

## **Prosodic Cues to Noun and Verb Categories in Infant-Directed Speech**

Rushen Shi & Annick Moisan  
University of Quebec - Montreal

We tested the hypothesis that grammatical categories are distinguished by prosodic cues in input. Sentences in French were created containing disyllabic pseudo-words serving as both nouns and verbs. Factors influencing prosody (utterance positions, sentence length, content-function-word alternations, and prosodic phrasal grouping) were balanced. This design enabled us to not only consider how syntactically ambiguous words are categorized, but also examine in a reliable way whether distinct prosodic cues exist generally in the language for nouns and verbs. Parents read the sentences to their four- and 11-month-old infants, i.e., before versus at onset of vocabulary learning. Acoustic analyses revealed that nouns and verbs were different in vowel duration patterns in speech to both ages. F0 patterns also differed for the two categories, but only in speech to older infants. We conclude that nouns and verbs are prosodically marked in input, with cues stronger when infants start learning words and their categories.