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"A great part of the work of a philosopher consists, or at least ought to consist, in a struggle against language." -Frege, 1924

"Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joint labors of grammarians, and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive science of language?" -Austin, 1956

Research topic

Words often express relational properties. When a word is in a sentence, the relations it implies are sometimes associated with grammatical dependencies. But in general they are not. Grammatical valence is divorced from conceptual valence, to put it in a slogan. Most of my research is about when and how implied relations do matter to grammatical structure, given this divorce. How does structure in sentences relate to structure in the thoughts we communicate in using them? I pursue this question through semantic and syntactic analysis of argument relations, explicit and putatively implicit, as well as through studies of their acquisition by infants, and online comprehension by adults. The idea that some arguments are implicit relates to a guiding interest in the division between semantics and pragmatics.

Research areas

Semantics: verbs, events, thematic relations, resultatives, implicit arguments, pragmatics
Philosophy: events, implicit content, philosophy of linguistics
Syntax: argument structure, complex predicates, syntactic theory, categorial and tree-adjoining grammars
Psycholinguistics: acquisition and processing of argument relations
Languages: Sinitic, Turkic, Tibeto-Burman, Igbo

Papers and presentations

Book: [Arguments in Syntax and Semantics](#) (2015) [[Amazon](#)], Cambridge University Press, "Key Topics in Syntax" series

Experimental projects

Transitivity of Sentences and Scenes in Early Language Development, [NSF BCS #1551629](#), with [Jeff Lidz](#)
Students: [Laurel Perkins](#), [Tyler Knowlton](#), [Mina Hirzel](#)
Past students: [Angela He](#), [Alexis Wellwood](#), and [Rachel Dudley](#)
Do toddlers expect transitive clauses to describe certain kinds of events? What sort? To answer this, we need to know both their perception both of transitive clauses, and of scenes we might describe with them. In this project we engage these questions, and direct our attention on two interesting cases. Transitive clauses that seem to describe their event as having three participants, such as "Lee stole the truck," and transitive clauses where the object has been questioned, such as "What did Lee steal?" Reports on this project have been presented at BUCLD38, 40 and 42, PLC28, IASCL13, and CUNY29 and CogSci 2016. [PLC Proceedings paper](#), along with the [BUCLD poster](#) and the [PLC slides](#).

'Submarine' (with [Ellen Lau](#), Michael McCourt and [Jeff Green](#))
Concerns the online comprehension of PRO in adjunct clauses, especially rationale clauses controlled by implied 'agent' of a short passive (as in Two outfielders were traded to acquire a better pitcher). [Here](#) is a paper on some initial experimental results, and [here](#) is one developing some grammatical background for our studies.

[My teaching](#)

[My CV](#)