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Meaning in the objects

ABSTRACT. When testing linguistic knowledge and behaviour in experimental conditions, we try to systematically vary factors constituting the external situation. We therefore make effort to create novel, neutral or abstract situations and attempt to control for the extraneous variables in the environment that might have an impact on the dependent variable accessed in the experiment. However, when we adapt this method to studies on children's language development, we have to calculate the risk of eliminating important components for children's reasoning: Children are good learners because they are biased towards certain solutions (Dabrowska, 2005). For this reason, it seems to be problematic to create situations, in which children cannot draw from their nonlinguistic experiences. In this paper, I am arguing that objects being present in the external situation ground the linguistic meaning. Referring to previous literature and the results of a pilot study, I will show that the nature of objects can change not only linguistic but also gestural behaviour. Instead of simply excluding materialistic factors, I therefore suggest a careful inclusion of object knowledge into experimental conditions.