

Object Naming and Later Lexical Development:
From Baby Bottle to Beer Bottle

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Some word classes are known to require an extended learning period, but names for concrete objects have been considered less problematic. However, there is surprising variability across languages in the sets of objects picked out by many nouns, indicating that the category boundaries are at best loosely constrained by similarity. We found substantial evolution from age 5 to 14 in the use of nouns for 73 familiar household containers, with only a minimal increase in total vocabulary. Instead, over-extended words narrowed over time and under-extended words broadened. The children gradually learned which features are relevant in assigning names to objects and came to attach the right weights to them. However, even the naming pattern of adults could not be fully explained by the weighted features. A second component of the development may be mastery of language-specific idiosyncrasies obtained through experience with the naming of individual objects.