THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE CUES ON FLEXIBLE MEMORY RETRIEVAL AT 12-MONTHS OF AGE

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The provision of language cues can enhance 12-month-olds' memory flexibility in a puppet imitation task, enabling memory retrieval across a change in the puppet's form at test (Herbert, 2011). The mechanism by which language cues enhance early memory flexibility remains unclear. Given that infants distribute their attention more widely than adults when viewing the puppet task (Taylor & Herbert, 2013), it is possible that language cues might help direct attention to the stimulus and the actions, or that the words themselves might provide an additional cue for retrieval. To test these possibilities in the present experiment 12-month-olds were provided with language cues during a difficult imitation task, a combined change in the puppet's colour and form (Hayne et al., 1997). Half the infants heard simple verbal labels during the demonstration and at the test, and half the infants did not. Imitation performance in the full language and empty language groups did not exceed baseline performance after the 10-min delay. Thus, language cues did not facilitate flexible memory retrieval on this task. CDI data revealed no correlations between infants' language comprehension and imitation performance in either group. Given that there was no relationship between infants' language comprehension and imitation performance in the full language group, these results suggest that language cues may direct attention to relevant parts of the demonstration rather than providing an additional cue for recall (see Balaban & Waxman, 1997).