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The effect of evidentiality markers on the survival processing effect

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Abstract

Human memory retains information related to survival more effectively, termed survival processing effect (SPE). Adaptive memory should also more effectively store reliable information than unreliable information. In an experiment (n=107) we asked whether the SPE depends on the reliability of information encoded by linguistic markers. In Turkish, evidentiality markers encode whether information is gathered firsthand (-miş) or not (-di), and provide cues on source reliability. We found that sentences processed for their relevance to survival were better recalled than those processed for their relevance to moving. This survival processing effect was significant for both direct and indirect evidentiality markers, although it was stronger for direct evidentiality. That SPE persisted in the indirect evidentiality condition suggests survival related information is privileged in encoding even when potentially marked as unreliable by linguistic markers. Thus, the effect of language on memory is not profound but rather computed online.