



BRITISH
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Title: Learning about the world through generic statements: a cross-linguistic perspective

Abstract: Generic statements such as ‘tigers have stripes’ attribute properties to kinds, but unlike universally quantified statements (‘Every tiger has stripes’), they are tolerant of exceptions (albino tigers). Little is known about how children learn the meaning of genericity or how adults process it, despite the obvious importance of understanding how we think and speak about properties and kinds. An influential proposal suggests that genericity is the default and innate mode of thinking and that universal quantifiers are initially misinterpreted as generic. However, this approach is not fully informed by cross-linguistic observations or theories of quantification. To establish a critical evidence-base, we will investigate how adult native speakers of two languages with distinct ways of expressing generic statements, English and Greek, process these statements and how young native speakers of English learn their meaning. This research will inform linguistics and cognitive science, and also pave the way for work on how bilingual children learn about the world through language.

PI: Dr Napoleon Katsos (University of Cambridge)

Co-I: Dr Linnaea Stockall (Queen Mary, University of London)

Post-doc RA: Dr Dimitra Lazaridou-Chatzigoga (University of Cambridge/Queen Mary)