Infant Directed Speech and Its Implications for Language Development: The Case of Danish

Professor Ocke-Schwen Bohn
Aarhus University, Denmark

October 11, 2019 (Friday)
17:30 – 18:30
Room 750-753, Meng Wah Complex, HKU
(Chair: Dr Puisan Wong)

Abstract:
This talk first presents an overview of the characteristics and potential functions of infant-directed speech (IDS), a special register used by many caregivers in interactions with young children. IDS may differ from adult-directed speech (ADS) in that it is often characterized by higher pitch, more variable intonation, and hyperarticulation which enhances sound contrasts of the language to be learned. The talk then presents a study which contributes to the debate on the supposed universality of infant-directed speech (IDS). Danish presents several challenges for language learners which could provide opportunities for hyperarticulation, such as a very large number of vowels with a densely packed upper portion of the acoustic vowel space. Our study examined whether Danish caregivers enhance Danish contrasts when speaking to their 18 month old child as opposed to an adult. Fifty-one caregivers were recorded talking about toy animals in conversations with their child and with an adult interlocutor. The surprising result was that the participants did not enhance any acoustic dimension when interacting with the toddlers. In fact, there were several dimensions along which ADS was enhanced relative to IDS. Results will be discussed in light of the challenges which Danish provides for language learners and how Danish-learning children cope with these challenges.

About the speaker:
Ocke-Schwen Bohn is Professor and Chair of English Linguistics at Aarhus University, Denmark. He received his PhD from Kiel University in Germany and spent his time as a post-doctoral fellow working with Professor James Flege at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. With funding from German and Danish research agencies, and in collaboration with American, Canadian, and Australian scholars, Bohn’s research focuses on the causes and characteristics of foreign accented speech, speech perception (in infants, cross-language, and second language acquisition), and bilingual memory. He has published widely in journals such as Applied Psycholinguistics, Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, Journal of the International Phonetic Association, Journal of Phonetics, Memory, Speech Communication, and Studies in Second Language Acquisition.

Further information is available at:
https://scholar.google.dk/citations?user=d5h977MAAAAJ&hl=da&oi=ao

~ All are welcome ~

Please register at: https://hkuems1.hku.hk/hkuems/ec_regform.aspx?guest=Y&uid=67597

For enquiries, please contact Office of Research, Faculty of Education, HKU at 3917 8254.