Towards an embodied phonology

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We recognize that low-level phonetic processes affect the structure of language over historical time, but speech and language are typically treated as separate systems when we think in terms of linguistic representation. Speech and language are acknowledged to interact in early acquisition, but the interaction is construed more as bottleneck than as meaningfully related to the development of linguistic representation. Once the child is conversant and comprehensible around age 3 years, they are said to have acquired phonology and to be in the process of acquiring an adult-like syntax. At this point, people who study speech and people who think about linguistic representation work in different domains. This social phenomenon reinforces an underlying assumption of dissociation between the systems, in line with the competence-performance distinction that functional linguists have long questioned. It also has important negative consequences for theories of speech-language production. The developmental data presented in the first part of this talk will be used to question the assumed dissociation between speech motor control processes and linguistic representation. This questioning will introduce the opportunity to fully reimagine the nature of linguistic representation, at least as it pertains to speech-language production, which I will begin to do in the second part of this talk.