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Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Scott Kirshner (sak292) 2019-04-24 15:06:11.0

After reading Papafragou & Tantalou (2004), I was wonder if children's tendency to favor 'logical' judgments may be confounded by the input they receive. I suppose that parents interact with their children using varied amounts of pragmatic and semantic interpretations of scenarios. However, in my experience, children are often asked to interpret statements without regard for implicatures. For example, if a child is eating dinner and wants his dessert, the parent may say "You can have your dessert after you've eaten all of your vegetables". In order to get the dessert, the child will likely have to eat all of the vegetables: not some but not all, or half. I suppose this may be a case of operant conditioning which does not shed light on the child's cognitive processes. However, I do wonder how often children access the pragmatic interpretation of utterances despite, it seems, often opting to act as if they access only the semantic interpretation. I am curious to hear what you all think about this.

Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Ilana Torres (ikt6) 2019-04-24 16:46:14.0

Hi Scott!

I like your example. I think it is interesting that if you tell a child to eat all of his or her vegetables, they will (should) eat all of them, with nothing left over. On the other hand, if you ask a young child to eat some or a little bit of their vegetables, they will eat the least amount of them possible to pass as "some". Another example would be if you say something about a child's room being messy and ask them to "tidy up a little", they will do the least amount of cleaning possible to pass as being "tidied up a little". This is at least what I can remember from my younger cousins, I haven't interacted with really young children in a while. That is why I think the Papafragou & Tantalou (2004) study is interesting in that when it comes to tasks given to animals, children were stingy in the quantifier conditions. I find it funny because if these animals were children, they would want to have successfully completed the task by doing the least amount of work possible. For example, when horse has to clean four toys and gets asked if he cleaned the toys, the horse responds "I cleaned some" which is something I would expect a child to say!

Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Rebekah Blonski (rmb290) 2019-04-24 20:36:58.0

Sup Ilana!,

I liked how you mentioned that in the Paoafragou & Tantalou (2004) study, children were being really stingy with the quantifier conditions. Following along with the experiments that we have been studying, I kept wondering if there is some personality factor that comes into play with the children that could also have influence over the results. What if some of the kids were just stingy in general? I've seen some really generous kids and some really stingy ones. My niece is a pretty sensible for a 4 year old. Once, her mother told her to share **some** chocolate with her younger sister. She gave her the tiniest piece possible. However, she followed up with the response, "babies don't really need chocolate." True I have to agree, but she's also a chocolate fiend. It's interesting how to her, "some" meant "not all," but she also gave the most minimal amount possible so that she was at least sharing something. Where as I'm 100% sure if the tables were turned and I had to her **some** chocolate, she would not be satisfied with the minimal amount (such as the one she gave to her sister). It seems to me that depending on the condition, maybe children use these "logical" judgments with quantifier conditions to their benefit...Just a thought.

Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Paula Rocha (por7) 2019-04-24 17:12:33.0

I really like what you said in regard to children having to eat all the vegetables in order to get dessert. It makes me wonder if children might answer the experiment questions differently depending on how their parents phrased the sentence and how much food is actually finished. If for example the parent only ever says "You can have dessert after you eat your veggies." However, one parent group only ever gives dessert after all the vegetables are gone versus another parent group who, as long as there isn't more than a spoonful or two left, counts it as being finished. In this case you have some kids who could potentially will infer always all and some who will pick some but not all on the same question. What about a kid who has to deal with a 'All' parent and a 'Some' parent?


Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Ari Mosbacher (am2108) 2019-04-24 20:29:26.0

My gut feeling re: a "some" parent vs. an "all" parent is that at a certain point you may run into the "metaphorical heap" problem. A really clear example of this would be some food measurable in granular quantities - i.e. peas. If you say, "if you eat all your peas, you can have dessert!" that's pretty cut-and-dried; however, if you judge "some" based on what's *left,* when is "some" satisfied? Two peas? One pea? That said, I would love to see an experiment like this be run; I feel like the conclusions have the definite potential to be super interesting, especially in light of the studies that have come before on the topic. An experiment looking at differing responses to differing phrasing (i.e. conditional "if you x, then you'll get y," negation "you won't get y unless you x" &c) could totally demonstrate kids' understandings in new ways.


Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Erin Lavielle (etl37) 2019-04-24 17:15:13.0

Hey Scott!

I think you bring up a really interesting point about operant conditioning that I hadn't thought about before! I also found Papafragou & Tantalou (2004) to be a really interesting study about scalar implicatures in children. Something that struck me the most was the quantifier condition compared to the encyclopedic condition. I was surprised that children withheld the prize 77.5% of the time when the elephant said he only colored some of the stars. When I first heard the response, I feel like my initial intuition was to give the elephant the prize because he did color some stars, even though 'the' is supposed to create the implicature of coloring all of the stars. I was surprised by how often children withheld the prize because this was a condition that I definitely had to think twice about. I thought it was interesting that they withheld the prize more for this scenario rather than the encyclopedic case, where the bear said he ate the cheese. I felt like this was a much more obvious case of the bear not eating the whole sandwich, yet children withheld the prize 70% of the time, which is less than the 77.5% of the time for the quantifier condition. Even though 7.5% is not that large of a difference, I thought it was interesting considering how inclined I initially was to give the elephant a prize for coloring some of the stars.


Re: Children's 'Logical' Judgments - Kenneth Maneely (klm337) 2019-04-24 22:59:23.0

Hi Scott!

I've found the findings that children favor 'logical' judgments like in experiments like Papafragou & Tantalou (2004) interesting because of ideas that follow from it. It seems to me that these findings suppose that children operate on 'logic' first and then learn 'non-logic' thinking later as they acclimate into society, which then follows that we in our 'natural states' prefer logical thinking to non-logical thinking. These ideas don't sit right to me in my experience as both a user of language and a studier of languages, as well as someone who has seen several children grow into socialized teenagers. Children are very adept learners, and I've seen my younger brother become quite adept at pragmatic act-specific language usage from a young age. When asking for snacks, he would

ask for something specific like three cookies and then bring the number down each time my parents said no. I believe he was flouting scalar implicature since he knew that he would be in trouble if he asked for a cookie and returned with 3 even though the determiner "a" entails more than 0 and 3 is more than zero. Considering most of the researchers have likely dealt with children before, I am surprised that there aren't any experiments (that I have seen) that designed to let children try to outsmart adults with language. Seeing how they try to manipulate language, beyond lying, could provide further insight into how children access the language knowledge they've obtained.