Practical information

- **Office hours:** Monday, 5–6pm
  - Or by appointment. Please send me an e-mail.

- **Office:** 32-D972
  - It is at Stata Center.
  - When going to my office, make sure you are on the Dreyfoos tower!
Some things about me
I am from Brazil

Before you ask: my parents are immigrants from China

I speak Brazilian Portuguese (BP)

Obvious question: why Brazilian Portuguese?
My honest answer:
- There are differences between European Portuguese and BP.
- But I don’t know whether they are enough to classify BP as a separate language.

Ethnologue’s answer: it’s a dialect.
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Ethnologue’s answer: it’s a dialect
- I am starting my fourth year at MIT.
- My pronouns: *she/her/hers*
  - A resource you may find useful: https://medium.com/trans-talk
- I am a syntactician.
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I am a syntactician.

- Basically, this means that I try to understand the internal structure and the building of sentences.
Some things I have worked on
Let’s start with English:

(1) a. The dogs seem to have eaten watermelon.
b. It seems that the dogs ate watermelon.
c. The dogs seem that ate watermelon.
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c.   *The dogs seem that ate watermelon.
Brazilian Portuguese:

(2) Os cachorros parecem ter comido melancia. ‘The dogs seem to have eaten watermelon.’

(3) Parece que os cachorros comeram melancia. ‘It seems that the dogs ate watermelon.’
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Brazilian Portuguese:

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(3) Parece que os cachorros comeram melancia. 
   seems that the dogs ate watermelon
   ‘It seems that the dogs ate watermelon.’
Brazilian Portuguese:

(4) Os cachorros parecem que comeram melancia.
    the dogs seem that ate watermelon
    ‘The dogs seem to have eaten watermelon.’

- Recall the English ungrammatical example:
  (1c) * The dogs seem that ate watermelon.

- Noteworthy: the string in (4) is ungrammatical in European Portuguese.
Brazilian Portuguese:

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Why should we care?

More modestly: why do you think I cared?
Recall what we saw in class:

- Is language something that is formally (e.g. explicitly by our care takers or in a school) taught to us?
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- Is language something that is formally (*e.g.* explicitly by our care takers or in a school) taught to us?
- No: our knowledge of language seems to be **innate**.
Some suggestions that this is true:

- We have knowledge that is not taught to us:
  
  (5) Massa-fucking-chusetts

- We also have ‘negative knowledge’:
  
  (6) * Ma-fucking-ssachusetts
  (7) * The dogs seem that ate watermelon.
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Arguments from language acquisition:

- It is universal, regardless of education.
- Children acquire language early, in comparison with skills that can be considerably simpler.
- Children produce utterances that are not part of the adult grammar

(8)  

a. It colds my bottom.  
b. Mommy, can you stay this open?  
c. I’m gonna just fall this on her.  
d. I’m singing him.

makes my bottom cold  
make this stay open  
make this fall on her  
making him sing
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Takeaway

Language is an innate capacity that every individual of the human species possesses.
Recall the contrast:

(1c)  * The dogs seem that ate watermelon.

(4)  Os cachorros parecem que comeram melancia.
    the dogs  seem  that ate  watermelon
    ‘The dogs seem to have eaten watermelon.’
There is some knowledge that is innate and which every human being possesses. This would explain the universality of language acquisition in the human species.

But: if there is an overarching linguistic knowledge common to the species, how could we also explain the differences between particular languages?
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But: if there is an overarching linguistic knowledge common to the species, how could we also explain the differences between particular languages?
This is a tension that linguists are constantly trying to deal with.

- Our theory of the human capacity for language is informed by what we know of particular languages.
  - But it cannot be a close reproduction of these languages, otherwise we miss generalizations.

- Our analyses of very specific phenomena found in particular languages cannot lose sight of this overarching language faculty.
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More English data:

(9)  a. Rosa believes them to be wonderful.
    b. Rosa believes that they are wonderful.
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Construction #2

More English data:

(9)  
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  b.  Rosa believes that they are wonderful.
More English data:

(9)  a. Rosa believes them to be wonderful.
    b. Rosa believes that they are wonderful.
    c. i. Rosa believes them that are wonderful.
        ii. *Clearer example:* Rosa believes John that is wonderful.
More English data:

(9)  
   a.  Rosa believes them to be wonderful.  
   b.  Rosa believes that they are wonderful.  
   c.   i.  *Rosa believes them that are wonderful.  
        ii.  *Clearer example: Rosa believes John that is wonderful.
A note on *them* vs. *they*:

- These are 3rd person plural pronouns.
- The choice between *them* and *they* depends on the syntactic position.
  - Subject:
  - Object:

- This is called **case**. Languages like Turkish, Russian, Hindi, Basque (a.o.) have case morphology distinctions that go beyond pronouns.
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A note on *them vs. they*:

- These are 3rd person plural pronouns.
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  - Subject: *they* \textit{NOM}inative
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A note on *them vs. they*:

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  - Subject: *they* NOMinative
  - Object: *them* ACCusative

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Now consider Mongolian, another language with richer case morphology:

(10) Bat changaar **nokhoi** gaikhaltai gej khelsen.  
Bat loudly dog.NOM wonderful that said  
‘Bat said loudly that dogs are wonderful.’
(11) Bat **nokhoi-g** changaar gaikhaltai gej khelsen.  
Bat dog-ACC loudly wonderful that said  
‘Bat said loudly that dogs are wonderful.’

*Almost literally: ‘Bat said *them* loudly that are wonderful.’*
Bat nokhoi-g changaar gaikhaltai gej khelsen.
‘Bat said loudly that dogs are wonderful.’

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*Almost literally:* ‘Bat said **them** loudly that are wonderful.’

- Compare with the English example:

(9b)  * Rosa believes **them** that are wonderful.

- Even though *dog* in (11) is a subject, it is marked with accusative (and not nominative) case.
- This is not a possibility in English
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- Compare with the English example:

(9b) * Rosa believes them that are wonderful.

- Even though dog in (11) is a subject, it is marked with accusative (and not nominative) case.
- This is not a possibility in English
This is another example of the tension between:

- trying to account for specific differences between languages
- but without forgetting that there is an innate overarching knowledge underlying particular languages
The causative data in Child English (8) is from:

The Mongolian data is due to my consultants.

Data from BP is my own, though first documented and analyzed in:

The absence of sentences like (4) in European Portuguese is reported here: