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Attentional Cues During Speech Perception

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Abstract

Temporally selective attention allows for the preferential processing of stimuli presented at particular times, and is reasoned to be important for processing rapidly presented information such as speech. Recent event-related potential (ERP) evidence demonstrates that listeners direct temporally selective attention to times that contain word onsets in speech. This may be an effective listening strategy since these moments provide critical information to the listener, but the mechanism that underlies this process remains unexplored. In three experiments, putative attention cues including word recognition and predictability were manipulated in both artificial and natural speech and ERP responses at various times were compared to determine how listeners selectively process word onsets in speech. The results demonstrate that listeners allocate attention to word-initial segments because they are less predictable than other times in the speech stream. Attending to unpredictable moments may improve spoken language comprehension by allowing listeners to glean the most relevant information from an otherwise overwhelming speech signal.

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