“At Least She Said Something”: Children Prefer Inaccurate Over Ignorant Informants

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Introduction

- Preschoolers prefer novel information from previously accurate informants over previously wrong or ignorant ones (Koenig & Harris, 2005).

- They expect an ignorant individual to guess incorrectly (rather than at chance levels) when making a choice between two alternatives (Ruffman, 1996; but see Friedman & Petrashek, 2009).

- If children equate ignorant with inaccurate speakers, they should endorse their novel information at equal rates. Alternatively, children may prefer a historically inaccurate speaker because she seemed to be a more helpful collaborator.

- We asked if 4- and 5-year-olds (n = 96) preferred novel information from a previously inaccurate labeler or an ignorant one (Study 1), if they knew that the inaccurate speaker's labels were indeed wrong (Study 2), and if the perceived helpfulness of the speaker influenced their preferences (Study 3).

Conclusions

- 4- and 5-year-olds did not equate ignorance with inaccuracy: they initially preferred a speaker they knew was wrong, preferred her novel information later, and claimed she knew more about the objects she had just labeled incorrectly compared to an ignorant speaker (unless she was also helpful).

- Children view those who make the effort to respond in some helpful way, even if incorrect, more favorably. This suggests that effort can overshadow ignorance and inaccuracy.

Method

4 Object Trials

Study 2

Do you know what this is called?

Is it a ball?

4 Induction Trials

Studies 1 & 2

Study 3

Ignorant

Inaccurate

Inaccurate

Ignorant

Who is saying the right thing?

What is this?

Is it a X?

Who is better at telling me what these were called?

Who knows the most about these things?

Results

Children admitted ignorance but rejected the familiar labels for the novel induction objects.

Even so, most children preferred the Inaccurate speaker, unless the Ignorant one was also helpful.

Explicit Judgment: Collapsed across all studies

Initial Preference

Who is Better

Who Knows More

Ignorant

Inaccurate

Ignorant

Inaccurate

Chance

Inaccurate

References


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