

June 12, 2019

Dear Editors,

We have enclosed a comment on an article by Kim, Elli, and Bedny recently published in *PNAS*. The original article showed that congenitally blind people have surprisingly rich knowledge about the appearance of animals. The authors argued that this knowledge derives from explicit inference. Although blind people have no direct visual experience, they generate visual knowledge by inferring that, e.g., because robins are birds and birds have feathers, robins have feathers. The authors explicitly reject the possibility that the knowledge manifested by blind people comes from language. We argue that the authors were premature to reject language as a source of visual knowledge. We support our argument by showing that contained within the distributional structure of English are rich patterns that allow a general associative learning mechanisms lacking inferential machinery to yield performance roughly comparable to that shown by Kim et al's participants. We believe publishing this commentary will generate additional interest in Kim et al.'s findings.

Sincerely,

Molly Lewis (on behalf of all authors)