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MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Communicative Sciences
And Disorders

LINGO LAB NEWS

Winter 2021

Dear families, colleagues, community partners, and friends,

The Lingo Lab remains dedicated to autism research, despite the many challenges that COVID-19 has presented. Our lab doors are temporarily closed, but the work continues! Our research is all about understanding how children with autism learn language and how best to support children who experience delays in language development. We have already learned so much and are excited to expand our understanding even more. We are actively recruiting families (for our waitlist), analyzing data, transcribing language samples, and developing new and exciting ideas for future projects.

We are looking forward to the day when we can start bringing families into the lab once again. We miss you!

We have had over 60 families visit the Lingo Lab so far! We thank you for your contribution to autism research. We have enjoyed getting to know each and every one of you!

Please read on to find out more about what we have been up to!

Sincerely,

**Courtney Venker, Ph.D., CCC-SLP (Lab Director),
Jenny Johnson, M.S., CCC-SLP (Speech-Language Pathologist)
and The Lingo Lab Team**

► Research Updates from the Lab

- Findings from our survey of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) were published in July (Venker, McDaniel, & Yasick, 2020, *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*). This study provides insight into SLPs' use of simplified speech while working with children with language delays.
- In May 2020, lab alum Julia Andary submitted her MA thesis entitled, "Simplified Language Input: Perspectives of Parents with Children Enrolled in Early Intervention." This study surveyed parents of children in Michigan Early On (early intervention) regarding their perspectives on simplified language input. Parents viewed the child's ability to comprehend language as the most important factor when determining how to speak to a child with a language delay. Julia is now an SLP completing her Clinical Fellowship Year in the Chicago public schools.
- An article published by Venker et. al. (2020, *Autism Research*) investigated two eye-gaze data collection methods with young children with ASD: automatic eye tracking and manual gaze coding (gaze coding by hand from video). Families who have visited the lab may remember the "movies" your child watched, when we tracked their eye movements as they looked at pictures and listened to speech describing those images ("Look at the doggie!"). Findings showed that the choice of eye-gaze system can impact a study's results.

► Future Questions

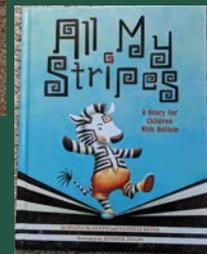
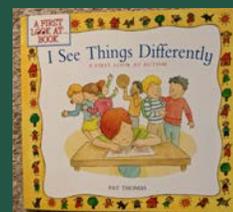
We are always asking new questions and learning from the families that visit our lab. A current MA thesis project by Mackenzie Sturman explores how electronic toys affect language learning in children with autism compared to traditional toys. Results will inform intervention techniques that promote language through play.



Using Picture Books to Talk about ASD

Picture books can be valuable tools to help start conversations about ASD. They can be used to raise awareness, enhance understanding, teach empathy, and encourage acceptance. Did you know that many read-alouds are freely available on youtube? Check out the examples below!

- [All My Stripes by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer](#)
- [I See Things Differently by Pat Thomas](#)
- [Since We're Friends: An Autism Picture Book by Celeste Shally](#)



► Lingo Lab in the News



Dr. Courtney Venker, Lingo Lab Director, received the Michigan State University Teacher-Scholar Award in January 2020 for her exceptional research accomplishments and her commitment to training future researchers and service providers.

For the full story, visit:

<https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2020/teacher-scholar-awards/>

The Lingo Lab is Growing!

We are excited to welcome two new members to our team this year.



Jenny Johnson, M.S., CCC-SLP, is a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist with more than 10 years of experience in public schools and preschools.

“I am excited to be a part of the Lingo Lab because I have a passion for working with young children, and I love to play! I hope to contribute to the important research that informs intervention and assessment techniques for children with ASD.”



Kezen Sanchez is a first-year undergraduate student at MSU. He is majoring in Human Biology with a minor in Cognitive Science.

“With the Lingo Lab, I hope to be part of a team that can help understand children with autism through the studies we conduct. But also, I joined this lab because of my love for children. I want to engage with the kids, and to hopefully have any positive impact on them, big or small.”

▶ Alumni Spotlight

We are proud to work with many outstanding students in the Lingo Lab. We recently caught up with Lingo Lab alum Lauren Luzbetak, the first student research assistant to join the lab back in the fall of 2017. Lauren is now a practicing SLP!

Where are you currently working? “I am currently working as a speech-language pathologist in the Waverly School District. I work in 2 buildings with grades 5-8.”

How do you think your experience at the Lingo Lab prepared you for your new position?

“Working in Lingo Lab helped to increase my understanding of autism spectrum disorder, as well as better understand when and how to ask questions when working with children who have ASD. It also prepared me in small ways, like strengthening my abilities to take on new projects and take charge even as a new clinician. I just started a social group for middle schoolers alongside a social worker, and I don't think I would have done something like that without my experiences in Lingo Lab.”

What do you enjoy about being an SLP?

“I love helping people achieve their goals, which speech-language pathology allows me to do. I work with older students, and I love that I get to work with them to problem solve, come to solutions, and strengthen skills. It is awesome to see when something clicks with them, their face lights up and they feel on top of the world. I love helping my students feel that way.”

Congratulations and best wishes, Lauren!





The Lingo Lab is recruiting families for an NIH-funded research study. Our goal is to better understand how children learn language. Families will receive a minimum of \$20/hr. We're looking for:



2 to 5-year-old children
with **autism**



For more information, or to find out if your child is eligible, contact us at: lingolab@msu.edu 517-884-8869

Lingo Lab Director:
Courtney Venker, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Assistant Professor, Communicative Sciences & Disorders

Lab visits are on hold, but we are still actively recruiting families of children with autism, age 2-5, to visit the lab once we re-open. If you or someone you know is interested, we would love to hear from you!

Email: lingolab@msu.edu

Phone: (517) 884-8869

In the meantime, check out these resources!

Make a Snowman Sensory Bottle

Sensory bottles or “Calm Down Bottles” are a great tool to use when you or your child just need a sensory break.

Shake it up and watch the glitter swirl and fall while your body calms.

Visit

<https://tinyurl.com/ybhf33fy>

for directions!



Michigan Alliance for Families

Need help navigating special education services during virtual learning? Michigan Alliance for Families provides free resources including on demand webinars for parents, caregivers, and educators.

<https://tinyurl.com/y3tjfl2b>



Free COVID-19 Toolkit

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has developed an online toolkit to support children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Visit

<https://tinyurl.com/vata8pd>

to access this free resource.



▶ Contact Us

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