

The architecture of LabPhon: towards building a more diverse and inclusive community

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Diversity in linguistic research and theoretical approach determines how we understand the architecture of grammar. In this project we review some of these approaches, and the pivotal role that Laboratory Phonology had to the development of linguistic theory. Furthermore, we argue that to fully understand the architecture of grammar, we need to go beyond traditional theoretical approaches and analyze the architecture of our own community. To do so, we collected a list of all publications listed for the LabPhon journal in the Scopus citations database [1] and found that there is an overrepresentation of academics and languages of the Global North. We suggest practical actions to be adopted by our community to build a more diverse and inclusive field. We argue that researchers of the Global South can greatly benefit the development of linguistic theories by providing their expertise and intuitions. We hope to start a discussion on how social issues pretraining the nature of our own community affects what is defined as Laboratory Phonology.

Different theories give different emphases on how linguistic research should be conducted. Generative grammar [2, 3, 4] argues that syntax is at the center of the architecture of grammar. Within this approach, it is generally agreed that the sound component is divided into phonology, which is concerned with abstractions, and phonetics, which is concerned with the physical and articulatory properties of speech sounds. LabPhon, on the other hand, argues about the importance of empirical research to the understanding of grammar¹ [5]. Who then is responsible to define what LabPhon is? We analyzed 152 papers published at the LabPhon journal from 2015 to 2023². We categorized the languages studied and countries of affiliations by region; Global North and Global South [6]³. As seen in Table and Figure 1, we find an overrepresentation of the Global North, both in the languages studied, and the affiliated institutions of the paper's authors. While the people of the Global South make up 82.1% of the world's population, only 37% of recent LabPhon publications study their languages. Similarly, while roughly 65% of the world's institutes of higher education are located in the Global South [7], only 10.1% of LabPhon publications have at least one Global South affiliation. These trends are observed in first language acquisition research [8].

We argue that this underrepresentation has harmful effects. Firstly, it is harmful to the academics of the Global South, who struggle to be represented in the academia of the Global North. Secondly, it is harmful to linguistic research, whose accuracy depends on the empirical representation of the wide linguistic diversity of the world. Languages of the Global North, which share many similarities, are not representative of this diversity [9]. This study is a call for increased diversity in LabPhon publications, and to start discussion as to how systemic issues affecting research and researchers may be circumvented at LabPhon. We then call for: (a) a quota for research from the Global South; (b) accessibility measures to enable participation from academics from the Global South, such as hybrid conferences, and editing assistance for publishing in the English language. With such little representation from the Global South, we are lacking on important ideas and data to the development of phonology theories. However, by adopting the measures suggested here, we can work towards the development of a more diverse and inclusive community and consequently strengthen our field.

¹ That is not to say that generative research is not conducted within LabPhon. Empirical data can also be used within a generative approach.

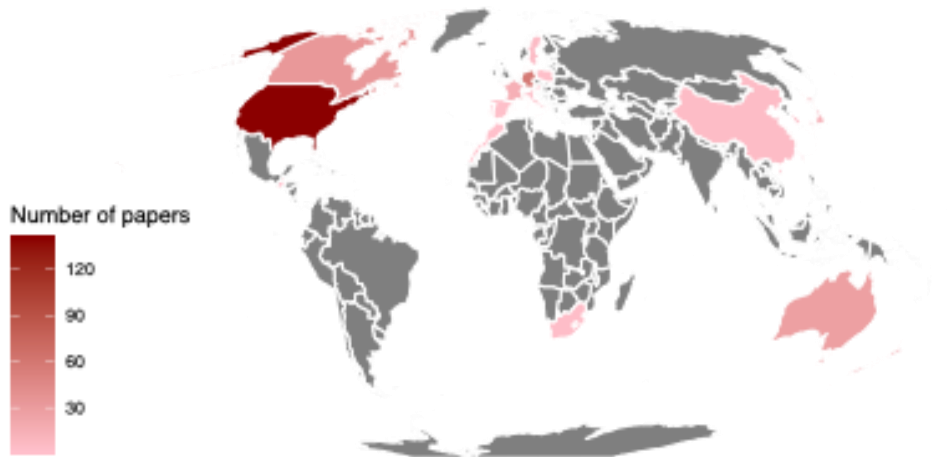
² All the data and analyses are available at <https://github.com/labphon-inclusion/labphon-inclusion>

³ We use the definition of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development of a “developed country” for the Global North, and “developing country” for the Global South.

Table 1: Affiliation of authors and languages analyzed by the papers published by the Journal of the Association for Laboratory Phonology from 2015-2023. Since the discrepancies between Global North and South are very straightforward, we are reporting the percentages and judged inferential statistics not to be necessary.

		Affiliation	
		Exclusively from the Global North	At least one from the Global South
Language	Exclusively Global North	75	0
	At least one from Global South	32	12
	Total	107 (90%)	12 (10%)

Figure 1: Number of papers published at the journal plotted for each country



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