

Effects of naturally-occurring segmental ambiguity on cross-modal priming of minimal pairs

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Facilitation is observed in cross-modal lexical decision tasks when the auditory prime and visual target are the same word relative to when the prime and target are unrelated words. In addition, segmentally ambiguous primes can facilitate lexical decision for both members of a minimal pair. The goal of the current study was to explore the effects of naturally-occurring ambiguity on cross-modal priming in a lexical decision task. The targets consisted of minimal pair words containing the vowels /eh, \ae/. The auditory primes were either the target word, its minimal pair, or an unrelated word, produced by talkers from the Northern and Midland dialects of American English. The results confirmed facilitation when the prime and target matched relative to when they were unrelated. In addition, inhibition was observed when the prime was the minimal pair of the target relative to when they were unrelated, but only for the Midland dialect. In the Northern dialect, these vowels are undergoing a change that makes them more perceptually confusable. Thus, these findings suggest that the less ambiguous Midland primes led to competition between the minimal pairs, whereas the more ambiguous Northern primes neither facilitated nor inhibited lexical access of the target word.