



brain+cognitive sciences

2008 Spring Colloquium Series

Speaker Jesse Snedeker, Harvard
Time 4pm, Departmental Tea immediately following.
Date Friday, 29 February 2008
Place BCS Auditorium, 46-3002
Title Starting Over: International Adoption as a Natural Experiment in Language Acquisition.

Abstract:

Language development is marked by a predictable sequence of milestones: single words are followed by short telegraphic utterances which are rapidly replaced by more complex sentences. Early vocabularies are dominated by nouns, with verbs and grammatical words appearing later in acquisition. Are these qualitative changes driven by cognitive development and maturation? Or are they a by-product of the learning process? We have been exploring these questions by examining the acquisition of English in internationally adopted preschoolers. These children are in a unique situation. Like infants they acquire language from child-directed speech. Unlike most second language learners they do not maintain their first language and they have little or no access to bilingual informants. But they are clearly older and more cognitively advanced than infant learners.