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## Semantic Priming of Attention Focus: Evidence for Short- and Long-Term Effects

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### ABSTRACT

Research on subliminal priming documents that our brain can understand words, interpret facial expressions and decode symbols even without realizing them consciously. Thus, words presented for merely a few ms can shorten the response times to semantically related target words, if compared to words with opposite meaning (e.g., Klauer & Musch, 2003). While most previous semantic priming studies used semantic prime-target pairs of affective valence, the present study explored for the first time semantic priming effects for prime-target pairs characterizing an attentional focus. In Experiment 1, a subliminally presented prime word was followed by an above-threshold target word such that both words denoted a broad attention focus, both denoted a narrow focus, or one word denoted a broad and the other a narrow focus. Subjects had to judge the focus of the target words, and we found their response times to be shorter when the prime-target pairs were semantically congruent rather than incongruent. In Experiment 2, a block of subliminally presented prime words, all denoting a broad or all a narrow focus of attention, was followed by a block of subliminally presented target words denoting a broad or a narrow focus in a mixed sequence. Subjects had to judge the position of each prime or target, and we found their target response times to be shorter when the target was semantically congruent rather than incongruent with the preceding prime block. We concluded that semantic priming is effective, that it works for primes denoting the attention focus, and that it persists for more than just a fraction of a second.

### KEYWORDS

Semantic Priming; Attention Focus; Subliminal Priming

### Cite this paper

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