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Working memory and language: an overview

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Abstract

Working memory involves the temporary storage and manipulation of information that is assumed to be necessary for a wide range of complex cognitive activities. In 1974, Baddeley and Hitch proposed that it could be divided into three subsystems, one concerned with verbal and acoustic information, the phonological loop, a second, the visuospatial sketchpad providing its visual equivalent, while both are dependent upon a third attentionally-limited control system, the central executive. A fourth subsystem, the episodic buffer, has recently been proposed. These are described in turn, with particular reference to implications for both the normal processing of language, and its potential disorders.

Learning outcomes

The reader will be introduced to the concept of a multi-component working memory. Particular emphasis will be placed on the phonological loop component, and (a) its fractionation into a storage and processing component, (b) the neuropsychological evidence for this distinction, and (c) its implication for both native and second language

learning. This will be followed by (d) a brief overview of the visuospatial sketchpad and its possible role in language, culminating in (e) discussion of the higher-level control functions of working memory which include (f) the central executive and its multi-dimensional storage system, the episodic buffer. An attempt throughout is made to link the model to its role in both normal and disordered language functions.



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Keywords

Working memory; Phonological loop; Visuospatial sketchpad; Central executive; Nonword repetition; Specific language impairment

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