilson (2017) have called "Target Uniformity." While this would be a victory for uniting inquiry into sound change and laboratory phonology, the situation is complicated by the fact that these vowels moving in parallel are also often correlated in their social evaluation (Watt 2000). At first glance, it is not clear how to disentagle these two sources of correlation. However, in this talk I will attempt to do just that, drawing upon data from the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus. By factoring out as many social influences as possible, I find that while strong correlations in some parallel shifts fall away, others remain just as strong, meaning a Target Uniformity account is a plausible one for some phonetic changes.