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Judgements of relative order: Mechanisms underlying subspan versus supraspan lists

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Abstract: Judging the relative order of materials is a core function of human memory. In short, subspan consonant lists with immediate judgments of relative recency (JOR), instruction wording ("which item was presented earlier?" versus "which item was presented later?") could flip around memory search direction (Chan et al., 2009). We wondered whether instruction wording could have an analogous influence on the JOR judgement in supraspan lists. However, supraspan lists typically show a very different behavioural pattern - distance effects (e.g., Yntema & Trask, 1963). Our participants performed JOR judgements on "short" (LL=8) supraspan noun lists. We evaluate whether it is possible to reconcile the subspan and supraspan data by assuming that the judgement in both sub- and supra-span regimes are influenced by the same factors, positional discriminability and attentional bias across serial positions, and that speed-accuracy tradeoffs combined with ceiling in subspan lists account for the observed qualitative differences in behaviour.