

Hello again!

We at the Warwick Research with Kids (Wa.R.Ks) group would like to say thank you to everyone who has shown interest and support in our research in 2016. The Wa.R.Ks group was created by a team of lecturers and researchers from the Department of Psychology and together we research different areas of cognitive development, language and communication. Our research would not be possible without the generous support of local families who participate in our studies through their schools and nurseries and in our on-campus lab space.



Meet the team



**Professor Sotaro
Kita (Director)**



**Dr Stephanie
Archer
(Researcher)**



**Suzanne Aussems
(PhD Researcher)**



**Dr Kate
Messenger
(Researcher)**



**Disha Depala
(Research
Assistant)**



**Anitha Mohanan
(Research
Assistant)**

What we've been up to...

Dr Stephanie Archer is a member of the Communication and Development Lab (CDLab). She specialises in speech perception and language development in infants. Stephanie has conducted four studies in 2016. One study showed 12-14-month-old babies are sensitive to sound symbolism: Infants think that words with rounded vowels (e.g., *mulolo*) go with curvy objects and that words with unrounded vowels (e.g., *teekaykay*) go with angular objects. Knowing this might help babies to learn other words too.

A second study investigated whether 9-18-month-old babies use pitch for word learning. Babies watched large and small objects on a screen while listening to words with either a high or low pitch. Stephanie expected that infants would look longer at small objects when they hear high-pitched words and longer at large objects when they hear low-pitched words. She's just begun the analysis of this study so stay tuned!

A third study looked at the different aspects of a mother's speech, directed at 14-16-month-old babies. Stephanie thinks that mums say more to their infants than they realize by using intonation (voice pitch, loudness, speech rate). We are still gathering data for this study, and hope to present the results to you in 2017 – please get in touch with us if you are interested in taking part!

Sadly, Stephanie has left our lab to start a new job at the University of Calgary, Canada. Fortunately, she will continue to study language development in infants in Canada, and in her absence Disha Depala and Anitha Mohanan will help finish her studies in the United Kingdom. Stephanie collaborates with researchers from different English-speaking countries to seek out how different dialects of English produce differences in the ways mothers speak to their babies. We hope to present to you the first results from her fourth study with 18-24-month-old babies soon.



Suzanne Aussems is also a member of the CDLab. Working towards her PhD degree, she specialises in cognitive development in 3-year-olds. Suzanne ran two studies in local nurseries and in the CDLab in 2016. One study showed that hand gestures produced by an adult can focus children's attention on what is important. In a memory task children watched videos of people doing silly walks. Suzanne found that moving her hands in a way that resembled the walks in the videos helped children to remember *who* did *what*.

Suzanne's second study focused on the role of gestures in word learning. Again, 3-year-olds watched videos of people doing silly walks, but this time the walks were labelled with a verb (e.g., marching, creeping). She found that producing hand gestures prepares three-year-olds for learning verbs. Young children often assume that verbs have something to do with the person that is carrying out the action. But, when you depict characteristics of the action that you are labelling with your hands (e.g., wiggling your fingers to depict walking), this focuses children's attention on what is important and helps them to acquire the true meaning of a verb.

Suzanne will continue to study the effects of hand gestures on word learning in 3-year-olds. She would like to express her sincere gratitude to all the families who have visited the lab to take part in her studies in 2016, and she hopes that many more will follow in 2017 – please contact us if you would like to be involved!



In the Language Development Lab (LDLab), Dr Kate Messenger studies how and when children learn to put words together to speak and understand sentences.

In 2016, Kate has been carrying out some sentence repetition studies with 3- and 4-year-olds in the LDLab and in local nurseries: This project investigates how the language children hear affects the way they use language immediately after, which tells us how children learn about how to construct sentences from hearing what adults say. This year we've been looking at how these effects interact with words - are children more likely to repeat sentences when they can reuse some of the same words? The answer seems to be yes! Hearing different sentences helps children to produce different types of sentence particularly when some of the words are the same. We will finish this study in 2017.

Kate has also been carrying out a study in the LDLab which looks at 5-year-old children's comprehension of sentences – as they're listening, can they work out what type of sentence they are listening to and predict how it will end? This study will help us understand what knowledge of language young children have and use whilst listening. We hope to recruit more 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds to take part in this study during the next half term – please contact us if you are interested in being involved!

Finally, Professor Sotaro Kita (Director) would like to thank you again for your great support throughout 2016, on behalf of all members of the Warwick Research with Kids Group. We are very excited to meet new families in the new year, and we certainly hope to see some familiar faces too! Please follow us on the social media below if you are interested in receiving updates about child research throughout the year. Our next newsletter will be published in June 2017. We wish you and your little ones a merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year!

Sotaro Kita

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