

Marianella Casasola

Web Bio

Information

Biography

Biographical Statement

Marianella Casasola earned her undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Spanish Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. Her expertise is in infant cognitive development and early language acquisition with a particular interest in the interaction between thought and language during first few years of development. She continues to study various aspects of infant cognitive and linguistic development, but is especially interested in the emergence of spatial concepts, the early acquisition of spatial language, and the interplay between spatial cognition and spatial language in infants and young children. Her more recent work is examining infants' and young children's ability to learn a second language.

Department Website Summary

My research examines various aspects of early cognitive and linguistic development. I am especially interested in infants' early spatial skills, their acquisition of spatial language and the interplay between these two domains during the first years of development. I am also examine second language learning in toddlers and young children.

Teaching

Teaching and Advising Statement

In my courses and research lab , I strive to help students develop their critical thinking, a skill which I hope will be useful regardless of their career path. In my courses, I also focus on developing students' writing so that they gain confidence and proficiency in clearly communicating their ideas. In the lab, I strive to instill a sense of excitement for the process of discovery and encourage students to use their creativity in tackling a research question.

Professional

Current Professional Activities

Associate Editor, Developmental Psychology

Board member, Cognitive Development Society

Member, Society for Research in Child Development, International Society on Infant Studies, Cognitive Development Society

Ad-hoc reviewer, Psychological Science, Cognition, Child Development, Developmental Science, Journal of Child Language, Journal of Cognition and Development, Spatial Cognition and Computation, Cognitive Science, Language Learning and Development, Infancy, Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, Trends in Cognitive Science, British Journal of Developmental Psychology, Developmental Neuropsychology, Perspectives on Psychological Science

Research

Current Research Activities

My research program focuses on various aspects of infant cognitive development and early word learning. I am particularly interested in the interaction between cognition and language during the first few years of development. Much of my work has focused on early spatial cognition as well as the early acquisition of spatial language.

One goal of my research is to outline the early emergence of infants' spatial skills. Current research in my lab is striving to outline new methodological approaches that can be used to trace the trajectory of spatial skills from infancy into early childhood. We also are exploring how acquiring spatial language may relate to infants' spatial skills and whether there is a causal link between particular experiences, such as exposure to spatial language or engaging in spatial play activities, that may promote the early development of spatial skills. Our goal is to not only understand how early spatial skills develop, but also how they may best be promoted.

In other work, my students and I have begun to explore how infants and toddlers learn labels in a second language, examining how much exposure to a novel language (such as Spanish) is necessary for infants to begin to demonstrate comprehension of words in the unfamiliar language. We recently launched a new research project examining the ability of school-aged children to acquire a new language (Spanish) during a weekly enrichment program.

Extension

Current Extension Activities

I have begun a recent partnership with Brofenbrenner Center to expand our study of early spatial skills to more diverse samples of young children throughout NY state. Thanks to the assistance of the Brofenbrenner Center, we have made critical new connections to Head Start Centers in Tompkins County and will be expanding our experimental studies to these centers. The work with the Head Start centers are especially important in addressing the question of whether any benefits documented in a spatial language training study will be replicated with a sample

of low-income children. In addition, we seek to document whether any benefits remain evident in our sample of low-income children. I am sharing the results from this study, as well as the current findings in the field on early spatial skills, at Head Start staff trainings as well as the Research Navigator Trainings.

Education

Education

B.A., University of California, Berkeley, 1992; Psychology and Spanish Literature
Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin, 2000; Developmental Psychology

Courses

Courses Taught

HD 2830: Research Methods in Human Development

HD 3460: The Role and Meaning of Play

HD 4980: Seminar in Language and Thought

HD 6310: Graduate seminar in Cognitive Development

Websites

Related Websites

Cornell Infant Study Laboratory <http://www.human.cornell.edu/HD/CISL/>

Administration

Administrative Responsibilities

Director of Undergraduate Studies, July 2013 - July 2014

Member, Human Development Department Executive Committee, Fall 2013-July 2014

Faculty-in-Residence, Mary Donlon Hall, Fall 2008 - Spring 2014

Publications

Selected Publications

Vredenburgh, C., Kushnir, T., & Casasola, M. (in press). Pedagogical cues encourage toddlers' transmission of recently demonstrated functions to unfamiliar adults. *Developmental Science*. doi:10.1111/desc.12233

Ferguson, K. T., & Casasola, M. (in press). Are you an animal, too? African and US

infants' categorization of animals. *Infancy*. doi.10.1111/infa.12069

Bhagwat, J. B., & Casasola, M. (2014). Infant sensitivity to speaker and language in learning a second label. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 118, 41-56. doi 10.1016/j.jecp.2013.09.009

Casasola, M., & Park, Y. (2013). Developmental changes in infant spatial categorization: When more is better and less is enough. *Child Development*, 84, 1004-1019. doi 10.1111/cdev.12010

Casasola, M., Bhagwat, J., & Burke, A. S. (2009). Learning to form a spatial category of tight-fit relations: How experience with a label can give a boost. *Developmental Psychology*, 45, 711-723.

Casasola, M. (2008). The development of infants' spatial categories. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17, 21-25.

Casasola, M. (2005). When less is more: How infants learn to form an abstract categorical representation of support. *Child Development*, 76, 279-290.

Casasola, M. (2005). Can language do the driving? The effect of linguistic input on infants' categorization of support spatial relations. *Developmental Psychology*, 41, 183-192.

Casasola, M., Cohen, L.B., & Chiarello, E. (2003). Six-month-old infants' categorization of containment spatial relations. *Child Development*, 74, 679-693.