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How do pragmatic and object cues affect monolingual and bilingual toddlers visual attention during word learning?

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Abstract

Compared to monolinguals, bilingual children attend more to pragmatic cues, especially when they conflict with perceptual cues (Brojde et al., 2012). This longitudinal eye-tracking study investigated monolingual and bilingual two-year-olds (T1 M.age=24.3 months; T2 M.age=27.6 months) visual attention in a word learning paradigm containing a conflict between eye gaze (pragmatic cue) and object salience (perceptual cue). Participants saw videos of a model looking at and labeling either a salient or a nonsalient object. Next, participants saw the objects from the videos side-by-side onscreen, and heard either the target label or a novel distracter label. At T1, monolinguals (N=14) and bilinguals (N=10) showed similar looking patterns during learning; at test, bilinguals modulated their looking to target and distracter objects differently than monolinguals. At T2, monolinguals and bilinguals showed similar looking patterns during all trials. These results suggest that language background may differentially influence word learning and visual attention across development.