

How Parent Corrections Affect Children's Label Acquisition

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Introduction

Many studies have looked at the effects of parent corrections on children's language acquisition. Most of this research has looked at its effect on grammar. This work is controversial, with some arguing that negative evidence aids in language learning (Chouinard & Clark, 2003; Saxton 1997), while others argue that it does not (e.g. Marcus, G. F., 1993). Relatively little work has examined the effect of corrective input on labeling. Laboratory tests have demonstrated that providing children with corrective linguistic contrast helps them to acquire new color terms (e.g. Au & Laframboise, 1990). These studies found that use of an "It's not X; it's Y" correcting structure that uses the child's own incorrect label for X is most effective in helping children to learn the correct label. These studies found that this type of corrective linguistic contrast was significantly more effective than other contrasting techniques which do not explicitly correct children's errors. Corrective linguistic contrast was more effective than semantic linguistic contrast, which uses the same "It's not X; it's Y" structure but with an arbitrary label for X. It was also superior to referential linguistic contrast, which simply references another object, "The X one, not the Y one." Further, Chapman, Leonard & Mervis (1986) found that corrective linguistic contrast enabled children to overcome overextension errors for categories like ball and car.

While these studies provide compelling evidence for the effectiveness of corrective linguistic contrast, very little work has focused on how corrective parent input affects word learning in natural situations. Mervis and Mervis (1988) studied play sessions of mother-child dyads and found that mothers seldom corrected children's incorrect labels until the child demonstrated knowledge of the correct label. However, this study was limited to children's category overextensions.

The Study

The goal of this study is to make a descriptive, naturalistic analysis of label corrections in parent input and to assess whether parent correcting behavior affects children's short term acquisition and comprehension of labels.

Methods

Transcripts from twelve monolingual English-speaking parent and child dyads were analyzed. Twelve children (7

male and 5 female) and their primary caregivers (11 mothers and 1 father) participated in the study. Children and parents visited the lab at three-week intervals beginning when the children were 24 months of age (mean = 24.2, SD = 0.6, range 23.3 – 25.4) and ending when they were approximately 30 months of age (mean = 29.7, SD = 0.5, range 28.8 – 30.6) for a total of 8 sessions.

Video transcripts were coded for instances when children were correct and incorrect in assigning object labels. Close attention was paid to incorrect child labels and parent responses to those labels. Transcripts were coded for all parent reactions, including ignoring errors, asking leading questions, overtly saying no or telling the child that he or she is incorrect, and all other parent response patterns. Results were analyzed against children's scores on comprehension tests.

Results and Discussion

Correcting patterns of each parent were analyzed against the comprehension scores for his or her child. Changes in amount of corrections and children's comprehension scores were tracked across all eight sessions. Patterns emerged that revealed important information about how parents' corrective input affects children's word learning in natural settings.

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