UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Examining the role of sentence context in cross-situational word learning

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3c2929d2

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 45(45)

Authors

LaTourrette, Alexander S
Yang, Charles
Trueswell, John

Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed

Examining the role of sentence context in cross-situational word learning

Alexander LaTourrette
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

Charles Yang
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

John Trueswell
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

Abstract

By 24 months, children rapidly infer the meanings of words from sentence context: for instance, inferring from "She eats the dax" that "dax" refers to a food item. However, prior work has typically presented these informative sentence contexts in the presence of the target referent; it is less clear whether sentence context on one exposure will influence learners' referential hypotheses on subsequent exposures. Here, we present results suggesting that even adults have some difficulty using a word's prior sentence context to constrain its subsequent hypothesized referents, and 3-year-olds fail to make these cross-exposure inferences at all. Finally, we examine an alternative avenue for sentence context to guide word learning: adults successfully use informative sentence contexts to disambiguate between previously encountered referents. Ongoing work examines this question in children. These results suggest linguistic context is most useful for forming in-the-moment hypotheses but may, in some contexts, also facilitate learning across exposures.