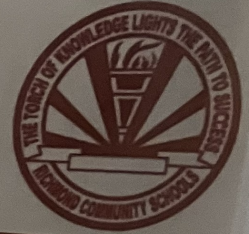


The Effect of Question Wording on Recollection

Aurora C. Nicholes

Logos Program, Hibberd Intermediate School
Richmond Community Schools



Research Question

How does the wording of a question affect a person's recollection of an event?

Background

The study I am doing is based on the work of Elizabeth F. Loftus. The purpose of Loftus (1975) was to see the effects of wording on memory. For example, in one experiment people were shown a car driving down a country road, then asked one of two questions: "How fast was the car going on the country road?" or "how fast was the car going when it passed the barn on the country road?" There was no barn. A week later, participants were asked if they saw a barn. The false proposition group had over 6 times more people say they saw a barn. My study was based on Loftus and Palmer (1974). In that study, they asked the participants "how fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other" after seeing a car crash, using verbs like crashed, contacted or slammed instead of smashed. The estimates of speed ranged from 10-50 Mph; the actual speed was 12 mph. The mean speed estimate was highest in the "smashed" condition.

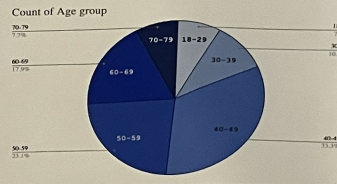
Hypothesis

On average participants who were asked "how fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other?" would give higher speeds estimates (mph) and on average would be more likely to report more broken glass.

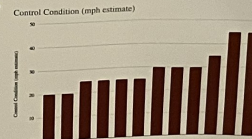
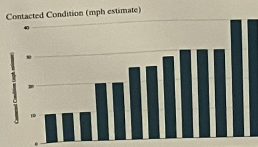
Method & Participants

- Participants were shown a car accident after indicating their consent an online survey.
- The participants were asked one of these three questions after being shown the accident:
 - "How fast were the cars going when they contacted each other?"
 - "How fast were the cars going?"
 - "How fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other?"
- The participants were then asked, "Did you see broken glass?"

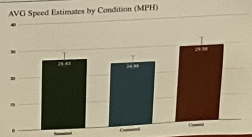
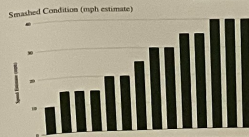
Condition	Number of Participants
Contacted	13
Control	12
Smashed	13



Results



Reported Seeing Glass?	Contacted Condition	Control Condition	Smashed Condition
Maybe	3	4	2
No	10	8	12



Conclusion

In conclusion, based on my study alone, unlike the study on which it was based, wording may affect memory but only slightly. As we see in my data, "Smash" yields the second highest average speed.

One possible reason that my study and the original study produced different results could be that the original researcher asked the follow-up question one week later, while I asked mine right after showing the video. This might mean that false memories take time to develop.

Future Results

In a future study, I would get a larger sample size, for example, 50 kids, 50 adults and 50 seniors. This would allow me to test age differences. I would also ask the follow-up question 1 week later instead of immediately.

Citations

Loftus, E. (1975). Leading questions and the eyewitness report. *Cognitive Psychology*, 7, 560-572.
Loftus, E. & Palmer, J. (1974). Reconstruction of automobile destruction: An example of the interaction between language and memory. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 13, 585-589.