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Abstract:

Although researchers often explore how predictive mechanisms support language processing in well known (i.e. predictable) contexts, a great deal of communication conveys novel (i.e. less predictable) information. Similarly, children, who are simultaneously learning about language and the world, may experience enhanced uncertainty during language processing. Given the ubiquity of uncertainty during everyday language processing, to what extent can we rely on prediction as a plausible and central mechanism in language processing across development?

I explore this tension between predictive processing and uncertainty in several studies that measure whether and how adult and child listeners deploy predictive mechanisms while learning about new events. Together, these studies paint a broad picture that flexibility in predictive processing develops over a protracted developmental period. I will argue that by incorporating developmental insights and learning paradigms into studies of linguistic prediction, we can develop more nuanced models of how and when prediction supports everyday communication and learning.