

I smell the salt lovely: Talking about olfactory experience with children

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The ease of describing smell appears to vary considerably across languages and different populations, while certain features of olfactory experience, such as judgements of pleasantness, may show surprising similarities (Majid & Burenhult 2014; Arshamian 2022). What about across development? To date, we don't know a lot about how olfactory language is acquired and used by children. Within a broader context of language socialisation and cross-linguistic research on the senses, I investigate the word *smell* in English child-caregiver interaction. Using longitudinal recordings (Demuth et al. 2006), supplemented by other corpora and opportunistic data, I talk about time of emergence, contexts of use, and non-standard examples of *smell* with reference to other basic perception verbs. Hedonic valence (e.g., as per Yeshurun & Sobel 2010), lexical frequency (e.g., Ambridge et al. 2015), and the supposed poor conceptualisation of certain sensory modalities (Engen & Engen 1997; cf. Gentner & Bowerman 2009) are considered as factors that might account for initial observations – but don't quite dispel the feeling that we're missing something.

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Bio

Lila San Roque studied for a PhD in linguistics at the Australian National University, working with speakers of a language called Duna spoken in Hela Province, Papua New Guinea. She has since worked at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics and at Radboud University in the Netherlands, and is now a Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Sydney. She is especially interested in the languages of New Guinea, one of the most linguistically diverse areas on the planet, and in the ways we use language to encode and express perceptual and cognitive experience.