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“Do I know you? How children learn to identify talkers’ voices and what it means for spoken word recognition”

Abstract:

The speech signal is highly variable, due in part to differences across talkers. Despite this variability, adult listeners are able to adeptly navigate incoming speech signals and accurately perceive the intended utterance. Previous work with adults has highlighted the flexibility of adult speech perception by showing that familiarity with a talker’s voice improves speech perception. During perception, listeners must track differences across talkers and also link talker and linguistic information. Here, we present results from two experiments. First, when discriminating talkers in a familiar and unfamiliar language, children rely on different information than adults when discriminating talkers. Second, despite their different (possibly immature) perceptual strategies, children can learn the link between talker and linguistic information, resulting in improved speech perception for familiar talkers. This improvement, however, is limited to highly familiar words, opening questions about the benefit of familiarity in novel word learning.