Gleebest of the blicks are doing a gorp!
Inferring word meanings from the syntax

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Abstract

A well-known challenge in word learning is that any word form is compatible with an infinite number of possible meanings (Quine, 1960; Chomsky, 1959). What mitigates the problem is cues from the syntax (Gleitman, 1990). In this talk, we will see how syntactic categories aid young infants’ novel noun and verb learning (Study 1); and how the same aid becomes misleading but other syntactic cues come to the rescue (Study 2). We will also see syntax constrains the meaning of a novel superlative determiner but does not explain why children only take it to mean “most” (but not “least”) (Study 3). Lastly, we will see how well syntactically-derived verb meanings fare over a delay (with and without sleep) (Study 4).

Bio

Angela Xiaoxue He received her Ph.D. in Linguistics at the University of Maryland College Park in 2015, specializing in first language acquisition. After graduation, she worked as a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences at Boston University. She is currently affiliated with the Department of Philosophy and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Southern California. Most of her work investigates the mechanisms underlying successful language acquisition. She examines the role of learning biases, memory and language-processing abilities, and social-communicative skills in language learning. She asks how young learners "decipher" the meanings of novel words, especially words whose referents are less transparent (e.g. verbs, nouns that denote event concepts like nap, object-mass nouns like furniture, pronouns, determiners like most, comparative morphemes like more, negative morphemes like not). She is broadly interested in studying human cognition using language as a window and aims to bring together multi-disciplinary perspectives to inform her work on language acquisition.