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Authors

Kutlu, Ethan

Chiu, Samantha

Sorensen, Eldon

et al.

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Network Diversity Leads to More Flexibility in Speech Categorization

Ethan Kutlu

University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, United States

Samantha Chiu

University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, United States

Eldon Sorensen

University of Iowa, Iowa city, Iowa, United States

Jacob Oleson

University of Iowa, Iowa city, Iowa, United States

Bob McMurray

University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, United States

Abstract

Previous studies suggest that speech categorization is established during the first year of life (Werker & Tees, 1984). However, recent work suggests protracted development through adolescence (McMurray et al., 2018). While the early development has been thought to be driven by the statistical properties of the input, it is unclear if this late phase is also input driven. We asked whether being exposed to diverse linguistic input leads to different patterns of speech categorization. Visual Analogue Scaling task and social network questionnaires were used to measure speech categorization and the effects of linguistic diversity in children's and adults' social environments. Results suggest that the development of speech perception is not finished during the first year of life. It continues to be shaped by the developmental changes across the lifespan (McMurray et al., 2018). Importantly, diverse linguistic experience makes both children and adults more flexible in their speech categorization.