

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

How do we learn new words?

Date: April 17, 2012 (Tuesday)
Time: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Venue: Room 624, Knowles Building, HKU
Speaker: Professor Brendan Weekes
Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences
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The University of Hong Kong

Learning new words is a requisite skill for language development ⁽¹⁾. Indeed, the acquisition of a new word leaves a neural signature on the brain that is evident throughout the life span ⁽⁴⁾. We know that learning new words draws on multiple cognitive processes including attention, lexical-semantic knowledge and verbal short term memory. Recent studies show that the capacity for serial order memory may be the critical component of verbal short term memory that predicts new word learning in monolingual and bilingual children and adults ⁽²⁾. Such findings can be taken as support for the serial order hypothesis of new word learning. An alternative hypothesis is that executive functions - specifically attention and cognitive control - play a necessary role in new word learning particularly for bilingual speakers ⁽³⁾. Data from neuroimaging studies suggest a dynamic interaction between serial order processing and attentional focus in the learning of new words for bilingual speakers which has pedagogical implications for learning expert words in English by native Cantonese speakers who are studying at the University of Hong Kong.

1. Liu Y.Y., Hao, M.L., Hua, S., Tan L-H. & Weekes, B.S. (2008). Age of acquisition effects on oral reading in Chinese. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 15(2), 344-350.

2. Majerus, S., Poncelet, M., van der Linden, M. & Weekes, B.S. (2008). Lexical learning in bilingual adults: the relative importance of short-term memory for serial order and phonological knowledge. *Cognition*, 107, 395-419.

3. Majerus, S., Belayachi, S., De Smedt, B., Leclercq, A.L., Martinez, T., Weekes, B.S. (2008). Neural networks for short-term memory for order differentiate high and low proficiency bilinguals. *NeuroImage*, 42(4), 1689-713.

4. Weekes, B.S., Chan, A., & Tan, L.H. (2008). Effects of age of acquisition on brain activation during Chinese character recognition. *Neuropsychologia*, 46(7), 2086-2090.