Visual statistical learning in infancy: Evidence for a domain general learning mechanism.

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Visual statistical learning in infancy: evidence for a domain general learning mechanism

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Abstract

The rapidity with which infants come to understand language and events in their surroundings has prompted speculation concerning innate knowledge structures that guide language acquisition and object knowledge. Recently, however, evidence has emerged that by 8 months, infants can extract statistical patterns in auditory input that are based on transitional probabilities defining the sequencing of the input's components (Science 274 (1996) 1926). This finding suggests powerful learning mechanisms that are functional in infancy, and raises questions about the domain generality of such mechanisms. We habituated 2-, 5-, and 8-month-old infants to sequences of discrete visual stimuli whose ordering followed a statistically predictable pattern. The infants subsequently viewed the familiar pattern alternating with a novel sequence of identical stimulus components, and exhibited significantly greater interest in the novel sequence

at all ages. These results provide support for the likelihood of domain general statistical learning in infancy, and imply that mechanisms designed to detect structure inherent in the environment may play an important role in cognitive development.

Keywords

Visual statistical learning; Infancy; Domain general learning mechanism

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