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Interpretate Novel Conceptual Combinations: Age-Related Impact of Memory Availability

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Abstract: This study looks at how combinations of two French nouns ("Incendie Brûlure" /"Fire Burn" ; "Voiture Tortue"/"Turtle Car") are interpreted. The order of occurrence of the constituents of two types of conceptual combinations, Relation and Property, was manipulated in view of determining how property-based and relation-based interpretations evolve with age. Three groups of French-speaking children (ages 6, 8, and 10) and a group of adults performed an interpretation-selection task. The results for the children indicated that while property-based interpretations increased with age, relation-based interpretations were in the majority for both combination types, whereas for the adults, relation-based interpretations were in the minority for property combinations. For the children and adults alike, the most frequent interpretations were ones in which the head noun came first and was followed by the modifier (the opposite of the order observed for English).