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Do social cues promote cross-situational verb learning and retention?

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Abstract

Children learn words using a range of social, statistical, and perceptual information. One proposal for how children determine word meanings is cross-situational learning, in which children track ambiguous word-object mappings over time (e.g., Yu & Smith, 2007). However, previous studies have not evaluated how children use natural social cues during learning (e.g., eye gaze). We taught 3-year-olds three novel verbs (c.f., Scott & Fisher, 2012) and hypothesized that social cues not only support cross-situational learning, but also support retention of verbs after a delay. In between-subjects conditions, children either did or did not have access to eye-gaze and head-turn cues during exposure. We tested for participants learning after 12 learning trials and after a delay. Pilot data suggest that children who have access to natural social cues successfully learned and retained links between novel verbs and their corresponding actions.