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Contextual determinants of category-based expectations during single-word recognition

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Abstract: Highly predictive sentential contexts can facilitate the generation of expectancies for low-level physical form-based properties of upcoming linguistic input. When contextual information (such as words in a sentence) constrains upcoming input to a specific syntactic category, words with category-typical physical form-based properties are processed more quickly than category atypical words. We aim to determine whether expectancies for grammatical category can be induced in experimental paradigms where words are presented in isolation. We demonstrate that properties of the stimuli to which participants respond can facilitate, through experience with the task, the generation of category-based expectancies. When all words were nouns, participants were more accurate on lexical decision and category judgments when targets possessed category-typical form-based features. When words from multiple categories were present, however, the typicality effect disappeared, suggesting higher-level expectancies can be induced without sentential context and modulate the effects of lexical- and form-based properties of words.