Investigating the nature of infants' lexical speed of processing

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Abstract

Children vary widely in their lexical development. These differences have been shown to carry through later ages and can even be found in adults. One parameter often found as a predictor of varying vocabulary size is speed of processing, measuring the reaction time in familiar word recognition tasks. However, the underlying nature of speed of processing is still unclear: Is it a purely linguistic phenomenon or is it tied to the general cognitive abilities of the child. Our study aims to shed light on the nature of speed of processing, by testing 17-month-olds in a word learning experiment and assessing their reaction time during word recognition for both newly acquired and familiar words as well as visual reaction times. Our results can thus disentangle how broad or narrow lexical speed of processing is and help us better understand the origin of its link with language skills across the lifespan.