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Access to inner language enhances memory for events

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Abstract

We investigated whether inner language enhances memory for events in a naturalistic, non-verbal task where participants constructed simple models from memory after watching an instructional video. Across three experiments, we used linguistic suppression to manipulate access to language and tested its effect on overall memory performance. Results showed that access to inner language consistently affected event memory: when inner language was disrupted at encoding, participants were poorer at recalling the models and remembered fewer events. Critically, the effect of linguistic suppression on memory performance was greater than a control secondary task that did not affect access to language (i.e., poorer performance was not solely due to dual-task effects). These findings support the proposal that inner language enhances event memory via a mechanism of linguistic bootstrapping, which in turn extends theories of event memory and adds to a growing body of evidence that inner language is a highly valuable cognitive tool.

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