Events Structure Information Accessibility Less in Children than Adults

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Abstract

Adults parse continuous experience into meaningful events, a process referred to as event segmentation. This segmentation in turn colors how experiences are construed content experienced within an event is held mentally in an accessible state, which is then dropped after an event boundary. However, little is known about whether children are similarly influenced by event boundaries. Here, we tested seven- to nine-year-old childrens and adults recognition of objects experienced either within or across event boundaries of two cartoons. We found that children and adults were both more accurate and faster to correctly recognizing objects that last occurred within events than across an event boundary. We, however, additionally observed an interaction such that childrens access to recent experience was less influenced by event boundaries than adults. Thus, while the spontaneous segmentation of complex events emerges by middle childhood, event structure less reliably shapes the active contents of childrens minds than adults.