“Footprints in the mud: finding traces of CNS damage in the spoken discourse of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.”

John C. Thorne, PhD, CCC-SLP
Senior Lecturer and Researcher, University of Washington
Child Language Lab, Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences;
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Diagnostic and Prevention Network,
Center On Human Development and Disability

Friday 1 June 2018 @ 3:30 PM
Eagleson Hall, Room 001

Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) relies heavily upon standardized assessment of behavioral functioning to identify CNS damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE). Language impairment is one neurodevelopmental symptom associated with PAE that can be used for this purpose, but clinical research suggests that traditional standardized language tests may fail to capture important communication challenges in many school-aged children with FASD, limiting their sensitivity to CNS damage associated with PAE. This may be due in part to the fact that these tests typically probe language capacity using tasks that decontextualize language in order to isolate specific linguistic skills. While this approach has certain advantages in terms of eliciting a clean signal to support reliable assessment of behavior, it may also reduce cognitive demands in ways that reduce sensitivity to CNS damage. Unlike the behavior elicited by most standardized language tests, real communicative discourse is messy. It requires hierarchical integration of multiple skills in dynamic social contexts. This makes it potentially more demanding cognitively, and, therefore, potentially more able to reveal CNS damage when it is present. The clinical challenge is to determine what aspects of the messy signal produced by children during a discourse task are diagnostically sensitive to underlying CNS damage, and how to systematically and reliably extract that information to support diagnostic decision making. This talk will discuss progress made towards meeting this challenge, as well as implications and future directions.

SHACS is a collaboration between the UW Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences and the Virginia Merrill Bloedel Hearing Research Center (VMBHRC). To learn more, contact Llyne Foy at 206.616.6655 or lfoy@uw.edu.

To request disability accommodations from Disability Services: 206-543-6450/V, 206-543-6452/TTY, 206-685-7264/FAX, dso@uw.edu/E-MAIL