# Exploring the Automaticity of Speech Perception and Adaptation

Rachel Sabatello[1], Shawn Cummings[2], & Florian Jaeger[1]
[1]University of Rochester, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences
[2]University of Connecticut, Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences

## Background

Despite spoken language being highly variable, listeners can often understand newly encountered talkers when hearing them speak for the very first time. Variation in speech presents a unique challenge for cognitive processing that is solved seemingly automatically: Our brains learn how talkers speak, and then apply this information to construct expectations about speech they encounter in the future. This process often occurs without the listener even noticing. However, this phenomenon presents the question of **how automatic is speech perception adaptation?** Are we constantly processing any speech we happen to hear in our environment? In this study, we will explore the automaticity of speech perception and adaptation when participants' available attentional resources are limited. To achieve this, we will expose listeners to two talkers speaking simultaneously, and test the effects of **directing the listener's attention to *one talker*** on the listener's **ability to adapt to *both talkers*.**

## Hypothesis

We hypothesize that speech perception adaptation is contingent upon attention. **If there are limits to the automaticity** of speech perception, then we expect listeners will adapt their perceived categorical boundary to **align better with the speech of the talker they are attending to** compared to the unattended talker.

## Predictions

*Predicted results if adaptation **is not** automatic:*

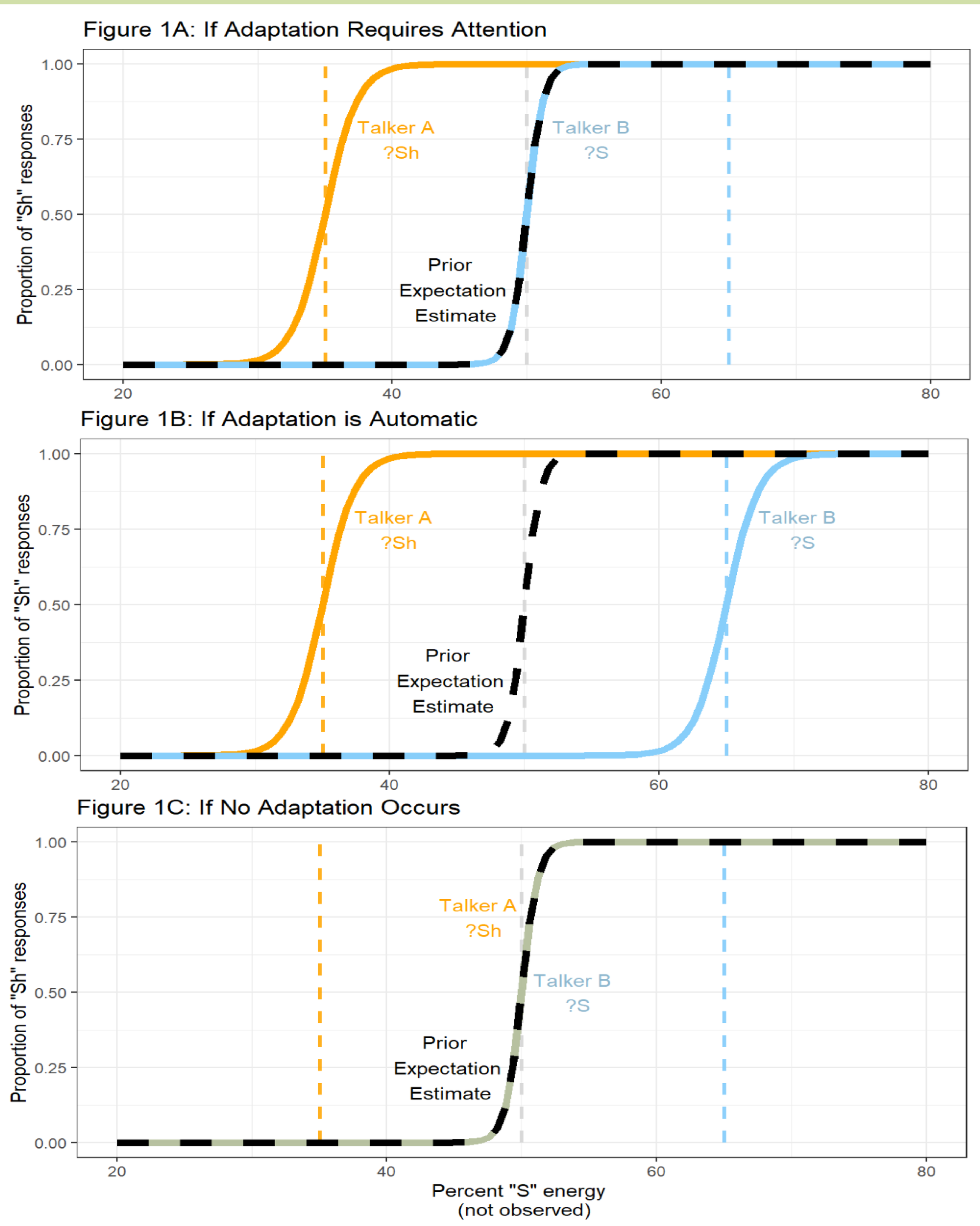
*Adaptation is found **only** for the attended talker.*

*Predicted results if adaptation **is** automatic:*

*Adaptation is found for **both** talkers*

*Predicted results if there is **no** adaptation to either talker:*

*Simultaneous exposure to two talkers could disrupt the necessary attention to adapt to **either** talker*




*Figures 1A, 1B, & 1C: Graphical representations of listeners responses to the asi-ashi test continuum during the Test Phase. As the percent of /s/ energy in the stimulus increases, the more likely participants are to respond "ashi" (sh), rather than "asi" (s). If perceptual adaptation is dependent on attentional resources, we anticipate listener' adjustment to the unattended talker will be constrained (Figure 1A).*

## Implications

A listener's perceptual boundary **changing more to fit the attended talker's speech** than the unattended talker's speech would suggest there are **limits to the automaticity of speech perception**. Conversely, complete adaptation to both talkers would suggest that humans automatically adapt their perception to any speech in their environment.

## Design

*In this study, we will be measuring listeners' perceptual adaptation to two simulated talkers' S-Sh production.*

S-Sh sounds exist on a continuum, spanning from "s" as in "Sock" to "sh" as in "Shock." Earlier research suggests that listeners' adaptation to S-Sh production is **talker-specific,** meaning that listeners adjust their perceived boundary between S-Sh for each talker (Kraljic & Samuel, 2005). In contrast, listener's judgement of other sound categories can be influenced by and applied to multiple talkers. **This quality of how the S-Sh is perceived could allow us to simulate two distinct talkers with different S-Sh productions during the same experimental exposure** (Cummings & Theodore, *accepted).*

## Exposure Phase

### Critical Trials

Our critical stimuli are created from 40 recordings of S/Sh words, each **spoken typically (S, Sh)** and **accented (?S, ?Sh)** (Kraljic & Samuel, 2005).

All recordings were processed using Praat (Boersma, 2002) to simulate the words being **spoken by a male talker** and **a female talker** (Luthra et al., 2021).

Gender will be counterbalanced such that **each experiment will have a male and a female talker:**

These words were split in half to **create two sets of words representing two talkers**: 10 unique S words and 10 unique Sh words were allocated to each talker.

**Talker A**

| Sh | S |
|---|---|
| Ambition | Pregnancy |
| Machinery | Democracy |
| Brochure | Embassy |
| Official | Legacy |
| Crucial | Reconcile |

**Talker B**

| Sh | S |
|---|---|
| Initial | Parasite |
| Beneficial | Obscene |
| Negotiate | Medicine |
| Commercial | Tennessee |
| Parachute | Peninsula |

*Figure 2: The lists of s and ʃ words that will be produced in Talker A's voice (left) and Talker B's voice (right).*

**Talker A and B recordings were paired to create Materials A and B.** Half of the participants will hear the words in Materials A with the simulated accent (?S, ?Sh), and the words in Materials B without the accent (S, Sh). The other half of the participants will hear the inverse.

The horizontal word pairings in Materials A & B were then spliced together to **create stereo audio files** where one talker is played in the left ear, and the other in the right ear. Ear assignment will be counterbalanced across participants.

### Filler Trials

Each experiment consists of **80 total exposure trials**, including **20 critical** trials and **60 filler** trials. During filler trials, one talker will say a word and the other talker will say a nonword. The attended talker will have a 50% chance of saying a nonword.

### Paradigm

Participants will be instructed to **attend to either the female talker or the male talker.** They will then perform a series of 2-option forced-choice lexical decision tasks, in which they will hear a recording and then select **if the attended talker said a word or a nonword** (*see below*).


*Figure 4: A static representation of how a participant will progress through a trial. Each trial will begin with the participant hearing an audio file, and then selecting either "Word" or "Nonword".*

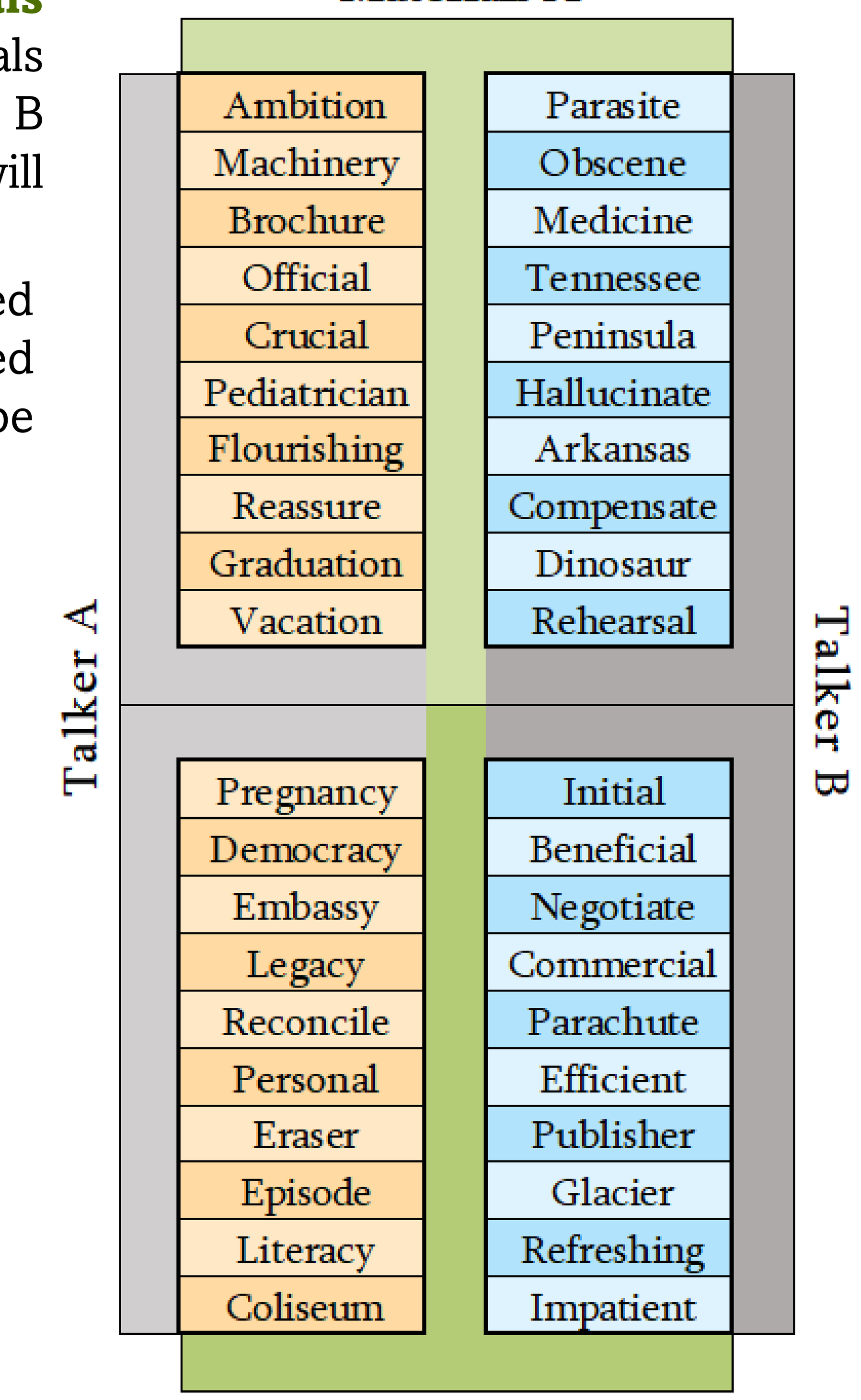



*Figure 3: A visual illustrating how the words spoken by Talker A and Talker B will be paired to produce two sets of materials.*

## Test Phase

After the Exposure Phase, participants will hear the asi-ashi test continuum in each talker's voice. This continuum is used to **gauge when listener's shift from perceiving a sound as "Sh" to "S"** (*see right*). Each trial will only play a recording from a single voice at once. Participants will select if the audio they heard was "asi" or "ashi" for each trial to produce results like the predictions, shown to the left.

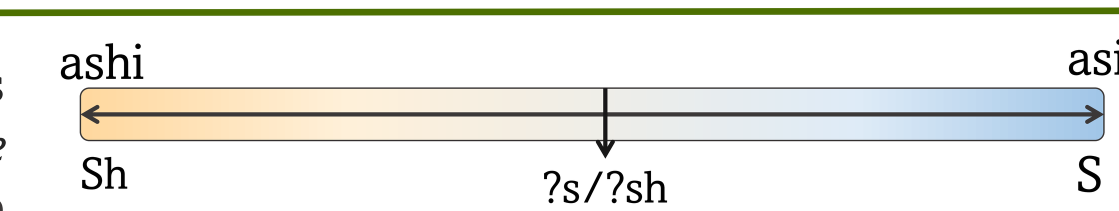



*Figure 5: "S" and "Sh" sounds exist on a spectrum, where "asi" can be altered to sound like "ashi" by changing the percentage of "S" energy.*

## References

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