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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8hp6v92t>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 32(32)

ISSN

1069-7977

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Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed

Experience word learning predicts children's ability to generalize novel labels

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Abstract: Recent research has suggested that rapid word learning develops within specific categorical domains as the result of previous within the domain (Thom & Sandhofer, 2009). The current studies further examined the relationship between children's previous experience learning words within a category and their ability to extend additional words within the category. In Study 1, children's extension of novel labels was compared across three common categories in relation to their existing vocabulary size within that category. In Study 2, children were trained in a greater or fewer number of category exemplars in two common categories, then tested in their ability to generalize new labels within each of these categories. Preliminary results indicate that greater experience learning words within a category predicts better extension within that category, but not in other categories, suggesting the development of rapid word learning is domain-specific, and occurs as the result of experience learning words within each category.