

## Dogs and words: Do they really understand what we're saying?

A new study by scientists at Emory University and published Monday [Oct. 15] in the journal [Frontiers in Neuroscience](#) suggests dogs possess a basic understanding of the words they've been taught to associate with objects. After training 12 very good dogs of different breeds over the course of two to six months to discern between two toys based on their respective names, the researchers then utilized functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to study whether they possessed a basic ability to differentiate between human speech they were taught to remember and new or unfamiliar words.

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Researchers observed that the dogs displayed greater brain activation to the made-up words than the ones they'd been trained to recognize.

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"We expected to see that dogs neurally discriminate between words that they know and words that they don't," [researcher Ashley] Prichard said. "What's surprising is that the result is opposite to that of research on humans — people typically show greater neural activation for known words than novel words."

Ultimately, researchers think that dogs may respond to novel words the way they do because they know we want them to understand us, and they want to please us—or perhaps, as [researcher Gregory] Berns said, "also receive praise or food."

**Read full, original post:** [New Study Explores How Dogs Understand Human Language](#)