
They are wellies, not shoes’’: Does children’s sensitivity to language norms get weaker with age?

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Abstract

Children develop abilities early to learn meanings of words, categorise, identify object functions, and take part in goal-oriented games. Simultaneously, they also realise that there is a conventional way to do so. This study examined sensitivity to conventions in 3-7-year-old children (N=119) and adults (N=30) through a picture-selection task. We predicted either that children become less strict about conventions with age, or that 5-year-olds are more sensitive to conventionality than 3-year-olds. We found some evidence for a u-shaped trajectory as 3-year-olds were significantly more accepting of the unconventional picture than 4-7-year-olds, and adults showed a trend for acceptance again.

Keywords: language norms, children, flexibility

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