

Grad Student Lands NIH Grant to Research Adolescent Conversation Patterns

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Camille Wynn's research aims to increase conversational success for adolescents with communication disorders.

Camille Wynn, a graduate student in the Communication Disorders and Deaf Education (COMDDE) department of USU's Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, was recently awarded a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund her study of conversation patterns among adolescents with and without disabilities.

Wynn's project focuses on conversational "entrainment," which is the tendency to modify speech patterns to match those of a conversational partner. Entrainment is important in many aspects of communication and plays a role in whether or not a conversation is successful.

While there is a substantial body of research on entrainment in adults, there is a significant gap in understanding how and when children develop

entrainment skills or how these skills are used in conversations during childhood. Even less is known about the impact of certain communication disorders on entrainment. Wynn's project aims to build a better understanding of what entrainment looks like in the conversations of both typically-developing adolescents and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). She hopes her research can provide some preliminary answers and set the stage for future research on the topic. "Ultimately, the hope is to develop diagnostic and treatment tools targeting social interaction deficits in individuals with ASD and other communication disorders," she said.

When asked what drives her research, Wynn stated that her goal is to increase conversational success during a pivotal period of growth for adolescents with communication disorders. "The ability to engage in quality conversations is especially important in adolescence, when the need for social connection is at its peak," she said. "I believe that interaction is a vital part of the human experience."

The new funding for the project, provided by the NIH National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders, will allow the project to continue until Wynn graduates. After that, she hopes to become a tenure-track professor and continue studying conversation patterns in adolescents to help them get the most out of their communications with others.

This research is sponsored by Dr. Stephanie Borrie, Speech-Language Pathology Associate Professor in COMDDE, and is overseen by advisory committee members Ron Gillam (COMDDE), Tyson Barret (Psychology), and Maryellen McClain Verdoes (Psychology), as well as Arizona State University professors Julie Liss and Visar Berisha.