

UConn

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT



Wednesday,
April 15th, 2026
3:00pm - 6:45pm in
Konover / Bousfield

Sponsored by:

UConn

INSTITUTE FOR THE BRAIN
AND COGNITIVE SCIENCES

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

The Plenary Session in Konover Auditorium in the Dodd Center will take place from 3:00pm–5:00pm

3:00–3:30 Registration in Konover

3:30–3:40 Welcome & Opening Remarks in Konover
Hosted by: *Umay Suanda*, PSYC

3:40–4:45 Graduate Student Symposium in Konover
Hosted by: *Lydia Palaiologou*, LING; *Kyler Jones*, PSYC

4:45–5:00 Undergraduate Commencement Address in Konover
Given by: *Briana Ashton*, SLHS

The poster session and reception will take place in the atrium of the WA Bousfield Psychology Building. Snacks and light refreshments will be available during this time.

5:15–6:45 Poster Session and Reception



GRADUATE STUDENT SYMPOSIUM



Nathan Lautz

Psychological Sciences

“Mapping experiential feature knowledge in the brain”



Zixi Liu

Linguistics

“Children’s Parallel Comprehension of Speaker Uncertainty: Evidence from a Mandarin Epistemic Modal and a Sentence-Final Particle”



Marissa Chappell

Curriculum and Instruction

“Epistemic Downgrade and Teacher Positioning in a Design-Based-Research Debrief: An Analysis Using Critical Discursive Psychology”



GRADUATE STUDENT SYMPOSIUM



Tamara Devine

Literatures, Culture, and Language

“The Intercultural Pragmatic Awareness of Au Pairs Working in the United States: An Ecological Qualitative Inquiry”.



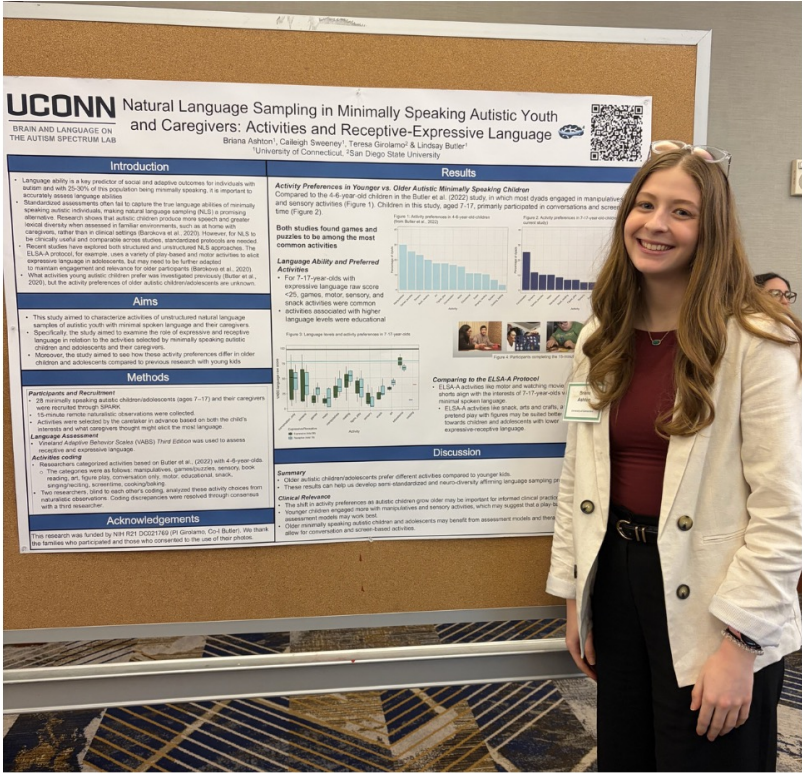
Kaila Cote

Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences

“Quality over quantity? Investigating the impact of conversational content during real-world communication on quality of life for people with aphasia”.



UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER



UCONN BRAIN AND LANGUAGE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM LAB

Natural Language Sampling in Minimally Speaking Autistic Youth and Caregivers: Activities and Receptive-Expressive Language

Briana Ashton¹, Callagh Sweeney², Teresa Grdanica³ & Lindsay Butler¹
¹University of Connecticut, ²San Diego State University

Introduction

- Language ability is a key predictor of social and adaptive outcomes for individuals with autism and with 25-50% of this population using minimally speaking is it important to accurately assess language abilities
- Standardized assessments often fail to capture the true language abilities of minimally speaking autistic individuals, making natural language sampling (NLS) a promising alternative. Research shows that autistic children produce more context and greater lexical diversity when assessed in familiar environments, such as at home with caregivers, rather than in clinical settings (Blanchard et al., 2020). However, NLS is often difficult to conduct with a variety of group-based and home activities. The ELISA protocol, an activity-based NLS protocol, has been shown to be valid for assessing language in adolescents, but may need to be further adapted.
- What activities young autistic children prefer was investigated previously (Butler et al., 2020), but the activity preferences of older autistic children/adolescents are unknown.

Aims

- The study aimed to characterize activities of unstructured natural language samples of autistic youth with minimal spoken language and their caregivers.
- Specifically, the study aimed to examine the role of expressive and receptive language in relation to the activities selected by minimally speaking autistic children and adolescents and their caregivers.
- Moreover, the study aimed to see how these activity preferences differ in older children and adolescents compared to previous research with young kids.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

- 28 minimally speaking autistic children/adolescents (ages 7-17) and their caregivers were recruited through UConn.
- Activities were selected by the caregiver in advance based on both the child's interests and what caregivers thought might be enjoyable.

Language Assessment

- Visual Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS) Third Edition was used to assess receptive and expressive language.

Activities coding

- Researchers categorized each activity based on Butler et al. (2020) with 4-6-year-olds. The categories were as follows: manipulative, game/activities, sensory, book reading, art, sports, music, role-play, board, equipment, snack, language, singing, over-time, cooking/baking.
- Two researchers blind to each other's coding analyzed these activity choices from naturalistic observations. Coding discrepancies were resolved through consensus with a third researcher.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by NSF R01 DC021769 (PI Grdanica, Co-PI Butler). We thank the families who participated and those who assisted in the collection of data.

Results

Activity Preferences in Younger vs. Older Autistic Minimally Speaking Children

Compared to the 4-6-year-old children in the Butler et al. (2020) study, which only coded engaged in manipulative and sensory activities (Figure 1). Children in this study, aged 7-17, primarily participated in conversations and sensory activities (Figure 2).

Both studies found games and puzzles to be among the most common activities

Language Ability and Preferred Activities

- For 7-17-year-olds with expressive language use score >25, games, music, sensory, and snack activities were common activities associated with higher language levels were educational.

Figure 1: Language levels and activity preferences in 4-6-year-olds

Figure 2: Language levels and activity preferences in 7-17-year-olds

Figure 3: Activities preferred by 7-17-year-olds

Figure 4: Activities preferred by 7-17-year-olds

Comparing to the ELISA-4 Protocol

- ELISA-4 activities are more and waiting received more engagement with the interests of 7-17-year-olds in natural spoken language.
- ELISA-4 activities are book, arts and crafts, a preferred play with blocks may be similar to preferred play with blocks and activities with board games/children and adolescents with lower expressive/receptive language.

Discussion

Summary

- Clear autistic children/adolescents prefer different activities compared to younger kids.
- These results can help us develop more standardized and neuro-diversity affirming language sampling tools.

Clinical Relevance

- The shift in activity preferences as autistic children grow older may be important for clinical trial practice.
- Younger children engage more with manipulative and sensory activities, which may suggest that early assessment models may not best.
- Older minimally speaking autistic children and adolescents may benefit from assessment models that allow for conversation and sensory-based activities.

Briana Ashton

Brain and Language on the Autism Spectrum Lab & Aphasia Rehab Lab
 Mentors: Dr. Lindsay Butler and Dr. Jennifer Mozeiko





POSTER
PRESENTATIONS

1) Temporal Trends in Standardized Language Scores in Developmental Language Disorder: A Meta-Analysis

Arinjoy Bhattacharjee, COGS, IBACS, SLHS

Tammie Spaulding, COGS, IBACS, SLHS

2) Gradience in Innovatibility

Hyosun Lee, IBACS, PSYC

Whitney Tabor, IBACS, PSYC

3) Structural Predictors of BrainAGE and Cognitive Performance

Mikayla Robinson, COGS

Portia Washington, PSYC, IBACS

Emily Myers, SLHS, PSYC, IBACS

4) Sensitivity to Informative Print-to-Sound and Print-to-Meaning Regularities Predicts Reading Skill and Growth in Reading Disability

Ana Bobrycki, PSYC

Daniel Kleinman, YCSC

Dasha Zdvizhkova, YCSC

Noam Siegelman, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Jay G. Rueckl, PSYC

Nicole Landi, PSYC

5) Developing Infrastructure and Metadata for a Hometown Language Corpus in Nicaragua

Marie Coppola, PSYC

Kellyn Thayer, PSYC

Adriana Tillison, SLHS

6) The Language of Lady Gaga: Semiotics, Rhetoric, and Expression of the Self in the Music of Mother Monster

Austin Fitterer, MUSC





7) Sensitivity to Grapheme–Phoneme Correspondences, but Not Imageability, Predicts Nonword Reading Gains in Children with Reading Disability

Dasha Zdvizhkova, YCSC

Dan Kleinman, YCSC

Ana Bobrycki, PSYC

Nicole Landi, PSYC

8) How Are Researchers Identifying Children with Developmental Language Disorder? An Updated Review of Diagnostic Tests Used (2020–2024)

Annalise Kish, SLHS

Arinjoy Bhattacharjee, IBACS, SLHS, COGS

Tammie Spaulding, IBACS, SLHS, COGS

9) Receptive Language Development in Minimally Speaking Autistic Children: The Role of Bilingual Exposure and Language Environment

Maren Hill, SLHS

Anais Albarran, SLHS

Lindsay Butler, SLHS

10) Does Timing Matter? The Role of Contiguity in Correlating Resting State EEG Arousal to Verbal Memory Task Improvement

Molly Rourke, SLHS

Isabella Piskator, SLHS

Vladimir Klyukin, SLHS

Sarah Gallagher, SLHS

Jenna Triolo, SLHS

Sanavi Gokhale, SLHS

Julia Majenski, SLHS

Adrián García-Sierra, SLHS

11) Semantic–World Knowledge Interactions During Processing

Emma Wing, IBACS, PSYC

Whitney Tabor, IBACS, PSYC

12) Dynamic Restructuring of VOT–FO Relations in Mandarin Stop Perception Across Tonal Context

Zimin Wu, LCL

Adrián García-Sierra, SLHS



13) Polygenic Risk Scores and Reading (Dis)Abilities: A Systematic Review

Rue Amaya, PSYC

Alyssa Bahadur, PSYC

Martina Villa, IBACS, PSYC, YCSC

Katie Hooker, Department of Epidemiology, Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth

Nicole Landi, IBACS, PSYC, YCSC

14) Assessing whole-person communication in minimally speaking autistic youth

Lindsey Kuniewch, SLHS

Abrielis Mejia, SLHS

Sheldon Felix, SLHS

Allyson Currier, SLHS

Teresa Girolamo, San Diego State University

Lindsay Butler, SLHS

15) Watch This! Learning Verbs from their Observational Contexts

Aditi Thaker, MCB

Courtney Pizza, PSYC

Nina Schoener, UC Berkeley

Sumarga H. Suanda, IBACS, PSYC

16) Effects of DCDC2 on Superior Colliculus Volume in Mouse Model of Developmental Dyslexia

Kaitlyn Beaupre, PSYC

Holly R. Fitch, PSYC

Ted Rosenkrantz, UConn Health

17) Morphological Features of Sign Language in Sentence Processing

Madison Stevenson, PSYC

James Payton, PSYC

Gerry Altmann, PSYC

18) The Effects of the Heggerty Curriculum Advanced Phonemic Awareness Instruction in First Grade

MaryKate DeSantis, NEAG



19) Is my Joy your Joy: How Religion Influences the Concept of Joy

Ashley Bejar, HDFS, PSYC

Kyler Jones, PSYC

Eiling Yee, COGS, PSYC

Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, COGS, PSYC

20) Pragmatic Knowledge in Adult Homesign: Analyzing Noun-Modifier Ordering Using ELAN

Sofia Ildardi, SLHS, PSYC

21) Between the Gates: Hausa Architecture and the Dispoietic Interior

Patience Odeh, LCL

22) PRISM: Priming Relationships in Syntax and Mathematics

Michelle Zhu, IBACS, NEAG, MATH

Adrián García-Sierra, IBACS, SLHS

23) Autistic children with minimal spoken language: How much language do they understand?

Alexa Jackson, SLHS

Sheldon Felix, SLHS

Allyson Currier, SLHS

Kelly Liang, SLHS

Lindsay Butler, SLHS

24) Words, votes, and gender: Dissecting the 2024 election discourse

Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, PSYC

Emma Wedell, PSYC

25) Quality over quantity? Investigating the impact of conversational content during real-world communication on quality of life for people with aphasia.

Kalia Cote, SLHS

Jennifer Mozeiko, IBACS, SLHS

26) A Roadmap to Language: Supporting Early Communication in Childcare Settings Through Accessible Media

Aidan Laliberte, SLHS

Allison Shane, SLHS



27) Bilingualism and the Brain: Structural Differences Between Bilinguals and Monolinguals in the Caudate Nucleus

Daisy Delgado, SLHS

Janet Desmarais, SLHS

Erika Skoe, SLHS

Andrew Collins, SLHS

28) Childrens Parallel Comprehension of Speaker Uncertainty: Evidence from a Mandarin Epistemic Model and a Sentence-Final Particle

Zixi Liu, LING

29) Mapping Experiential Feature Knowledge in the Brain

Nathan Lautz, PSYC

Sisira Vandara, PSYC

Gary Hernandez, PSYC

Leonardo Fernandez, PSYC

Eiling Yee, PSYC

30) Imagery and Meaning: How Individual Differences in Visual Imagery Affect Conceptual Knowledge

Nathan Lautz, PSYC

Janise James, PSYC

Diqing Li, PSYC

Fanola Dede, PSYC

Eiling Yee, PSYC

31) Syntax Development in English by Deaf Children Acquiring both American Sign Language and English

Shuyan Wang, LING

Margaret Chui Yi Lee, LING

Kayla Vernon, SLHS

Deborah Chen Pichler, Gallaudet University

Diane Lillo-Martin, LING

32) When Pears Become Guitars: Continuity of Object Identity During Event Processing

Grettel Atterberry, PSYC

Jonathan Baig, PSYC

Giavanna M. Scognamiglio, PSYC

Gerry T.M Altmann, PSYC





Abbreviations

AHS – Allied Health Sciences
ASL – American Sign Language Studies
ANT– Anthropology
COGS – Cognitive Science Program
COMM – Communications
EPSY – Educational Psychology
HDFS – Human Development & Family Studies
IBACS – Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences
LING – Linguistics
LCL – Literature, Cultures, and Languages
LCL-AL– Literature, Cultures, and Languages: Applied Linguistics
MCB – Molecular & Cell Biology
MUSC– Music
NBL – Neurobiology of Language
NEAG– NEAG School of Education
PHIL – Philosophy
PNB– Physiology and Neurobiology
PSYC – Psychological Science
SLHS – Speech, Language, & Hearing Sciences
YCSC – Yale Child Study Center

Collaborators

San Diego State University; Gesiel School of Medicine at Dartmouth; UC Berkeley; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; UConn Health



ABOUT LANGUAGE FEST

Language Fest is a University-wide research conference that brings together the full community of language researchers at UConn, including undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, for a day of sharing results, ideas, methodologies and fostering future interdisciplinary collaborations.

Language Fest is funded by the Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

Briana Ashton
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