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UNIVERSITY

# *Department of Psychology and The Cognitive Science Program*



Dr. Casey Lew-Williams

Princeton University

Breaking into language in infancy: Finding  
structure in patterned input

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In the first year of life, two signatures of human cognition begin to interact: our capacity for detecting and remembering patterns, and our interest in communicating with others. Using language as a window into the developing mind, I will present experiments showing that typically developing infants thrive in breaking into structure when they have ample 'high-quality' data to operate over. Their learning abilities are well-matched to input that is communicatively relevant, naturally variable, and packaged with accessible statistics. I will conclude by discussing how some children miss these opportunities for learning, whether over the course of seconds or years. Investigations into the detection, processing, and learning of structure may be important for understanding the mystery of how infants learn language so quickly, and also how children who lack access to enriching experience are often hindered in the same pursuit.

For more information contact:

Department of Psychology ▪ 610-758-3630 ▪ [tml6@lehigh.edu](mailto:tml6@lehigh.edu)