Your notes

GCSE Psychology: revision notes

Reconstructive memory and factors affecting memory

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Bartlett's theory of reconstructive memory

- Bartlett (1932) argued that memory isn't an exact recording: we reconstruct memories each time we recall them.
- We use **schemas** (mental frameworks of knowledge and expectations built from experience) to fill in gaps, so memories change to fit what we expect.

The War of the Ghosts study

- Bartlett asked British participants to read a Native American folk tale, "The War of the Ghosts", and recall it several times over a long period.
- Their recall got shorter, and unfamiliar details were changed to fit their own culture (for example, "canoe" became "boat").
- Parts that made no sense to them were left out or rationalised. This supports the idea of **reconstructive memory**.
- Evaluation: the story was unusual and the procedure wasn't standardised, but the findings match everyday experience.

Factors affecting memory

- Interference: **proactive interference** is when old learning disrupts new learning (such as an old phone number getting in the way of a new one); **retroactive interference** is when new learning disrupts old memories.
- Context: we recall better in the same context where we learned. Godden and Baddeley found divers recalled words better in the same environment (on land or underwater) where they had learned them.
- False memories: people can remember events that didn't happen, or remember them wrongly, especially after misleading information.

Key terms

Reconstructive memory	The idea that memories are rebuilt each time they are recalled.
Schema	A mental framework of knowledge and expectations.
Proactive interference	Old learning disrupting new learning.
Retroactive interference	New learning disrupting old memories.
Context-dependent forgetting	Forgetting because the context at recall is different from when learning.
False memory	Remembering something that didn't happen, or remembering it wrongly.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who proposed the theory of reconstructive memory?
2. What is a schema?
3. What happened to the War of the Ghosts story in recall?
4. What is proactive interference?
5. What is retroactive interference?
6. What did Godden and Baddeley find about divers?
7. What is a false memory?
8. What does reconstructive memory suggest?

Answers

1. Bartlett
2. A mental framework of knowledge and expectations
3. It got shorter and changed to fit the participants' culture
4. Old learning disrupting new learning
5. New learning disrupting old memories
6. They recalled better in the same environment where they learned
7. Remembering something that didn't happen
8. Memories are rebuilt each time we recall them

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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