AGE DIFFERENCES IN THE EFFECTS OF LEARNING GOALS ON SELF-REGULATION IN READING

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Rationale
Age differences in memory for text are well documented (Johnson, 2003). However, the conditions that moderate age-related deficits in text recall are not well understood. It is plausible that there are age differences in the extent to which goals guide memory processing (e.g., West et al., 2001). Evidence also exists that memory beliefs may impact allocation of effort in reading difficult texts (e.g., Miller, & Gagne, in press). With this in mind, this study sought to address the following:

- Are older and young adults’ beliefs regarding their own memory processes and capacities predictive of this self-regulatory effectiveness?

Methods

Participants read each sentence twice in a judgment of learning (JOL) paradigm in which they made estimates of their memory performance (60%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%) in advance of actual recall (see Figure 1). Half of the sentences were read after instructions that emphasized the goal of Accuracy (i.e., “take your time and read each passage carefully . . . aim to remember 80-100% of the information from the passage”). And half were read after instructions that emphasized a goal of Speed (i.e., “read as rapidly as possible . . . aim to remember 40-60% of the information from the passage”). Materials were counterbalanced across instructional goal conditions and the order of instructional goal condition was counterbalanced across subjects.

Materials and Procedure
Younger and older adults read 36 18-word sentences about topics in nature, science, and history, in a self-paced fashion. These sentences were drawn from a larger set of sentences used in a memory performance and beliefs study (Nelson & Hertzog, 1988) and Overall Recall (proportion of propositions) and Effective Reading Times.

Correlations between subscales of the Metamemory in Adulthood Questionnaire (Dixon, Hultsch, & Hertzog, 1998) and Overall Recall (proportion of propositions) and Effective Reading Times.

Conclusions
Older learners appear to be less flexible in the allocation of effort to meet specific goals in learning information from text. However, younger learners may allocate relatively more effort than needed when faced with high-accuracy goals (i.e., show a “labor-in- vain” effect, Nelson & Leonardi, 1988). Relative to younger adults, older adults showed a stronger relationship between memory beliefs and text memory performance. Among older adults, memory beliefs affected encoding efficiency more than they affected the allocation of time, per se.

References

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