



Inside this issue:

<i>Bilingual Study</i>	1
<i>Verb Learning Study</i>	2
<i>Book Review</i>	2
<i>Call for Volunteers</i>	2
<i>Attitudes towards obesity</i>	2
<i>Understanding basic sentences</i>	3
<i>Learning from others</i>	3
<i>Children's musicality</i>	3
<i>Too much information!</i>	4
<i>Why we contact you—and why we don't!</i>	4

Welcome to the January edition of the Child Development Unit Newsletter. As new research starts and we have new colleagues expanding our team, we are keen to keep parents informed of both the projects you may have helped with and those which are in need of volunteers. If you know of anyone else who may wish to help with our research, please direct them to our website, details below.

Bilingual Study Completed

Together with colleagues in Plymouth and in Birmingham, we tested 34 children aged between 29 and 33 months, who hear only English (monolinguals) and compared them with 20 children the same age who hear both English and another language in the home (bilinguals). Children in both groups were tested on tests standardised for monolingual children, namely a vocabulary questionnaire (which the parents filled out), a word understanding test, an object naming test and the Preschool Language Scale, which is a test which asks the children to do things like "Get the cup and give the bear a drink".

We found, firstly, that the bilingual children who heard English 58% of the time or more performed like the monolingual children. Secondly, for those bilingual children who heard English less than 58% of the time, their performance on the vocabulary questionnaire, the object-naming test and the Preschool Language Scale could be predicted statistically from their percentage exposure to English. Both of these findings are extremely useful for Speech and Language therapists in the UK, as over half have a least one bilingual child on their caseloads, but are unable to easily



English comprehension is assessed partly through "natural situation" act out tasks

assess the child's other language. We are currently writing up this study for publication and it has been accepted as a presentation at the next conference of the International Association for the Study of Child Language, which will be held in Montreal in July.

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"I'm a busy mum and time is precious, but I am happy I made the time to assist in the university's child development research."

Verb Learning study continues with encouraging initial results

We have carried out four studies on how children learn words for actions. Children were shown video clips of a woman carrying out unfamiliar actions on unfamiliar objects (e.g. headbutting a bamboo candle holder). The researcher described the video clips using a made-up word in a sentence which made it clear that the new word referred to the action and not the object (e.g. 'she is *blicking* it').

The children were then shown two video clips and were asked e.g. 'show me, where is she *blicking* it?'. In one clip the woman was now carrying out the same unfamiliar action but on a different unfamiliar object. In the other she was carrying out a different unfamiliar action but on the same unfamiliar object. Five-year-olds choose the correct clip, when the actions were continuous but did not impact on the object (e.g. rolling the



object between hands). When the action involved changing the location of the object, the five-year-olds chose incorrectly half the time. Five-year-olds made the same mistake for both types of action when there was a minute

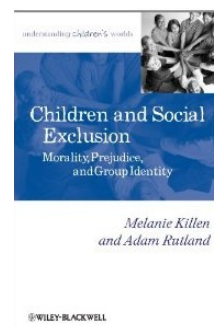
or two's pause between the 'learning' and 'test' clips. The most recent version of this study found that five-year-olds point correctly if the two actions they have to choose between are very distinct from one another. Now we want to see if three-year-olds will also show this improvement in their performance. See the "studies" tab on the Child Development Unit website for more details on the procedure.

New Book

Children and Social Exclusion: Morality, Prejudice, and Group Identity.

Killen, M. & Rutland, A. (2011). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

This book by Professor Adam Rutland delves deeply into the origins of prejudice and the emergence of morality to explain why children include some and exclude others and sheds light on the origins of stereotyping, prejudice, and social justice. By tackling these important issues from a global perspective, the book illustrates how the concept of exclusion might be better understood in multiple cultures and reveals its implications in regions of conflict in the world.



Call for more volunteers

Only a small proportion of the children on our database will be suitable for each study we undertake, as we work with narrow age ranges. We are therefore looking for more parents who are willing to bring their children in to the University for one or maybe two short visits.

If you know anyone else who may be able to help with any of our studies, they can contact the Child Development Unit on Tel: 01227 827424, email child@kent.ac.uk or sign up online at <http://www.kent.ac.uk/psychology/childdevelopmentunit/>

Attitudes towards obesity - a new study

Children's attitudes are often associated with their parents' attitudes, and in particular, mother's attitudes. A new study by Masters student, Emily Townsend, will be exploring the link between the attitudes of 3-5 year old girls and their mothers, towards obesity, a very relevant issue in today's society.

A big thank you to all parents who attended sessions here at the University and also to all of those Primary Schools who kindly gave us access to their Reception and Year One Classes.

How young children understand basic sentences

A new study funded by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council has just started to look at how young children interpret basic sentences. Young two-year-olds are surprisingly good at understanding sentences, even when they cannot say any themselves and even when the verbs are ones which they have never encountered before (as in 'The girl glorped the boy'). By 3½ many children can even correctly understand

sentences in which the person affected by the action is mentioned first, as in 'The policeman is being rescued by the fireman'. Over the next 18 months, Dr. Kirsten Abbot-Smith, Rebecca Croll (Masters student) and Catherine Davies are going to be comparing these two age groups to see how development occurs. In one task children are asked to point to the picture they hear 'Piglet' talking about. In the other task, children

simply watch video clips and a little box in front of them measures which one they are looking at and how the direction of their gaze changes as they hear a sentence unfold in time. In February and March the team will be assisted by Research Assistant, Amanda Norman and will be working mainly with 27-30-month-olds, perhaps going younger to 22-27



months, depending on our preliminary findings.

"She really liked the whole experience - the room, the toys, the Thomas bean bag, the drink and biscuit, the balloons and toy!!"

Learning from others

One of the best ways children can learn about the world is from other people. By paying attention to what others do and say, we can quickly learn what might take us years to figure out for ourselves.

Very young children will learn from others by imitation. For example, after watching an adult use a new toy, they very quickly pick up how the toy works, and use it the same way. In one new study, we will be exploring when 12-20-month-olds are more likely to imitate. Will they copy an adult who is teaching someone else, or do they need to be taught directly?

Older children can learn from others by asking questions. In earlier studies, we have found that even though children ask questions all the time, they don't necessarily ask

the right people. In our study, to find out what was hidden in a box, 4-year-olds could either ask someone who had seen inside, or someone who had not. We were surprised to find that they often chose to ask the person who didn't know. We are now exploring these strange findings more carefully, to find out when children are likely to ask questions, and what it can show us about children's understanding of what people know.

Dr Erika Nurmsoo will be looking at these issues over the coming year.



Pre-school children's musicality

There seems to be nothing young children like more than making music – even if it is their favourite drum first thing in the morning! Dr Michael Forrester, with some of his students, is carrying out a study investigating, describing and measuring pre-school and primary-aged children's musical skills. As part of a large-scale cross cultural study of early musicality (comparing children from



Canada, China, Israel, Brazil, Hungary and other countries), children are being video-taped while performing a number of simple musical tasks – such as singing a favourite song, repeating an unknown song – and their responses and attempts, whatever form they might take, measured and analysed. Researchers world-wide are now recognising that we know little about the acquisition of singing and this study will provide key data on identifying when various skills emerge. If you are interested in learning more about this study, and your child is between 3 and 5 years old, please contact us via our usual email address, child@kent.ac.uk.

Too much information!

Our previous research has found that 5-year-old children are sensitive to expressions which contain too much information, e.g. calling a single apple a 'big green apple'.

We are now interested in whether children can use this knowledge to interpret expressions in a meaningful task.

Adults are thought to do this by making a *contrastive inference*, i.e. they assume that there is a contrasting apple around if they hear one referred to as 'the big apple'. They also know that if there is only one apple then there should be no need to refer to it as 'big'.

In a new study, 5- and 7-year-old children will see

a group of novel animals containing a big and a small example of one animal and a small example of a different animal, on a computer screen (see Figure 1).

They will then be asked to point to one of the animals, e.g. 'the small blicket'.

Their response will tell us whether they are using their knowledge of appropriate amounts of detail to target the intended animal.

By testing children on these tasks, we hope to document the development of contrastive inference.

This research is being carried out by Catherine Davies.



Fig.1. Example array for contrastive inference study

Have you moved house, had another baby or changed your telephone number/email address? Make sure that you let us know, in order that we can update your details on our database.

Why we contact you—and why we don't!

At many of our recruiting events, we speak to parents who have already signed up but have not yet been contacted to take part in a study. It is not that we have forgotten you by any means. Each of our studies targets a very specific age range. For most of them, we need to see children when they are, for example 5 years old, plus or minus 3 weeks. So, when we start a study, we look on our database for children

who will be within this range during the weeks of testing, and therefore you may simply have been unlucky because your child was just a little too young or too old to participate.

Another reason might be multilingualism. For most of the studies, the tradition in the field is to see monolingual children, because this is the "simplest case". It is already extremely complicated to study how language develops in a

monolingual child, and it adds to the complexity by including bilinguals. However, as you can see on page 1, we do sometimes specifically call for bilingual children, because this is precisely what the study is looking at. Another very common reason for not being contacted is that your contact details may have changed since you signed up or a mistake was made when inputting your

email address, for example.

When this happens, we try every way we can to find you (email and telephone). If you think you might have been in that situation, please let us know (using our postal address, phone or email).

If for any reason you don't want to be contacted in the future, please let us know and we will of course remove your details from the database.