

## The facilitatory length effect in visual word recognition

Alison L. Morris

Mary L. Still

In a multiple regression study using a large database (the English Lexicon Project [ELP]; Balota et al., 2007), New, Ferrand, Pallier, and Brysbaert (2006) demonstrated that the function relating lexical decision latencies and word length is U-shaped: facilitatory for 3- to 5-letter words, null for 5- to 8-letter words, and inhibitory for 8- to 13-letter words. The facilitatory length effect demonstrated for short words is particularly problematic for existing models of visual word recognition. However, because the ELP used a short (300-msec) interstimulus interval (ISI) between the fixation symbols (three asterisks) and the target letter string, it is possible that the facilitatory length effect stems from interactions in the processing of the fixation and target. In several experiments, we demonstrate that the magnitude of the facilitatory effect varies as a function of the fixation–target ISI, as well as the type of fixation symbols used. Implications for conducting word recognition studies are discussed.