

The Effects of Contextual Cues on the Learning of Prepositions

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Abstract

Language has the power to shape the way people organize their thoughts and concepts. Some concepts, like spatial words, are categorized differently cross-linguistically. Conflicting language-to-concept mappings, such as the Spanish *en* translating to both *in* and *on*, may pose difficulty to Spanish speakers learning English. This study investigated how contextual cues can help children learn prepositions. Three-year-olds were read preposition books that were arranged in one of two conditions: separation or control. The separation condition had each instance of *in* appear in one visual context (e.g., Bear put the apple in the box, blue page) and each instance of *on* appear in a separate context (e.g., Penguin put the ball on the grass, green page). The control condition eliminated the contextual cues by presenting instances of *in* and *on* in both contexts. This study informs our understanding of strategies to improve the learning of spatial words in everyday adult-child interactions.