Morphological facilitation for regular and irregular verb formations in native and non-native speakers: Little evidence for two distinct mechanisms*

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Abstract

The authors compared performance on two variants of the primed lexical decision task to investigate morphological processing in native and non-native speakers of English. They examined patterns of facilitation on present tense targets. Primes were regular (billed–bill) past tense formations and two types of irregular past tense forms that varied on preservation of target length (fell–fall; taught–teach). When a forward mask preceded the prime (Exp. 1), language and prime type interacted. Native speakers showed reliable regular and irregular length preserved facilitation relative to orthographic controls. Non-native speakers' latencies after morphological and orthographic primes did not differ reliably except for regulars. Under cross-modal conditions (Exp. 2), language and prime type interacted. Native but not non-native speakers showed inhibition following orthographically similar primes. Collectively, reliable facilitation for regulars and patterns across verb type and task provided little support for a processing dichotomy (decomposition, non-combinatorial association) based on inflectional regularity in either native or non-native speakers of English.
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