Young Children Use Accuracy and Confidence, But Not Calibration, When Judging Credibility

Jenna E. Small, Elizabeth R. Tenney, Robyn L. Kondrad, Vikram K. Jaswal & Barbara A. Spellman

Introduction

• Adults think previously accurate or previously confident witnesses are more credible than inaccurate or uncertain ones (Borckhardt, Sprohge, & Nash, 2003).
• Preschoolers are also sensitive to past accuracy (e.g., Koenig & Harris, 2005) and confidence (e.g., Sabbagh & Baldwin, 2001).

• In Study 1, we asked 5- and 6-year olds if a witness who was accurate about the facts of an accident was more likely than an inaccurate witness to know who caused it. In a second condition we asked other children if a witness confidently reported facts about the accident was more likely than an uncertain witness to know who caused it.
• In Study 2, we asked if children and adults could integrate accuracy and confidence to assess credibility. Which witness was more likely to know who caused the accident: one who made one error about the facts but qualified it by admitting she was uncertain, or one who confidently made a similar error?

Method

• Two witnesses described two details of an accident, then reported who was responsible. Participants decided which witness accurately identified the suspect both before and after learning who got the facts right.

Study 1

• Accuracy Condition (n=24): Both witnesses were confident, but one made a mistake.
• Confidence Condition (n=24): Both witnesses were accurate about both details, but one admitted uncertainty (i.e., by saying “I think”).

Study 2

• Calibration Condition (n = 48 children and 33 adults): Both witnesses were inaccurate about one detail, but only one admitted uncertainty.

Conclusions

• 5- and 6-year-olds are sensitive to accuracy information, and they are sensitive to confidence information. They can use this information to assess witness credibility.
• However, unlike adults, children do not seem to integrate these two pieces of information when determining witness credibility. This may be due to meta-cognitive limitations (Kondrad & Jaswal, in preparation).

References


Acknowledgments

Thanks to the children and parents who participated in this research, and the research assistants in the Child Language & Learning Lab who helped collect the data. Contact: small.jenna@gmail.com.