Motion influences children's attention to object properties during noun learning

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Abstract: This research demonstrates that the motions of objects influence children's attention to the parts of objects when learning nouns. Three- to five-year-old children viewed animated events involving bug-like creatures, each accompanied by one of two novel nouns. Nouns were differentiated by the creatures' heads and legs. In addition, for some participants, the motions of the heads and legs distinguished nouns while paths of creatures varied randomly. For other participants, paths distinguished nouns while motions of the heads and legs varied randomly. We tested children by presenting events that varied on the relevant object properties and motions and asking if these events were still good examples of the nouns heard earlier. Participants were more likely to discover the association of nouns with creatures' heads and legs when they moved in consistent manners than when moved in randomly-varying ways. These results suggest that motions influence children's noun learning preferences.