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LOBO LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION LAB
IMPACT REPORT

AY 2023 - 2024

Lobo Language Acquisition Lab Impact Report AY 2023 - 2024

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Who We Are

A group of passionate language scientists from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, collaborating to foster more linguistically equitable communities.



A brief history

In early 2020, three professors at UNM focusing on child language acquisition formed a lab to promote research in this field, and to **foster a community aimed towards increasing the prevalence and acceptance of bilingualism**. The Lobo Language Acquisition Lab's humble beginnings were in a small office space that could comfortably sit no more than four people, and the lab was quickly forced to adapt to decentralized, remote work in response to the historic pandemic whose effects are still being felt today. And through all that, the lab has grown to inhabit a much larger space, complete with a conference table, multiple computer stations, and filing cabinets for various data collecting equipment, while also expanding greatly in membership, activities, and achievements.

Our ethos

The LLA Lab was founded on three core principles that guide our research programs and the products we aim to create for our community. The first is that all forms of language are variable, adapting to the environments in which they occur. Moreover, **all varieties of a language are valid**, with no one variety being "clearer" or superior than any other. The second principle of the lab is that our society at large nevertheless privileges certain types of language, and so we aim to **fight against linguistic biases**. The third principle the lab follows is the understanding that bilingual children acquire the language varieties present in their environment, receiving influences from the various factors present therein. Keeping in line with the preceding two principles, the forms of language used by bilingual children not only exhibit traits of the languages in their environment, their language has unique properties as a result of their multilingual interactions.

1. Language is variable, and all forms are valid

2. Linguistic biases impact people differently

3. Children acquire linguistic varieties in their environment

Co-Principal Investigators



MELVATHA R. CHEE

Dr. Chee's research involves the **acquisition of Navajo by young children**, with particular interest in how children learn to identify and use verbal roots, which are typically modified by a wide range of affixes. Dr. Chee is also involved in creating and promoting **resources for indigenous communities** to document and maintain their languages throughout New Mexico and beyond.

JILL P. MORFORD

Dr. Morford's work relates to **how deaf signers acquire and process their languages**, with more recent emphasis on how deaf children learn to utilize the more nuanced aspects of American Sign Language (ASL) to achieve joint attention. Dr. Morford has also been heavily involved in the **promotion of bilingual approaches to deaf education** across the state.



NAOMI L. SHIN

Dr. Shin investigates children's **acquisition of variable structures** in language, with a particular focus on Spanish-English bilingual children's developmental trajectory. Dr. Shin's work has shown that children are highly sensitive to variation in their linguistic environments, and that **bilinguals often have unique paths** to their language development.

ICLRC Program Specialist

TAMERA YAZZIE

Tamera finished her MA in Linguistics and is now the program specialist at the **Indigenous Child Language Research Center (ICRC)** directed by Dr. Melvatha Chee, focusing on **acquisition of Navajo by young children**.





Lab Member Highlights



Dawnadine Harvey

Dawnadine is pursuing her BA in Elementary Education with a focus on Language Arts. She plans to serve as an Indigenous reflection for students to connect with in the classroom environment.



Audriana Saucedo

Audriana is a Colorado native pursuing her B.A in Speech and Hearing Sciences with a minor in Family and Child Studies. Her goal is to become a certified Speech Language Pathologist specializing in pediatric care.



Melanie T'akhipaf Kirk-Lente

A tribal member of Isleta Pueblo, Melanie completed her BA in Linguistics in May 2024. She hopes to use her education to preserve, document, and revitalize Tiwa in her community.



Kayleigh Russell

Kayleigh is pursuing her BS in Signed Language Interpreting with a minor in Navajo. Her goal is to continue working with American Sign Language, Hand Talk and Navajo.



Monica Perez

Monica is a Pre-Med student in the Combined BA/MD Program, majoring in Criminology and Spanish with minors in HHMV and Chemistry. Monica's overall goal is to become a pediatrician and use her bilingualism as a tool to help many families.



Sharmaine Chee

Sharmaine is an undergraduate student in the Speech and Hearing program, minoring in Navajo. She has worked with the Indigenous Child Language Research Center for over a year and hopes to work as a Speech Pathologist in the Navajo Nation.



Evelyn Johnson

Evelyn is pursuing her BS in Signed Language Interpreting with a minor in Fine Arts. She is currently researching Hand Talk. Her goal is to become a signed language interpreter.



Devin Lansing

Devin is pursuing his BA in Special Education. He plans to earn a Master's Degree in Special Education before pursuing a career as a Diné Language and Culture teacher.



Lab Member Highlights



Eliza Forrest

Eliza graduated with their M.A. in Linguistics in May 2024 and will be pursuing their PhD in Linguistics at UNM beginning in Fall 2024.



Sarah Lease

Sarah Lease is a PhD candidate who has been working on projects related to Spanish-English bilingualism in the lab since 2021.



Jadin Moore

Jadin is an M.A. student in linguistics, they have interest in language documentation, sociolinguistics, and L2 learning of minority languages by heritage speakers. They are involved in the lab's research on Spanish-English bilingualism.



Rikki Farrell

Rikki completed their M.A. in Linguistics in May 2024 focusing on studying signed languages. During their two years in the lab, they worked on children's acquisition of ASL and the history of Hand Talk.

Graduate Students



Cormac League

Cormac completed his M.A. in Linguistics in May 2024. He has been a researcher with the Indigenous Child Language Research Center.



Ryan Smith

Ryan is pursuing his PhD in Linguistics with a focus on the neural and physiological relationship between gesture and speech.



Bethany Lycan

Bethany Lycan is a PhD student in the Department of Linguistics at UNM. She is originally from Southern California and went to California State University Long Beach for her MA in Linguistics. Her interests are in morphosyntax, typology, and language revitalization.



Alec Goldberg

Alec is pursuing a M.A. in linguistics at UNM. He works for the Indigenous Child Language Research Center under the direction of Dr. Melvatha Chee studying Navajo child language acquisition. His research interests are in the morphosyntax and semantics of the Navajo language.



Devin Tankersley

Devin is originally from southern California, but spent almost a decade living in Taiwan. He is now in his fourth year pursuing a PhD in Linguistics, focusing primarily on researching variation in Taiwan Sign Language.



Lab Alumni Highlights

Alumni from the LLA lab have continued doing great things after graduation! From research to teaching, to continuing education, former lab members are using their knowledge and research in amazing ways!



Elisabeth Baker Martínez
Hispanic Linguistics PhD

Elisabeth completed her PhD in Hispanic Linguistics in Spring 2024. Her research focused on monolingual and bilingual children’s language development. This August, she will be starting a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at El Paso.



Keda Kanye
Linguistics BA

Keda Kanye completed her BA in Linguistics in Fall 2022. As a McNair Fellow, her work focused on Spanish-English bilingual children.



Luisa Hurtado
Dual MA | Hispanic Linguistics and Portuguese

Luisa Hurtado completed her dual MA in Hispanic Linguistics and Portuguese in Spring 2024. Her research focused on bilingualism and language ideologies in Colombia.



David Páez
Linguistics PhD

David completed his PhD in Linguistics in Fall 2023. His research focused on co-speech gestures. He is currently a Spanish teacher in Santa Fe.



Joseline Segovia
Linguistics MA

Joseline Segovia completed her MA in Linguistics in Spring 2022 and is currently working as the Language Access Coordinator for the Albuquerque Police Department. She continues to collaborate with UNM faculty and students on combating linguistic bias.



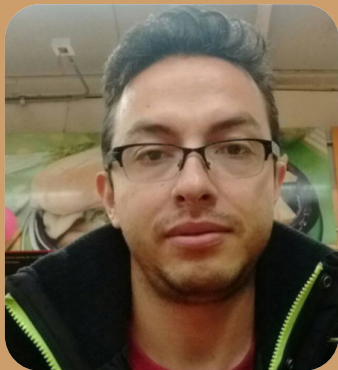
David Player
Linguistics MA

David Player completed his MA in Linguistics in Spring 2023. His thesis focused on regional variation of ASL in New Mexico. He is currently a lecturer at Sac State.



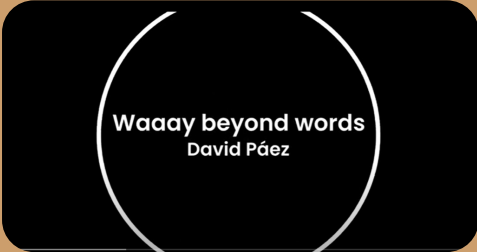
Paul Twitchell
Linguistics PhD

Paul Twitchell completed his PhD in Educational Linguistics in Spring 2023. His thesis focused on signed language development among deaf children. He has joined the faculty of the Signed Language Interpreting Program at UNM.



Fredy Mendieta Rodríguez
PhD candidate

Fredy is pursuing a PhD in Hispanic Linguistics. His research focuses on Spanish-speaking adults’ and children’s co-speech gestures, in particular points and demonstratives.



Lab member and UNM graduate Dr. David Páez won 2nd place at the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) Five-Minute Linguist video competition! His video was titled “Waaay beyond words: Using voice and gestures to catapult communication”.

Combating Linguistic Bias

Interactive Workshops for Teachers

Early Education

Explora Summit for Early Science Learning

September 2023: "Language Variation and Linguistic Bias Awareness"

New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC)

October 2023: Online Webinar "Language Variation and Linguistic Bias in the Classroom"

K-12

Dual Language Education of New Mexico- La Cosecha

September 2023: "Grappling with Variation and Linguistic Biases in the classroom"

New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children (NMAEYC)

April 2024: "Celebrate Linguistic Diversity, Combat Linguistic Bias"

Educators in Navajo Language Learning

Dine Language Teacher Institute

January 2024: "Language Variation and Linguistic Bias: Implications for Navajo Language Learning"

Educators of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

New Mexico School for the Deaf Training

May 2024: "Grappling with Variation and Linguistic Bias"



The LLA Lab utilizes its research on minority languages to *celebrate linguistic diversity* and *combat linguistic bias*. They have accomplished this through the formation of many community partnerships and a variety of different resources and interactive presentations for a wide array of audiences, each catered to groups that they serve.

Online Credential for NM Teachers

Naomi Shin and David Páez created a **module on linguistic bias in the classroom** for the **New Mexico Public Education Department's** online micro-credential "New Mexico Education Acts." 529 teachers have taken the course or are currently enrolled. Comments on the module indicate teachers found it to be **helpful and informative**:

- "The Linguistic Bias Videos were amazing--I think they should be required viewing for all teachers."
- "I found all the presentations to be well-delivered, but the one on Linguistic Bias stood out to me the most. It prompted me to reflect on and assess my own biases."

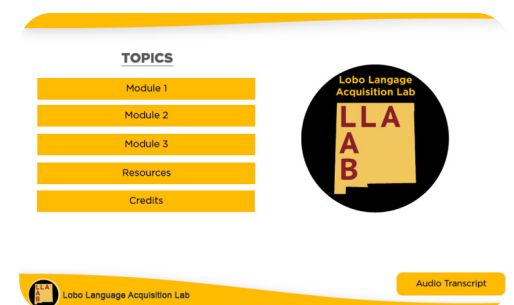
Linguistic Bias Training

3 Modules

- Linguistic Diversity in New Mexico and Intro to Linguistic Bias
- General Unconscious Bias
- How to Address Linguistic Biases and Resources

UNM Newsroom Story

UNM published a story highlighting the LLA lab's **teacher outreach team**. They research the effects linguistic bias has in the classroom, and provide teachers with evidence based tools and protocols to prevent linguistic bias from affecting student success.



Our Research

Signed Languages (ASL, Hand Talk)

Dr. Morford continued her research on **children’s and adult’s use of demonstratives** in ASL and worked with research assistants to develop training materials that **raise awareness about linguistic bias in signing communities and Indigenous ways of signing** that predate ASL. Lab member Devin Tankersley wrote an article for DLENM’s Soleado newsletter on the **importance of Deaf dual language education**. With Dr. Morford, Russell and Johnson also gave presentations on **Hand Talk, signed language, and indigenous identity** at the Native American Special Education Conference hosted by EPICS as well as DLENM’s La Cosecha conference.



“Broadening Bilingualism: The Case for Deaf Dual Language Education” by: Devin Tankersley

Published in the Summer 2023 edition of *Soleado*, lab member Devin Tankersley wrote this article to call attention to the often overlooked and underserved population of deaf bilingual students.

The LLA Lab is engaged in a number of different research areas, focusing on *language development of various minority languages used throughout New Mexico and beyond.*

Indigenous Child Language Development

Dr. Chee continued her work researching **Navajo child language and building community engagement to support Indigenous child language development**. Her work with research assistants in the Indigenous Child Language Research Center produced several new research projects that **document child and child-directed speech and child gesture development in Navajo** as well as the development of a card game to **help learners of Navajo acquire the complex verbal system**. Chee was the plenary speaker for the 26th Annual Workshop on American Indigenous Languages (WAIL, 2024). The ICLRC also launched a new website to provide information about their research as well as resources to the community (iclrc.unm.edu).



Spanish-English Bilingual Child Language Development

Lab members continued their work on **Spanish-English bilingualism** and built new **community partnerships** with educational organizations throughout the state. In addition to publishing the book chapter “Monolingual and Bilingual Child Language Acquisition and Language Change,” Dr. Shin met with the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care to discuss **how bilingualism research can improve state educational policies**. Lab member Dr. Elisabeth Baker Martínez completed her dissertation on **bilingual children’s acquisition of irregular Spanish verb forms** and published an article with Dr. Shin on **child heritage Spanish speakers’ overregularization**. Monica Perez, Naomi Shin, Jadin Moore, and Sarah Lease (pictured right) continued to research Spanish-English bilinguals’ conceptualization of space and use of demonstratives.



What's Coming Next

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

May 17-18, 2024 | Albuquerque, NM

CLASIC 2024

The inaugural Child Language Acquisition Symposium for Indigenous Communities (CLASIC).

Debuting in 2024, CLASIC is a symposium concerned with Indigenous child language acquisition in the United States and Canada.

On May 17-18, the Indigenous Child Language Research Center will host the inaugural Child Language Symposium for Indigenous Communities. This symposium brings together researchers, language nest representatives, and families to discuss both research and praxis related to Indigenous child language.

Melvatha Chee continues to direct the **Indigenous Child Language Research Center**. Her team has been working closely with **Saad K'idiliyé**, a **Diné language nest** in Albuquerque. Chee's article on Navajo-speaking children's production of verbs was recently accepted for publication in the *Journal of Child Language*.



The LLA lab has plans to continue their research and positive community impact!

HAND TALK AND COLLABORATION WITH THE DEAF COMMUNITY



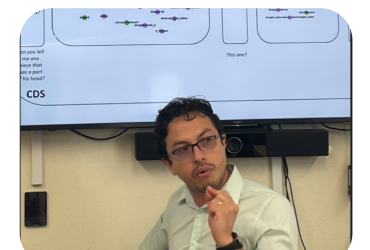
A team of three Early Intervention Specialists from NMSD will participate in the CLASIC conference to consider how the Language Nest Model can be used to support Deaf children's language development.

The signed language research team is discussing summer programming at NMSD with a focus on **documenting and sharing the resilient practices of families in tribal communities who have raised Deaf Indigenous children**. They also have a paper under review with *Sign Language Studies* titled, "Recentring Hand Talk in the History of North American Signing".

HERITAGE SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM

Naomi Shin will present "Child heritage speakers' Spanish nominal demonstratives" at the 15th Heritage Language Institute at UC Irvine in June.

Shin and lab member Fredy Mendieta-Rodríguez's article "Spanish-English bilinguals' use of demonstratives *esta* and *esa*" was published in the *Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics Journal*. In addition, Shin and lab member Sarah Lease have two articles under review related to **bilinguals' demonstratives**. Shin continues to work with students on **teacher outreach projects** and is preparing an article on **Sociogrammar**. Sarah Lease also continues to work on Spanish-English bilingual children's sound patterns.



Stay Connected!



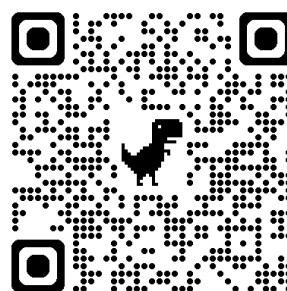
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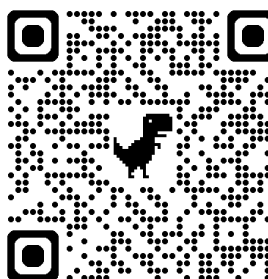
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Thank You!



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