

CBS Research Seminar

Tone Development in Mandarin-Speaking Children

Presented by

Dr PENG Gang

**Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

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Time: 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Venue: HJ302, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

All are Welcome.

ABSTRACT

Children start to produce their first words by the age of one; by four, most children have developed the ability to use their native language; by six or seven, they become veteran users of their native language. Studies on tone production have suggested very early mastery of Mandarin tones and reported that children produce tones correctly around age two. However, early production of tones in children before three years of age does not mean that children have the same tonal production ability as adults. On Mandarin tone perception, although the literature suggests that three-year-old children have already achieved a relatively high perceptual accuracy of all four Mandarin tones, research on the developmental course of categorical perception (CP) of Mandarin tones is still limited.

To track the detailed developmental course of children's fine-grained perception of Mandarin tones, we have explored how CP of Mandarin tones (Tone 1 vs. Tone 2) develops along age among four- to seven-year-old children. Our results indicate that six-year-olds have already acquired adult-like identification competence of Mandarin Tones 1 & 2. Moreover, the ability to discriminate more fine-grained between-category tonal differences has been enhanced gradually with age due to perceptual accumulation.