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Memory biases in matching and recall: Evidence from initial consonant clusters

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Abstract: Perception and memory of linguistic information is biased in favor of stimuli that conform to structural regularities. At the level of word form, there is evidence that initial consonant clusters varying in grammatical status (e.g., br vs. *bn, *bd, *rb) differentially affect response times in same-different matching (e.g., slower responses to rbif - REBIF than to brif - BERIF; Berent & Lennertz, 2010). Previous results are consistent with two hypotheses: non-conforming clusters could be modified by a specific 'repair' (e.g., rbif recoded as rebif), or the encoding of such clusters could be more uncertain and their recall more variable. A series of matching and full-recall experiments support the second hypothesis: the response time effect for non-conforming clusters is observed for both *rbif - REBIF and *rbif - RBIFE, but only the former 'repairs' the cluster; furthermore, errors made in recall exhibit high variability and do not systematically improve structural well-formedness.