

Toddlers' mapping of emotion words to facial expressions and body postures in a looking-while-listening task

Hanqi Chen

University of Toronto Scarborough, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Sahej Gulati

University of Toronto, Scarborough, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Yang Wu

University of Toronto Scarborough, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Traditional research on children's emotion word comprehension has relied on explicit-response tasks and focused primarily on facial expressions, potentially underestimating early abilities. Using a looking-while-listening paradigm, this study examined whether 18- to 30-month-old children (N=100) could map emotion words to combined facial and bodily expressions. On each trial, children heard an emotion word while viewing a pair of emotional expressions that were either across valence (e.g., happy vs. sad) or within valence (e.g., sad vs. angry). Children aged 24-30 months preferentially looked at the matched expression on both trial types, while children aged 18-24 months old performed at chance levels. These findings suggest that the ability to map emotion words to facial and bodily emotional expressions emerges in early age two.