

Professor Sophie Scott's 19 years at PALS

I have been at UCL since 1998, when I came to work at the ICN in [Paul Burgess's](#) lab. I started my own lab in 2001, studying the neurobiology of human vocal communication, and this has grown and developed over the next few years. Much of my current work looks at human vocal communication in the context of social interactions – we can study speech perception and production independently but 'in the wild' they occur together in spoken conversation. I am also interested in how other aspects of our voices are modulated by social context, and the ways that we use emotional expressions like laughter.



My research started as very focussed on speech as an expression of language, but I now see it has an equally important social function, and much of the important information in the voice is as much to do with emotion and identity as it is to language.

I have also learnt a great deal about the voice from working with different kinds of vocal artists – from impressionists to beat boxers, from singers to theatre directors. Many of the chances have arisen through my science communication work, and I have come

increasingly to value the opportunity to share my work with wider audiences – it's a great way of improving communication skills more generally and of practicing more accessible ways of describing my work. It is also interesting to try and develop this into more coherent projects which can help train a wider range of my UCL colleagues and students – such as the "[what's in a voice](#)" exhibit that I ran at the [Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition](#) this summer.

I am absolutely delighted to be able to say that my research – and my science communication work – have led to my being invited to give this year's [Royal Institution Christmas Lectures on the Language of Life](#). This is both a tremendous honour and a huge challenge, as I'll be following in the footsteps some pretty impressive scientists, and we have both got to make the lectures fun and accessible, but also be scientifically accurate! You can watch the first lecture on BBC4 this Boxing Day, so you can determine how well we manage this!

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