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PSY 337 Cognitive Processes

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Lab 4 – Serial Positioning

Introduction

The serial positioning effect is the psychological effect that seems to happen when a person recalls the first (the primacy effect) and last (the recency effect) items in a list and the middle items are not nearly remembered as well. A ubiquitous finding is that this results in a U-shaped serial position function. Serial position function can be observed in many types of items like letters, words, pictures, and lists in your general knowledge like states that make of the United States of America. The exact shape of the function (e.g., a greater or lesser primacy effect or a greater or lesser recency effect) can be affected by several different manipulations. For example, if you are asked to recall the items in order (serial recall), there is typically a larger primacy effect and a smaller recency effect compared to if you are allowed to recall the items in any order (free recall). In many memory tasks, people are given a list of items to remember and are later asked to recall them. A ubiquitous finding is that this results in a U-shaped serial position function in which the first few items in the series are well remembered (the *primacy effect*), the last few items in the series are well remembered (the *recency effect*), but mid-list items are not remembered nearly as well.

Today I am going to test this effect by using what is known as free recall. I will find out if I am able to beat the odds at this “U-shaped” serial positioning function.

Methods

I conducted 15 trials of this method. I saw a random set of 10 letters drawn from the entire alphabet. Each letter was shown for 1 second. I indicated which letters I saw by clicking on response buttons. I was able to click on the alphabet letter buttons in any order once the 10 letters were drawn.

Results

Throughout all 15 trials, it was difficult for me to remember all 10 letters. I found that I was trying to group letters together by basic words in my vocabulary. I pieced apart words that contained some of the letters in each, so that it would be easier for me to recall the 10 letters. I also found when it was time to click on the buttons of letters shown, sometimes I had forgotten one of the words I had made up in my mind from the grouping the letters I used. My result accuracy for each set was around 70% and 7 out of the 10 trials I could not beat the “U-shaped” serial positioning function.

Discussion & Conclusion

I find that with practice of serial positioning, my results will improve over time. It is now one of my goals to be more mindful about this process and to be able to keep my mind strong and sharp. In conclusion, learning about serial positioning, I can achieve a more accurate ability to recall any given groups of numbers, lists, etc. This will be especially helpful with my educational studies on exams and remembering peoples name.

References

Cognitive Psychology Connecting Mind, Research, and Everyday Experience 5th Edition

E.B. Goldstein

Footnotes