

Word learning as the product of multiple cues: Factors involved in learner's strategy preferences

Emma Healey
emma@ling.ed.ac.uk
University of Edinburgh

A typical word learner has many different learning strategies available to them. For example, children are readily able to use cues provided by the environment in which words are used (environmental cues) as well as cues provided by speakers themselves (speaker cues) to learn the meanings of new words in context. Environmental cues include the regular co-occurrence of labels and referents across naming episodes (Smith & Yu, 2008) and the perceptual salience of potential referents (Pruden, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff & Hennon, 2006). Speaker cues include social cues, such as eye-gaze, pointing and tone of voice (Tomasello, 2003), and linguistic cues such as syntactic and semantic context (Bloom, 2000; Gleitman, Cassidy, Nappa, Papafragou & Trueswell, 2005). The aim of my research is to investigate how learners integrate these strategies and, in particular, to explore the factors that determine learners' strategy preferences. These factors may include the age of the learner, the type of word being acquired and the learner's linguistic background. My research explores an additional possibility; that the strategy a learner selects is affected by the strength of the available cues. Specifically, I predict that children's tendency to follow a particular cue will increase as the amount and quality of referential information that cue provides increases. This prediction can be tested by observing children's strategy selections in situations where the strength of the available cues is systematically varied. I will present a methodology designed to test this prediction across a series of experiments using the preferential looking paradigm.

References

- Bloom, P. (2000). *How children learn the meaning of words*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gleitman, L.R., Cassidy, K., Nappa, R., Papafragou, A. & Trueswell, J.C. (2005). Hard words. *Language Learning and Development*, 1/1, 23-64.
- Pruden, S.M., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R.M. & Hennon, E.A. (2006). The birth of words: Ten-month-olds learn words through perceptual salience. *Child Development*, 77, 226-280.
- Smith, L. B., & Yu, C. (2008). Infants rapidly learn word-referent mappings via crosssituational statistics. *Cognition*, 106/3, 1558-1568.
- Tomasello, M. (2003). *Constructing a language: A usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.