

Let's forget the everyday / laboratory controversy

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Abstract

In contrast to its aims, the article vividly demonstrates (i) the complementarity of ecological and traditional approaches and (ii) the difficulty of characterising the growing diversity of memory research with a single set of distinctions. Moreover, the contrast between correspondence and storehouse metaphors is important enough to stand alone without reference to an everyday/ laboratory controversy which is neither acute nor necessary

The controversy between everyday- and laboratory-based research has a long history and is not confined to the study of memory (Kvavilashvili & Ellis, 1995). However, as the target article demonstrates, it is within memory research that this controversy has provoked extreme positions and elicited heated and recurrent discussions. It is pertinent therefore to ask what the state of this controversy was prior to the publication of this article and whether or not the article contributes to its resolution.

The latest round in the controversy undoubtedly began in 1978 (Neisser) and reached its peak in 1989 (Banaji & Crowder). It has since been in decline, probably because of the increased versatility of recent research practices which make it difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear distinction between the ecological and laboratory approaches to the study of memory. Indeed most researchers, irrespective of their orientation, admit that any tension between the two approaches is being gradually resolved in favour of peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit. This view has prevailed not only at several conferences (e.g. Kihlstrom, 1994; Neisser, 1988; Winograd, 1991) but also among the participants of a heated debate in the *American Psychologist* (January, 1991) prompted by Banaji and Crowder's paper (see also Davies & Logie, 1993). It would appear, however, that the primary aim of the current article is to demonstrate that the controversy has not been resolved. By presenting new experimental data and, importantly, by introducing the correspondence metaphor (in opposition to the prevailing storehouse one) the authors will succeed in provoking a fresh debate. This seems inevitable given their expressed, concluding desire to see the differences between the two approaches "sharpened and cultivated" (p. 43). Have the authors indeed managed to increase the breach between the two approaches to memory ?

By emphasising the importance of variables such as memory property, report option and test format the authors have reformulated the debate on the everyday/laboratory controversy on more precise and rigorous grounds. Contrary to their final assertion, however, the article reveals not only that the two approaches are complementary but also the difficulty in finding a set of distinctions that can clearly differentiate between them. For example, with respect to the recall-recognition paradox the authors convincingly argue that the research setting ('where aspect') may be the least important dimension in everyday/laboratory controversy. What is important, however, is that variables identified in an everyday setting are exposed to empirical test. Thus the superiority of recall over recognition, established in naturalistic studies, may be attributed to the use of accuracy measures rather than the research context per se. Clearly, however, accuracy and quantity measures complement each other and should not be viewed in isolation. For instance, there are likely to be qualitative as well as quantitative differences between two persons who reveal 100% accuracy on a standard free word recall test yet differ widely in the number of words they recall. Moreover, the superiority of recall over recognition has been amply demonstrated in laboratory studies using only quantitative measures (see, e.g., Tulving & Thomson, 1973; Watkins & Tulving, 1975). Clearly another important variable in both research contexts is the similarity between target items and foils in a recognition test (e.g. Bahrick & Bahrick, 1964).

Finally, consider the 'what, 'where' and 'how' dimensions of the everyday/laboratory controversy. The authors cogently point out that these dimensions do not provide a clear-cut distinction between the two approaches. Instead they offer a contrast between correspondence and storehouse metaphors which, they suggest, can account for some correlations between the three dimensions and clarify important aspects of the everyday/laboratory controversy. However, although their analysis of these metaphors is important with respect to the development of memory research it does not clarify the fuzzy boundaries between the everyday and laboratory approaches. On the contrary it quite reveals the difficulty in drawing a clear line between these approaches. As the authors note, a great deal of correspondence oriented research is conducted within the laboratory while much everyday research continues to employ a storehouse metaphor and that there are clear signs of shift "toward a correspondence-oriented metatheory in a wide variety of contemporary approaches, including the reconstructive, attributional, ecological, functional, nonmediational, procedural, and connectionist approaches to memory" (p. 12)

In view of these important trends it is reasonable to conclude that tension between the everyday and laboratory approaches in memory is neither acute nor necessary (cf. Kvavilashvili & Ellis, 1995). Moreover, the contrast between a storehouse and a correspondence metaphor is, we suggest, sufficiently important to stand alone without reference to the everyday/laboratory controversy. This contrast is likely to prove more theoretically interesting than endless recurrent discussions about the merits and drawbacks of the everyday and laboratory approaches to memory. Thus it is our firm hope that in the near future we will be able to say "The everyday/laboratory controversy is dead, long live the correspondence/ storehouse distinction"!

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