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Four attemps to find morphological effects using complex and simple stimuli as primes: a matter of orthography

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Whether morphological decomposition of complex words occurs independently of semantics and orthography is a matter of intense debate. In this study, morphological processing is examined by presenting complex words (brujería -> brujo –witchcraft -> witch), as well as simple (brujaña ->brujo) and complex pseudowords (brujanza ->brujo), as primes in four masked lexical decision tasks. In the first experiment, the three experimental conditions facilitated word recognition in comparison to the control condition, but no differences emerged between them. Given the importance of the surface frequency effect observed, a second experiment was conducted. The results fully replicate those observed in the first one, but this time with low frequency targets. In the third experiment, word ending frequencies were manipulated so that non-morphemic ending frequencies of simple stimuli were lower than the suffix frequencies of complex stimuli. Despite this manipulation, the results once again showed similar facilitation effects for the three experimental conditions, which were different from those for the control condition. In the fourth experiment, vowels were removed from the stems of primes to reduce the orthographic overlap between primes and targets. The results show facilitative effects only for complex words. However, paired comparisons showed no differences between experimental conditions. The overall results show the main role played by the processing of stems in visual word recognition and are explained in terms of current models of morphological processing.

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