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Language perception under task load

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Research is reviewed that shows language perception at the semantic level – as indicated by the N400 component in the event-related brain potential – to be severely delayed in time when additional tasks are performed concurrently. This interference can be explained by a central processing bottleneck or by attention shifts elicited by the additional tasks. Recent tests of the attention shift account indicate that language perception is unimpaired by exogenously triggered visuo-spatial attention shifts, lending further support to the bottleneck account of concurrent task effects.