

The influence of social network size on linguistic skills and linguistic malleability  
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Does the size of our social network influence how good we are at understanding others or how influenced we are by others' speech patterns? Previous research shows that both infants and adults are better at learning new phonological categories when exposed to multiple speakers compared with only one speaker. In this talk, I'll present converging evidence from individual differences studies, experimental studies, and computational simulations to show that the size of our social network influences our linguistic skills even as adult native speakers, and, in particular, that having a larger social network leads to better comprehension at the phonological and semantic levels. I'll further show that having a smaller social network leads to more malleable representations and use, and discuss the implications of these findings for language change. Thus, the size of our social network can influence the way we learn, use, and represent language, as well as the spread of linguistic changes across the community.