# Toddlers recognize multiple polysemous meanings and use them to infer additional meanings

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**Abstract**

Up to 80% of words have multiple, related meanings (polysemy), yet work on early word learning has almost uniformly assumed one-to-one mappings between form and meaning. Using a looking-while-listening procedure, we present the first evidence that toddlers (n=40) can recognize multiple meanings for common nouns, e.g., dog collar, shirt collar. In an English-meaning condition, toddlers were tested on their ability to recognize multiple English meanings for polysemous words such as cap (e.g., a baseball cap and a bottle cap). Another condition prompted toddlers with the same English words (e.g., cap), but target referents instead corresponded to the words polysemous extension in an unfamiliar language, (e.g., lid is a meaning for Spanishs cap, tapa). Toddlers looked to the correct targets above chance on both trial types, but with greater accuracy on English-meaning trials, demonstrating a recognition of familiar word-meaning pairs and an ability to infer potential new meanings.