

CLDN NEWSLETTER



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CHILD LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT NODE

CLASS Seminar

On the 27th of May 2026, Prof. Pernille Hansen presented our final Child Language Africa Seminar Series (CLASS) talk of the semester.



Her talk titled **Studying Early Milestones in Multilingual Children** explored how early language development can be measured across a child's full multilingual repertoire, rather than through a monolingual lense. Drawing on recent research using a parent report mobile app, Prof. Hansen discussed innovative ways to track language development in multilingual children and the potential applications of such tools in practice.



Norming Updates: isiXhosa and Afrikaans

The Child Language Development Node is currently in the norming phase of the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (MB-CDI) project. The aim is to establish child language development norms that reflect the country's linguistic diversity. The MB-CDI is a widely used parent-report tool used to track how infants and toddlers acquire their language. At present, the team is norming the MB-CDI for isiXhosa and Afrikaans, working with 1600 parents and caregivers in both language groups.

100 Common First Words



Earlier this year, we developed resources depicting the first 100 common words that Afrikaans- and isiXhosa-speaking children typically learn. This included words children learn during everyday experiences (for example, names of different objects in the home, action words and descriptive words). The resources grouped these words into categories so that caregivers and language practitioners can see the range of words children typically acquire first. The resources received positive feedback from children's organisations and caregivers alike.

We are pleased to share that we are now in the final stages of developing an **"isiZulu 100 words and phrases"** resource. This will be made available on our website and social media, and shared with affiliated children's organisations. Click below to view the isiXhosa and Afrikaans resources:

- [isiXhosa & Afrikaans](#)

During the week of 23 March, the CLDN hosted a fieldworker workshop in Mthatha, Eastern Cape. This workshop formed the foundation of our rural data collection for isiXhosa and consisted of our fieldworkers familiarising themselves with the CDI, training in the administration of the CDI, as well as countless insightful discussions on child language acquisition. Between April and June, our fieldworkers administered 400 CDIs, thereby completing our isiXhosa data collection for the Norming Phase.

The project has recently moved into the rural phase of Afrikaans data collection, with almost 100 CDIs already completed for rural-situated infants and toddlers.

Total isiXhosa CDI's completed (rural and urban areas)

800

Afrikaans CDIs completed (rural and urban areas)

490

800

Click the link below, if your family is Afrikaans-speaking and you would like to help us by completing the Afrikaans MB-CDI for your infant or toddler:

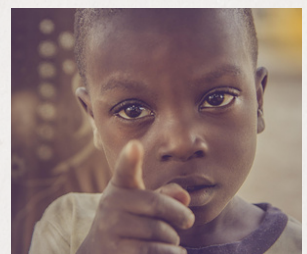
[Afrikaans CDI](#)

New Publications

Defty, C., & Southwood, F. (2026). **Child-Directed Speech in Rural and Urban Households in a Low-SES Afrikaans-Speaking Community in South Africa.** *Infancy: The official journal of the International Society on Infant Studies*, 31(2), e70079. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inf.70079>

New Child Magazine Article

We are excited to share that the CLDN has published a third article in *Child Magazine* - an online publication that shares tips with South African parents on how to make parenting 'easier'. Our third article, **"Gestures supercharge early learning"** (May 2026), delves into the importance of noticing and responding to children's gestures in developing their language skills. Read it [here](#). If you missed our previous articles, see them on our website, [here](#).



Conferences

On 12 May, Susan Lotz, who is pursuing a joint PhD at Stellenbosch University and the University of Groningen, attended the 2026 Language Resources and Evaluation Conference (LREC) in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and two of its co-located workshops: READIXTSAR, which dealt with readability research, and the 7th Workshop on Resources for African Indigenous Languages (RAIL). At the RAIL workshop, she presented a paper that she co-authored with Dr Rik van Noord and Prof Gertjan van Noord on the ability of a language model to complete cloze tests (fill-in-the-blank assessments) in Afrikaans and how its performance compared to that of human test-takers. The paper is closely linked to Susan's PhD research, which focuses on developing a new approach to readability assessment for Afrikaans. The paper is available in the RAIL@LREC proceedings: <https://lnkd.in/djQ6MizC>.



Two of our master's students, Anisha van Staden and Emma Thom, attended the 4IR Research Symposium and Expo on 28 and 29 May at CPUT in Bellville as part of a multidisciplinary team. During the symposium, they engaged in insightful discussions on child language acquisition and computational linguistics with academics, researchers, and business leaders from across the country.



On 29 May, Professors Heather Brookes and Frenette Southwood attended the SADiLaR SASL Dissemination event in Pretoria. The aims of the event included advancing the inclusion of South African Sign Language in digital spaces, as well as increasing accessibility through language technology and innovation. The event was an opportunity for discussions on the advancement of SASL in digital spaces, research that supports Deaf communities, as well as the various strategies that can strengthen the digital growth and sustainability of SASL. More information on the event can be found [HERE](#).



YARN Workshop

On 20 March 2026, two members of our team, Carmen Defty and Atshilaho Viola Nethathe, presented their research at the Young Africanist Research Network (YARN) workshop. Carmen shared the work the CLDN has undertaken to adapt the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories into South Africa's 11 spoken languages. Atshilaho presented findings from her Master's research on the acquisition of grammatical features in Tshivenda-speaking toddlers. Carmen and Atshilaho described their experience at YARN as enriching and inspiring, highlighting the opportunity to build connections with other emerging African academics.



Book Series Recommendation



Thank You for 750 Followers!

We are happy to announce that our Instagram profile has surpassed 750 followers!

We would like to thank everyone who has followed us thus far for their continued support. If you are not following us yet, feel free to head to our account!

Authors: Oarabetse Dithlareng, Neil Badenhorst, Mbali Magubane

Book Title: Grumpy Cloud

Languages: Afrikaans, English, Setswana, and SASL

Publisher: Book Dash

More details about the book: [Grumpy Cloud](#)

Feelings, emotions, and language come together in Grumpy Cloud! This charming story encourages children to talk about their emotions and to express them. As language plays a key role in understanding and communicating feelings, this book is a perfect way to support both language development and emotional growth.

Visit [Bookdash](#) for new South African Sign Language children's books.

Upcoming Funding and Conference Calls

* National Research Foundation (NRF) Postgraduate scholarships

Who: Masters and PhD students

Deadline: 3 July 2026

[Click here for details](#)

* L+ Summer/Winter School on Language Acquisition

When: 24-28 August 2026

Where: Online

NB: This workshop is free of charge!

[Click here for details](#)

* SAMWOP-14

When: 2-4 December

Where: Stellenbosch University, SA

Deadline: 01 September 2026

[Click here for details](#)

* SADiLaR's Event Sponsorship

Who: Conference organisers, organisations planning dissemination events.

Deadline: 30 June 2026

[Click here for details](#)

R-Training Workshop

Last month the CLDN, in collaboration with SADiLaR's Escalator, hosted a three-day R training workshop at Stellenbosch University. The workshop introduced postgraduate students and researchers to data visualisation techniques in R, equipping participants with practical skills for research and data analysis. The interactive sessions provided a valuable opportunity to explore the capabilities of R and its applications in academic research.

We would like to thank all the participants for their enthusiasm and engagement, as well as SADiLaR's Escalator for their partnership and support in making the workshop a success. We look forward to hosting more training opportunities in the future.



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