Comparing Flanker Effects in Direction and Color over Development

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Abstract

The Erikson flanker task is a well-established measure of selective attention for adults. In this task, participants judge the direction a central target points with flanking distractors that are neutral (no direction), congruent (same direction as target), or incongruent (opposite direction of target). This task has recently been modified for use with young children, but it is unclear whether developmental differences in childrens spatial skills and language limit its appropriateness. The current study tested preschool-aged children in both the classic directional version and new color version (i.e., blue and red targets, with blue, red, or white flankers). Results showed significantly better performance on the color versus directional version, with trial types showing the same pattern in both tasks: worst performance on incongruent trials, comparable performance on congruent and neutral. Ongoing work is comparing the same tasks in adults to see if this difference is limited to early childhood.