

## **Learning verb argument-structure: Syntax and statistics**

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Learning a language requires balancing lexical and abstract knowledge, to learn patterns ranging from the idiosyncrasies of individual words to structures that can be generalized to almost any word. In this talk I will discuss the role of syntactic-distributional learning about verbs in creating and maintaining this balance. I will present evidence that, both early in acquisition and in the ongoing adaptation of the linguistic system, distributional learning creates probabilistic syntactic-semantic combinatorial knowledge about verbs and verb classes. This knowledge plays two roles: (a) it permits syntactic bootstrapping, as children use each verb's combinatorial behavior in sentences to help identify its meaning; and (b) it supports sentence processing (this is known as *verb bias*), by reducing ambiguity in online comprehension, and guiding sentence production.