



Media Release

Thursday, December 8, 2016

The Bilingual Benefit

The benefits of raising bilingual children have been a long debated topic among academics across the world.

Now, researchers are putting their “science where their mouth is” by showcasing the *bilingual benefit* at the 30th Speech Science and Technology Conference taking place in Parramatta this week.

Hosted by The MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development at Western Sydney University and the Australasian Speech Science and Technology Association, national and international researchers are reporting the latest findings in the fields of linguistics, speech sciences, and psycholinguistics.

Research from the MARCS BabyLab, together with Macquarie University and the National University of Singapore, has shown how early experiences with language affects children’s emerging linguistic abilities.

Dr Marina Kalashnikova, head of the MARCS BabyLab, said although most speech sciences focused on how adults processed language, children provided researchers with a unique test case for language understanding.

“Children come in to the world with no linguistic knowledge, but quickly become experts in their native language or languages in their first years of life in a manner that appears to be effortless.” she said.

“Babies can distinguish their native language from other languages at just one (1) month old.

“By 10-months of age they already know the sounds of their language and can understand multiple words. By 18-months of age they can say over 50 different words.”

Dr Kalashnikova said each child’s experience with language differed dramatically, impacting on their language understand and linguistic abilities.

“For example, many children in Australia and around the world grow up learning more than one language.

“These children face the challenging task of learning to distinguish between their two languages and learning the sounds and words in those two languages.”

“It is often believed that growing up bilingual may lead to delays in language development, but our research demonstrates that bilingual children follow different pathways in the task of learning language, which are not delayed compared to their monolingual peers.”

ENDS

For more information, contact - Farah Abdurahman – Media and Communications Officer for the MARCS Institute for Brain, Behavior and Development on 9772 6695 or F.Abdurahman@westernsydney.edu.au