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Affect and syntactic anomaly

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Abstract

In an event-related potential (ERP) language experiment, we investigated whether variability in the P600 component, a marker of syntactic anomaly, could be accounted for by dispositional affect. Sentences such as (i) The broker planned to conceal the transaction *was sent to jail vs. (ii) The broker persuaded *to conceal the transaction was sent to jail (critical words are underlined) were read by 25 participants. These stimuli were adapted from Osterhout & Holcomb (1992), an influential early study on the P600 waveform. We expected to replicate previous findings, where P600 effects were expected at to in (ii) vs. (i) and at was in (i) vs. (ii). The P600 effect at to did not replicate, whereas it did at was. Regarding affect, our results showed a significant positive correlation between positive affect scores and P600 amplitude. Results are discussed in terms of the family of P600 components and affect.