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The psychology of reading: temporal processing and reading

Agnes Au
University of Wollongong

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The Psychology of Reading: Temporal Processing and Reading

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Agnes Au, B.Sc. (Hons.)

Psychology Department

1997

SOURCES STATEMENT

The present thesis describes original research undertaken in the Department of Psychology, University of Wollongong. To the best of my knowledge and belief, any theories and techniques not my own have been acknowledged in the text. The theoretical contributions in this thesis are my own original work and the thesis has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Agnes Au

December, 1997.

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ABSTRACT

Dyslexics exhibit visual and auditory temporal processing deficits and these have been attributed to some abnormality in their sensory systems specialising in processing rapidly presented stimuli - transient systems. As a result, a generalised temporal processing deficit across modalities has been hypothesised. Research also shows a relationship between auditory temporal processing deficits and phonological deficits (deficits in reading nonsense words) and it is suggested that visual temporal processing deficits may be related to deficits in reading irregular words (Farmer & Klein, 1995). In addition, it has been argued that the sustained visual system is involved in reading singly presented words whereas the transient visual system is involved in reading continuous presented text (Hill & Lovegrove, 1992).

Therefore, this thesis investigated in normal readers: 1) whether there is a common temporal processing mechanism across vision and audition; 2) the relationship between auditory temporal processing and nonsense word performance, and between visual temporal processing and irregular word performance; 3) the role of the sustained and transient visual systems in reading single words and continuous text; and 4) whether good readers exhibit better temporal resolution than normal readers.

Results are suggestive of a common temporal processing mechanism across modalities. Visual temporal processing is related to irregular words whereas auditory temporal processing is related to nonsense words. The transient visual system is involved in processing continuous text whereas the sustained visual system is involved in processing single text. "Nonsense word" readers who had better phonological skills tended to perform better in the auditory tasks but "irregular word" readers who had

better whole-word skills did not perform better in the visual tasks. However, once IQ was controlled, the relationship between auditory temporal processing and nonsense words remained but the link between visual temporal processing and irregular words was not found. Similarly, the differential effect of the transient and sustained visual systems in different text presentation was not found when IQ was controlled. Good readers exhibited better auditory temporal resolution and a trend for a faster transient visual system. Although good readers and “nonsense word” readers excelled in the auditory tasks, choice of reading strategies was independent of reading proficiency. Temporal processing was an effective discriminant for good and normal readers but not for whole-word and phonological skills.

Although this experimental work refers only to “normal” readers and not dyslexics, the results are consistent with other dyslexic research. The results implicate the facilitation of phonological skills by auditory temporal perception, but the facilitation of whole-word skills is unrelated to visual temporal perception. This corroborates other research (e.g., Tallal & Stark, 1982) in that temporal processing deficits may only appear in dyslexics who have phonological deficits and that visual temporal processing deficit may be secondary to the auditory one. Consequently, dyslexic subtypes may have different sources of origin and should be considered separately.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Sources Statement	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures	xvii
 Chapter 1: Overview	 1
 Chapter 2: Parallel Visual Pathways	 3
2.1 Introduction	3
2.2 The Process of Seeing	3
2.3 Anatomical Evidence for the Parallel Visual Pathways	3
2.3.1 Segregation in the Retinal Ganglion Cells	4
2.3.2 Segregation in the Dorsal Lateral Geniculate Nucleus (dLGN)	5
2.3.3 Segregation in the Visual Cortex	5
2.4 Chemical and Morphological Evidence for the Parallel Visual Pathways	8
2.5 Psychophysical Evidence for the Parallel Visual Pathways	8
2.6 Incomplete Segregation and Interaction of the Parallel Visual Pathways	11
2.6.1 Overlap of the Two Pathways or the Existence of a Third Pathway?	14
2.7 Summary of the Parallel Visual Pathways	15
2.8 The Role of the Parallel Visual Pathways in Reading	15
2.9 Summary	19

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 3: Parallel Auditory Pathways	20
3.1 Introduction	20
3.2 The Process of Hearing	20
3.3 Segregation of the Parallel Auditory Pathways	21
3.3.1 Morphological Evidence for the Parallel Auditory Pathways	21
3.3.2 Psychophysical Evidence for the Parallel Auditory Pathways	23
3.4 Similarities between the Parallel Visual and Auditory Pathways	25
3.4.1 Similarities in Properties	25
3.4.2 Less Distinctive Segregation at Higher Levels	26
3.5 Audition and Reading / Language	26
3.6 Summary	27
 Chapter 4: Auditory and Visual Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia and Dysphasia	 28
4.1 Introduction	28
4.2 General Temporal Processing in the context of Farmer and Klein (1995)	29
4.3 Experimental Evidence for Auditory Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	31
4.3.1 Detection or Identification of a Stimulus Event	31
4.3.2 Individuation of Two Stimuli	35
4.3.3 Temporal Order Judgment	37
4.3.4 Sequence Matching or Discrimination	42
4.4 Anatomical / Physiological Evidence for Auditory Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	45
4.5 Summary of Auditory Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	55

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
4.6 Experimental Evidence for Visual Temporal Processing	
Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	55
4.6.1 Detection or Identification of a Stimulus Event	55
4.6.2 Determination of Numerosity	59
4.6.3 Temporal Order Judgment	64
4.6.4 Sequence Matching or Discrimination	67
4.6.5 Masking	73
4.6.6 Contrast Sensitivity	77
4.6.7 Miscellaneous: The Persistence of the Transient Deficit into Adulthood?	82
4.7 Anatomical / Physiological Evidence for Visual Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	83
4.8 Summary of Visual Temporal Processing Deficits in Dyslexia / Dysphasia	87
4.9 Crossmodal Nature of Temporal Processing Deficits	87
4.10 Summary	95
 Chapter 5: The Role of Temporal Processing in Reading	 96
5.1 Introduction	96
5.2 Coltheart's (1978) Model of Reading	96
5.3 Possible Implications of Temporal Processing for Coltheart's (1978) Model of Reading	98
5.4 The Relationship between Temporal Processing and Reading / Phonological Ability	100
5.4.1 The Relationship between Auditory Temporal Processing and Reading / Phonological Ability	100
5.4.2 The Relationship between Visual Temporal Processing and Reading / Phonological Ability	103

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
5.4.3 The Relationship between Transmodal / Crossmodal Sensory Temporal Processing and Reading / Phonological Ability	105
5.5 Possible Confounding Effects of Memory and Intelligence on Sensory Temporal Processing in the context of Reading	107
5.5.1 Possible Confounding Effects of Memory on Sensory Temporal Processing	107
5.5.2 Possible Confounding Effects of Intelligence on Sensory Temporal Processing	110
5.6 Summary	113
 Chapter 6: Rationale for the Present Study	 115
 Chapter 7: Study 1: The Relationship between Visual and Auditory Temporal Processing	 121
7.1 Rationale	121
7.2 Stage 1: Vision	124
7.2.1 Measure 1a: Flicker Sensitivity (FSEN)	127
7.2.2 Measure 1b: Visual Temporal Order Judgment (VTOJ)	131
7.2.3 Measure 1c: Visible Persistence based on the Judgment of a Blank (BLAN)	133
7.2.4 Measure 1d: Visible Persistence based on the Judgment of a Flicker (FLICK)	136
7.2.5 Measure 1e: Flicker Fusion (CHAS)	136

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
7.3 Results	138
7.3.1 Flicker Sensitivity (FSEN)	139
7.3.2 Visual Temporal Order Judgment (VTOJ)	139
7.3.3 Flicker Fusion (CHAS)	140
7.3.4 Visible Persistence (based on the judgment of a blank and a flicker) (BLAN, FLICK)	140
7.3.5 Intercorrelations among the Visual Measures	141
7.3.6 Factor Analysis among the Visual Measures	141
7.4 Stage 1 Discussion	142
7.5 Stage 2: Audition	146
7.5.1 Measure 2a: Auditory Fusion (AFUS)	147
7.5.2 Measure 2b: Auditory Temporal Order Judgment (ATOJ)	149
7.6 Results	151
7.6.1 Intercorrelations among the Auditory Measures	153
7.6.2 Factor Analysis among the Auditory Measures	153
7.7 Stage 2 Discussion	154
7.8 Stage 3: Vision and Audition	156
7.9 Results	156
7.9.1 Pearson Correlation	156
7.9.2 Factor Analysis among the Visual and Auditory Measures	160
7.10 Stage 3 Discussion	162
7.11 Summary and Conclusion	164

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 8: Study 2: The Effect of Temporal Processing on Irregular and Nonsense Words, and the Role of the Transient and Sustained Visual Systems in Various Text Presentation	167
8.1 Introduction	167
8.2 Study 2a	172
8.2.1 Subjects	172
8.2.2 Measure 1: Advanced Raven's Progressive Matrices (IQ)	172
8.2.3 Measure 2: Irregular Word and Nonsense Word Reading	172
8.3 Results	175
8.3.1 Visual and Auditory Measures	176
8.3.2 Reading	177
8.3.3 Intercorrelations among the Visual, Auditory and Reading Measures	178
8.3.4 Factor Analyses of Study 2a	183
8.3.5 Multiple Regression Analyses of Study 2a	197
8.4 Discussion for Study 2a	202
8.5 Study 2b	206
8.6 Results	207
8.6.1 Reading	208
8.6.2 Intercorrelations among the Visual, Auditory and Reading Measures	208
8.6.3 Factor Analyses of Study 2b	213
8.6.4 Multiple Regression Analyses of Study 2b	223
8.7 Discussion for Study 2b	226
8.8 Discriminant Function Analyses of Study 2a	228
8.9 Results and Discussion	229
8.10 Discussion	234

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 9: Study 3: The Implication of Temporal Processing on Reading Ability	238
9.1 Rationale	238
9.2 Study 3	240
9.2.1 Subjects	240
9.2.2 Tests and Procedures	241
9.3 Results	241
9.3.1 Verification of Study 2	241
9.3.2 “Irregular Word” Readers vs “Nonsense Word” Readers	257
9.3.3 Good Readers vs Normal Readers	262
9.3.4 Further Analysis	267
9.4 Discussion	268
9.4.1 Verification of Study 2	268
9.4.2 Good Readers vs Normal Readers	270
9.4.3 Are Good Readers Necessarily “Nonsense Word” Readers?	272
9.5 Summary	273
Chapter 10: Discussion	275
10.1 Overview	275
10.2 Global Issues	279
10.2.1 Differentiation of the Transient and Sustained Visual System within a Temporal Framework?	279
10.2.2 Common Temporal Processing Mechanism across Vision, Audition and Reading?	282
10.2.3 Effect of the Transient Visual System in Dyslexics in the “Moving Window” Condition: Commentaries for Chapter 9	289
10.2.4 Relationship between Visual Temporal Processing and Reading in the Context of IQ	290

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
10.2.5 What Facilitates Whole-word Skills?	291
10.2.6 Visual Temporal Perception: Secondary to Auditory Temporal Perception	293
10.2.7 Implications for Dyslexic Subtypes	294
10.3 Conclusion	301
REFERENCES	304
Appendix A. Word Lists	369
Appendix B. Instructions to Subjects	370
Appendix C. Chapter 7: Study 1	378
Appendix D. Chapter 8: Study 2	389
Appendix E. Chapter 9: Study 3	412
Appendix F. Consent Form	428
Appendix G. Subject's Information Sheet	429

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
4-1 Auditory Tasks on Detection or Identification of a Stimulus Event	32
4-2 Auditory Tasks on Individuation of Two Stimuli	35
4-3 Auditory Tasks on Temporal Order Judgment	37
4-4 Auditory Tasks on Sequence Matching or Discrimination	42
4-5 Visual Tasks on Detection or Identification of a Stimulus Event	56
4-6 Visual Tasks on Determination of Numerosity	59
4-7 Visual Tasks on Temporal Order Judgment	65
4-8 Visual Tasks on Sequence Matching or Discrimination	68
4-9 Masking Studies	73
4-10 Contrast Sensitivity Studies	77
4-11 Crossmodal Tasks	88
6-1 Temporal Tasks used in both Visual and Auditory Modalities	117
6-2 Types of Words and their Presentation Mode used in the Reading Task	119
6-3 Types of Subjects compared	120
7-1 Parameters used in Flicker Sensitivity Task	130
7-2 Parameters used in Visual Temporal Order Judgment Task	132
7-3 Parameters used in Visible Persistence Task	135
7-4 Parameters used in Flicker Fusion Task	137
7-5 Means and (s.d.) of the Visual Measures and their Log-transformed Data (N=91)	139
7-6 Factor Analysis on the Visual Measures	141
7-7 Parameters used in Auditory Fusion Task	148
7-8 Parameters used in Auditory Temporal Order Judgment Task	150
7-9 Means and (s.d.) of the Auditory Measures and their Log-transformed Data (N=91)	152
7-10 Factor Analysis on the Auditory Measures	153

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
7-11 Correlation Matrix of the Log-transformed Data of the Visual and Auditory Experiments (N=91)	157
7-12 Factor Analysis on the Sensory Measures	160
8-1 Means and (s.d.) of the Visual, Auditory and Reading Measures and their Log-transformed Data (N=79)	175
8-2 Correlation Matrix of the Log-transformed Data of the Visual, Auditory and Reading (first session) Tasks (N=79)	179
8-3 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Single Mode Presentation (IWS1)	184
8-4 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Presentation (IWL1)	187
8-5 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Single Mode Presentation (NWS1)	190
8-6 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Continuous Mode Presentation (NWL1)	193
8-7 Multiple Regression on Irregular Words Single Mode Accuracy (IWSA1)	198
8-8 Multiple Regression on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Accuracy (IWLA1)	199
8-9 Multiple Regression on Nonsense Words Continuous Mode Accuracy (NWLA1)	200
8-10 Means and (s.d.) of the Reading Measures (second session) and their Log-transformed Data (N=79)	208
8-11 Correlation Matrix of the Log-transformed Data of the Visual, Auditory and Reading (second session) Tasks (N=79)	209
8-12 Correlation Matrix of the Log-transformed Data of the Reading (first and second session) Tasks (N=79)	211
8-13 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Single Mode Presentation (IWS2)	213

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
8-14 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Presentation (IWL2)	216
8-15 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Single Mode Presentation (NWS2)	218
8-16 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Continuous Mode Presentation (NWL2)	220
8-17 Multiple Regression on Irregular Words Single Mode Accuracy (IWSA2)	223
8-18 Multiple Regression on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Accuracy (IWLA2)	224
8-19 Means and (s.d.) of the Original and Log-transformed Data of the “Irregular Word” and “Nonsense Word” Readers on the Sensory and Reading Measures	229
8-20 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual Measures and the Discriminant Function	232
8-21 Loadings showing Correlations between the Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	233
8-22 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual and Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	233
9-1 Means and (s.d.) of the Visual, Auditory and Reading Measures and their Log-transformed Data (N=105)	242
9-2 Correlation Matrix of the Log-transformed Data of the Visual, Auditory and Reading Tasks (N=105)	244
9-3 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Single Mode Presentation (IWSA)	247
9-4 Factor Analysis on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Presentation (IWLA)	249
9-5 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Single Mode Presentation (NWSA)	251

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
9-6 Factor Analysis on Nonsense Words Continuous Mode Presentation (NWLA)	252
9-7 Multiple Regression on Irregular Words Continuous Mode Accuracy (IWLA)	255
9-8 Multiple Regression on Nonsense Words Continuous Mode Accuracy (NWLA)	256
9-9 Means and (s.d.) of the Original and Log-transformed Data of the “Irregular Word” and “Nonsense Word” Readers on the Sensory and Reading Measures	258
9-10 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual Measures and the Discriminant Function	260
9-11 Loadings showing Correlations between the Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	260
9-12 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual and Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	261
9-13 Means and (s.d.) of the Original and Log-transformed Data of the Good and Normal Readers on the Sensory and Reading Measures	262
9-14 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual Measures and the Discriminant Function	265
9-15 Loadings showing Correlations between the Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	266
9-16 Loadings showing Correlations between the Visual and Auditory Measures and the Discriminant Function	266
10-1 Independent Visual Factor: Loading of the Visible Persistence and Flicker Fusion Measures across Analyses (Study 2a)	284
10-2 Transmodal Factor: Loading of both Visual and Auditory Measures on the Same Factor (Study 2a)	285

LIST OF TABLES (cont.)

	<u>Page</u>
10-3 Transmodal and Reading Factor: Loading of both Temporal Processing and Reading Measures on the Same Factor (Study 2a)	285

LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
2-1 Parallel Pathways in the Primate Visual System	7
2-2 A Hypothetical Response Sequence of Sustained and Transient Channels in Reading	18