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Abstract

The current experiments investigate memory for source information when reading multiple texts reflecting gossip. Results demonstrate that discrepancies promote memory for links between sources and their content, but not links between the sources themselves, relative to when texts are consistent. Discussion focuses on the potential for cognitive conflict brought about by discrepant information in texts to aide in constructing more complete intertext models, which could likely result in more accurate mental representations of the texts.

Keywords: discrepancies, mental representations of texts, source information

Introduction

Past research has shown that attention to and evaluation of source information within and across texts facilitates better memory for links between sources and their respective content statements, and between the sources themselves (Braasch et al., 2012). The Discrepancy-Induced Source Comprehension (D-ISC) theoretical model assumes that readers will more deeply encode texts' source features, resulting in more source-content links in mental representations of the texts, specifically, when the information in the texts disagrees in comparison to when the information agrees. (Braasch et al., 2012). However, all prior examinations of D-ISC's assumptions have focused on expository texts. The current work extends D-ISC to consider additional discourse contexts requiring source attention and memory. The current studies focus on reading texts reflecting gossip provided by multiple sources (*e.g., "The captain of the soccer team said that the algebra teacher ensures her students pass by curving their final grade. / The cheerleading captain said that the algebra teacher never curves her student's grades.").*

In alignment with prior work, two experiments investigated memory for sources conveying discrepant and consistent gossip (relative to unique) (Braasch et al., 2012), and memory for relationships between the sources themselves (Saux et al., 2016). We hypothesized for both experiments that sources associated with discrepancies in gossip would be better remembered than sources for unique statements, and both would be better than sources who agree. We hypothesized that memory for source-source links would display the same pattern, again for both experiments.

Experiment 1

Methods

Participants

Sixty-five individuals at a university in the midsouth participated for course credit.

Materials

Participants read 50 texts. They read 10 pairs of discrepant, and 10 pairs of consistent gossip statements. Memory for the second statements were considered target texts. They also read 10 statements that were unrelated to any earlier-read information, which reflected unique target statements. Texts were blocked by topic and randomized.

Procedure

Participants were instructed to imagine they started at a new high school and wanted to learn as much as possible about people at the school. Participants were asked to imagine overhearing multiple statements in the hallway at their new school. After reading the 50 texts, participants were presented with multiple choice questions assessing their memory for source to content links and source to source links in the texts.

Results

ANOVA using accuracy of source to content links as the dependent measure and text type as the within participants variable produced a significant effect, $F(2,128) = 10.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$. T-tests demonstrated that people better remembered unique and discrepant statements relative to consistent. T-tests comparing accuracy of source-source links for consistent and discrepant revealed no significant differences. See Figure 1 for additional information.

Experiment 2

Methods

Participants

Sixty-nine individuals at a university in the midsouth participated for course credit.

Materials and Procedure

The materials and procedure for Experiment 2 were identical to Experiment 1 with the exception of the presentation of the texts. Participants first read a randomized order of 10 gossip statements that would be consistent with and 10 that would be discrepant with later-read information. They then read a randomized order of the 30 target statements. Ten of these agreed, and another set of ten disagreed, with information they read earlier; ten were unrelated to any earlier-read information (i.e. unique).

Results

ANOVA using accuracy of source to content links as the dependent measure and text type as the within participants variable produced a significant effect, $F(2,136) = 16.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$. T-tests revealed significant simple effects such that people displayed better memory for unique statements relative to consistent and discrepant. Significant simple effects also show that people displayed better memory for discrepant statements relative to consistent. The accuracy of source-source links for consistent and discrepant were examined using t-tests, which revealed no significant differences in memory for consistent and discrepant sources. See Figure 2 for additional information.

Discussion

In alignment with prior work (Braasch et al., 2012), the results demonstrate that memory for source-content links was better for unique and discrepant than for consistent, however memory for discrepant was not significantly better than for unique. Given that our texts were brief, discrepancies across the texts could have resulted in more co-activation of both the original and discrepant information in working memory. Co-activation of the texts could allow readers to

detect breaks in situational coherence caused by the discrepant information. Despite our original predictions, memory for source-source links did not differ when across discrepant and consistent situations.

All told, the analyses suggest that, although people can remember that two sources were talking about the same gossip topic, they better remembered which particular source said what when two people contradicted each other. Thus, mechanisms described in D-ISC may generalize to additional discourse contexts (Braasch & Bråten, 2017). Additionally, the presentation of the texts across the two experiments replicated that discrepancies helped readers monitor and later remember source-content links. This occurs when the presented texts are paired by topic (Experiment 1), resulting in co-activation in working memory, and when the texts are not paired by topic (Experiment 2) and reactivation from long term memory likely occurs as result of featural overlap. Further, the effects may bolster an assumption that cognitive conflict induced by contradictions guides readers to construct more complete intertext models, resulting in a more coherent and accurate mental representation of the texts (Braasch et al. 2012; Britt et al., 1999).

References

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Figure 1

Results for Experiment 1 memory for source-content links.

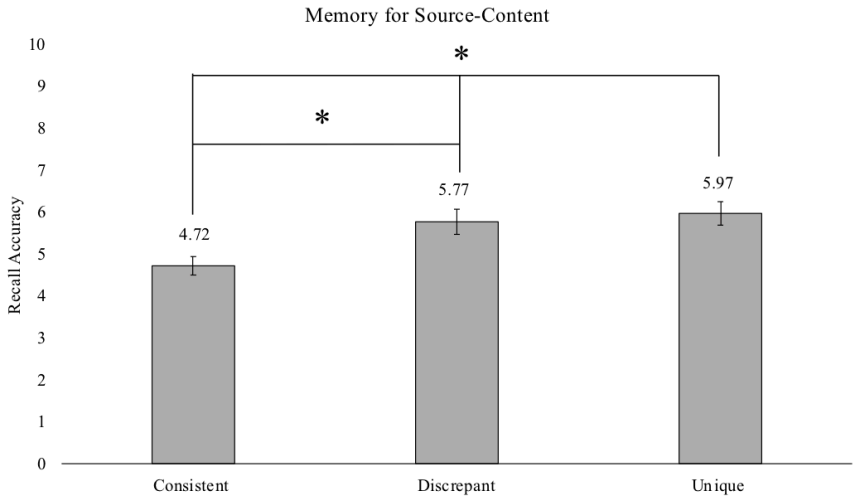

Figure 2

Results for Experiment 2 memory for source-content links.