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Childrens generalization of food properties: the role of transformation, property valence, and neophobia

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Abstract

Children build concepts for food categories which they use in property induction-generalization situations. Which factors children do favor in their inductive strategies and to what extent interindividual differences, such as food neophobia, affect them remains unclear. We used an induction task with negative and positive properties, and manipulated the familiarity (i.e., familiar and unfamiliar) and the state (i.e., untransformed and transformed) of foods. This study is the first to address the role of interindividual differences in inductive reasoning strategies in the case of opposed valence properties. Results revealed that positive and negative properties are not generalized the same way, depending on the food familiarity and state. In addition, we observed that neophobic children were characterized by different inductive strategies for negative properties compared to their neophilic counterparts. We conclude that food neophobia is sensitive to risk uncertainty and therefore, caution should be taken when introducing new foods to preschoolers.