

Molly E. Flaherty

Davidson College
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Language acquisition, numerical cognition, cognitive development, language emergence, sign languages and sign acquisition, effects of cultural variation in early childhood environment

EMPLOYMENT

Davidson College, Davidson, NC, USA 07/20-present
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology

Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, USA 08/18-07/20
Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology

The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK 12/16-08/18
British Academy & Royal Society Newton International Postdoctoral Fellow
Centre for Language Evolution
Department of Linguistics and English Language

The University of Chicago, Chicago IL, USA 08/14-12/16
Postdoctoral Scholar
Casasanto Lab & Goldin-Meadow Lab
Department of Psychology

EDUCATION

The University of Chicago
Chicago, IL USA
Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology, June 2014
Advisor: Susan Goldin-Meadow

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Advisor: Simon Kirby
MSc in the Evolution of Language and Cognition, November 2007
Degree awarded with distinction.

Columbia College, Columbia University
New York, NY USA
B.A. in Psychology, May 2004, Concentration in Spanish Literature
Graduated magna cum laude with additional honors in psychology.

AWARDS & GRANTS

Best Paper in *Language* Award, The Linguistic Society of America, 2019
Newton Alumni Fellowship, The British Academy, 2019-2020 (Flaherty, PI)
Faculty Research Support Grant, Swarthmore College, 2018 (Flaherty, PI)
NIH (NIDCD) R01 DC005407 "The creation and enhancement of language" 2017-2022
(Senghas, PI; Flaherty, Consultant)
NSF 1654154 "*Language emergence in the manual modality*" 2017-present (Goldin-Meadow, PI; Flaherty, Consultant)
Newton International Fellowship, The British Academy, 2015-2018 (Flaherty, PI)
Benjamin Bloom Dissertation Year Fellowship, June 2013-2014
William Rainey Harper Dissertation Year Fellowship, 2013-2014 (declined)
John Dewey Prize Lectureship, Spring 2013
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, September 2009-August 2012
Paula Menyuk Travel Award, BU Conference on Language Development, 2007 & 2013
US Masters Scholarship, University of Edinburgh, September 2006

LANGUAGES

Native English, Fluent Spanish, Conversational Nicaraguan Sign Language, Conversational German, Conversational American Sign Language, Basic British Sign Language

TEACHING EXPERIENCE**Davidson College, Department of Psychology**

Child Development Fall 2020

Is Nature vs. Nurture the Wrong Question? (Upper Level Seminar) Fall 2020

Swarthmore College, Department of Psychology

Developmental Psychology Fall 2018, 2019

Research Methods Fall 2019

Developmental Research Practicum Spring 2020

Mini-seminar: Research and Debate in the Age of Twitter Fall 2018

Language Learning and Development (Upper Level Undergraduate Seminar) Spring 2019, 2020

Is Nature vs. Nurture the Wrong Question? (First Year Seminar) Spring 2019

The University of Chicago, Department of Psychology

Psychology 22550 Is Nature vs. Nurture the Wrong Question? Spring 2013
Lecturer

Psychology 25101 The Psychology of Decision Making Spring 2012
Teaching Assistant

Psychology 20500 Introduction to Developmental Psychology Spring 2011
Teaching Assistant, Guest Lecturer

Psychology 20100 Psychological Statistics Fall 2010
Teaching Assistant

Mentorship

Caroline Reynier (BA, thesis)	Swarthmore College	2019-2020
Evan Orticio (BA, honors thesis)	Swarthmore College	2019-2020
Lilia McGee-Harris (BA, thesis)	Swarthmore College	2018-2020
Samantha Martin (BA)	Swarthmore College	2019-present
Asha Stewart Sato (PhD)	The University of Edinburgh	2016-present
Katelyn Stangle (BA, honors thesis)	The University of Chicago	2011-2014

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Max Planck Child Study Centre, University of Manchester 09/07 – 08/08

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Department of Comparative and Developmental Psychology

Research Assistant

Advisors: Elena Lieven, Michael Tomasello

Lab examines language acquisition from a usage-based approach. Responsible for proofing of dense corpus of child speech. Ran child subjects in studies. Aided in preparing and developing studies on children's use of articles and the origins of pointing.

Language Acquisition and Development Laboratory, Columbia University 04/04 – 09/06

Lab Manager

Advisor: Ann Senghas

Lab's research investigates mechanisms behind language acquisition and innovation through the lens of Nicaraguan Sign Language. Responsible for day-to-day lab activities in New York as well as field trips to Nicaragua. Aided with preparation of papers, presentations. Personal project examined concepts of numerosity in typically and atypically language exposed signers.

Terrace Lab for Primate Cognition, Columbia University 06/03 – 09/06

Research Assistant

Advisor: Herbert Terrace

Lab investigates numerical abilities, confidence judgments, metacognition, cognitive imitation and spatial recall in Rhesus macaques. Examined metacognitive abilities in first grade children as they compare to those in rhesus monkeys for honors thesis.

**PROFESSIONAL
SERVICE**

Evolution of Language Conference (Evolang) Accessibility Committee 04/17-present

Founder, Chair

Committee addresses issues of language accessibility. Facilitated sign language interpreting for our 2020 conference (cancelled due to COVID) and ensures all future conferences will include interpreting support.

Evolution of Language Conference (Evolang) Scientific Committee 04/16-present

Committee elicits submissions, assigns reviewers, and oversees acceptance of conference presentations. In recent years, committee has instituted anonymous reviewing of abstracts leading to a significant increase in junior presenters and female presenters at the most recent conferences (Evolang 2018, 2020).

Academic Life Committee, University of Chicago 09/10-07/14

Founder, Chair

Committee addresses issues of concern for graduate students by increasing student faculty communication. Issues addressed include increasing student involvement in the hiring process, standardizing course requirements, and increasing teaching opportunities for students.

Student Mentor, Department of Psychology, University of Chicago 09/09-09/12

Helped new students to get acclimated in the department. Provided information about coursework, departmental requirements, as well as social and living issues.

Ad Hoc Reviewer for

Journals: Behavior Research Methods, Cognition, Cognitive Science, Cerebral Cortex

Conferences: Boston University Conference on Language Development (BUCLD), The Evolution of Language International Conference (Evolang)

Funding Bodies: The British Academy (2018 Visiting Fellowships)

**PROFESSIONAL
AFFILIATIONS**

Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) 09/10-present

International Association for the Study of Child Language 09/04-present

Evolution of Language (Evolang) Conference Permanent Committee 04/16-present

INVITED TALKS

Flaherty, M. How Developing Minds Build a New Language: The Emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language. Psychology Department Brown Bag. University of the Sciences, Philadelphia. September 2019.

Flaherty, M. What Happens When You Learn to Count in Adulthood? The Case of Nicaraguan Signers Older than their Language. Developmental Area Meeting. Temple University, Philadelphia, February 2019.

Flaherty, M. The Emergence of Grammatical Structure in a New Language: Marking Who Did What to Whom in Nicaraguan Sign Language. The Transmission of Songs in Birds, Humans, and Other Animals. Columbia University, New York, February 2019.

Flaherty, M. Deaf Children Create their Own Language: The Birth of Nicaraguan Sign Language. EdSign Public Lecture Series on Topics Related to Sign Language and Deaf Studies. Edinburgh, April 2018.

Flaherty, M. How Developing Minds Build a New Language: The Emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language. School of Psychology Seminar. Queens University, Belfast, February 2018.

Flaherty, M. How Developing Minds Build a New Language: The Emergence of Nicaraguan Sign Language. The University of California, Santa Barbara, January 2018.

Flaherty, M. What Can Language Emergence Tell us about the Developing Mind?: The Case of Nicaraguan Sign Language. Developmental Linguistics Seminar. The University of Edinburgh, UK October 2017.

Flaherty, M. Multivariate approaches to diversity: The present and future of multi-measure, multi-modal, and interdisciplinary work in shaping first language acquisition theory. Invited workshop talk presented at the Many Paths to Language Workshop, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, October 2017.

Flaherty, M. Marking Argument Structure in Nicaraguan Sign Language (and Gesture). Language Evolution Seminar. The University of Edinburgh, UK, August 2017.

Flaherty, M. The Birth of a Language: Is Nicaraguan Sign Language a Creole? Plenary talk presented at the Tenth Creolistics Workshop, Aarhus University, Denmark, April 2015.

Flaherty, M. Building a New Language: How Input, Community, and Iterated Learning are Shaping Nicaraguan Sign Language. The University of California, San Diego, February 2015.

Flaherty, M. The Emergence of Linguistic Structure: Evidence from Nicaraguan Sign Language. The University of Edinburgh, Chancellor's Fellow Candidate Presentation, April 2014.

Flaherty, M. Can You Teach an Adult to Count?: Number and Language Emergence in Nicaragua. Workshop on Education, The University of Chicago, February 2014.

Flaherty, M. The Emergence of Verb Agreement in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Workshop on Language, Cognition, and Computation, The University of Chicago, April 2012.

POSTERS AND PRESENTATIONS
(*denotes student author)

Flaherty, M., Martin, S.* Learning What Counting is for May be the Hardest Part. Poster to be presented at the Conference of the International Association for the Study of Child Language. July 2021 (delayed due to COVID)

Flaherty, M., Sato, A.*, Kirby, S. An Emergent Language Becomes Smaller as it Evolves: New Evidence from Motion Tracking in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Paper accepted to the 13th Evolution of Language Conference, Brussels, Belgium, April 2020. (Conference cancelled due to COVID)

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. Efficient from the Beginning: Argument Structural Relations in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Paper presented at the 44th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, USA. November 2019.

Flaherty, M., Sato, A.*, Kirby, S. Quantifying the Emergence of Structure in Nicaraguan Sign Language with Motion Tracking Technology. Paper presented at the 8th Conference for the International Society for Gesture Studies, Cape Town, South Africa, July 2018.

Flaherty, M., Schouwstra, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. Do We See Word Order Patterns from Silent Gesture Studies in a New Natural Language? Paper presented at the 12th Evolution of Language Conference, Torun, Poland, April 2018.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. The Effects of Gesture Input on the Development of Child Homesign. Poster and highlight talk presented at the Many Paths to Language Workshop, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, October 2017.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. Emergent Marking of Animacy in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Poster presented at the Inaugural Cultural Evolution Society Conference, Jena, Germany. September 2017.

Flaherty, M., Hunsicker, D., Goldin-Meadow, S. The Seeds of Nicaraguan Sign Language are not Found in Gesture. Paper presented at the 41st Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, USA. November 2016.

Flaherty, M., Hunsicker, D., Goldin-Meadow, S. Does Input Matter?: The Effects of Gesture Input on the Development of Child Homesign. Paper presented at the 7th Conference for the International Society for Gesture Studies, Paris, France. July 2016.

Flaherty, M., Stangl, K. *, Goldin-Meadow, S. Do Lab Attested Learning Biases Predict the Structure of a New Natural Language? Paper presented at the 11th Evolution of Language Conference, New Orleans, USA. March 2016.

Silvey, C., Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Kirby, S., Smith, K. Communication Without Prior Learning Inhibits the Emergence of Systematic Structure. Paper presented at the Workshop on Language Adapts to Interaction Workshop at the 11th Evolution of Language Conference, New Orleans, USA. March 2016.

Martin, A., Flaherty, M., Senghas, A., Pyers, J. The Emergence of Three-Dimensional Signing and Mental Rotation Skill in Deaf Nicaraguan Signers. Plenary talk accepted at International Conference on Sign Language Acquisition (ICSLA). Amsterdam, Netherlands. July 2015.

Flaherty, M., Senghas, A., Coppola, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. The Emergence of Redundancy in a New Language. Paper presented at the 11th High Desert Linguistics Society Conference, Albuquerque, USA. November 2014.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Senghas, A., Coppola, M., Gleitman, L. Language from Gesture? Emergent Transitivity Marking in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Paper presented at the 10th Evolution of Language Conference, Vienna, Austria. April 2014.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Senghas, A., Coppola, M., Gleitman, L. Animacy and Verb Classes in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Poster presented at the 38th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, USA. November 2013.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Senghas, A., Coppola, M. Growing a Spatial Grammar: The Emergence of Verb Agreement in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Poster presented at the 11th Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research Conference, London, England. July 2013.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Senghas, A., Coppola, M. Watching Minds Shape Language: The Emergence of Spatial Verb Agreement in Nicaraguan Sign Language. Poster presented at the Budapest Central European University Conference on Cognitive Development, Budapest, Hungary. January 2013.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S., Özyürek, A. Does Input Matter? Gesture and Homesign in Nicaragua, China, Turkey, and the USA. Paper presented at the Child Language Seminar, London, England. June 2010.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. Does Input Matter? Gesture and Homesign in Nicaragua, China, Turkey, and the USA. Paper presented at the Eighth Evolution of Language Conference, Utrecht, The Netherlands. April 2010.

Flaherty, M., Senghas, A. Number and Number Signs in Nicaragua. Paper presented at the Alston Hall Child Language Conference, Preston, England. May 2008.

Flaherty, M., Kirby, S. Iterated Language Learning in Children. Paper presented at the Seventh Evolution of Language Conference, Barcelona, Spain. March 2008.

Flaherty, M., Senghas, A. Numerosity and Number Signs in Deaf Nicaraguan Adults. Presentation at the 32nd Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, USA. November 2007.

MANUSCRIPTS

Flaherty, M., Hunsicker, D., Goldin-Meadow, S. (submitted). The birth of a new language: Gestural precursors to Nicaraguan Sign Language.

Flaherty, M., Sato, A. *, Kirby, S. (submitted). Quantifying the Emergence of Structure in Nicaraguan Sign Language with Motion Tracking Technology.

PUBLICATIONS

(*denotes student author)

Rissman, L., Horton, L., Flaherty, M., Senghas, A., Coppola, M., Brentari, D., Goldin-Meadow, S. (2020) Emergence of agent-backgrounding in homesign and Nicaraguan Sign Language. *Cognition*, 203, 104332.

Abner, N., Flaherty, M., Stangl, K*, Coppola, M., Brentari, D., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (2019). The noun-verb distinction in established and emergent sign systems. *Language*, 95(2), 230-267.

Awarded the Best Paper in *Language* 2019 Award

Gleitman, L. Senghas A., Flaherty, M., Coppola, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. (2019) The emergence of the formal category “symmetry” in a new sign language. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*, 116(24), 11705-11711.

Sato, A. *, Schouwstra, M., Flaherty, M., Kirby, S. (2019) Do all aspects of learning benefit from iconicity? Evidence from motion capture. *Language and Cognition*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1017/langcog.2019.37

Flaherty, M., Stangl, K. *, Goldin-Meadow, S. (2016) Do lab attested biases predict the structure of a new natural language? In S. Roberts, C. Cuskley, L. Barceló-Coblijn, O. Feher, & T. Verhoef, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Eleventh Evolution of Language Conference*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. (2014) Language from gesture?: Emergent transitivity marking in Nicaraguan Sign Language. In E. Cartmill, S. Roberts, H. Lyn, & H. Cornish, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth Evolution of Language Conference*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co.

Spaepen, E., Coppola, M., Flaherty, M., Spelke, E., Goldin-Meadow, S. (2013). Generating a lexicon without a language model: Do gestures for number count? *Journal of Memory and Language*, 69(4), 496-505.

Flaherty, M., Senghas, A. (2011). Numerosity and number signs in deaf Nicaraguan adults. *Cognition*, 121(3), 427-436.

Flaherty, M. (2010). Review of *Sign Language Acquisition*. *Journal of Child Language*. 37, 956-961.

Flaherty, M., Goldin-Meadow, S. (2010) Does input matter? Homesign in Nicaragua, China, Turkey and the USA. In A.D.M. Smith, M. Schouwstra, B. de Boer, & K. Smith, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Eighth Evolution of Language Conference* (pp. 403–404). Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co.

Hurford, J. R., Flaherty, M., Argyropoulos, G. (2007). Past and future, human and non-human, semantic/procedural and episodic, commentary on Suddendorf and Corballis: The evolution of foresight: What is mental time travel and is it unique to humans? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 30, 324-325.