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Turkish- and English-speaking children's belief revision based on the reliability of counter-evidence

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Abstract

Children revise their beliefs depending on the strength of counter-evidence. Research with German-speaking children showed that while 5-year-olds were sensitive to whether a contradicting claim is based on direct versus indirect evidence in revising their beliefs, 3-year-olds were not that sensitive (Köymen & Tomasello, 2018). Unlike German, in which evidential marking is optional, in languages such as Turkish, the obligatory use of evidential markers provides information about reliability, e.g., whether the speaker's knowledge is based on direct- or indirect observation. In this online study, we investigated whether Turkish- and English-speaking 3- and 5-year-olds (N=146) revised their initial plausible beliefs in favor of implausible beliefs supported by counter-evidence in varying degrees of reliability (direct evidence, indirect evidence, or inference). The results showed that 3-year-olds not only revised their beliefs more often than did 5-year-olds, but they also did so more in the direct-observation and inference conditions compared to the indirect-observation condition. Thus, three-year-old children consider the reliability of counter-evidence in revising their beliefs.