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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5zb1k8fq>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 33(33)

ISSN

1069-7977

Authors

Vanootighem, Valentine

Bredart, Serge

Dehon, Hedwige

Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed

Verbal descriptions hurt face recognition in children and adults

Valentine Vanootighem

University of Liège

Serge Brédart

University of Liège

Hedwige Dehon

University of Liège

Abstract: The verbal overshadowing effect (VO), first demonstrated by Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990), indicates that providing a verbal description of a previously seen face may impair its recognition on a subsequent lineup identification task. This phenomenon, widely demonstrated in adults, was investigated in children only once (Memon & Rose, 2002): no VO effect was found with 8-9 years old participants. However, some procedural details were not controlled in this experiment and the absence of a control adult group did not allow determining whether the procedure used was able to induce a VO effect. Current experiments examine the VO effect in several groups of children (7-8, 10-11, 13-14 years old) and adults to determine the developmental trajectory of the phenomenon across the ages. In both experiments, verbalization interfered with identification performance in all children's and adults' groups. The influence of descriptors' quality provided by subjects was analyzed and discussed.