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Clarity in question: the effects of ambiguous language on exam-style performance

Tuesday 2 September 2025 10:30 (45 minutes)

Ambiguous language (i.e. words or phrases with multiple meanings) can sometimes be difficult to interpret. This is especially true in time-pressured, high-stakes situations like academic assessment. This study investigated the role of ambiguous language on performance in an exam-style multiple choice assessment. Psychology students were tested on their knowledge of text extracts via multiple-choice questions. Texts and questions were designed to resemble those used in a university exam. Questions were manipulated to be either ambiguous or non-ambiguous. Participants' language status and anxiety levels were measured. Results will demonstrate whether ambiguity affects performance. This will also explore whether there are differences between students who speak English as a first language vs additional language, and between students with high and low anxiety. These conclusions can help us to understand how students are impacted by unclear language during academic assessment.

Is the first author also the speaker?

Yes

If first author is not the speaker, please indicate speaker's name here:

Please indicate up to five keywords regarding the content of your contribution

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