

Exploring the role of visual attention in relational reasoning across two cultures

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Abstract

Relations like “same” and “different” are among the earliest abstract concepts, and this type of reasoning may be central to human cognition (Gentner, 2003). While relational reasoning is a ubiquitous part of human experience and a key feature of cognitive development, the path that young learners follow as they begin to reason about relations varies across cultures, with children showing differences in both relational matching performance, and preference for relational solutions in an ambiguous context as early as 3 years (Carstensen et al., 2019; Carstensen et al., 2023). Which features of the environment prompt the early emergence of these cross-cultural differences? Several prominent accounts implicate early appearing differences in visual attention, which could facilitate or impair relational reasoning by highlighting the relevant relational context. We explore the role of visual attention in relational reasoning through attention priming with 381 children in two cultural contexts, the US and South Korea.