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Mutual exclusivity inferences in 12-to-15-month-olds: an online looking-while-listening study

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Abstract

Novel word disambiguation via mutual exclusivity is the tendency to discard familiar objects as referents of novel words. While mutual-exclusivity inferences have been widely documented in toddlers beyond 18 months of age, studies typically failed to show it in younger infants. Recently, Pomiechowska, Brody, Csibra, and Gliga (2021) showed that 12-month-old infants can use mutual exclusivity, but only if familiar objects are targeted by non-verbal communication (i.e., pointing) prior to labeling. This arguably triggers infants to represent these objects under a conceptual description, a representational format that is necessary for mutual exclusivity inferences but is not spontaneously generated in young infants. The present study is a direct online replication of the task used by Pomiechowska et al. with a wider age range (12-15 months) and adapted for Zoom-based testing.