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Verb learning in young children: Are types of comparisons important?

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Abstract

Evidence shows comparing events helps children learn verbs (e.g., Childers et al., 2016), but studies are needed to understand whether event type is important. Study 1 examines two types of experiences during learning: seeing similar events than varied, or all varied events. Two½-(n=22), 3½-(n=20) and 4½-year-olds(n=14) learned 4 novel verbs. BS:similar events first or all varied events; pointed at test. A 3(Age: 2,3,4 years) x 2(Condition: similar,varied) univariate ANOVA,dv=proportion correct, showed main effect of Age, $F(2, 55)= 7.6$, $p=.001$ only. All children succeeded (one sample t-tests,$ps< .03$), whereas in a prior study, younger children failed. A second study confirms these results with a different set of video events, and events separated by 1-minute distractors. Here, only 2½- and 3½-year-olds who saw similar events extended verbs,perhaps because events were separated in time. These studies show that verb learners can benefit from comparing events, and comparing similar events can be especially useful.