Context-dependency in the real world: How different retrieval cues affect Event-Specific Knowledge in recollections of a real-life event.

Authors

Elise van den Hoven, Berry Eggen and Ineke Wessel

Abstract

We studied how different cue-types facilitate autobiographical recall. Participants joined in a standardized real-life event. Recall testing used one of five cue-types. Scoring units of Event Specific Knowledge employed an especially developed method. Results suggest that relative to a no-cue control condition, cueing has mixed effects on eliciting ESKs.

Summary

The beneficial effect of reinstating learning context on memory has been well established, at least in laboratory settings. The role of context dependency in autobiographical memory (AM), however, has been studied less extensively. The purpose of the present study was to examine whether various cue-types differ in their contribution to AM-performance. In order to quantify AM, we developed a method to score units of Event Specific Knowledge (ESKs). According to Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000), ESKs represent the highest level of specificity in AM. Our method is based on grammar of the Dutch language, and scores ESKs on detailedness and classifies them into five content-types (i.e., perception-, reflection-, state-, action- and object-specific knowledge). It was hypothesized that a) cueing would increase the number of ESKs relative to a no-cue control condition and that b) particular cue-types would increase the number of related ESKs .

Sixty-eight adults participated in a novel event (i.e., visiting a history theme park). One month later, recall was tested in a laboratory living-room setting using one of five cue-types and a no-cue baseline. This resulted in a 5 (cue-type: pictures, videos, sounds, smells, artifacts) x 2 (condition: no-cue vs. cue) design with repeated measures on the last factor.

Two raters scored ESKs with a high inter-rater reliability (r=0.97). Preliminary results suggest that overall, the no-cue condition generated an equal or higher number of ESKs than the cued conditions. Results will be discussed and practical implications for the development of a Recollection Supporting Device will be addressed.