

## How Children See Complex Event Types

Ekaterina A. Khlystova, Principal Investigator ([ekhlystova@g.ucla.edu](mailto:ekhlystova@g.ucla.edu))

Dr. Laurel Perkins, Faculty Sponsor ([perkinsl@ucla.edu](mailto:perkinsl@ucla.edu))

### Research Goals:

This winter quarter, Ekaterina Khlystova, a Ph.D. student from the Department of Linguistics, conducted a study that examined how young children (EC1 classrooms) perceive complex events like trading. We looked at how children of this age see different actions in the world around them, as they are learning the words that describe those events. To determine how children match new verbs to the actions they see in the world, we first need to know whether they see those actions in the same way as adults do.

### Method:

This study consisted of a single session in which the child was introduced to a “very picky” puppet. The child watched pairs of silent videos, with one video showing a girl and a boy trading some toys and another with a small change to the video. By asking the child to help the puppet sort the pairs into ones that “match”; and ones that don’t, we can see whether changes to some parts of the event (for instance, how the toy moves, what the toy is, who is moving the toy) are more or less noticeable than other changes.

### Findings:

We found that children aged 4-5 can track all four participants within a “trading” scene: the girl, the boy, the ball, and the truck. This means that when children are learning the verb *trade*, they can map between their view of a trading action and a sentence that has all four participants labeled (i.e., *The girl and boy traded the ball and the truck*). This finding is important for our understanding of how children learn verbs that label complex events with many participants, like trading. Understanding how children learn these verbs is critical for future work investigating early literacy!



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