



Lexical stock under scrutiny: exploring the mental representations of morphologically complex structures

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The present work aims to shed light on the mental representations of lexical items composed of more than one morpheme. It seems that one way of gaining access to the mental lexicon is via the visual word recognition task (henceforth VWR). Although VWR research enjoys a somewhat longstanding tradition (e.g. Cattell 1886, Gough 1972, McClelland and Rumelhart 1981, Balota 1994, Larson 2004) the problem of the morphological structure of the mental lexicon persists. Extensive research has led to the following three divisions: the Full Listing Hypothesis (e.g. Butterworth 1983, Hankamer 1989, Cieśllicka 2004), Prelexical Mandatory Decomposition (PMD) (e.g. Taft and Forster 1975, Feldman et al. 1995, Longtin et al. 2003), Augmented Addressed Morphology (e.g. Laudana et al. 1989) and Morphological Race (Frauenfelder and Schreuder 1992).

This study sought to replicate the results obtained by Pillon (1998), which seem to support the PMD. For this purpose two conditions were created: one inhibiting and one facilitating affix stripping. The hypothesis was that, irrespective of the condition in which pseudoprefixed words (affix-like string of letters and a pseudostem) were embedded, they would take more time to be responded to. Forty subjects whose L2 is English participated in the experiment.

The results obtained by Pillon (1998) were not replicated in the present study. It appears, however that the facilitating condition did actually help morphological dismantling. The mean response time for the experimental stimuli in the inhibitory condition was 52 msec faster than in the facilitating condition; this result revealed statistical significance. Nevertheless, the difference between the mean reaction times to control and to experimental stimuli failed to reveal statistical significance $F(1,76)=0.02$; $p=0.8879$. Yet, what seems crucial in the observations is that the response times between the two different conditions turned out to be significant, $F(1,76)=0.81$; $p=0.0063$.

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