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Preschoolers' Learning of Words with Emotional Variability in Shared Book Reading

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Abstract

Mapping words to referents is important for language acquisition. Learning a word relies heavily on memory because it requires forming associations between labels and referents, integrating examples across time, and retrieving words. Memory supports, such as variability, can be added to word learning events to help children learn words. This study examined the effect of emotional variability on word learning. Four-year-olds learned eight novel words presented four times in a storybook organized in one of three conditions: no variability, low variability, or high variability. Words with no variability were presented in the same emotional context (i.e., happy, sad, afraid, or angry). Words with low variability were presented with two emotions (e.g., happy and sad), and words with high variability were presented with all four emotions. After hearing the book, preschoolers participated in a generalization test. This study informs our understanding of the role of social contextual variability in word learning.