

LAD Conferences

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DS-3470, 320 Ste-Catherine Est, Montréal

L a b o r a t o i r e d e r e c h e r c h e s u r l e s a s y m é t r i e s d ' i n t e r f a c e s

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Hard Words

In language communities all over the world, children characteristically learn the word that (in their native tongue) means dog before they learn idea and they learn jump before think. Easy answers as to what accounts for this progression from "easy" to "hard" words are defeated by realizing that congenitally blind children learn the meanings of look and see as fast and as systematically as do sighted children.

In this talk I outline an overlapping but intrinsically ordered series of steps through which novices move in representing the lexical forms and phrase structures of the exposure language, a probabilistic multiple-cue learning process known as syntactic bootstrapping, which predicts and (in part) explains the typological growth of vocabulary. I will concentrate detailed attention on two types of verb that pose principled obstacles to "learning by observation." These are perspective verbs (e.g., chase and flee) and credal verbs (e.g., think and know).

Overall the conclusion is that the bottleneck in word learning that we see in young children has more to do with the restriction on information sources -- a "poverty of the stimulus" problem -- than on conceptual restrictions or inadequacies in the young child.

Lila R. Gleitman is Professor Emerita at the University of Pennsylvania (Dept. of Psychology) and Rutgers University (RUCCS), and co-Director of Penn's Institute for Research in Cognitive Science from 1982 to 2000. She is a Past President of the Linguistic Society of America and of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology. She has written extensively on language acquisition, the mental lexicon, and the putative effects of language on perception and cognition.

Representative Publications:

- Gleitman, L., Gleitman, H., Miller, C., and Ostrin, R., (1996) 'Similar' and similar concepts, *Cognition* 58, 321-376.
- Li, P. and Gleitman, L.R., Turning the tables: spatial language and spatial reasoning. (2002) *Cognition*, 83:3, 265-294.
- Gleitman, L.R. and A. Papafragou (2005) Language and thought, in *Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning* R. Morrison & K. Holyoak (eds), NY: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Gleitman, L.R., Cassidy, K., Papafragou, A., Nappa, R., & Trueswell, J.T. (2005) Hard words, *Journal of Language Learning and Development*, 1:1., 23-64
- Trueswell, J. & L.R. Gleitman (2005) Children's eye movements during listening: evidence for a constraint-based theory of parsing and word learning, in J. M. Henderson & F. Ferreira (eds). *Interface of vision, language, and action*, NY: Psychology Press.

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