

Book Notice

The Cognitive Psychology of Proper Names. By Tim Valentine, Tim Brennen and Serge Bredart. Routledge, London and New York, 1996. Pp. xlv + 212. \$17.95, paper.

The authors (European psychologists) present a thorough summary of research on recognition and memory of various types of verbal material by several categories of people, including some with brain damage. Categories of proper names (placenames, surnames, etc.) are contrasted; proper names are compared with common nouns.

The main conclusion is that people usually have poorer memory for proper names than for common nouns, because proper names differ from common nouns in that they refer to a single individual, are less likely to have associative links with other nouns, and have a greater variety of phonological components. Furthermore, new exposures in later life are more often to proper names than to common nouns.

The descriptions and interpretations emphasize cognitive functions rather than the attributes of the nouns and the experiments are highly technical and specialized, e.g., the behavior measured in many of the studies is the reaction times to the nouns instead of the percentage of nouns recognized or remembered.

The text is written for specialists in cognitive psychology. Numerous diagrams and graphs often complicate instead of simplify the narrative. The discussions of the studies emphasize the limitations to the conclusions due to different possible interpretations of the findings.

This book is recommended as an important compilation of information for people with special interest in how the human brain processes verbal material. Most readers of *Names* will not buy or read this book, but they should be aware of it since the cognitive psychology of nouns is an active research topic.

The authors often conclude their evaluations with the statement that further research is needed. Expansion of knowledge about the topic will provide an opportunity for a textbook or a popular survey by an author who writes clear and entertaining prose. The present book will be a valuable reference for that prospective author.

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