

Exploring the (non-) lexical nature of Spanish inflection: a view from an inflectionless counterpart

An open question in psycholinguistics is whether there are qualitative differences in the mental lexical representation of regular and irregular inflectional morphology (Anshen & Aronoff, 1988; Penke, 2006). Four basic models for the lexical storage of inflected words have been proposed: full listing (e.g. Butterworth, 1983; Manelis & Tharp, 1977), decompositional (e.g. Clahsen, 1999; Prasada & Pinker, 1993; Taft, 1985), connectionist (e.g. Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986), and satellite-cluster (e.g. Feldman & Fowler, 1987; Lukatela, Gligorijević, & Kostić, 1980). Previous experimental research has placed emphasis on the lexical items themselves, in an attempt to determine whether only the root or fully inflected (root + affix) forms are stored. The present study turns attention to processes of morphological affixation in Spanish, which if demonstrably autonomous in some contexts, would provide complementary evidence suggesting decompositional lexical storage. This is exemplified by examining bilingual speakers' ability to toggle between inflection and lack of inflection in two lexically cognate languages, Spanish and the Afro-Colombian creole language Palenquero. Spanish exhibits gender and number inflection on modifiers as well as person-number agreement on verbs, while Palenquero—which shares most of its lexical roots with Spanish—has no morphological agreement: adjectives are derived from the corresponding Spanish masculine form, while verbs are invariant, and are accompanied by pre-verbal tense/mood/aspect particles. In a series of five experiments conducted with Palenquero-Spanish bilinguals in the community of San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia, cross-linguistic priming with cognate (low-frequency and high-frequency) lexical roots triggered in the primed language (Palenquero) some of the morphological agreement processes found in the priming language (Spanish). The tasks included rapid translation, memory-loaded repetition, repetition with distractor utterances, close-shadowing, and auditory sentence-matching (utterances differing only in the presence/absence of an inflectional morpheme). The results for Spanish-like feminine gender marking show a lack of lexical frequency effects, which is consistent with decompositional models in which gender-agreement morphemes are added to lexically stored stems. In the data for retention of Spanish-like person/number verb inflection, Spanish irregular verb forms appear to be stored in full form (no lexical frequency effects), while the roots of regular forms are lexically stored (large main effect for lexical frequency), with inflectional affixes added by an active process cf. Bowden et al., 2010; Álvarez et al., 2011; Clahsen, Avelado, & Roca, 2002; Sonnenstuhl, Eisenbeiss, & Clahsen, 1999). By experimentally deactivating morphological agreement with cognate or identical roots, an additional probe into the lexical representation of regular and irregular inflection becomes available.

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PALENQUERO EXAMPLES:

{no gender inflection}

| | | | | | | |
|----|--------|---------|-----|-----------|-------|--------------|
| ma | hende | ase-ba | asé | <u>to</u> | kusa | <u>bueno</u> |
| PL | person | HAB-IMP | do | all | thing | good |

'People did all sorts of good things'

{no verb inflection}

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|-------------|-----|-----|-------|
| i | tan | <u>ablá</u> | bo | un | kusa |
| I | FUT | speak | you | ART | thing |

'I will tell you something'