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Is the Time Course of Lexical Activation and Competition in Spoken Word Recognition
Affected by Adult Aging? An Event-Related Potential (ERP) Study

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ABSTRACT

Adult aging is associated with decreased accuracy for recognizing speech, particularly in noisy backgrounds and for high neighborhood density words, which sound similar to many other words. In the current study, the time course of neighborhood density effects in young and older adults was compared using event-related potentials (ERP) and behavioral responses in a lexical decision task for spoken words and nonwords presented either in quiet or in noise. Target items sounded similar either to many or to few other words (neighborhood density) but were balanced for the frequency of their component sounds (phonotactic probability). Behavioral effects of density were similar across age groups, but the event-related potential effects of density differed as a function of age group. For young adults, density modulated the amplitude of both the N400

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