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# Syntactic adaptation and word learning in French and English

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## Abstract

Syntactic priming may be a key mechanism underlying children's learning of novel words. Havron et al. (2019) exposed French-speaking children (ages 3 to 4) to a speaker biased by the use of either familiar verbs or nouns presented in the same syntactic context. This influenced participants' interpretations of ambiguous novel words presented in the same syntactic frame. In Experiment 1, we successfully replicated Havron et al. with 77 French-speaking adults, using a web-based eye-tracking paradigm. Experiment 2 adapted this paradigm to English: Repeated exposure to a syntactic structure induced 102 English-speaking adults to update their expectations about the meanings of novel words. Our results indicate participants adapted to the specific linguistic structure used, not just the speaker's tendency to mention actions or objects. These findings support the role of rapid adaptation during word learning. Experiments in progress investigate whether the English paradigm yields successful learning in 3- to 5-year-old children.