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Emerging Morphosyntactic Prediction in Early Childhood: A Visual Tracking Study

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Abstract

Emerging Morphosyntactic Prediction in Early Childhood: A Visual Tracking Study Linguistic prediction, a key mechanism in language acquisition (Dell & Chang, 2014), enables anticipation of upcoming linguistic input based on contextual cues (Mani & Huettig, 2012; Angulo-Chavira et al., in review). This eye-tracking study investigated gender-based morphosyntactic prediction in Spanish-speaking toddlers aged 30 and 36 months. Participants heard highly constraining sentences (e.g., La gallina puso su… [The hen laid its…]) while viewing images of a gender-matching competitor (cuchillo [knife]), which shared only grammatical gender with the target (huevo [egg]), and a distractor (gorra [cap]). Results revealed that 36-month-olds, but not 30-month-olds, shifted their gaze toward the gender-matching competitor before hearing the target noun, indicating developmental differences in morphosyntactic processing. These findings suggest that the ability to integrate morphosyntactic cues into predictive language processing emerges by 36 months, providing empirical evidence on the developmental trajectory of linguistic prediction in early childhood.

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