



Press release

The 20th Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen is awarded to Prof. Patricia K. Kuhl (University of Washington, Seattle, USA)

Paris (France), 2 December 2011 – The international jury under the presidency of Prof. Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA) awarded on November 29th, 2011 the 20th Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize of the Fondation Ipsen (20.000€) to Prof. Patricia K. Kuhl (University of Washington, Seattle, USA) for her work that played a major role in the understanding of language acquisition and the neural bases of language.

Kuhl's work shows that infants are born with innate abilities to easily identify every sound of every language, however, by the end of the first year of life, infants show a perceptual narrowing of their language skills. Their ability to discern differences in the sounds that make up words in the world's languages shrinks. Nonnative sounds are no longer differentiated. This developmental transition is caused by two interacting factors: the child's computational skills and their social brains. Computational skills allow rapid statistical learning and social interaction is necessary for this computational learning process to occur. Neuroimaging using Magnetoencephalography (MEG) may help explain the neuroplasticity of the child's mind versus the more expert (but less open) mind of the adult, and account for the "critical period" for language. Kuhl has also studied the early development of the brain of bilingual children. By 10 to 12 months bilingual infants do not show the perceptual narrowing of the monolingual children. This is another piece of evidence that experiences shape the brain.

Patricia Kuhl is co-director of the Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences and a Professor of Speech and Hearing Sciences at the University of Washington. Prof. Kuhl is a member of the National Academy of Science USA, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has been elected a fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Psychological Association, and the Association for Psychological Science. Prof. Kuhl was awarded the Silver Medal of the Acoustical Society of America in 1997, the Kenneth Craik Research Award from Cambridge University in 2005, and the Gold Medal from the Acoustical Society of America in 2008.

About the Jean-Louis Signoret Neuropsychology Prize

Launched in 1992, this prize has been awarded by the Fondation Ipsen to many renowned specialists: Eric Kandel (1992), Jacques Paillard (1993), Rodolfo Llinas (1994), Stephen Kosslyn (1995), Alfonso Caramazza (1996), Jean-Pierre Changeux (1997), Edoardo Bisiach (1998), Joseph LeDoux (1999), Joaquin Fuster (2000), Stanislas Dehaene (2001), Deepak Pandya (2002), Uta Frith (2003), Hanna and Antonio Damasio (2004), Marc Jeannerod (2005), Faraneh Vargha-Khadem (2006), Alvaro Pascual Leone (2007), Elizabeth Warrington (2008), Pierre Maquet (2009) and Giacomo Rizzolatti (2010).

The jury members are: Albert Galaburda (Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA), President, Jocelyne Bachevalier (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Laurent Cohen (Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, Paris, France), Branch Coslett (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA), Richard Frackowiak (CHUV, Lausanne, Switzerland), Didier Hannequin (Hôpital Charles Nicolle, Rouen, France), Kenneth Heilman (University of Florida, Gainesville, USA), Bernard Laurent (Hôpital Bellevue, Saint-Etienne, France), Kimford Meador (Emory University, Atlanta, USA), Michel Poncet (C.H.U. Hôpital Timone, Marseille, France), Donald Stuss (The Rotman Research Institute, Toronto, Canada).



La Fondation Ipsen

Established in 1983 under the aegis of the Fondation de France, the mission of the Fondation Ipsen is to contribute to the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge. The long-standing action of the Fondation Ipsen aims at fostering the interaction between researchers and clinical practitioners, which is indispensable due to the extreme specialisation of these professions. The ambition of the Fondation Ipsen is to initiate a reflection about the major scientific issues of the forthcoming years. It has developed an important international network of scientific experts who meet regularly at meetings known as Colloques Médecine et Recherche, dedicated to six main themes: Alzheimer's disease, neurosciences, longevity, endocrinology, the vascular system and cancer science. Moreover, in 2007, the Fondation Ipsen started three new series of meetings. The first series is an annual meeting organized in partnership with the Salk Institute and Nature and focuses on Biological Complexity; the second series is the "Emergence and Convergence" series with Nature, and the third with Cell and the Massachusetts General Hospital entitled "Exciting Biologies". Since its beginning, the Fondation Ipsen has organised more than 100 international conferences, published 72 volumes with renowned publishers and 219 issues of a widely distributed bimonthly newsletter Alzheimer Actualités. It has also awarded more than 100 prizes and grants.

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