Working title: Feature-based Attention and Reward: Insights from Steady-state Visually Evoked Potentials

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**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

*650 word limit including citations*

**Reward and attention**

Given the limited processing capacity, selective attention is crucial in choosing which stimuli will be processed (Chun et al., 2011; Desimone and Duncan, 1995). Selective attention prioritizes stimuli in accordance with current goals and knowledge based on previous learning (Chelazzi et al., 2013). Rewards play an important role in selective attention. Reward prospect enhances selective attention (REF), stimuli associated with rewards are prioritized (REF), and continue to be preferentially processed even when the possibility of gaining rewards is no longer present (Anderson and Yantis, 2013; Anderson et al., 2011). The mechanisms through which rewards influence selective attention are a matter of intensive empirical and theoretical work. Apart from the role of top-down and bottom-up processes, it has been argued that reward history plays a crucial as well. However, most researchers in the field agree that rewarded locations, objects, and object features are prioritized by increasing their saliency, while the saliency of the other locations, objects, and object features is reduced (Chelazzi; Anderson; Failing & Hickey). This is commonly linked to the activity of the neurons in the visual cortex (e.g. Roelfsema). This idea has received a significant amount of support in fMRI and ERP studies.

However, this prediction is hard to explicitly test without simultaneously recording responses to both features. Most of the paradigms in the field use tasks in which a stimulus or array of stimuli are briefly presented. Then brain responses are recorded in response to that stimulus. This approach is useful for investigating brain responses to transient stimuli, but it fails to address the more realistic situations in which multiple stimuli are simultaneously present and attention is allocated towards some of those stimuli in a more sustained manner. Importantly, the effects of attention and reward can be hard to dissociate (Maunsell 2004).

*Chelazzi 2013*

“When performance is considered determinant for the achievement of rewards, then plasticity is observed at the level of the specific processes that enabled it (i.e., target selection and distracter inhibition), and learning takes the form of an instrumental type of adaptation (Della Libera & Chelazzi, 2009). Differently, when rewards are viewed as random, fortuitous events, then a direct and passive association takes place between the perceived stimuli and the rewards that follow them (Della Libera, Perlato, & Chelazzi, 2011).”

“Recent research suggests that both types of reward-based attentional learning involve brain structures usually associated with attentional control, including posterior parietal cortex (Krebs et al., 2011; Peck et al., 2009), and the processing of rewarding information, including the striatum and the anterior cingulate cortex (Hickey, Chelazzi, & Theeuwes, 2010a; O’Doherty, 2004; Schultz, 2006; Weil et al., 2010). Moreover, and perhaps most interestingly, they can affect the neural representation of visual stimuli at the level of extrastriate visual cortex, including area V4 and the inferotemporal cortex (Frankó, Seitz, & Vogels, 2010; Hickey, Chelazzi, & Theeuwes, 2010a; Jagadeesh et al., 2001; Mogami & Tanaka, 2006; Pessiglione et al., 2008; Weil et al., 2010), and this can occur even outside the context of a task as the result of the shear association of a stimulus with reward (Frankó, Seitz, & Vogels, 2010)”

“To sum up, the studies on attentional processing of stimuli associated with biased rewards reveal that when highly rewarded stimuli are task relevant they may lead to faster and more accurate performance in visual search tasks (Della Libera & Chelazzi, 2009; Kristjánsson, Sigurjónsdóttir, & Driver, 2010), and in the Stroop task (Krebs, Boehler, & Woldorff, 2010; Krebs et al., 2011); they also engender stronger inter-trial priming effects (Hickey, Chelazzi, & Theeuwes, 2010a; Kristjánsson, Sigurjónsdóttir, & Driver, 2010) and a higher resistance to the attentional blink phenomenon (Raymond & O’Brien, 2009). When the same stimuli act as distracters that need to be ignored they often lead to stronger effects of involuntary attentional capture (Anderson, Laurent, & Yantis, 2011a, 2011b; Rutherford, O’Brien, & Raymond, 2010) and greater interference effects (Della Libera & Chelazzi, 2009; Krebs, Boehler, & Woldorff, 2010; Krebs et al., 2011). However, it should be recalled that while some of the above results could all be reconciled with the notion of value learning, and the ensuing influence on attentional priority, some other results require a different explanation, namely one where rewards cannot only increase the salience of certain visual stimuli, thus facilitating their selection, but also increase the efficiency with which other stimuli can be suppressed. We have proposed that the latter effects can only be accounted for by making reference to notions of instrumental conditioning, whereby the delivery of rewards in relation to the suppression of a certain stimulus will reinforce the tendency for attention mechanisms to suppress the same stimulus on future occasions, not unlike the influence of instrumental conditioning on motor performance.”

**SSVEPs**

Frequency-tagging offers the possibility to overcome this issue. “SSVEPs allow us to register continuously the neuronal processes underlying the perception of each individual element in search displays (Soren chapter)”. “A number of studies have localized the major generators of the SSVEP to early visual cortical areas and the highest SSVEP amplitudes are commonly recorded at occipital and parietal electrodes. The specific cortical areas involved and their individual contributions to the total scalp-recorded signal appear to depend upon the driving frequency. For the SSVEP elicited by a pattern-reversing stimulus, which produces a percept of motion, combined SSVEP and fMRI recordings have identified early visual areas V1 (primary visual cortex) and the motion sensitive MT/V5 as the main generator sources with minor contributions from midoccipital (V3a) and ventral occipital (V4) areas.” In the PNAS paper: “the cortical currents giving rise to the SSVEP attention effect were localized to a region containing the early visual areas V1-V3.”

Steady-state visually evoked potentials represent… *Explain what they are (oscillatory activity of the visual cortex, provides a measure of attention – amplitude increases with attention). They have been used to look at feature-based sustained attention.*

**The present study**

In the present study we aimed to better understand the influence of rewards on feature-based selective attention by simultaneously looking into the amount of attention allocated towards stimuli linked to high and low reward probabilities. We recorded the SSVEPs in conditions when participants attended colors linked to either high or low reward probabilities. This allowed for making a clear distinction between the effect of attention and the effect of reward magnitude. Finally, our experiment consisted out of three phases (baseline, acquisition, and extinction) that allowed us to investigate the influence of reward probability on attention when rewards are present, but also when they are no longer relevant.

We show that:

1) Introduction of rewards affects feature-based attention both behaviorally and in SSVEPs

2) Leads to lower levels of attention for the low rewarded stimuli, while high rewarded stimuli stay at the same level

3) The lingering effect of reward is present in the absence of rewards, even though our measure of feature-based attention goes back to baseline

**Maunsell, 2004**

However, the few neurophysiological studies that have varied the difficulty of a spatial attention task have shown that neuronal modulations by attention vary depending on task demands [29,30,34].

**SSVEPs**

**Andersen et al., 2012**

“In order to dissociate feature-selective attention from spatial attention”

“In typical visual search paradigms, each element of the search display is presented at a unique location, and hence spatial locations and features are confounded”

SSVEPs scale with the amount of attention: Toffanin, P., de Jong, R., Johnson, A., & Martens, S. (2009). Using frequency tagging to quantify attentional deployment in a visual divided attention task. International Journal of Psychophysiology, 72(3), 289-298.

**Norcia et al., 2015**

*Advantages of SSVEPs*

“The SSVEP is particularly well suited to attention research questions, as it provides a high-SNR measure of neural activity that can be unambiguously associated with specific external stimuli, even when multiple stimuli are present at the same time. Importantly, it allows monitoring of responses made to stimuli that are outside of the focus of attention, something that is difficult to do with behavioral methods. Moreover, the SSVEP can be flexibly deployed over a number of configurations, including the tagging of both spatially distinct and spatially overlapping stimuli. In light of these attributes, the SSVEP approach has gained possibly its greatest utility in studies that have addressed the cognitive and neural mechanisms underlying volitional attention in human beings.”

*Dissociating spatial and feature attention*

“The multi-input SSVEP studies already discussed provide compelling evidence that volitional attention operates on spatially distinct regions of a scene to modulate neural processing in an adaptive, goal oriented manner. Ample evidence also exists that attention can operate in a nonspatial manner to enhance processing of particular visual features such as color, orientation, or direction of motion. Because the SSVEP can be obtained from multiple overlapping stimuli, this method has been particularly useful in elucidating the neural mechanisms underlying such feature-based attention.

“Beginning in 2006, Muller, Andersen, and Hillyard conducted a series of elegant studies aimed at dissociating the influence of attention to features and feature conjunctions from the influence of spatial attention. These studies utilized overlapping fields of randomly moving red and blue colored (or in some cases achromatic) dots that were modulated at distinct frequencies (Figure 15).”

*Attended vs. unattended advantage*

“Frequency tagging makes it possible to monitor the response to multiple stimuli that are simultaneously visible. This feature of the SSVEP makes it possible to measure the effects of allocating attention to spatial location even for stimuli that are outside of the focus of conscious attention. In the first application of the SSVEP to spatial attention (Morgan, Hansen, & Hillyard, 1996), two strings of alphanumeric characters were presented in the left and right visual hemifields

(Figure 13).”

**The present study**

Our goal is to use SSVEPs in order to, for the first time, assess the influence of reward magnitude on sustained feature-based attention. How this fits with the theoretical models presented in the first part of the intro? Present the main idea and design of the study. We manipulate reward probability, not magnitude (Maunsell, 2004).

In order to better understand the underlying neural substrates of reward-guided deployment of attention in relation to depressive symptoms, we have decided to add an EEG study to our project. This study is focusing on the steady state visually evoked potentials (SSVEPs) which represent the oscillatory responses of the visual cortex to flickering stimuli (Norcia, Appelbaum, Ales, Cottereau, & Rossion, 2015). This method has already been successfully used to explore the “attention grabbing” by irrelevant emotional stimuli (Attar, Andersen, & Müller, 2010) and is particularly interesting because it provides not just a measure of which stimuli capture attention, but also a continuous measure of how much attention is simultaneously being paid towards different stimuli. The first aim of this study is to investigate the possibility of using the SSVEPs to detect differences in the amount of attention deployed towards stimuli based on their associated reward value (Study 2a). The second aim of this study is to explore if the amount of attention being paid towards reward-related stimuli is linked to depression levels and anhedonic symptoms in particular (Study 2b).

**Methods**

**Subjects**

**Stimuli and procedure**

**EEG recording and preprocessing**

**Statistical analysis**

In Studies 2a and 2b we are using the Random Dot Kinematogram task (Andersen & Müller, 2010) in which participants are presented with a cloud of randomly moving dots of two colors flickering at two different frequencies. On 32% of trials 75% of dots of one color make a coherent movement and participant’s task is to detect this movement. On each of the trials participants are presented with an auditory cue which instructs them to focus on one of the two colors. The experiment consist out of three blocks. The first block is the baseline block in which participants are doing the previously described task. The second block is the training block in which one of the colors is paired with high reward (80% of correct detections are rewarded), while the other color is paired with low reward (20% of correct detections are rewarded). The third block is the test block in which participants are not being provided by rewards and they are doing the same task as in previous two blocks. Reward sensitivity (BIS/BAS scale) and depression levels (BDI-II scale) are also being measured for each participant in order to inform the future study that will be run on participants preselected based on their depressive symptoms.

**Results**

**Discussion**

*1500 word limit including citations*

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**References**