UC BERKELEY LANGUAGE & COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT LAB NEWSLETTER

2023-2024

LETTER OF THANKS

Dear Families, Teachers, and Staff of Zenith School,

Thank you very much for participating in our research this past winter! Our research is made possible by the generosity of families and communities like yours, and we greatly appreciate your support.

Our research focuses on how children learn different aspects of language, what this might tell us about the nature of cognitive and social development, and how these different aspects of development interact. This newsletter highlights some of the studies that your child may have participated in and gives an overview of our current findings.
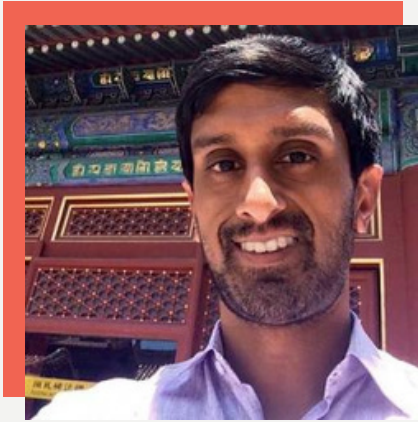
If you have any questions about our projects, please feel free to contact us at lcdlab@berkeley.edu.

Best wishes,

Mahesh Srinivasan, Ph.D.
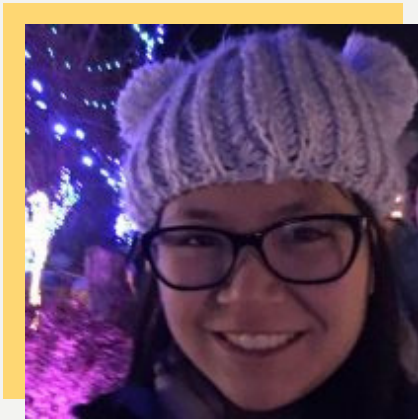Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of California, Berkeley
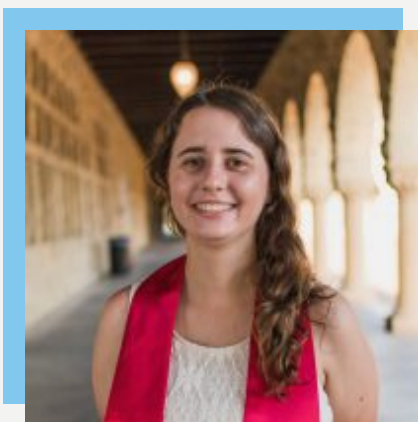
LCD LAB MEMBERS

MAHESH SRINIVASAN

I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and a member of the Cognitive Science Faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. Previously, I was a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego. Before this, I received a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Harvard University in 2011, and received a B.S. in Symbolic Systems from Stanford University in 2005. Using empirical methods from developmental psychology and psycholinguistics, our lab's research explores how linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities arise and interact with one another during human development and across different cultures.

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VICTORIA KEATING

As a graduate student working in the LCD Lab and the UC Dreams Lab, I am interested in how the people and cultures children are exposed to affect how they think about the world and others. My current research interests are focused on how children learn to think about those that are different from themselves. For instance, how does the way we communicate about race with children shape their concepts of their own race and others? Additionally, I am curious about the multiple ways we can think about diversity and its various impacts.

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SOPHIE REGAN

I am broadly interested in how children learn to communicate using language, especially how their burgeoning language skills interact with their developing understanding of the social world. My current research interests focus on the development of pragmatic reasoning, specifically how children learn to integrate information about specific speakers when interpreting and producing utterances. I am also interested in how language shapes the formation of different category representations and in adaptation and convention formation in conversation.

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LCD LAB MEMBERS
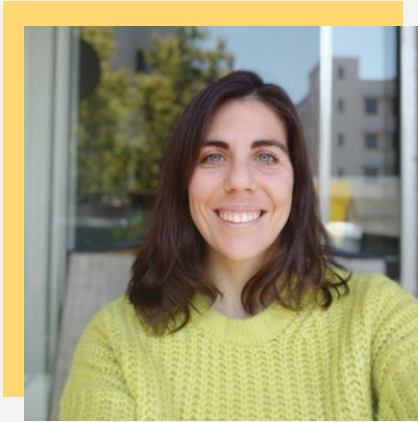
MARINA ORTEGA ANDRÉS

I am a postdoctoral researcher from the Basque Government at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) and a visitor researcher at the Department of Psychology in the University of California. I work on polysemy and language development with Dr. Mahesh Srinivasan. I also work at the Lindy Lab on language processing in the ASC population. I finished my PhD in June 2020 at the University of the Basque Country. My thesis was about theoretical issues on polysemy and copredication. I am also interested in other fields like Feminist Philosophy, Social Identity, and Epistemic Injustice.

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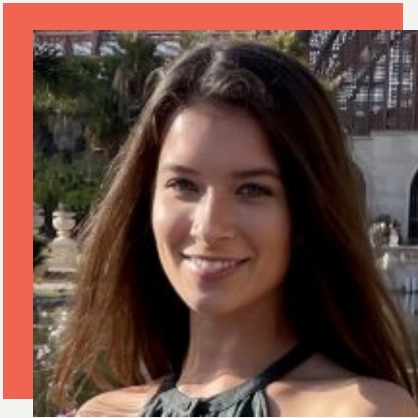
NINA SCHOENER

My primary interest lies in exploring the many different factors that influence word learning, particularly in early childhood. Specifically, I'm curious about how aspects of childrens' cultural, linguistic, social, and economic environments interact to facilitate language acquisition. My research also focuses on identifying the specific learning mechanisms that underlie the acquisition of semantic knowledge, in order to better understand the types of input that foster word learning.

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EMILY CHAU

I'm a recent Berkeley graduate interested broadly in how people weigh competing sources of information to reach a goal they might have. I'm excited to explore this further in the intersection of language and cognition as I'm fascinated by how words in itself act as information units, often without needing to be explicitly told their meaning. If you have any questions about the lab—whether it be working in it or participating in one of our studies—please feel free to reach out.

📍 LCDMANAGER@BERKELEY.EDU

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- PRISHA MANGAT
- NISHAD KALLURI
- ANDIE BENITEZ
- ZACK AQRA

CLOCKWISE STARTING FROM BOTTOM LEFT: VIVEK KHATTAR, MARINA ORTEGA ANDRES, NINA SCHOENER, TVISHA VITHALANI, SIDDHARTH AAYADI, VIDHI PARMAR, NAUREEN GANAM, ABHA RAJPUROHIT, RISHA THANKI, SAMARJEET SHINDE, AQSA MERCHANT, MANASVI BHATT, TAZEEN SHAMSI, AZRAA CHAVIWALA, ZEBA JINWALA, PRATHAM SONI, DHAIRYA DAVE

STUDIES CONDUCTED AT ZENITH SCHOOL

DEVELOPING BELIEF NETWORK YEAR 2

As part of the Developing Belief Network, an international, cross-cultural collaborative research network exploring the development and diversity of cognition, our research at Zenith School explored how Hindu and Muslim children develop beliefs that have implications for global health, intergroup relations, and scientific learning. This is our second year working with children on this project.

More specifically, 2nd to 7th standard students and their parents participated in two studies. The first study was an interview for children about their understanding of religious beliefs and the second study was a survey that parents filled out about how they introduce their children to religious beliefs.

📍 DEVELOPINGBELIEF.COM

LEXICAL KNOWLEDGE & EXPECTATIONS IN INTERGROUP COMMUNICATION

We all belong to many communities, each with its own specific vocabulary. We have different expectations about people knowing or using these words. We use these expectations about our interlocutor to decide the words we use when we speak. In this study we wanted to understand whether children from different communities use their expectation about the knowledge that others have to decide which words they use to describe concepts of their own community.

To explore this question we had a set of questionnaires asking children whether they know the meaning of some words and whether they expected other people to know those words. We also ran a study in which two children played a card game. One of them had to describe some pictures while the other child had to put the pictures in the right order according to the description that the first children gave. We recorded the session to analyze whether children use different words to describe the same concepts depending on the community of their interlocutor.

STUDIES CONDUCTED AT ZENITH SCHOOL

HOW CHILDREN LEARN HINDI KINSHIP TERMS

यह अनिका है! उसे प्रतिदिन स्कूल जाना और अपने सभी दोस्तों से मिलना पसंद है। उसका कई चाची, चाचा और चचेरे भाई-बहनों वाला एक बड़ा परिवार भी है। वह लंबे समय में पहली बार अपने परिवार से मिलने जा रही है, और उसे यह याद रखने में आपकी मदद की ज़रूरत है कि उन्हें क्या कहा जाए। आप परिवार के विभिन्न सदस्यों के बारे में कुछ प्रश्नों के उत्तर देने जा रहे हैं ताकि अनिका सीख सके कि उन्हें क्या बुलाना है।

In this study, we were interested in how children learn the words for specific relatives -- or "kinship terms". Some of these terms can be relatively complex, for example the word "masi" could be used to describe one's aunt. However, it can't be just any aunt, it must be a maternal aunt who is related by blood. We wanted to know how children come to understand all of the layers involved in these complex terms. In this study, we asked Zenith students in HKG, 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th standards to define these terms and to answer a series of questions about who would be considered a "masi", a "nani", a "dada", etc. Our preliminary results show that students in 6th standard and above generally use these terms in adult-like ways and understand that they refer to a relationship (i.e, "my masi is my mother's sister"), while younger children tend to think of these kinship terms as being defined by characteristics of a person (e.g., "my masi is the one who brings me gifts"). This aligns with previous research on the topic of kinship terms in other languages.

HOW DO CHILDREN CHOOSE WHICH LANGUAGE TO SPEAK?

In a multilingual culture where everyone speaks several languages, how do individuals choose which languages to speak in which situations? Are there certain implicit rules that people follow when choosing which language to speak, for example, wanting to make a certain impression or communicate more effectively. In this study, 7-12-year-old children filled out a worksheet with engaging drawings of children. They were shown drawings and asked questions like, "Do you think this girl will speak in English, Hindi, or Gujarati to her friends?" Overall, we found that children have strong intuitions about when it is appropriate to speak a certain language. For example, they expect other children to speak English at school but not at home. We also found that speaking some languages (like English) are associated with being smart whereas others (like Gujarati) are associated with being friendly.

2. प्रिया अपने दोस्तों से बात करने जा रही है। वह अपने दोस्तों से कौन सी भाषा में बात करेगी?
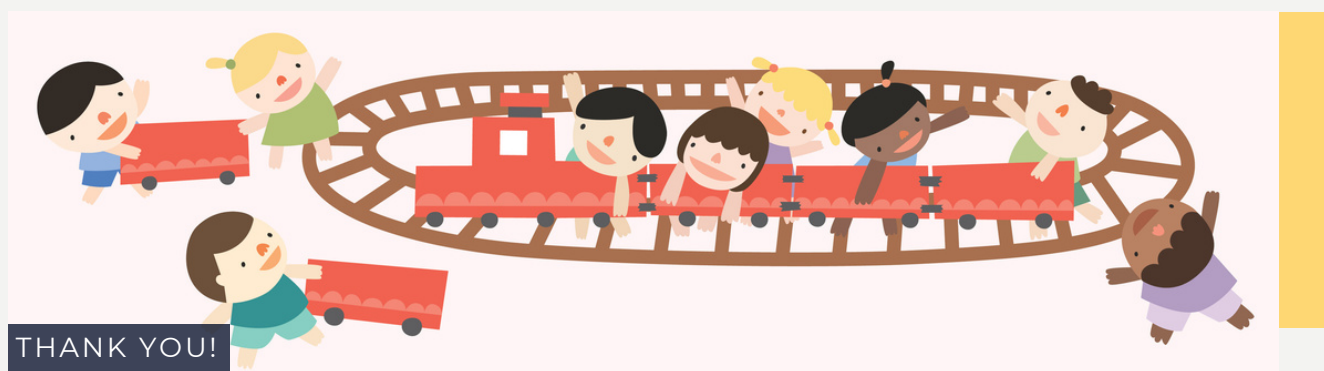
अंग्रेजी   हिंदी   गुजराती

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR RESEARCH, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE.

http://lcdlab.berkeley.edu

email: lcdlab@berkeley.edu

THANK YOU!