

Prosodic cues in early first language acquisition

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Children master to acquire the essential grammatical and phonological properties of their ambient language(s) with an amazing speed during their first years of life. What are the mechanisms that make this fast development possible? Acoustic cues from the speech input like pitch, duration, and intensity are connected in a systematic way to the linguistic structure in speech and the “Prosodic Bootstrapping” account predicts that these prosodic cues supports young infants’ early syntactic and lexical development. I will present findings from our lab that show that young infants are sensitive to these specific prosodic features from early on, but that these features are not universal and that, hence, their exploitation needs some attunement to language-specific characteristics. Furthermore, I will argue that disturbances of this early prosodic development may hinder further lexical and syntactic development leading to lower language performance in children up to school age.