**ISCA Distinguished Lecturer Travel Report #2**

Catherine T. Best (MARCS Institute, U Western Sydney, Australia)

Countries: Barbados and Jamaica

Universities: University of the West Indies/Cave Hill (Bridgetown, Barbados)

University of the West Indies/Mona (Kingston, Jamaica)

Dates: October 26-31, 2014

This ISCA visit supported three research presentations at universities on two Caribbean islands. Two talks were public science lectures, open to the broader communities, though largely attended by undergraduate and post-graduate students and academic colleagues. These talks were given at the Linguistics departments of two campuses of the University of the West Indies: Cave Hill campus in Barbados, and Mona campus in Kingston, Jamaica. I had suggested a set of possible topics to both departments; both departments selected the same one (title and abstract below; photos and announcement flyers as email attachments). The talk was heard twice only by me, as Barbados and Jamaica are separated by 1300 miles of Caribbean Sea. While at UWI Mona I also gave a guest lecture on psycholinguistic research methods at a graduate seminar in Linguistics.

Professor Kean Gibson kindly hosted my visit in Barbados. I was there from October 26 to 28, where I had stimulating discussions with Professor Gibson and colleagues Drs Keisha Evans and Jason Seigel and Head of Program Professor Claver Mabana. Professor Silvia Kouwenberg (Head of Department) generously hosted me in Jamaica from October 28 to November 1. While there, I had many interesting research discussions with her, with Professor Hubert Devonish (Director, Jamaican Language Unit) and with Lecturer Michele Kennedy regarding their current research projects and our mutual interests in sociophonetics research. I gained many new insights into Caribbean creole research from them all. At UWI/Mona I also met with two of Professor Kouwenberg’s MA research students, Tina Whyte and Tanyia Wilkins, to discuss their thesis research projects. I happily agreed to become a member of Tina’s supervisory panel, and she has kept in touch since my visit regarding her experiments and stimuli. In addition, Professor Kouwenberg was very helpful in arranging for two of the PhD students, Shalieka Burris and Patrice Clarke, to work as Research Assistants to collect recordings of Jamaican Mesolect English speakers for me, on which they have been doing a fantastic job.

It was wonderful to meet everyone in both locations, and to hear about their research. It was a fantastic experience. I look forward to keeping in touch with them.

**UWI/Mona** (Jamaica) (October 30, 2014): Guest Lecture at postgraduate research seminar

**Public Lecture:** “Spoken word recognition across regional accent variation: Development in young children” (given on October 27 at UWI/Cave Hill, Barbados; and on October 29 at UWI/Mona, Jamaica)

In establishing the foundations for language development, children progress from becoming perceptually attuned to the language-specific phonetic properties of consonant and vowel contrasts in their native language, to beginning to recognize recurring word-forms in their language input, to learning the referential associations of actual words in their language, to being able to produce those words themselves and to expand their vocabularies by learning more and more additional words consistent with their growing understanding of the phonological patterning of words in the language. The transition from language-specific phonetic tuning during their first year, to language-specific word recognition and learning during the beginning part of the second year of life, is a topic of great research interest especially in the past 10 years. The question of whether young children early in their second year learn words as global phonetic patterns that they have encountered in their specific language environment, or whether (and when) they may instead begin to sort out the phonological inventory of the language and use that more abstract phonological knowledge to learn and recognize words, is one of the central debates in the field. At my lab we have employed regional accent variation to probe whether and when children are able to recognize the more abstract phonological structure of words across unfamiliar pronunciations in accents they have not previously encountered. Our findings indicate that prior to 16-17 months children seem to learn global and native-accent-specific word patterns, but by 19 months they instead use more abstract phonological knowledge that allows them to generalize word recognition to unfamiliar-accent pronunciations (e.g., Jamaican-accented English, which is unfamiliar to most children growing up in Australia). Additionally, we have found that the ability to generalize recognition of familiar words spoken in unfamiliar accents is correlated more with the child¹s level of vocabulary development than with his/her age per se. We also find that the type and degree of native versus unfamiliar-accent phonetic differences systematically influence the child¹s ability to generalize cross-accent word recognition: when the word pronunciation in the unfamiliar accent involves only “category-goodness” differences from the native accent pronunciation, then even the younger children can recognize words in the unfamiliar accents. Conversely, if the pronunciation in the unfamiliar accent involves consonants or vowels that are so deviant from the native accent that they can be mis-perceived as other consonants or vowels, then even the older children fail to recognise the unfamiliar-accent words, much like adults do. The implications of the cross-accent findings for theories of early word-learning and native attunement of speech perception will be discussed.