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Authors

Yu, Madeleine
Johnson, Elizabeth

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Is there an Own-Age Advantage in Talker Recognition?

Madeleine Yu
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Elizabeth Johnson
University of Toronto, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Adults are far better at identifying adult talkers than child talkers (e.g., Cooper et al., 2020). Why is this the case? Are child talkers acoustically less distinguishable (e.g., Lee et al., 1999)? Or perhaps adults better identify adult talkers, while children better identify child talkers (e.g., see Anastasi & Rhodes, 2005, for evidence that an own-age advantage exists in face recognition). Here, we test adults (N=72) and 6.5-year-olds (N=71) on a voice identification task featuring single word recordings by 8 children and 8 adults. While all listeners successfully identified all talkers above chance (ps<.05), adults significantly outperformed children with both adult (Madult=0.66 vs. Mchild=0.54; p<.001) and child talkers (Madult=0.64 vs. Mchild=0.57; p<.05). Thus, we find no evidence of an own-age advantage in talker recognition. Rather, we find additional evidence that adults are more skilled than children in voice identification tasks, suggesting that talker recognitions skills take time to fully mature.