

The no-negative evidence problem and the retreat from (dative) overgeneralization errors: Children's and adults' sensitivity to verb frequency, verb semantics and morphophonological constraints.

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How do children learn that certain verbs may not be used in certain argument structure constructions? The entrenchment hypothesis (Braine & Brooks, 1995) states that repeated presentation of a verb in one construction (e.g., prepositional dative) constitutes probabilistic evidence that it may not be used in non-attested constructions (e.g., double-object dative). Alternatively (Pinker, 1989) children may form semantic and morpho-phonologically-based classes of items that appear in particular constructions only. To investigate these hypotheses, participants (5-6yrs, 9-10yrs and adults) rated ungrammatical, double-object datives (and various grammatical control sentences) with high frequency, low frequency and novel verbs (half "native-like", half "Latinate") from each of four semantic classes. In general, participants correctly rejected double-object-dative uses of all verbs that did not denote transfer of possession (e.g., Marge *pulled/*dragged/*blicked her friend the box), and of possession-transfer verbs with "Latinate" morpho-phonology (e.g., Lisa *contributed/*donated/*orgulated the library the book). Frequency (entrenchment) effects were also observed.