

京大過去問 1989年 第2問

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It may seem at first sight easy to tell when a child knows what a word means. When a little girl of thirteen months sees a ball, says 'ball', and then at once goes to pick it up, the obvious conclusion may appear to be that the meaning of the word is now known to her. (1)But if, during the next month or so, she is heard to say 'ball' on seeing a balloon, an Easter egg, a small round stone, and so on, doubts must begin to arise; and it may then seem wiser to replace the first conclusion by the more guarded one that the word 'ball' has now entered her word-stock and that her knowledge of its meaning has begun to grow.

The above example is not invented. It is provided by Bowerman from a study of her daughter, Eva. And many similar instances have been recorded by Bowerman and others. (2)So it is clear that, even in the case of 'simple' words like 'ball', the acquisition of word meaning is not an all-or-none affair. Word meanings grow and change — a fact central to an understanding of the development of thought and language. Thus it is by no means so easy as one might suppose to give a straightforward answer to the question: how large is a child's vocabulary, on average, at different ages?