Promoting relational responding by varying presentation conditions

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Abstract

The relational match-to-sample (RMS) task assesses whether people are sensitive to matching relational content and consider such matches more compelling than an object-based alternative. On each trial, participants see a triad of shape sequences: target item (XYX), object match (VZY), and relational match (TST). In prior research, participants show a relational preference supporting the structural alignment account of similarity-based processing. We address two goals: 1) assessing generality across variation in stimulus materials and task wording; and 2) investigating the hypothesis that relational responding can be promoted via presentation conditions for the RMS task. Specifically, along with the standard simultaneous presentation of target plus options, we tested two sequential variations: presenting each possible match in isolation before showing the full triad and presenting only the target item for evaluation before showing the full triad. Results are discussed in the context of structural alignment theory and the role of relational encoding.