Differential Processing for Actively Ignored Pictures and Words

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Abstract: Previous work suggests pictures may be processed more readily than words, likely because pictures appear to maintain more direct access to semantic and conceptual representations (Amit, Algom, & Trope, 2009). However, it is unclear how words and pictures may be processed differently when they are actively ignored. Our earlier work demonstrated a facilitated recognition for actively ignored words, provided they appeared frequently with an attended target in a previously presented repetition detection task (Dewald, Sinnett, & Doumas, 2012). The current study adapted this paradigm to examine the extent to which unattended pictures may be processed under analogous conditions. Overall, ignored pictures were recognized more often than ignored words. Moreover, recognition for ignored pictures did not benefit from target-alignment whereas ignored words did. These findings suggest that unattended pictures may continue to be processed more readily than words even under conditions in which attention is not directed toward them.