



Wednesday, June 25th, 14:30-15:00, room 201

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Is the rate of children's colour language learning inconsistent with the existence of pre-linguistic colour categories?

Keywords: colour categorization, colour concepts, pre-linguistic categorization, prelinguistic concepts, colour, core cognition

Suppose that there is a pre-linguistic disposition to the categorical perception of colour: a disposition for infants to group non-perceptually matching colour samples into hue categories such as red, yellow, green, and blue. (e.g. Franklin & Davies 2006) Now suppose that a language expresses those colour categories lexically. Is it reasonable to believe that the pre-linguistic disposition should facilitate linguistic development? In 1985 the cognitive psychologist Marc Bornstein proposed that the answer is "yes" and that what can be called "Bornstein's paradox" arises from the fact that such facilitation seems not to occur. Children have a difficult time learning colour names, even in languages that possess so called "basic color terms" such as "red," "yellow," "green," and "blue" (e.g. Bornstein 1985, but there are many others, e.g. Kowalski & Zimiles 2006) This presentation argues that there is no paradox, even if some colour categories are pre-linguistic (an issue this author takes no position on). The psychologist Susan Carey's idea of "core cognition" is extended to colour categorization and it is argued that if colour is a domain of core cognition the development from initial infant colour experience need not be continuous with linguistic experience. (Carey 2009) This argument makes reference to work by Carey and others on counting which the author views as analogous to colour naming. The ability to construct and deploy a number sequence may be viewed as [a] a socially constructed representation/ability that [b] utilizes prelinguistic resources. This presentation makes a parallel case for colour naming. It is not paradoxical to attribute prelinguistic conceptual resources to children who must, then, socially construct adult colour language competence. This is not a straightforward "mapping task" from prelinguistic resources to mature colour language competence, as the "paradox" suggests it ought to be.

References:

1. Bornstein, M. (1985). *On the development of color naming in young children*. Brain and Language, 26, 72-93.
2. Franklin, A., & Davies, I.R.L. (2006). *Converging evidence for pre-linguistic colour categorisation*. In C.P Biggam & N. Pitchford (Eds.), *Progress in Colour Studies: Psychological Aspects* (pp. 101-120). John Benjamins: Amsterdam, NL.
3. Kowalski & Zimiles (2006). *The relation between children's conceptual functioning with color and color term acquisition*. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 94, 301–321
4. Carey, S. (2009) *The origin of concepts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.