Happy New Year from the Child Language Lab!

Connect with us on Facebook to keep updated with events and information all year round.

Dear all,

Welcome to the new year! I hope you have had a wonderful festive season, and are settling in well to 2015. We are very excited about what the new year will bring. We are wrapping up our current data collection and getting everything in place for some new and exciting studies which should begin taking participants in a few months. Please review our current studies below, and if you are able to join in any of them and help us collect our final data samples, please let us know!

We still need many more 18 month-olds, as well as 2 year-olds, and Mandarin-speaking children who have been learning English for a couple of years. It is exciting to be able to include studies on languages other than English so please spread the word to your Mandarin-speaking friends!

Our final quarter of 2014 was full of conferences and events, including a workshop hosted here at Macquarie on Prosody, as well as conferences in Boston, New Zealand, Melbourne and Newcastle. It is wonderful to learn about all the new and exciting research endeavours, and to have more and more of our lab members presenting their research to new audiences.

Thank you again for your continued support and involvement. We look forward to seeing more of you in 2015!

Best regards,

Distinguished Prof. Katherine Demuth, Lab Director, ARC Laureate Fellow
Lab Director awarded 'Distinguished Professor' title

Lab director Katherine Demuth has been awarded the university's highest academic honour, the title of Distinguished Professor.

Distinguished Professor Katherine Demuth is internationally recognised for her groundbreaking research into child language acquisition. The work she leads at the Child Language Lab occupies a key niche at the interface between basic and applied research.

Katherine’s contributions to the advancement of knowledge and education include a strong commitment to mentoring students and junior academics, and collaborating widely to address language learning and its problems.

As an active member of the Australian Hearing Hub, Katherine's research explores aspects of bilingual language learning, as well as language development in children with hearing loss and language delay/specific language impairment.

Katherine is committed to excellence and demonstrates an enduring determination to support the important role of language in social development, health and well-being. Her outstanding contributions to this field were recognized by the award of an Australian Laureate Fellowship in 2014, and now this esteemed title awarded by the university.

Researcher Michael Proctor receives multiple grants for phonology research

Sign up online!

All of our current studies are listed on our website.

Read more and sign up today!

How do children learn to discriminate sounds?

URGENTLY SEEKING 18 and 24 MONTH-OLDS

Take part and receive $30 cash!

Let your friends know!

When do children understand plurals?

30-31 month-olds

Bring your 2 year old in and receive a fun balloon animal! Children watch a 5min video while their gaze is recorded with an eyetracking camera.

How is English grammar learnt?

3 yr-olds, Mandarin

We need 3 yr old Mandarin speakers to join Dr Nan Xu's study! Children must speak only Mandarin at home, and be enrolled in English-speaking daycare.

Beyond words: learning to use intonation

5.5-6.5 yr-olds
Meaning isn’t all about the words you use - it’s also the way you use them! We want to find out how children are using words. Take home a $40 Coles/Myer gift card!

**Processing Speech Input: Monolinguals**

**7.5-11 yr-olds**

How do Australian-English-speaking children process ungrammatical speech? Our EEG study will watch what your brain does when you hear grammatical and ungrammatical sentences.

**Processing Speech Input: Bilinguals**

**9-11.5 yr-olds, English learners**

Exciting EEG study for Mandarin-speaking children acquiring English as a second language (L2 learners).

Please register your details if your child is a native Mandarin speaker with 1-3 years exposure to English.

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Child Language Lab researcher Dr Michael Proctor has been awarded the ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award for his project *Solving the puzzle of complex speech sounds*.

This project will use state-of-the-art articulatory methods to investigate speech sounds that fall into the 'l' and 'r' family of consonants ('liquids'), which are amongst the most difficult to master, both for children learning their first language and for learners of a second, posing a significant challenge for remediation of speech errors and for effective pedagogy in language learning.

Dr Proctor has also been successful in obtaining an ARC grant as Chief Investigator for the project *Kaytetye and Prosodic Theory*.

This project addresses a central question about language: How well do we understand the structure of syllables and words? The project aims to examine the endangered Australian language Kaytetye, the unusual word and syllable structure of which suggests that models of syllable and word structure may require significant revision.

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**Conversations with Researchers**

**Kiri Mealings in the spotlight investigating classroom acoustics**

**Hui Chen describes her early language acquisition research**
What would be an ‘elevator pitch’ of your research area?

Open plan classrooms have recently become popular in the UK, Europe, and now Sydney. These classrooms can have up to 200 children in the one area without any walls between the classes, so they are subject to high levels of noise. My research investigates the acoustics (i.e. reverberation/echo, noise levels, and how loud the teacher’s voice is compared to the background noise levels) of open plan primary school classrooms. I am interested in how the acoustics of these classrooms affect young children’s ability to hear their teacher/classmates and to learn, compared to children in quieter enclosed classrooms.

In layman’s terms, what is the wider impact of your research?

I am hoping the results of my research will help us better understand what classroom designs are most appropriate for learning. As children need to learn many new concepts in the early years of primary school, it is very important that they are able to hear and comprehend what their teachers are saying. Our studies show that high levels of noise result in children misperceiving or completely missing what their teacher has said. This is especially the case for children seated at the back of the class. Additionally, high noise levels can lead to increased stress levels, fatigue, and vocal health problems in teachers. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we understand what classroom designs are best for the students and teachers, and whether or not open plan classrooms are suitable learning spaces for young children.

Read the full interview here >>

What is your area of research?

I am a PhD student working at the Child Language Lab. I am currently using eye-tracking technology and acoustic analysis to investigate early language acquisition in toddlers.

Who do you take into your study?

I have been focusing on testing 18- and 24-month-old children who have been raised in English monolingual environments, where the English is Australian-accented English.

Why is the accent important?

Australian English has quite unique vowel sounds, and children can be very sensitive to these differences from a young age.

What exactly are you investigating?

I am looking at whether these young children can hear the differences between different vowel sounds, for example the long vowel in boat against the short one in bot. I am then looking to see what capabilities they have in terms of articulating these different sounds, considering that children can not always produce the same speech sounds as adults.

Why is this important?

This study helps us to understand what children can perceive and produce right at that early age where we start to see speech emerging. This is very important for informing language theories, as well as for clinical and pedagogical applications.

Hui still needs many more 18- and 24-month-olds for her study, so please let your friends know or sign up today!

Recent Events

Prosody Workshop brings researchers together

The use of stress, tone, and/or intonation

CLL students take People’s Choice Awards

In October, the Department of Linguistics
varies widely across languages, and is important for separating words within speech, learning vocabulary and sentence structuring rules, and using languagefunctionally in conversation. Using prosody correctly in everyday speech is critical to becoming a competent speaker of any language.

In December, Distinguished Professor Katherine Demuth, Professor Mark Johnson, and the Centre for Language Sciences hosted a successful public workshop which brought together researchers working on various aspects of stress, tone and intonation to discuss how these prosodic cues are exploited by learners, and put to use in language comprehension and production.

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It was a wonderful showcase of talent, with over 20 presentations across the course of the day, covering multilingualism, brain processing, clinical tools for hearing aid users and more. CLL members Pragati Vandikal Masuki and Sithembinkosi (Thembi) Dube took home the People’s Choice Awards for their presentations on music and language in the brain, and brain processing of ungrammaticalities in English.

To complete her thesis, Thembi still needs more Mandarin-English bilinguals. Read more and sign up <<here>>

Promoting collaboration and effective leadership

Collaboration was the order of the day at the Women, Management, Work conference held in November. Organised by Macquarie University, the conference brought together leaders from university, industry, and government to share their expertise and ideas of how to support collaboration and effective leadership in the workplace.

The Child Language Lab values collaboration, and is well positioned in the new Australian Hearing Hub building to join with other researchers and industry to investigate issues of child language development in greater depth. Lab coordinator, Katherine Revius, valued the dynamic workshops and insightful presentations and was left feeling very inspired about new collaborative opportunities for the CLL in 2015.

To discuss collaborative opportunities, we welcome your email at ling.cll@mq.edu.au

Thank you for visiting us at The Essential Baby and Toddler Show!

Child Language Lab researchers and staff had a great time connecting with families at The Essential Baby and Toddler Show in September.

It was very inspiring to meet so many inquisitive and interested families willing to donate their time to be part of our studies. Some of you have already come in and completed one of our studies, for which we are very grateful! We hope to see more of you as you continue to come and visit us, and we continue to develop new studies for new age and language groups.

If we don't have a specific study for your age or language group, you can still help us out by sharing our information with your friends, family, and social groups. Please let us know at ling.cll@mq.edu.au if you would like advertising materials to share around.