Bastin Christine

The impact of preexisting semantic integration on associative memory in normal aging

Aging is accompanied by a decline of associative memory. Given that unitization of associations increases familiarity-based memory and that familiarity is better preserved than recollection in aging, to promote unitization during encoding of associations may attenuate age-related differences in associative memory. In two aging experiments, unitization was favored by preexisting semantic integration (compound words and semantically-related word pairs). With the Remember/Know procedure, it was found that unitized associations induced more familiarity-based recognition memory than nonunitized associations, with no effect on recollection. However, unitization at encoding was not successful at attenuating the age-related associative memory decline. Older adults did not disproportionally benefit from semantic integration, possibly because of difficulties to control absolute familiarity of prior knowledge.