

Context effects in spoken language processing among children with hearing loss

Abstract:

Listeners can use the surrounding context of an utterance to facilitate their language processing and comprehension. For example, at the sentence level, constraining contexts (e.g., *The cyclist rides the...*) may enable listeners to predict how the sentence will end, allowing for faster and less effortful processing. At the discourse level, context may assist listeners in correctly interpreting the meaning of the speaker, particularly in cases of non-literal language, such as verbal irony. However, previous research suggests that children with hearing loss may be less able to benefit from contextual cues than their peers with normal hearing.

In this talk I will present three studies exploring the extent to which primary-school children with hearing loss (hearing aid and/or cochlear implant users) are able to use contextual information in their spoken language processing. These will focus on the ability of children with hearing loss to predict upcoming sentence constituents based on both semantic and morphosyntactic information, and their ability to correctly interpret ironic statements. Results will be discussed with reference to the real-life listening challenges experienced by these children.

Bio:

Rebecca Holt is a post-doctoral research fellow in the Department of Linguistics and a member of the Child Language Lab at Macquarie University. She completed her PhD at Macquarie in 2020. Her current research investigates spoken language processing among children with and without hearing loss, and among adults learning English as a second language. This research employs diverse methods including eye-tracking, pupillometry, electroencephalography (EEG) and behavioural measures. She is also the coordinator for Macquarie's Centre for Language Sciences (CLaS).