

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Memory conformity is the topic of intended research. This is an effect that occurs when two people discuss information or event they remember, and a statement made by one of them influences what the other person recalls later. Imagine Peter and Caroline who recall together their last trip to the local ZOO. During their conversation Peter may say something that was not present in Caroline's recollection, for example that the inscription over the main entrance to the ZOO was red. When Caroline recalls the trip next time, information about inscription provided by Peter may influence her memory report. This influence of information present in a discussion can have both positive and negative consequences. If the inscription was in fact red, then information given by Peter will augment Caroline's memory report with another detail. However, if the inscription was not red, or even there was no such inscription at all, Caroline adopted from Peter false information. This, in turn, will decrease accuracy of her later memory report. Research into memory conformity conducted so far has been focused only on negative consequences, namely when people adopted incorrect information.

In order to avoid this one-sided bias, the first aim of my research is to investigate whether people conform to correct and incorrect pieces of information to the same degree. Precisely, the question is whether they conform to any of these two more often. It is worth to point out that the answer to this question may depend on situational demands and individual differences. For instance, people more often conform to incorrect pieces of information that have been obtained from a person with more knowledge and prestige. However, not much is known about the conditions determining that people more often adopt correct pieces of information from their partners and ignore the incorrect ones. Therefore, an investigation of this problem will be the second objective that I intend to meet with my research.

In the first two experiments participants will discuss the details that they have previously seen on the photographs. They will be asked to inform their partner about the level of their confidence in the answer. I assume that the correctness assessment of the information provided by the partner will be easier when a participant will have access to partner's confidence statements. This would result in an increase of participant's tendency to conform more to correct information. In the next experiments, instead of reporting the level of confidence to the partner, people will individually assess quality of every statement of their partner by providing arguments for and against the claim that these statements are correct. I assume that encouraging people to evaluate partner's statements critically will also result in increasing the tendency to conform to only correct pieces of information.

The planned research will be very significant for obtaining a better understanding of memory conformity, and its result will most probably find plenty of practical applications. Analysis of conditions in which people can become an important source of information for each other about past events and information stored in memory, is a true novelty in the research into memory conformity. Until the effect is understood completely, the strategies used by people in discussing the past or solving memory tasks with another person will remain not fully understood as well. Additionally, such a holistic perspective will enable to assess harmfulness of consequences of memory conformity. In many situations conforming to incorrect information from another person is very damaging, for instance in cases of testimony of a crime witness. Still, successful means of preventing such negative consequences have not been found so far. Possibly, it is analysis of positive aspects of memory conformity that is the key element to break the impasse. It will enable to create methods that, by stressing positive aspects of sharing recalled information, will result in minimising negative consequences of the described effects.