

Beyond decomposition: Processing zero-derivations in English visual word recognition

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Four experiments investigate the effects of covert morphological complexity during visual word recognition. Zero-derivations occur in English in which a change of grammatical class occurs without any change in surface form (e.g., a bridge-to bridge; to bump-a bump). Bridge is object-derived and is a basic noun (N), whereas bump is action-derived and is a basic verb (V). As the suffix {-ing} is only attached to verbs, deriving bridging from its base, requires two steps, bridge(N)>bridge(V)>bridging(V), while bumping can be derived in one step from bump(V). Experiments 1 to 3 used masked-priming at different prime durations, to test matched sets of one and two-step verbs for morphological (bumping-BUMP) and semantic priming (jolting-BUMP). Experiment 4, employed a delayed-priming paradigm in which the full verb forms (bumping and bridging) were primed by noun and verb phrases (a bump/to bump, a bridge/to bridge). In both paradigms, different morphological priming patterns were observed for one-step and two-step verbs that can be distinguished from purely semantic effects. Our results demonstrate that morphological processing cannot be reduced to surface form-based segmentation.

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