



# LANGUAGE LINKS

NEWSLETTER OF PURDUE UNIVERSITY CHILD LANGUAGE RESEARCH PROJECTS

SPRING 2010

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## WELCOME

*Language Links* is the Newsletter of the *Child Language Research Projects* in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at Purdue University. Through this publication, we strive to keep in touch with families who have participated in our research, as well as people who have referred families to our programs.

In this issue, you will find news about research findings from the Developmental Speech Production Lab, an article about the nature of language “mistakes” your child may make, and *Parent Tips* on reading with your child. You’ll also find out about opportunities offered in upcoming programs.

We are grateful for the contributions that you have made to our research, and we hope that you find this newsletter interesting and informative!

Department of Speech,  
Language, and Hearing Sciences

[www.cla.purdue.edu/slhs](http://www.cla.purdue.edu/slhs)

## JOIN US FOR SUMMER FUN!

Each year, the Child Language Research lab at Purdue offers a unique program for children with language delays. The Summer Fun program combines language research with speech-language therapy for eligible 4 and 5 year olds, at no cost to parents.

This year, Summer Fun will begin on June 15 and end on July 8. The sessions are held during these four weeks on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings from 9:00 to 11:30 am.

During Summer Fun, children participate in general preschool activities and a variety of fun and language-enriching experiences.

*The Summer Fun Program  
combines language research  
with speech-language therapy  
for eligible 4 and 5 year olds.*

They paint T-shirts, have a pretend camping trip, march in a 4th of July “parade”, and sell lemonade at a stand. Each Summer Fun participant has individualized communication goals, which are addressed during daily half-hour therapy sessions, as well as in the classroom. Children may work on articulation, descriptive language, social communication, and school readiness skills. Parents are provided with progress summaries and reports of their children’s test scores, and they have the opportunity to meet with clinical staff at the end of the program to discuss their child’s progress.



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SUMMER FUN PROGRAM  
(765) 496-1821 or (800) 691-4700

CHILD LANGUAGE RESEARCH LAB  
(765) 496-1821 or 496-2253

DEVELOPMENTAL SPEECH  
PRODUCTION LAB  
(765) 494-1669

PURDUE STUTTERING PROJECT  
(765) 496-6403 or (866) 360-0051

# UPDATE FROM THE DEVELOPMENTAL SPEECH PRODUCTION LAB

When we learn a new motor skill, such as swinging a tennis racket or a golf club, it seems that practice makes perfect. Speech is another sort of motor skill, but one that may require more than just practice. In our lab, we are trying to understand what sort of practice children need to learn new words. This is especially important for children with language difficulties, since the sorts of practice they need will influence how we teach them new words in therapy.

In our studies we record lip movements while children say made up words that they have never heard before, such as “bupkuv.” We include two kinds of practice. One kind of practice is similar to that used in improving a tennis swing: Do children learn words better by repeating the movement patterns again and again? A second kind of practice includes listening: Do children learn words better by hearing them more? Does the meaning of what they hear matter? We measure whether children’s speech movements change during their learning.

We have found that children do change their speech movements even after a very short period of learning. What is most important is that they only

show this learning when a new string of sounds, such as ‘bupkuv,’ is given meaning. No learning is observed if they just say and hear this new “word” repeatedly. Talking is not like riding a bike or playing tennis; it is important to do more than just practice the movement. The practice must occur in a meaningful language context. If children are taught a word in a meaningful context (e.g., “here’s a picture of a bupkuv; you can squeeze a bupkuv”) they show speech motor learning.

Children with language difficulties were also sensitive to whether a new “word” was meaningful or not. These children increased the precision of their speech movements only when a “word” was meaningful. It appears to be very important to practice speech in a context that includes the meaning of the word being learned. This work is coming out in the journal *Developmental Science*.

We thank the children who participated in “Summer Fun” for their hard work on this project!



## When Mistakes Represent Progress

For many parents, a child’s sentence such as “My dog caught the ball!” is quite amusing, even though it is recognized that “caught” is the correct verb form to use. In fact, parents might not even correct the child after hearing an error of this type, or, if they do, they will do it in a very indirect, subtle way, by saying something like “Yes, he caught the ball all right!”

In most instances, substitutions such as “catched” in place of “caught” are very temporary errors. For children who have only just begun to use past tense forms such as “jumped” and “played”, an error such as “catched” can be taken as a positive sign that the child has now learned that events in the past can be described by adding “-ed” to the ends of verbs.

Of course, some verbs are irregular, such as “caught” (“went”, “ate”, and “drank” are a few others). Sometimes children will use a correct irregular past tense form and a few weeks later produce an error such as “drinked”. However, such errors do not represent going backwards. Instead, they reflect the fact that the child has learned a more general pattern and has simply over-applied it. Correct irregular forms such as “drank” will return, once the child has begun to sort out which verbs take the more general “-ed” pattern, and which are exceptions to the rule.

Errors in word order can also occur. For example, for children who initially ask questions such as “Where the kitty going?”, one day the question might be changed to “Where the kitty is going?”. Very often such errors occur when children are just beginning to add auxiliary (or “helping”) verbs such as “is” to their sentences. For simple statements, they may change from “The baby crying” to “The baby is crying”. A question such as “Where the kitty is going?” is probably modeled after these newly acquired statement forms (compare “The kitty is going” to “The baby is crying”). Before long, “is” will appear in its proper location in the child’s questions (as in “Where is the kitty going?”).

If errors such as “catched” or “Where the kitty is going?” persist for many months, a speech-language professional might be contacted, especially if the child seems unusually slow in learning many other details of language. However, by themselves, errors of this type are usually only temporary detours as children make their way into the adult world of language use.

*Summer Fun! continued from page 1*

**Eligibility** - To be eligible to participate in the Summer Fun program, children must be between 4 and 5 years of age by June 1st and demonstrate a significant delay in language development without accompanying medical problems, hearing impairment or other developmental delays. Testing to determine eligibility will take place this spring. Families are reimbursed \$9 per session for eligibility testing, and the program is provided at no cost to families. If you would like more information about this program, please contact Pat Deevy at (765) 496-1821; (800) 691-4700; or [deevy@purdue.edu](mailto:deevy@purdue.edu). Children can be scheduled for eligibility testing starting now and continuing through early April.

# PARENT TIPS: READING WITH YOUR CHILD

Reading is a wonderful way to introduce your child to new words and ideas. It provides the foundation for reading and writing skills, and can enhance your child's language growth. Perhaps most importantly, it can be an enjoyable routine that you and your child share.

There are many ways to read with your child. Here are some suggestions to ensure that book-reading is a fun and special time for both of you:

- Let your child choose the book sometimes; spend more time on pages that interest him/her; use a sing-song, expressive voice to capture your child's attention
- You do not need to start at the beginning; you can skip pages or not finish the book
- You don't have to "read" the words in every book; you can talk about the pictures or change the words to suit your child's interests
- Children enjoy having the same books read to them over and over; this repetition allows them to anticipate what comes next and to participate in telling the story

## WHICH BOOKS ARE BEST FOR:

### INFANTS

- board books with colorful photos or pictures of people, familiar objects, and common actions
- books with rhyme, rhythm, and repetition
- interactive books that make sounds, have textures, or flaps to lift

### TODDLERS

- books with nursery rhymes and finger plays (like "Eensy Weensy Spider")
- books with themes of interest to your child (like dinosaurs, birthdays, etc.)
- homemade books with photos of your child, family members, and pets

### PRESCHOOLERS

- books that help your child cope with new experiences (like going to the dentist or starting preschool)
- books with predictable phrases
- books which introduce imaginary places and creatures to help the child learn about pretending



## Project Seeks Children Who Stutter

We are seeking children who stutter to participate in a study of speech motor development conducted by Professors Anne Smith and Christine Weber-Fox.

- Children must be 4 or 5 years of age.
- Free assessment of child's speech, language, & hearing.
- Families of eligible children will receive \$100.00 per year to help cover time and transportation costs.

Contact: Barbara Brown at [brownb@purdue.edu](mailto:brownb@purdue.edu) or 496-6403 or toll-free at 866-360-0051

## YOUNG RESEARCHERS WANTED FOR 2 STUDIES AT PURDUE

### Learn about BRAIN WAVES!

Participation requirements include:

- Child currently in the 2nd grade
- Right-handed, native English speakers
- No history of speech, language, hearing, or reading difficulties

Children will receive \$20.00 per 1.5 hr session for 1-2 sessions and a free speech, language, and hearing evaluation

Contact: Mandy Hampton Wray at [ahampton@purdue.edu](mailto:ahampton@purdue.edu) or (765)496-2435



### Research on LANGUAGE AND MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

- We are looking for children ages 4-5

Children will receive a toy and a free speech, language, and hearing evaluation. Parents will be paid \$8.00 for each session.

Contact: Lisa Goffman at [goffman@purdue.edu](mailto:goffman@purdue.edu) or (765)494-1669

# PURDUE

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