Hemispheric Differences in the Appreciation of the Overall Meaning of Passages

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Murdoch University, 2013.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Full Name of Degree: Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

Thesis Title: Hemispheric Differences in the Appreciation of the Overall Meaning of Passages

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Year: 2013
Abstract

This study examined hemispheric differences in processing the overall meaning of passages. Based on past research it was hypothesised that the right hemisphere (RH) would be uniquely involved in processing the overall meaning of passages. A sample of 52 right-handed Murdoch University students participated in a lexical decision task, with reaction time (RT) and error rates recorded. Stories were read between each trial with half of the target words presented in the passages to manipulate the independent variables of: visual field of presentation (left or right), relatedness to the overall meaning of passages (related or unrelated), and presence in passages (in or out). A significant facilitation effect in favour of the LH over the RH was found for words that were not present in the passages, however there was no significant difference in facilitation effects between hemispheres for words in the passages. Further, this LH advantage was found for males but not for females, with females having no significant hemispheric differences for facilitation effects. The results therefore did not replicate the findings of previous studies demonstrating a RH dominance for the appreciation of the overall meaning of stories (Jung-Beeman, 2005). Rather, the presence effect demonstrates a LH dominance for making the inferences necessary for the appreciation of the overall meaning of stories. The results are also consistent with McGlone’s (1977) interhemispheric model, claiming that language is predominately processed in the LH for males and bilaterally for females.

*Keywords*: lexical decision task, hemisphere, visual field, language, overall meaning
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Jeffrey Coney, for his support and guidance throughout the preparation of this thesis. He has approached my work with great enthusiasm and at times humour. I could not have asked for a better supervisor.

I also wish to thank my friends and colleagues for their support and encouragement throughout this endeavor.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to my very understanding and loving partner, Sandy Roberts, for her patience and support. Also, to my family that have had to put up with hearing about my thesis highs and lows throughout the past year.
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