



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Second Language
Acquisition & Teaching

Graduate Interdisciplinary Program

SLAT COLLOQUIUM SERIES

January 30, 2026

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm AZ time

**Hybrid Colloquium (see below
for location information)**

**Distributions and intonation, but not faces, shape bilingual
language learning in adults**

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Sarah Phillips, Ph.D.

University of Arizona

**In-person location: Education
Building, Room 240**

Zoom location:

<https://arizona.zoom.us/j/83003857819>

If you have trouble with the Zoom
location, email
GIDP-SLAT@arizona.edu.

Bilingual learners rely on implicit, perceptible cues from their input to differentially acquire two languages. What are the cues that support the acquisition of two languages simultaneously? Statistical learning studies demonstrate a strong reliance on tracking the distributions of linguistic elements, such as phonemes in word segmentation, during language learning (e.g., Saffran et al., 1996; Austin et al., 2021). Linguistic discrimination studies suggest that intonation, the changes in pitch that occur across multiple speech segments, may play a role as well (e.g., Vicenik & Sundara, 2013; Chong et al., 2018). However, many bilingual processing studies invoke visual cues, such as faces (e.g., Blanco-Elorrieta & Pytkänen, 2017), to signal a target language, suggesting that non-linguistic social cues may also support bilingual learning. I will present a study that maximizes the chances of learning two artificial languages by presenting consistent distributional cues while manipulating the presence/absence of intonation and face cues. The results suggest that adults: (1) rely on distributional cues; (2) are influenced, but not dependent, on intonational cues; and (3) ignore face cues during bilingual learning. From this, research in my lab will continue to explore how intonational and distributional cues interact when differentially acquiring two languages simultaneously.



Dr. Sarah Phillips is an Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Cognitive Science, and SLAT. Before coming to the University of Arizona, she completed her Ph.D. in Linguistics at New York University and her postdoctoral training in Neurology at Georgetown University. Dr. Phillips's research seeks to develop linguistically-inclusive, neurobiologically-grounded models of language development and language processing using behavioral measures and neuroimaging.