

Emotion and association-memory

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Abstract: Emotional items are remembered better than neutral items. It is unclear how this extends to memory for associations involving emotional items. We manipulated the pairings of emotional and neutral words and direction of cued-recall probes. Pairs were pure (EMOTIONAL-EMOTIONAL, NEUTRAL-NEUTRAL) or mixed (EMOTIONAL-NEUTRAL, NEUTRAL-EMOTIONAL). We asked whether emotion would enhance association-memory, independently of its effects on item-memory (e.g., target retrievability). We fit the data with a probabilistic model to obtain estimates of how emotion influenced cued recall depending on emotionality of the target or probe (item-memory effects), or relationship between constituents (association-memory effect). In a follow-up we replaced emotional words with taboo words to exaggerate the manipulation. Findings suggest that mildly emotional words reduced memory for the associations whereas taboo words neither impaired nor enhanced memory for the associations. Consistent with other recent findings, our results suggest that emotional enhancement of memory effects do not extend to relational memory.