

Tel Aviv University
School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies,
Department of Linguistics

THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 07/05/2026

16:15-17:45

Webb 103

Amit Almor, University of Southern California

Spatial Bases of Linguistic Reference

How do comprehenders track reference across discourse, and why do languages so often prefer reduced forms such as pronouns over repeated names? This talk examines the cognitive and neural bases of referential choice and interpretation, with a focus on the repeated name penalty: the finding that repeated names are often harder to process than pronouns when the referent is already salient. I will present work arguing that this effect reflects memory-based interference rather than a simple linguistic rule, and show evidence that similar principles extend across modalities and languages. I then turn to a broader proposal: that reference tracking recruits spatial mechanisms even when discourse is not overtly about space. Converging behavioral, cross-linguistic, and neuroimaging findings suggest that spatial attention and parietal brain systems contribute to maintaining and updating discourse referents. I will close by discussing recent causal evidence from brain stimulation and current work on individual differences and fMRI localizers, with the goal of clarifying how memory, space, and language interact in real-time comprehension.

Click [here](#) to see the colloquium program.