Abstract

Language comprehension often requires making *implicatures*: for example, inferring that "I ate some of the cookies" implicates the speaker ate some *but not all* (scalar implicatures); and "I ate the chocolate-chip cookies" where there are both chocolate chip cookies and raisin cookies in the context implicates that the speaker ate the chocolate chip, *but not both the chocolate chip and raisin cookies* (ad-hoc implicatures). Developmental work have reported mixed results about the development of implicature processing abilities. In the current work, using a time-sensitive tablet paradigm, we examined developmental gains in children’s ad-hoc implicature processing, and found evidence for successful implicature computation by children as young as 3 years in a supportive context and substantial developmental gains in implicature computation from 2 to 5 years. We also tested whether one cause of younger children (2-year-olds) consistent failure to process such implicature is their difficulty in inhibiting an alternative interpretation that is more salient than the target meaning (the *salience hypothesis*). We present support for the salience hypothesis: Younger children’s failures with implicatures are likely related to effects of the salience mismatch between possible interpretations.