

Contextualising generalisations

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In this talk I will first discuss some challenges for different approaches to genericity focusing on the received view in formal semantics as expressed for instance in the *Generic Book* (Krifka et al., 1995) and on a growing body of work in experimental cognitive and developmental psychology that postulates that generics are an innate and default mode of thinking (see Leslie, 2007; Gelman, 2010). I will then present recent work in collaboration with Napoleon Katsos and Linnaea Stockall that addresses two relevant phenomena. The first phenomenon is the so-called generic overgeneralisation effect, that is, the tendency that adults have to misinterpret universal generalisations as if they were generic (Leslie et al., 2011). I will discuss data from two experiments in English and Greek that support the view that quantifier domain restriction is a viable alternative explanation for much of the behaviour attributed to this effect. The second phenomenon is exception tolerance and the content of a generalisation in the acquisition of generics. I will discuss data from two experiments with 4- and 5-year old English-speaking children that show that children are sensitive to both exception tolerance and the content of a generalisation, but they are still on the learning process.