

ERP responses reflect individual differences in visual statistical learning

Joanna Morris, Emma Kealey, Joemari Pulido, Natalia Alzate

Department of Psychology, Providence College, Providence, RI 02918



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Methods

Following Andrews & Lo (2013), we used standardized scores on vocabulary and spelling tests as measures of **semantic coherence** and **orthographic precision** respectively.

Readers with better spelling than vocabulary were characterized as having an '**orthographic reading profile**'.

Those with better vocabulary than spelling were characterized as having a '**semantic profile**'.

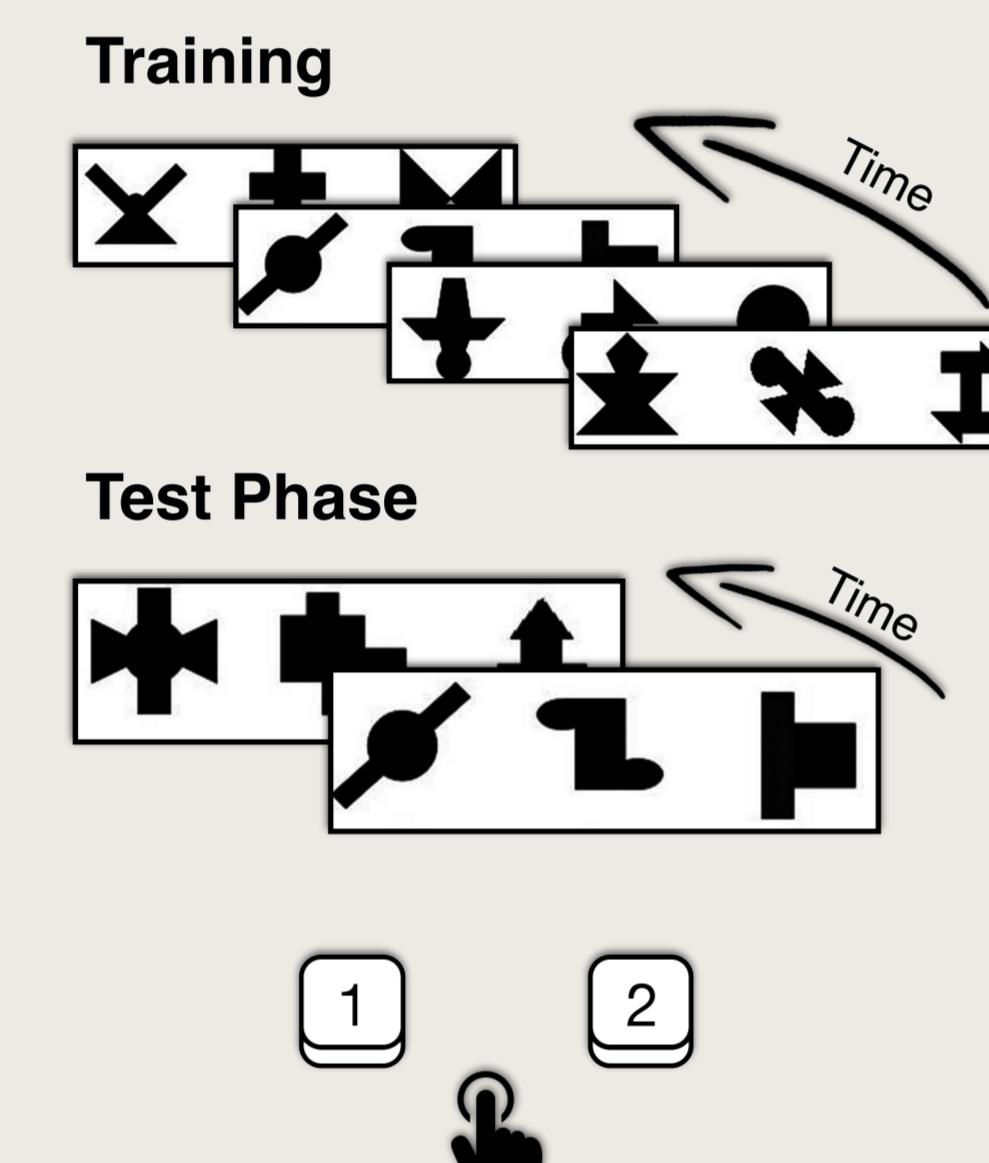
Participants ($n = 45$) completed a **visual statistical learning task** consisting of an initial **training phase** and a subsequent **test phase**.

In the training phase, participants viewed a series of unfamiliar shapes organized into triplets. Each triplet was presented 24 times during training.

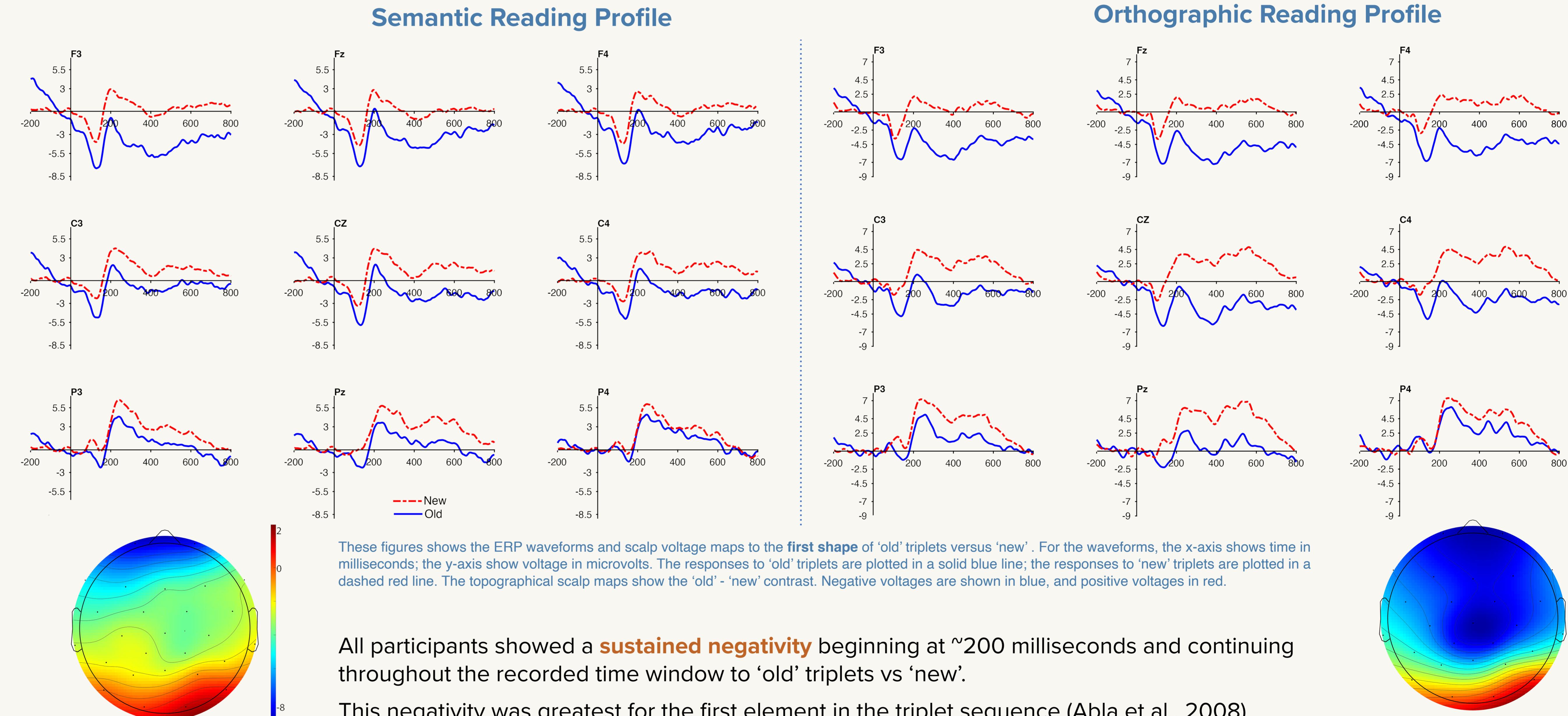
In a subsequent testing phase, on each trial participants saw two triplets—one that had been presented in the training phase and one unfamiliar triplet.

On each trial, they pressed a button to indicate whether the familiar triplet was presented first or second.

As they completed the task we measured the **amplitude of the N400 component**, a reflection of statistical learning (Abla et al., 2008; Abla & Okanoya, 2009).



Results



All participants showed a **sustained negativity** beginning at ~200 milliseconds and continuing throughout the recorded time window to 'old' triplets vs 'new'.

This negativity was greatest for the first element in the triplet sequence (Abla et al., 2008).

The 'old'-'new' difference was **greater for readers with an orthographic versus a semantic profile**.

Discussion

There were clear differences in the ERPs to 'old' versus 'new' sequences, even when participants did not recognize the sequences as old; ERP responses to 'misses' resembled those of 'hits', while ERP responses to 'false alarms' resembled those of 'correct rejections'.

Although orthographic and semantic readers did not differ in ability to discriminate old from new sequences based on their

behavioral data, the ERP data showed clear differences—**orthographic readers** were more sensitive to statistical patterns.

These data suggest that ERP responses reflect differences in sensitivity to **visual statistical learning**, and these differences are related to readers' sensitivity to sub-lexical orthographic structure.

Introduction

Visual statistical learning refers to the mechanism by which we extract regular patterns from the visual stimuli in our environment.

Recognising visual patterns is a key component of many cognitive activities, and individuals differ in their sensitivity to these patterns (Misyak et al., 2010).

Reading words requires visual statistical learning in that readers must recognize letter patterns that frequently co-occur within words, such as affixes like 'pre-', '-ing', and '-er'.

Andrews & Lo (2013) found that skilled readers differ in terms of the extent to which they are sensitive to these **sub-lexical orthographic patterns**, (i.e. multi-character graphemes and affixes), and that this sensitivity influences the early stages of lexical retrieval.

Visual statistical learning has been shown to facilitate reading ability in children (Arciuli & Simpson, 2012). But do individual differences in statistical learning play a role in skilled reading?

If so, to what extent are individual differences in sensitivity to **sub-lexical orthographic patterns** reflected in individual differences in **brain responses to the statistical patterns in non-linguistic visual sequences**?



References

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