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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

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Publication Date

2025

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Universals in Visual Word Recognition: Investigating the Optimal Viewing Position for Visual Words in Hindi

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Abstract

The Optimal Viewing Position (Nazir, Heller & Sussman, 1992; Brysbaert & Nazir, 2005) for reading visual words is well studied and documented in most of alphabetic languages (Grainger, 2022). The current study investigates the optimal viewing position in Hindi, written using the Devanagari script in attempt to understand reading universals across scripts as suggested by Frost (20120. We carried out two experiments using the lexical decision task, one each on words with maatraa (3, 4 and 5 varna) and without maatraa (2, 3, and 4 varna). Maatras are diacritics used to manifest vowel pronunciations with aksharas in Hindi and can be be marked all around the base akshara, adding to the graphemic complexity of a Hindi word (for a detail review see, Share et al., 2015; Rimzhim et al., 2021; Verma et al., 2021). The results demonstrate robust optimal viewing position effects in terms of reaction times with a U-shaped curve in relation to initial fixation position and the optimal viewing position has been found to be slightly left to the centre of the word. These seem to be similar to the OVP findings reported for European languages (Brysbaert & Nazir, 2005) and may add information about reading universals across scripts and writing systems. Keywords: Optimal Viewing Position, Hindi, Lexical Decision Task

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