Learning to become a native listener of Japanese

Professor Reiko Mazuka

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Abstract:
The goal of our research is identify the processes by which human infants with no prior linguistic knowledge and highly limited cognitive skills acquire the ability to understand and manipulate highly complex language systems in a short time and without explicit instruction. The talk will present results from studies that investigated how Japanese infants learn certain characteristics of Japanese phonology, knowledge of which is considered prerequisite for the acquisition of abstract, symbolic properties of language. One distinctive characteristics of Japanese phonology, for example, is duration-based vowel distinction, which can be used for both lexical differentiation (obasan vs obaasan, "auntie" vs "grandma") and for phrasal/prosodic differentiation (obasan vs obasaaan). How do babies learn that lexical and prosodic information systems are different, and how do they determine whether a given long or short vowel is being used lexically or prosodically? Our studies compare babies' behavioral responses with speech input provided by their environment, computational acquisition models, and brain imaging studies. The talk will discuss results from these and related studies, highlighting the unique opportunities that Japanese language properties provide to disentangle fundamental questions pertaining to acquisition.

February 18, 2016 (Thursday)
17:00 – 18:15
Room 802, Meng Wah Complex, HKU
(Chair: Dr Shelley Tong)

About the speaker:
Professor Reiko Mazuka is the Head of the Laboratory of Language Development in RIKEN Brain Science Institute and the Research Professor in Duke University. She focuses on investigating the process how baby learn words, and the factors affecting infants' phonological representation and early word learning. She is interested in the development and consequences of acquiring very different types of languages. The research has taken a cross-linguistic approach between English and Japanese, and her current research involves the following three areas: (1) study of sentence comprehension strategies by adult and child speakers of Japanese and English; (2) cross-linguistic study of infants' speech perception; and (3) influence of acquiring language specific categories on cognition.


~~ All are welcome ~~
For enquiries, please contact Office of Research at 2857 8254.