

Is prefix identification position-specific?

Thursday, June 22, 2017 3:20 PM (2h 10m)

How morpheme position is represented within the word recognition system is an issue of great importance to any model postulating a sublexical decomposition of morphologically-complex words. Crepaldi, Rastle & Davis (2010) and Crepaldi, Hemsworth, Davis & Rastle (2015) studied this matter focusing their attention on the processing of English suffixes, and reached the conclusion that their representations are position-specific (i.e., they are accessed by the word recognition system only when they appear following the stem). Although the evidence provided in these experiments is restricted to suffixes, the authors mention that similar results would be expected with prefixes: they are probably stripped from word onsets but not from word endings. However, some evidence has been found suggesting that derived prefixed and suffixed words are organized and accessed differently in the mental lexicon, and that the representations of prefixes and suffixes are not equivalent (Beyersmann, Ziegler & Grainger, 2015; Ferrari & Kacirik, 2014; Giraudo & Grainger, 2003; Kim, Wang & Taft, 2015).

The aim of our experiment is to determine whether Spanish prefixes are recognized as such only when they are in their typical position (preceding the base), or if they are activated independently of their position, as stem representations seem to be (Crepaldi, Rastle, Davis & Lupker, 2013). For this purpose, we have adapted Crepaldi et al.'s (2010) first experiment by designing morphologically-structured nonword stimuli in two conditions: prefix-plus-stem and stem-plus-prefix. If prefix representations are position-specific, a morpheme interference effect should emerge in lexical decision tasks for the prefix-plus-stem stimuli relative to matched nonwords without a morphological structure, but no such processing disadvantage should be found for the stem-plus-prefix stimuli. On the contrary, if prefixes are position-invariant, we should observe comparable interference for both type of stimuli. Results will be presented and discussed.

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Session Classification: Poster 1

Track Classification: Freely Contributed Paper