Boundedness in event and object cognition

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Abstract

The semantic property of boundedness characterizes the presence of well-defined spatio-temporal boundaries for events or objects in language (Bach, 1986; Frawly, 1992; Jackendoff, 1991). Little research has tested whether this property actually characterizes event and object cognition (but see Wellwood, Hespos, & Rips, 2018). We showed participants videos of bounded events where a salient change in state of the affected object(s) occurred (e.g., dressing a teddy bear) and unbounded events that lacked a salient change (e.g., waving a handkerchief). Participants decided whether a video matched with a picture of a single novel object or a picture of a novel substance (object/substance pictures were adopted from Li, Dunham, & Carey, (2009)). Participants tended to pair a bounded event with an object and an unbounded event with a substance, and were in fact better at establishing the former connection. We conclude that boundedness underlies the cognitive representation of both events and objects.