

'Cultural learners' in the cradle

August 10 2016

We are "culturally biased" right from the cradle and we tend to prefer information we receive from native speakers of our language, even when this information is not transmitted through verbal speech. Hanna Marno, researcher at the International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA) of Trieste (together with other colleagues among whom Jacques Mehler and Marina Nespor, professors at SISSA, -that coordinated the study- and Yamil Vidal, SISSA Ph.D. student) has carried out an experiment in which she proved that infants selectively paid attention to the informants they have previously heard speaking their own language.

In a first series of experiments, 12-month-old infants were first familiarized with native speakers of their language and foreign speakers. In a following session, the same infants were presented with short movies where each of the known speakers silently gazed toward unfamiliar objects. The analysis of the looking behaviour showed that infants looked longer at the objects indicated by the native speaker, compared to those indicated by the foreigners. Further experiments have shown that this behaviour was replicated with 5-month-old infants already.

"Recognizing the spoken language of their interlocutors stimulates in children, even at a very early age, the social learning: [infants](#) tend to prefer information received from speakers recognized as belonging to their own cultural group. Language is a lead that guides the learning process", Marno, first author of the study, explains. "Though it may seem limiting, children are presented with a huge amount of stimuli, and therefore need strategies to efficiently distribute their attention potential,

maximizing thus the learning of relevant inputs. Choosing [native speakers](#) of our [language](#) is a good way to be able to selectively learn from them the knowledge of our cultural environment "

More information: Hanna Marno et al, Infants' Selectively Pay Attention to the Information They Receive from a Native Speaker of Their Language, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01150](#)

Provided by International School of Advanced Studies (SISSA)

Citation: 'Cultural learners' in the cradle (2016, August 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-08-cultural-learners-cradle.html>

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