Christmas Newsletter - December 2017

2017 has been a busy year and a year of change. Our funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) came to an end in December 2016. Since then DCAL staff have been supported by UCL and we have been applying for lots of research grants. This newsletter has an update on the many exciting things that we’ve done this year – including research, teaching, CPD and impact.

Many thanks for your support this year. We are looking forward to many more exciting developments in 2018!

Research update

Our research into how deafness and language experience influence brain function has resulted in a couple of important papers this year (Twomey et al., Journal of Neuroscience; Cardin et al., Cerebral Cortex). These studies have shown that parts of the brain that typically respond to sound in hearing people can be used in cognitive tasks (not just low level processing of vision) in people born deaf.

Mairéad MacSweeney’s group have also continued their research into the role of lipreading in reading development in deaf children. In a recent paper they have shown that deaf and hearing children show very similar looking patterns when they look at a face of someone speaking - however this pattern relates to reading more in deaf than hearing children (Worster et al.).

In the area of linguistics, Kearsy Cormier was appointed as a Reader in the UCL Linguistics Department. She was also awarded two research grants this year. Her new team have been busy on these projects exploring BSL syntax, interaction in BSL conversation, and language attitudes.

Kearsy is also beginning some new collaborations with linguists at the Centre for Language Evolution at the University of Edinburgh and is applying for grants in this area and also in the area of computer recognition of sign language – so watch this space for more developments next year.
In the area of translation, **Robert Adam** has presented a number of keynote lectures this year - e.g. at the Gallaudet University Interpretation and Translation research symposium and the International Conference on Minority Languages in Finland.

**Bencie Woll** has enjoyed stepping down from the DCAL Director role but has kept busy with a new research project on the cognitive benefits of language learning (both signed and spoken language). She also was elected as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in February. She also presented the keynote lecture at the British Association for Applied Linguistics https://baal.org.uk/annual-conference/video-from-50th-anniversary-baal-annual-meeting-university-of-leeds/

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**Interested in DCAL degree level courses?**

At DCAL we offer a number of modules to undergraduate and graduate students at UCL, including Linguistics of Sign Languages; Deafness, Cognition and Language; Introduction to Deafhood; Interaction and Language Management of Interpreting; Historical and Social Context of Interpreting; Live Captioning (from autumn 2018). Find out more about the courses we offer on our website – [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/study](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/study). Many professionals working in the area of deafness or sign language have told us that they are interested in these courses but don’t want to sign up for a full degree course. Therefore we are looking into offering these modules for Continuing Professional Development credit. We will have more information about this in 2018.

UCL is the only UK University that requires that all undergraduate students enter with or gain a certain level of competence in a Modern Foreign Language (MFL). We campaigned for UCL to recognise BSL as a language meeting this MFL requirement, and this was approved in July 2017. Although BSL is of course not ‘foreign’ to the UK, the term “modern foreign language” is often applied to additional indigenous languages at University level (e.g., ASL and Navajo in the US; Welsh in the UK). DCAL already runs two introductory BSL modules at UCL and we plan to expand this provision at both introductory and advanced levels.
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In 2017, we have been working hard to develop the summer schools on offer at DCAL, introducing new short courses and promoting our online Deaf Awareness course (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/study/deaf-awareness). Due to growth in CPD demand, Manjula Patrick, (Centre Administrator at DCAL) and Robert Adam are now working together as co-Directors of Continuing Professional Development.

In May we had a group of students from the University of Pittsburgh visit for a three week summer school. They studied BSL and visited Frank Barnes School and the UCL Action on Hearing Loss Library. The students loved it so much, the University is bringing a larger group in 2018. We plan to offer these courses to other universities in the future. We are also developing plans for a ‘Research Skills Summer School: The language of deaf people’ (July 2018). There will be more information about this on the website soon.

Our bespoke courses continue to be in demand. We have organised workshops on a range of topics, both nationally and internationally (including Japan, Sweden, USA). Find out more about our CPD courses here – https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/study. Or get in touch by emailing calcourses@ucl.ac.uk if you would like a course delivered at your workplace or educational institution.

Impact

Over the last decade we have developed many tests of language and cognition for deaf people, both adults and children. In spring 2016, we launched the DCAL Assessment Portal – which makes our tests available to clinicians, educators and researchers all over the UK (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/dcal-portal). We have also had lots of international interest and some of our tests will be adapted for use in other countries in the future.

Our work developing cognitive tests for dementia directly led to a new Cognitive Disorders Clinic for Deaf patients at UCLH National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London. Deaf people who are concerned about their memory or thinking can be referred by their GP from all over the UK. In the clinic, we use several cognitive tests developed through our research. In 2017 we received the exciting news that NHS England are going to fund this clinic on an on-going basis. This is a huge achievement in the current economic climate, and is great news for deaf people in the UK. It is the first time there has been specialist neurology provision for BSL users. If you would like to organise a referral, please contact, Rayna.James@uclh.nhs.uk

Happy Christmas and happy new year from all at DCAL!

If you’d like to contact us about anything in this newsletter or any of the work we do – please do email: dcal@ucl.ac.uk
You can also follow us on twitter @DCAL_UCL