

The suffix priming effect in children: A developmental perspective

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The role of morphological processing has been shown to be very relevant in learning to read. However, there is little evidence from a developmental perspective about the processing of derivational suffixes. In this study we focus on them and carry out an experiment with 70 children in which we explore the suffix priming effect. Children of fourth and fifth grade took part in this experiment as well as adults. The experiment consisted in a masked priming lexical decision task (go, no-go version) in which complex and simple words are primed by other words sharing the suffix (as in lechero->jornalero) and word ending (as in araña->España) or not (surfista->jornalero; carpeta->España). The results of adults replicate previous studies by showing that only in the case of complex words the related condition elicits a significant facilitation (see Duñabeitia, Perea & Carreiras, 2008). In the overall analyses it is shown that children are increasingly sensitive to the experimental manipulation. In particular there are significant differences among fourth graders and adults but a lack of significant differences among fifth graders and adults. An inspection of the pattern observed clearly show an evolution of the morphological priming effect taking place in the school ages analyzed. Although previous studies showed a significant role for suffixes, from the best of our knowledge this is the first time the suffix priming effect is assessed in children. The results are interpreted from a developmental perspective of current theoretical models of morphological processing by which children are increasingly able to process and benefit from the processing of suffixes.

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