

Inflection from form versus meaning: Developmental task differences

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Abstract: Most of the theoretical debate concerning the processes involved in inflectional morphology has been based on data acquired using a task that involves presentation of the stem. It is not universally accepted, however, that this kind of task accurately approximates more naturalistic speech production. Indeed, work with adults reveals quite different results when inflection proceeds instead from meaning. The extent to which such task differences also occur during inflectional development has not been explored. Here we consider for the first time the impact of task type upon inflectional development in a group of 900 children aged between 2;6-5;5. Across all ages, the robust regularity effect observed in the standard “wug”-task was reduced when children were required to produce the past tense from an action video. Connectionist models have captured a similar pattern of task differences in adults, and the children’s data provide a target for simulations of inflectional development.