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Retrieval Based On Recognition Memory: Testing the Retrieval Effort Hypothesis

Jonin Pierre-Yves (1,2,3), Noël Audrey (4), Besson Gabriel (5), Muratet Sophie (2), Belliard Serge (3), Barillot Christian (2), Barbeau Emmanuel (3),
(1) Centre de Recherche Cerveau et Cognition, CNRS UMR 5149, Toulouse, France; (2) Inria, Unité–Projet VisAGeS, Université de Rennes 1, INSEERM CNRS, IRISA, U 1228, Rennes, France; (3) CHU Pontchaillou, Service de Neurologie, Rennes, France; (4) Laboratoire de Psychologie: Cognition, Comportement et Communication, EA1185 LP3C, Université de Rennes 2, Rennes, France

1. Experiment 1: recognition memory vs. restudying

- Between-subject design, N = 76
- Recognition memory vs. typical Old/New task
- Matching for Age, Education, FSIQ, Verbal Memory
- Manipulation of the intervening tasks:
  - 2 successive study trials = Study group
  - 2 successive test trials = Test group
- Main outcome: Performance at final test (25 min. delay)

2. Results 1

- Before final test, study duration was on average 11 minutes in the « Study-Test » group, 7.4 minutes in the « Study » group and only 6.3 minutes in the « Test » group.
- « Study-Test » vs. « Study » conditions yielded better long-term memory (A,B), without increase in False Alarms (C), and a « Test » condition led to better 25 minutes retention (D).

3. Experiment 2: familiarity practice vs. restudying

- Probing familiarity-based recognition memory: The « Speed and Accuracy Boosting procedure » (SAB) is a speeded Old/New memory test providing a direct estimate of familiarity-based recognition memory (S).
- Use of the SAB procedure for all test phases

4. Results 2

- Subjects in the « Study » group spent twice as much time studying AND had up to three times more opportunities to encode the stimuli.
- Similar minimal reaction times (minRTs) were achieved in both groups, well below 400 ms, strongly constraining responses to familiarity-based recognition memory (S).
- Repeated retrieval was therefore based on automatic & fast processing, rather than slow, effortful, recollection.
- Still, repeated testing proved as beneficial as restudying for short-(A) and long-term(B) retention.
- This did not come with an extra false alarms cost (C&D).

Time spent studying does not drive learning efficiency. Instead, Experiment 2 provides unique evidence that learning occurs through repeated familiarity-based retrieval, i.e., even when retrieval is automatic.

Discussion

- Experiment 1 shows that the retrieval practice effect can be observed when retrieval is based on recognition memory rather than recall. Thus, learning does occur during recognition testing.
- Importantly, both experiments show that the benefits of memory retrieval based on recognition memory are immune to negative side effects like extra false alarms.
- When retrieval is constrained to fast and automatic processes (around 320 ms), thus being mostly familiarity-based, the generation of elaborative retrieval cues and/or effortful (controlled) processing are quite unlikely. Even then, extensive restudying does not outreach retrieval practice. Repeated automatic retrieval yields similar learning levels than extensive restudying, up to a 6 months delay.
- Familiarity-based recognition memory can support a retrieval practice effect, and resists to a 6 months delay similarly to restudying, thus challenging a core prediction of the « Retrieval Effort Hypothesis ».

References

(3) Pye & Rees (2000) Testing the retrieval effort hypothesis: Does greater difficulty correctly recalling information lead to higher levels of memory? Journal of Memory and Language, 42, 437–447

Experiment 1 provides the first evidence for a retrieval practice effect based on recognition memory. However, a contribution of controlled recollective processes cannot be ruled out, which is addressed in experiment 2.

Aim

Can recognition memory support a retrieval practice effect?