

SPEECH, LANGUAGE, & HEARING SCIENCES

Advancing the science and practice of communication



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2017 STEER LECTURE

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Speech Perception and Early Word Learning: Multisensory Foundations

Language acquisition begins in perceptual development long before infants produce or even understand their first words. While we typically focus on studying auditory perception of spoken language, infants also experience and perceive speech through other modalities. In this talk, I will explore the thesis that speech perception is multisensory from early in life, and will examine the question of whether the different perceptual systems that support speech processing develop independently and then come together, or whether they are linked and mutually informative from early in life. In this endeavor, I will review the rapid changes in auditory, visual, and multimodal speech perception that occur in the first months of life as infants become experts at perceiving, categorizing, and interpreting the characteristics of their native language(s), and will then review research beginning to investigate if and how this trajectory is different when information is available (or removed) from one of these modalities. I will end by discussing the implications of these findings for both a deeper understanding of speech perception development, and for research and ultimate intervention in populations of infants with various types of sensory challenges.