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Open Peer Commentaries

on Jaša Černe & Urban Kordeš's "Deconstructing Accurate and Inaccurate Recall in the DRM Paradigm: A Phenomenological and Behavioral Exploration"

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Between Naming and Knowing: The Possibility of Critique in Working with Cognitive-Psychological Paradigms of Memory

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> Abstract • The phenomenological-constructivist perspective can offer insights into the hidden assumptions of empirical research methods, including those related to the Deese-Roediger-McDermott (DRM) paradigm, because it makes it possible to detect acts of construction underlying the assertions and the decisions within research paradigms. While attempting to align their efforts with conventional cognitive science, phenomenological researchers might risk neglecting the critical potential of their own perspectives.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

« 1 » In the fifth of his *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl (2001) provides an analysis of explicit and implicit judgments, emphasizing their distinctions as (parts of) meaningful acts. He observes that some acts of judgment are so implicitly embedded in our speech that they function primarily as acts of naming. To illustrate, he notes:

❝ If we have found out or seen that the town Halle is on the Saale, or that π is a transcendent number, we may go on to talk of Halle-on-the-Saale or the transcendent number π, but we shall not be judging any longer, or at least we need not be do-

ing so, and such a judgment, should it arise in the side, makes no contribution to our act of nominal reference. ❞ (Husserl 2001: 153)

« 2 » Pertaining to our discussion, Husserl's insight can be related to experimental procedures and how they have been deemed valid tools for assessing specific psychological functions. Just as we transition from "π is a transcendent number" to "the transcendent number π," we shift from the assertion, "The Deese-Roediger-McDermott (DRM) paradigm can assess memory," to an act of naming or nominal reference such as "The DRM memory test." In doing so, we are led to overlook the underlying assumptions of the DRM paradigm.

« 3 » The value of a constructivist-phenomenological stance, especially in the context of the present study, lies in its capacity to discern how a paradigm, or an experimental

59

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method, forms the subjects of its investigation. In this brief commentary, I try to show how the DRM paradigm forms our perception of participants, the recall process, and the notion of accurate or inaccurate recall.

« 4 » The DRM paradigm employs curated word lists (e.g., WINTER, SNOW, ICE, FROST, SCARF, FLURRY), with each list semantically linked to a critical word (in this case, COLD) that is intentionally omitted. A common result of a well-constructed DRM task is the mistaken recall of the missing, pivotal word. Following convention, the missing word is referred to as "the critical lure." Additionally, a distracting task, such as the arithmetic task employed by Jaša Černe and Urban Kordeš (Footnote 6), is intended to draw participants' attention away from an explicit assessment of the task structure and its purpose.

« 5 » When researchers strategically guide the attention of research participants toward (or away) from certain features of a task, they are maintaining a particular image of their research participants. In this case, the image of the research participants upon which interpreting the DRM findings rests is one that excludes full knowledge of the experimental paradigm and its purpose. It is also assumed that participants are motivated to perform well, according to the task rules, and not according to a simpler approximation of the task rules. In light of these assumptions, when a research participant recalls an item as having been present or absent on a list, the researchers assume that their expression should be interpreted exactly in light of the task instructions delivered to them.

« 6 » However, a phenomenological approach raises the question of whether, despite its literal omission, the critical lure is entirely absent. Given that the word list in the DRM paradigm aims to direct participants' attention to the critical lure, its absence can be depicted as a particular form of presence that is implied or strongly insinuated by other items on the list. Accordingly, reporting the critical lure as being present might be the valid response according to a modified interpretation of the task, and with a different set of task instructions.

« 7 » The observation that participants sometimes think about the critical lure during the "encoding phase" aligns with the idea that the critical lure, conceptually, is embedded in the list, and participants are being exposed to it. This is what Černe and Kordeš discovered when they identified a correlation between performance accuracy and the overt recognition of the critical lure's absence (§43). What they describe as "complete critical lure recognition" can be interpreted as participants grasping the experiment's structure and being mindful of it as they progress. A relevant inquiry here would be whether the participants' awareness impacts the DRM's validity as a memory test. Does the test maintain its validity equally for participants who identify the critical lure and those who do not? Is "complete critical lure recognition" not equivalent to a transformation of the task instructions? **Q1**

« 8 » Examining the foundation and purpose of the DRM paradigm also offers a fresh perspective on findings suggesting that "flow of recall" can occur in both accurate and mistaken recall instances. The flow of recall might not necessarily denote recall accuracy, especially if the DRM procedure successfully convinces participants that the critical lure was one of the word items. If some participants, under some conditions, take the critical lure to be present on the list, it would not be surprising for them to experience a "flow of recall" when reporting the presence of the item.

« 9 » This segues to another aspect of the study, i.e., the variability among research participants in interpreting the DRM experimental scenario. Černe and Kordeš highlight that the meaning of words can be different when participants use identical terms to describe their experiences (§89). Given that words are used differently by researchers and research participants, it is no surprise that the verbal-phenomenological data cannot explain all instances of accurate or inaccurate recall (§65). The challenge is not merely to link linguistic labels to behaviors, as these behaviors are rooted in a social contract pivoted on negotiation and interpretation. The authors acknowledge this obstacle by drawing attention to accounts concerning participants' mood, motivation, self-assurance, and trust (§40). In cognitive-experimental psychological research, where the focus tends to be on a fixed set of responses (e.g., pressing one of two response keys; measurement of response time; wheth-

er or not the participant utters the critical lure), researchers typically do not consider that participants might be interpreting the experimental situation and events differently. Instead, they describe the experiment and its events in accordance with their theoretical interests (Gozli 2022). Thus, by drawing attention to the participants' experiences and interpretations, Černe and Kordeš open a significant avenue of investigation not much developed in the present study.

« 10 » Conducting phenomenological interviews is labour intensive, which could be a reason why Černe and Kordeš do not meet the methodological benchmarks set by mainstream cognitive experiments. Most notably, this means a small number of participants/observations and a resulting low statistical power. Increasing the participant pool will complicate an empirical-phenomenological study further, running the risk of relegating the relatively atypical observations to the margin of the findings. From a phenomenological standpoint, a single instance of an observation could potentially have great significance, while the cognitive-experimental approach is more sensitive to the frequency and overall patterns of observations. Thus, setting aside the problem of resource limitation, is there a methodological contradiction between the aims of the DRM paradigm and those of your phenomenological inquiry? **Q2**

« 11 » The core problem seems to be that Černe and Kordeš attempt to align their work with prevailing research in cognitive psychology. In doing so, they accept the tacit assumptions associated with the DRM paradigm (e.g., the "critical lure" is absent and the participants' mode of engagement is representative of processes outside of the experiment). Thus, they take for granted the way in which the DRM paradigm depicts the process of recall. Consequently, they miss the opportunity to harness the critical potential of the phenomenological-constructivist viewpoint, which could identify how the process of recall is shaped by the constructions of the experiment, and how those constructions could have been done differently (Gozli 2016). To be clear, the point would not be to refuse the assumptions of the DRM paradigm, but to identify the arbitrariness of those assumptions and the restrictions they place on how memory

is depicted. Would it thus not be better to concentrate on refining the phenomenological-constructivist perspective, applying it on the side of not only research participants, but the researchers as well, instead of trying to align with the constructions/findings of the DRM paradigm in cognitive psychology? **Q3**

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Fishing in the Pond Marked "BN": Avoiding the "View From Nowhere"

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> Abstract · Černe and Kordeš criticize taking "God's eye view from nowhere," but then perform a view-from-nowhere study. I present a study that explicitly aspires to reject the view-from-nowhere approach and contrast it with the target article's study.

Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

« 1 » Making it explicit in Footnote 1 of their target article, Jaša Černe and Urban Kordeš (hereafter Č&K) emphasize that

A memories should not be called "true" or "false" because that instantiates the researcher-only perspective; instead, they will refer to "accurate memories" and "inaccurate memories" to emphasize the fundamental importance of the participant's perspective – that "memories should be viewed on a continuum ranging from less accurate to more accurate"; and

B "it is not possible to adopt a God's eye view from nowhere."

I agree that both principles are fundamentally important. However, I will argue that the design of their study could be said to violate both of those principles. I will contrast this with an example from my own work that aspires to operate within both principles, thus emphasizing their fundamental importance.

« 2 » Č&K use the DRM paradigm to present word lists, and then, after a delay, ask participants to recall words from the list. Č&K's study's main aim is to differentiate (quantitatively and qualitatively) the characteristics of the processes that produce either "accurate" (on-the-list) or "inaccurate" (off-the-list) recollections. However, that design ignores both principles A and B:

▪ it treats memory as accurate or inaccurate rather than on a continuum; and
▪ it creates the study from the researcher's view-from-nowhere: without any input from participants, Č&K used the DRM as their memory paradigm, created crit-

ical lures and derivative lists, and created the analytical procedure.

Avoiding the view from nowhere

« 3 » By way of contrast, I examine the viewpoints in a study from our own work (Jones-Forrester & Hurlburt 2011) that was expressly designed to *avoid*, to the extent possible, the view from nowhere.

« 4 » The study explored bulimia nervosa (BN) using the following steps:

Step 1

The investigators advertised for participants who had BN. "Jessica" (and others, but we will focus on Jessica) volunteered.
▪ The investigators' Step-1 viewpoint was a view-from-nowhere interest in BN.
▪ Jessica's Step-1 viewpoint was personal/idiosyncratic: for whatever personal-to-Jessica reasons, she responded to the BN recruitment.

Step 2

We administered a standard battery of BN-diagnostic questionnaires and structured interviews to Jessica. Jessica's scores were consistent with a diagnosis of BN.
▪ The investigators' Step-2 viewpoint was view-from-nowhere: using questionnaires/interviews presumed that BN is an established scientific condition, that the questionnaires/interviews had been scientifically validated, that the questionnaire/interview administration was standard.
▪ Jessica's Step-2 viewpoint was likely some combination of her personal/idiosyncratic view on BN and the view-from-nowhere view spawned by the repeated interview/questionnaire standard questions.

Step 3

We (typically two or three investigators, designed to weaken any personal/idiosyncratic perspective) introduced the descriptive experience sampling (DES; Hurlburt & Heavey 2006; Hurlburt 2011)[1] procedure, encouraging Jessica and us to set aside ("bracket") any presuppositions she and/or

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1 | To see DES in action, visit https://hurlburt.faculty.unlv.edu/lena/do_I_have_internal_monologue_sampling.html