

# Marianella Casasola

Web Bio

## Information

### Biography

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#### Biographical Statement

Marianella Casasola earned her undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Spanish Literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She earned her Masters and Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. Her expertise is in infant cognitive development and early language acquisition with a special interest in the interaction between cognition and language. She continues to study various aspects of infant cognitive and linguistic development, with a particular focus on the emergence of spatial concepts, the early acquisition of spatial language, and the interplay between spatial cognition and spatial language in infants and children. Her more recent work is examining infants' and young children's ability to learn a second language. In collaboration with Dr. Gary Evans and several graduate students, she also has begun to examine early links between infant cognitive and socio-emotional abilities.

#### Department Website Summary

### Professional

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#### Current Professional Activities

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

*Board member, Cognitive Development Society*

*Consulting Editor, Developmental Psychology*

*Charter member, 2009-present, NIH Cognition and Perception study section*

*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 Trends in Cognitive Science, British Journal of Developmental Psychology*

## **Research**

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### **Current Research Activities**

My research program focuses on infant cognitive development and early word learning. I am particularly interested in the interaction between cognition and language during the first two years of development. In collaboration with students, I examine infants' ability to discriminate and categorize the spatial relations (e.g., in, on). One goal of my research is to outline the degree to which infants' perceptual and cognitive abilities provide them with the ability to acquire the meanings expressed across language-specific semantic categories (e.g., "in", "on", "out" and "off"). Much of my work focuses on outlining the processes that guide how infants learn to form abstract categorical representations of spatial relations. I also explore how experience with spatial language can shape which spatial categories infants learn to form. This line of work has been extended to examine how parent interactions with their infants as well as infants' own play behavior may be providing infants with the necessary experiences to learn about particular spatial relations. Finally, in the realm of spatial language, my students and I have examined how infants acquire semantic spatial categories. We explore this question in both experimental and naturalistic studies.

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. My most recent line of research has begun to explore links between infant cognitive and socio-emotional abilities. In collaboration with Gary Evans and several graduate students, we are documenting relations between infants' early cognitive abilities (such as language and attention) and their socio-emotional abilities (such as emotion understanding and self-regulation). In sum, my students and I are conducting numerous experimental as well as naturalistic studies that explore developmental changes in infant cognitive development, their socio-emotional abilities, how each of these of these abilities may be mutually influencing each others' development.

## **Extension**

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### **Current Extension Activities**

Gary Evans and I have developed partnership with several Cornell Cooperative Extensions agencies to assist us in recruiting a broader sample of infants. We are most interested in recruiting low-income families for our study of early cognitive and socio-emotional development. Thanks to the generous support of the Human Ecology Summer Internships, we have been able to work with our undergraduate students in developing a partnership with Topmkins, Yates and Cortland Counties Coopertive Extension Agencies and have consequently seen a significant increase in new families participating in our collaborative project.

## **Education**

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### **Education**

B.A., University of California, Berkeley, 1992; Psychology and Spanish Literature

M.A., University of Texas at Austin, 1995; Developmental Psychology

Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin, 2000; Developmental Psychology

## **Courses**

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### **Courses Taught**

HD 2830: Research Methods in Human Development

HD 4980: Honors Thesis Seminar for Human Development

HD 6310: Graduate seminar in Cognitive Development

HD 6360: Graduate seminar in Connecting Social, Cognitive, & Emotional Development

HD 6860: Graduate seminar in Research Methods

## **Websites**

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### **Related Websites**

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

## **Administration**

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### **Administrative Responsibilities**

Director, Undergraduate Honors Program, Fall 2005-present

Member, Undergraduate Education Committee

Faculty-in-Residence, Mary Donlon Hall

## **Publications**

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### **Selected Publications**

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., & Bhagwat, J. (2007). Does a novel word facilitate 18-month-olds' categorization of a spatial relation? *Child Development, 78*, 1818-1829.

Casasola, M., Wilbourn, M. P., & Yang, S. (2006). Can English-learning toddlers acquire and generalize a novel spatial word? *First Language, 26*, 187-205.

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., & Wilbourn, M.P. (2004). Fourteen-month-old infants form novel word-spatial relation associations. *Infancy*, 6, 385-396.

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

Casasola, M., & Cohen, L. B. (2002). Infant categorization of containment, support, and tight-fit spatial relationships. *Developmental Science*, 5, 247-264.

Casasola, M., & Cohen, L. B. (2000). Infants' association of language labels with causal actions. *Developmental Psychology*, 36, 155-168.

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