Bright, unfriendly words

Gestalt psychology
and children’s word perception

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Consider these figures...
Which is called “TAKETE”? 
And which is “MALUMA”?
What did you say?

• Maluma is the round one, and Takete pointy?
• Nearly all adults identify this way
• What about the figures makes us identify them so predictably?
• What about our minds makes us identify them so predictably?
Gestalt Psychology

- Kohler (1929)
  - Tendency to perceive wholes
  - Organization of perception according to patterns

- Lindauer (1990)
  - Attribution of qualities to maluma & takete

Expansions

• Cross cultural / linguistic
  - English
  - Dutch (another Germanic)
  - French (Romance)
  - Serbian (Slavic)

4: Jankovic & Markovic (2000,2001)
Expansions

• Production\(^4\)
  - More m, a, l, o, n phonemes for Maluma
  - More t, z, r, c, k phonemes for Takete

• Other populations
  - Aphasics: not present\(^5\)
  - Children: present in grade school\(^6\)

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4: Jankovic & * Markovic, 2000, 2001
5: Ammon, Moerman & Guleac, 1977
6: Irwin & Newland, 1940
Our study

• What about preschool children?
• How early can this phenomenon be observed?
• Are there developmental changes during the preschool period?
• Requires some procedural modification
The teddy bear is in the MALUMA box. Can you find him?
Preliminary Results

- 83% of preschoolers use names like adults
- 2, 3, and 4-year-olds tested
Future Directions

• Word specific?
  - Local phonemes, existing words
• Phoneme classes
  - Voiced / unvoiced
• Refugee population
  - African languages
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