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Do typically and atypically developing children learn and generalize novel names similarly: the role of conceptual distance during learning and at test

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Abstract

There is a large body of evidence showing that comparison leads to better conceptualization and generalization of novel names than no-comparison settings in typically developing (TD) children (e.g., Gentner, 2010). So far, comparison situations have not been studied with children with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Chapman & Kay-Raining Bird, 2012). In the present research children with ID and TD children matched on mental age with the Ravens coloured progressive matrices RCPM (Raven, 1965) were tested in several comparison conditions. We manipulated the conceptual distance between stimuli in the learning phase and between the learning phase stimuli and the generalization phase stimuli for object and relational nouns. Results showed that overall both populations had rather similar performance profile when matched on their cognitive skills (low vs. high functioning). Unexpectedly, ID childrens performance was equivalent or better than their TD peers. We discuss our results in terms of the role of conceptual distance on participants conceptual generalization as a function of their intellectual abilities and cognitive functioning.