What predicts how quickly children learn words?

12:00 - 13:00, Friday, Apr 12, 2019
Room 385, Geography Building, Zhongbei Campus, ECNU
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Abstract:

Children differ substantially in the speed with which they learn to talk. By the age of 18 month, the fastest learner will know nearly 400 words, the slowest fewer than 100. We have known this for many decades, but until recently, we understood very little about why this was, partly because of the difficulty of studying language in very young children.

The onset of sophisticated new behavioural and neurological methods means that we can gain new insights into children’s learning. In this talk, I will present data from two intensive child language studies (the Language 05 Project and the Canberra Longitudinal Child Language Study) which use complex multi-method longitudinal designs to determine why children differ in the speed with which they build their lexicon in the first two years of life. I will present three studies from these projects – all around the theme of statistical learning. These studies illustrate how we are using multi-method designs combining behavioural and neurological measures to build a picture of what kinds of learning mechanisms underpin vocabulary development.