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Do chimpanzees represent the actions of a co-ordination partner?

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Abstract

Effective social co-ordination benefits from mentally representing a partner's actions. Chimpanzees can successfully work together, but the cognitive mechanisms they employ to aid social co-ordination remain unclear. Studies of action planning show that, like humans, chimpanzees demonstrate the end-state-comfort effect; considering the end of an action sequence during motor-planning, e.g. using an initially awkward grasp when handling an overturned glass to facilitate how it will end up being held. Human research shows that we extend this to a partner; we pass objects in a way that facilitates the action to be performed with them. Here, we assessed the location in which chimpanzees passed a tool to an experimenter to investigate action accommodation. We manipulated experimenter hand location and their ease of access to locations and found some effect on passing behaviour indicating that, under certain conditions, chimpanzees consider a partner's actions when planning their own actions in a co-ordination context.