

Departmental Seminar

Word Learning in Bilingual Children

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. | August 13, 2018 (Monday)

Rm 813, 8/F, The Jockey Club Tower | Centennial Campus | The University of Hong Kong



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Abstract

In a 21st-century super-diverse world, young children are likely to speak different first languages which are not the majority language of society. For some children, preschool is one of the few environments where they experience this majority language. A pressing issue encountered by preschool staff is how to communicate with these children and how to help these children acquire the majority language they need for a successful school entry. My research seeks to understand how monolingual and bilingual children utilise different strategies to learn words and look at how preschool staff communicate with children in a preschool setting. These will help us identify and develop strategies that preschool staff can use to foster children's development of the majority language. In my talk, I will first talk about how monolingual and bilingual preschoolers learn words from speakers of different languages through mutual exclusivity and the acceptance of lexical overlap. Using a fast-mapping task, I found that both monolingual and bilingual preschoolers are sensitive to the linguistic environment around them and can adapt their word learning strategies to cope with the demands of different learning situations. Then, I will talk about an observational study on whether and how preschool staff in a UK setting communicate differently with monolingual preschoolers and preschoolers with English as an additional language (EAL). Preliminary analysis shows that receiving shorter utterances is associated with EAL preschoolers' improvement in English, whereas monolingual preschoolers' improvement in English is associated with receiving longer utterances, suggesting that ability-appropriate scaffolding is beneficial for children's language development. I will then talk about how the findings of these studies can inform the development of strategies for supporting the English language development of EAL children in a preschool setting.

~All are Welcome~