Does minimally altering toddlers environments change the words they learn?

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Abstract

Previous work showed that after 9 weekly visits to the lab in which 17- month-old children repeatedly played with and heard names for objects alike in shape, children generalized novel nouns by shape and showed a dramatic increase in acquisition of new object names outside of the laboratory. The present attempts to influence childrens vocabularies by giving them themed boxes of toys and books about vehicles (organized by shape) or foods (organized by material and shape). The question is, will minimally altering childrens home environments change their vocabulary composition and word learning biases? Results show that typically developing children showed the predicted shifts in their vocabulary composition – children in the food enrichment knew more food words than children in the vehicle enrichment, and vice versa but no change in word learning biases. In contrast, late-talkers showed increased shape bias in both conditions, but more so in the vehicle condition.