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The Influence of Emotional Cues on Toddler Word Learning

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Abstract

Prior research indicates that the physical context in which a word is spoken can influence how well young children learn the word. Yet, it is unclear how variability in social contexts (e.g. emotion) may impact word learning. To assess this, the present study used a novel noun generalization task with 2-year-old children. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four emotional labeling conditions: consistently angry, consistently happy, consistently sad, or variable (one label in each emotional tone per trial). We investigated whether the number of correct responses out of eight trials varied by emotional condition. Preliminary data from 28 (14 female) participants suggests that the percentage of correct responses in the sad (59.4%) and happy (64.3%) conditions may be lower than in the angry (70.8%) or variable (69.6%) conditions. These results hold implications for how emotional contexts may influence childrens ability to learn new words.