Young children learn words in dynamic contexts where objects and learners are constantly moving. Research in cognitive psychology has demonstrated that the spatial locations of objects and learners organize attention and memories. Do dynamic spatial contexts affect how children map a label to a meaning? In this talk, I will describe three sets of experiments that examine the role of spatial consistency in 1.5 to 2.5-year-olds’ object-name learning. The first study shows that consistent object locations organize where to look and what is remembered, promoting word learning in toddlers. The second study links these processes to the position of the child with respect to objects, and shows that a consistent postural position also supports word learning. The final study examines why consistency might be important for learning, and demonstrates that the ability to predict an event also promotes word learning. Together, these findings show that consistency in the spatial properties of word learning moments supports the ability to learn the meanings of words. The findings highlight the importance of understanding how word-learning mechanisms are grounded in the body and spatial contexts of the developing child.

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4:00 PM, 290 PAIS
(Psychology & Interdisciplinary Sciences Bldg)