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Semantic Richness Effects in Memory

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Abstract: The semantic richness of a word is multidimensional, and includes dimensions such as semantic neighborhood density, imageability, number of features, and valence. While certain dimensions (e.g., imageability) have been examined in the memory domain, the bulk of semantic richness research has been confined to visual word recognition tasks. Therefore, it is unclear if other dimensions influence memory and in what manner. Our aim was to extend previous works by investigating the relative contributions of these dimensions in memory using the megastudy approach. This approach allows the language to define the stimuli, rather than have the experimenter select stimuli based on a limited set of criteria. 120 participants studied 532 words and they had to either recall or recognize these words. We found that although semantically richer words were generally more memorable, this did not generalize to all dimensions. The implications of these findings will be discussed.