

Abstract

This study showed that the learning of an artificial language's grammatical rule is eased by the lexical activation of L1 vocabulary. We used a sentence-picture matching task to investigate the impact of Spanish-Basque full cognates on explicit learning of an artificial language drawing on Basque. Two groups of Spanish speakers learnt one of two sets of lexical items (cognates or non-cognates) and the grammatical rule for word order (SOV and OSV) in the language. They were subsequently tested on their ability to apply the rule, assessed by accuracy rates and reaction times. In a post-test, all participants listened to sentences made up of previously unheard cognates. Results showed that rule learning was greater for the cognate version of the language. This finding goes in line with the Lexical Bottleneck Hypothesis (Hopp, 2014) and suggests that, the less costly lexical retrieval is, the more resources can be devoted to grammatical rule learning.

Keywords: cognates, rule learning, vocabulary learning, explicit learning, artificial language, second language learning