
We got the beat: The role of biases, abstractions, and experience in prosody acquisition

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Prosody has received much attention in language acquisition research because of its assumed key role in language development as a bootstrap to lexicon and syntax. However, two important questions have hardly been addressed: first, whether infants' speech processing is facilitated by innate prosodic biases and, second, whether they draw on abstract prosodic representations when perceiving acoustic correlates of stress.

In this talk, I will present a collection of our studies with mono- and bilinguals from infancy to adulthood that investigate these questions. We focus on two prosodically distinct languages, French (no lexical stress) and German (variable lexical stress). So far, our data points towards a role for biases in infancy, but later their effects are modulated by experience. Moreover, again dependent on experience, we find effects of abstract prosodic knowledge on speech processing. The talk will highlight the benefits of a comparative psycholinguistics approach to studying language acquisition.