Poster

Associative memory in normal aging: The effect of unitization

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Memory for associations declines in normal aging, but not memory for individual items. Unitization consists in encoding a new association in such a way that it forms a single entity, later treated as an item. The current study aimed at testing the hypothesis that age-related differences in associative memory can be reduced following encoding instructions promoting unitization. Twenty young adults and 20 elderly participants performed two tasks, in which they learned new associations between a word and a background colour (either green or red), and then had to recall the colour associated to each word. In the Standard task, the item and the background colour were associated in such a way that they remained separated components: the participants had to imagine that the item interacted with another green or red object. In the Unitization task, the participants had to imagine that the item is the same colour as the background, an instruction which promotes the integration of the colour as an item detail. The results showed an age-related decrement in memory performance in the Standard task but not in the Unitization task. This suggests that unitization of new associations can overcome the associative memory deficit observed in normal aging.