

Event Perception Differs Across Cultures

Khena Swallow

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, United States

Qi Wang

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, United States

Abstract

Event segmentation divides continuous experience into meaningful events and guides attention, memory, and learning. Culture could impact event segmentation by emphasizing the importance of different aspects of experiences (attentional focus), and by providing different exemplars of everyday activities (familiarity). In this study, Indian and US viewers identified large (coarse) and small (fine) events in videos of everyday activities recorded in Indian and US settings. Analyses revealed that US viewers segmented the activities at a higher rate than Indian viewers. In addition, while the boundaries identified by US viewers were more strongly associated with visual change, boundaries identified by Indian viewers were more strongly associated with changes in actions and goals. However, there was no evidence that familiarity with an activity, as indicated by the match between a viewers culture and the activity setting, impacted segmentation. Culture appears to affect how people define events during perception, independent of familiarity.