Rule Extraction and Generalisation in Language Learning

Much of language learning consists of discovering regularities across multiple exemplars, which can be used to interpret or produce new linguistic items. Morphology presents an important example of this discovery process. Though we are rarely exposed to prefixes and suffixes in isolation, our repeated exposure to them in different words (e.g. banker, runner, teacher) allows us to develop an understanding of their functionality, in such a way as to use them to create new words (e.g. tweeter; someone who tweets). In this talk, I will describe work that my group has conducted using artificial word learning paradigms, in which we have discovered some key constraints on this discovery process. I then relate the principles that have emerged in these laboratory studies to what is known about children's acquisition of morphological knowledge.

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