Listeners’ Choices

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Theoretical framework
Matching problems

• Marriages: brides and grooms
• Kidneys: donors and recipients
• Clerkships: clerks and judges
• Articles: authors and journals
• Speech: speakers and listeners
Speech as a matching problem

• Speakers and listeners have preferences among each other, and they act on those preferences
• History, geography, etc. structure their choices
• The state can also try to affect the process
• Result: a speaker-listener matching
Limits on individual choice

- *Structural limits*: speakers and listeners have incompatible goals
- *Internal limits*: “choice” is always a bit of a fiction
- *External limits*: honoring individual preference is not the only important value
Important scarcities

- **Bandwidth**: not all speech can reach everyone
  - Much less significant on the Internet
- **Attention**: the brain is also bandwidth-limited
  - Affects listeners much more than speakers
- **Information**: no need to listen if you already know
  - Listeners operate from comparative ignorance
Illustrations
Lessons
General takeaways

• Pay more attention to the structure of conflicts among speakers and listeners
• Pay more attention to listeners’ agency
• Attention is the new bandwidth
Questions?