

# Christmas Newsletter - December 2021

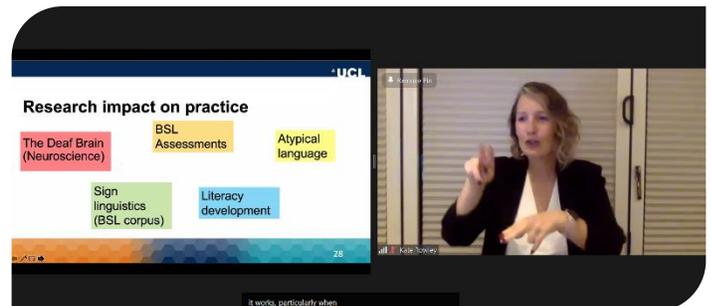


It's hard to believe that we are again rapidly approaching Christmas! 2021 has been another year of challenges presented by the Covid19 pandemic. However, it has also been a year of growth and development at DCAL. In August 2021, we were delighted to appoint Dr. Kate Rowley as a UCL Lecturer in Language and Cognition. [Kate's expertise](#) in language and literacy development in deaf children, along with her breadth of experience in other areas related to sign language and deaf studies, further strengthens our world-leading teaching and research in the field of Deafness, Cognition and Language. Welcome Kate! We are delighted that you are part of the DCAL team and look forward to many exciting years of working together.

We have selected some of the highlights from this year for this newsletter. I hope you enjoy learning more about what we have been up to. From all of us, thank you for your support and we wish you a very happy Christmas and we hope 2022 will be happy and healthy for all.

## 15 year celebration

This year we celebrated 15 years of research excellence from DCAL, where we explored 'the Legacy of DCAL' through three fantastic online events on BSL, Deaf education and the Deaf brain. Together with our panelists and audience, we also discussed future directions for our research and engagement work. Three nights of celebrations, attended by 305 people, saw performances from deaf artists, researchers and practitioners from across the globe coming together to celebrate the contributions of DCAL to the academic and deaf community. If you missed these events, they have been recorded and they will be available to watch shortly.



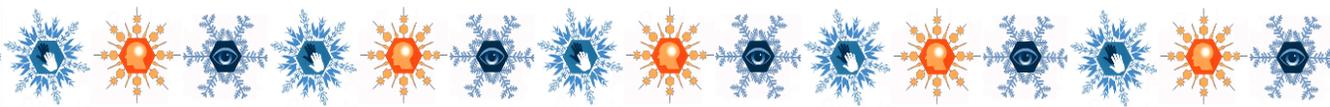
## Research update

UCL and DCAL started opening the doors for Covid-safe research in April 2021. This has been a slow process, but with many interesting projects now up and running. If you are interested in being involved in our future research please do [sign up](#) here.

We have summarised some highlights of our recent research below and you can find out about all of our ongoing projects [here](#). We are working on creating short summaries of some of our specific research studies in BSL and English. [Here](#) is the first one.

### **Sign Linguistics Research**





This year we have conducted studies on BSL grammar – including work on sign order, facial expressions and head movements. We have also focussed on sign language technology, including development of tools for automatic translation between BSL and English.

We finalised some work on language attitudes towards BSL in the deaf community. This included a new [publication](#) about regional variation. Many of us know that there is a lot of regional variation in BSL, with different regions of the U.K. having different signs for colours, places, numbers, etc. Less is known about how deaf people feel about regional variation, whether or not they viewed regional variation in a positive manner. Our research shows that deaf signers are aware of the extensive regional variation in BSL and are able to give many examples of these variations. We also found that many deaf signers placed enormous value on regional signs believing that it put BSL on an equal footing to English, as English has many accents. Keep an eye on our twitter feed where we will post a BSL and English summary of this research very soon!

### ***Language Comprehension in Deaf Children***



[Dr. Kate Rowley](#) was recently successful in being awarded a grant from the ESRC. Congratulations! The aim of the project is to investigate the role of language comprehension in deaf children who use BSL and how this may impact reading comprehension. Dr. Patrick Rosenberg will be joining the DCAL team to work full time on this project as a post-doctoral researcher when it starts in January 2022. Patrick previously developed an American Sign Language (ASL) Comprehension Test. Using the test to examine the relationship between ASL and reading comprehension he found that children who performed better on the ASL comprehension test also performed better on the reading comprehension test. We will be adapting the ASL

comprehension test into BSL and will be working with schools around the U.K. on this project. Do get in touch with us if you are interested in helping us with this project on [BSLAssessments@gmail.com](mailto:BSLAssessments@gmail.com).

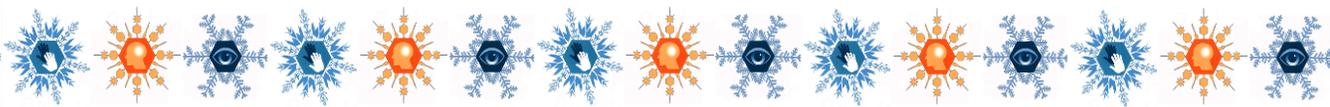
### ***Reading Research***

We continue our longitudinal Preschool Language and Literacy project, which investigates how early spoken and sign language skills relate to reading later on. Yet again, due to COVID-19, we were not able to visit schools and assess children in the spring. Teachers have kindly helped us out and tested children on our behalf. The team is busy working through data, and planning the next phase of data collection in spring/summer 2022. We look forward to visiting all children and schools next year!

### ***The Deaf Brain***

We continue our work on the deaf brain, investigating language and cognitive processing. We know that in hearing people, there are regions of the brain that are involved in making sense of sounds. These regions are called 'auditory cortex'. We know that deaf individuals use the auditory cortex for vision and touch, but in recent work we show that they are also used for other functions, such as switching between tasks. These are not functions that are typically found in the auditory cortex in hearing individuals, showing that the brain adapts its function to the sensory experience of the individual. This is an exciting finding, because it changes the way we think about the function of different brain regions. It shows that the function of different brain regions is not 'fixed' and that is very much influenced by sensory experience. You can see our preprint [here](#).





### ***Impact of Covid-19 on the Deaf Community***

While face coverings have been important in reducing the spread of Covid-19, it has affected human communication, particularly for deaf and hard-of-hearing people (HoH). In collaboration with Dr. Eva Gutierrez-Sigut (project lead), lecturer at the University of Essex, Dr. Kate Rowley (co-investigator) carried out a survey exploring the impact of face coverings on communication. Responses from 395 deaf/HoH people from the U.K. and Spain revealed that despite difficulties in communication, most deaf/HoH

wore masks. Deaf people who became deaf later in life struggled the most with communication and reported lower levels of wellbeing. All deaf people, whether they became deaf early or late in life, reported that they were missing more information and felt more disconnected from society. Deaf people who sign valued transparent face shields more than those who do not sign, as seeing the whole face, and not just the lips, is important for communication. Deaf people generally appreciated alternative ways to communicate in face-to-face interactions such as gesture, pointing.

## **Studying at DCAL**

Last year's shift to fully online education due to Covid was a major achievement. All DCAL staff rose to this challenge and both Dr. Velia Cardin and Dr. Fiona Kyle were even nominated for the UCL Student Choice Awards. This year we are 'flexing' yet again with blended learning – some face to face teaching and some online.

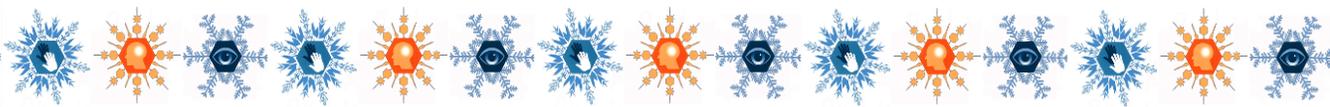
We offer degree-level modules 'Deafness, Cognition and Language', 'Sign Language Linguistics', 'Deaf Culture' and modules on BSL (level 1 and level 2) and on interpreting. For postgraduate students, we also offer the [MSc in Language Sciences with specialisation in Sign Language and Deaf Studies](#), which attracts students from around the world. We also offer an [affiliate programme in Psychology and Language Sciences](#). This allows undergraduate students from overseas to study at UCL for one or two terms, with an option to specialise in Sign Language and Deaf Studies.



Find out more about the courses we offer on our [website](#) and [get in touch](#) if you are interested in applying.

## **Widening Participation, Engagement and Community Projects**

2021 saw the realisation of the "[Light-Wave](#)" project, where **Deaf artist Rubbena Aurangzeb-Tariq and Prof. Bencie Woll, together with members of the East London Deaf community**, examined the underrepresentation of the Deaf community in cultural discourse. They focused on the community's history, culture, Sign Language development and use, and collaboratively explored the potential of Zoom as a site of co-creation for Deaf people. In April, Rubbena premiered her artist's film, which aimed to bring wider attention and visibility to the community's presence and narratives. The Zoom conversations in BSL which formed the basis of the film will be made available by the end of the year on the DCAL website together with the final edited version of the film. More information can be found [here](#).



### **Discover UCL for deaf and hard of hearing Yr11&12 students**

ran online in August 2021 for the 9<sup>th</sup> year, led by Dr. Manjula Patrick. We introduced new online sessions, including interviews with deaf role models, a Q&A panel and interactive groups sessions to create deaf awareness posters. Four former Discover UCL students came back and helped deliver the programme this year. It has been extremely valuable for the students this year to know their stories, and nice to see them all doing so well! Next August will be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Discover UCL, we hope to have an extra special programme and deliver it in person! [Get in touch](#) if you want to find out more.



## **Resources for research and for the community.**

The current pandemic has changed the ways in which we communicate and work, in many cases with more profound effects for deaf and hard of hearing people. Throughout the pandemic, members of DCAL developed a range of strategies and guidelines to adapt to these new challenges. These include:

- [Remote working guidelines](#) to ensure that deaf people could maximise their online participation in virtual meetings and events, and reduce visual demands and fatigue.
- [COVID-19 BSL e-books for children](#), in collaboration with Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children. These e-books provide deaf children who use BSL with direct access to crucial information about coronavirus and its impact on everyday life.
- [Information about the impact of face masks on communication](#). We wrote a statement explaining communication issues due to face coverings, where we highlight the main challenges and also explain some possible adaptations.
- [How to caption videos](#). As part of our commitment to provide accessible information and teaching materials, teaching staff at DCAL have looked into various options both for creating and editing auto-captions. We hope these can be used not only by other lecturers and teachers working remotely, but also aid people and organisations in providing accessible videos.



We also have a range of resources from all of our research projects and findings. The [DCAL Research Data Archive](#) is a publicly available data archive of our studies of language, communication and cognition. Browse the data from our unique projects here and learn more about our findings!



The [British Sign Language \(BSL\) Corpus](#) is a publicly accessible, on-line record of BSL used by Deaf people in the UK. It's a collection of video clips showing Deaf people using BSL, together with background information about the signers and written descriptions of the signing in ELAN. You can also explore [BSL SignBank](#), a wonderful website with approximately 2500 BSL signs developed from the BSL Corpus. In other words, BSL signs directly from the deaf community!

For qualified professionals and researchers working with deaf children and adults, the [DCAL Assessment portal](#) hosts eight language and cognition assessments suitable for use with deaf individuals. These assessments have been based on 15 years of research at DCAL, and can be used to assess

