

Temporal dynamics of preschoolers novel word learning and categorization

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Abstract

Word learning paradigms often teach children the name of a novel object and then immediately ask them to generalize the label to another object. This study uses a new paradigm that affords the ability to determine how childrens generalization changes over time. Participants (N=22, Mage=3.8 years) saw a novel object labeled by the experimenter (e.g., wug) and then were shown five novel objects that each had an additional feature changed from the exemplar (i.e., the fifth object had five changed features), either immediately after the exemplar or after a five minute delay. Category membership endorsement of the five test objects was higher at immediate test than delayed test, suggesting that children represent novel categories broadly at first but more narrowly over time. We propose that childrens forgetting of exemplars across time leads to shifts in childrens generalization; as children forget exemplar features, category membership becomes more specific.