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Authors

Popov, Vencislav

Hristova, Penka

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The Relational Luring Effect: False Recognition via Relational Similarity

Vencislav Popov

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Penka Hristova

New Bulgarian University

Abstract: We present evidence for a novel relational luring effect (RLE) in recognition memory. Participants performed a continuous associative recognition task in which they had to discriminate between new, old and recombined word pairs. Participants made more false alarms and responded more slowly to lures (TABLE CLOTH) that were relationally similar to studied pairs (FLOOR CARPET). RTs and false alarms for lures increased linearly as the number of previously studied different exemplars of the relation increased (e.g., 0 to 4 previous exemplars). The RLE effect was stronger for relations that were represented by exemplars that were more typical of the relation. These results suggest that semantic relations exist as independent representations in LTM, and that during associative recognition these representations can be a spurious source of familiarity. The RLE has implications for models of semantic and episodic memory, unitization in associative recognition, analogical reasoning, and constructive memory research.