The attention-binding effect of prosodic prominence in language processing

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The aim of our study was to deepen our understanding of the influence of prosodic prominence on language processing. We conducted a word recognition memory task in German where we manipulated the word preceding the target word with either the most prominent accent type (L+H*) or lack of prosodic prominence (deaccentuation) in German. Previous studies have shown higher accuracy rates when the target word was prosodically manipulated with a highly prominent accent type. Based on these findings, we postulated that prosodic prominence binds processing resources, as the attention of the listener is drawn to the prosodically prominent entity, furthering recognition memory of this entity. Conversely, we assumed that a highly prominent accent (*L+H*) on the word preceding the target word would lead to less accurate recognition rates of the target word compared to a control condition with deaccentuation. In this case, processing of the prominently accented word would bind attention and processing resources that would not be available for a deeper anchoring of the following word, the target, in memory. Our data confirmed this expectation. Prosodic prominence hindered recognition when it was on the word preceding the target word. This finding supports our assumption that prosodic prominence binds attention and processing resources.