

Say as I say: Structural priming in young children's dialogue

Prof Holly Branigan
(University of Edinburgh)

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LT7, Rendall Building, University of Liverpool

ALL WELCOME

Abstract

Extensive research has shown that adults tend to reuse syntactic structures that they have recently experienced (e.g., Bock, 1986), so that they are more likely to produce a particular structure if they have recently heard the same structure used by a conversational partner (Branigan et al., 2000). Such findings have been interpreted in terms of priming of abstract syntactic structure (Pickering and Ferreira, 2008), which is enhanced by repetition of lexical content (the 'lexical boost'; Cleland & Pickering, 2003; Pickering & Branigan, 1998). Children show a similar tendency to repeat a conversational partner's syntax (Messenger et al., 2011, 2012; Rowland et al., 2012), but the potential contribution of a lexical component to this effect is less clear-cut (Rowland et al., 2012). The evidence for abstract, but not lexically-specific, priming effects in young children is perhaps unexpected in light of usage-based accounts of grammar acquisition that emphasise the emergence of abstract structure from experiences with individual verbs (e.g., Tomasello, 2000). In this talk I will present evidence for structural priming effects in young (3-4 year old) children that display a pattern which is in many ways surprisingly similar to that of adults, including the presence of an (ephemeral) lexical boost, and will consider how such effects might relate to tendencies to imitate a partner's behaviour more broadly.

Speaker Biography

Holly Branigan is Professor of Psychology of Language and Cognition at the University of Edinburgh. After a degree in Language and Linguistic Science at the University of York, she completed an MSc and PhD in Cognitive Science at the University of Edinburgh. She then held a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Glasgow before joining the School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences at Edinburgh. Her research is mainly concerned with the nature of the cognitive processes and representations that underlie language production and interactive language use in adults and children, with a particular focus on syntactic structure. She serves on the editorial board of *Journal of Memory and Language*, and currently holds a British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship.

Directions

The Rendall Building is number 432 on the [University of Liverpool campus map](#).

Further information

For further information about this seminar, please contact michaeline.k.glover@manchester.ac.uk or about LuCiD, please contact helen.allwood@manchester.ac.uk