**The facilitative role of lexical frequency in initial L2 syntax acquisition**

High frequency words are processed faster and more accurately than low frequency words both in the L1 and in the L2 (*word frequency effect*). Some studies have shown that differences in lexical frequency facilitate L1 and L2 syntax processing (Tily et al. 2010, Hopp, 2016). I study whether differences in lexical frequency additionally facilitate initial L2 syntax acquisition, focusing on cross-linguistically similar and dissimilar structures. I created two versions of a miniature language based on Galician where all the vocabulary was cognate with Spanish. One version included the Galician translation of Spanish high frequency verbs and the other included the Galician translation of Spanish low frequency verbs. The target structures were two embedded clauses, one similar in Spanish and Galician (e.g. *É importante [que Pedro repare a radio]*) and the other existing only in Galician (e.g. *É importante [Pedro reparar a radio]*). Eighty-eight Spanish natives without knowledge of Galician participated in the experiment. Participants were divided into a high frequency group and a low frequency group, each processing sentences formed by the similar and the dissimilar structure containing a high frequency verb or a low frequency verb, respectively. Both groups of participants processed (aurally and visually) sentences formed by the target structures in a structure-search task. Syntax learning was tested in a Grammaticality Judgement Task with feedback. Results showed that processing sentences with high frequency verbs facilitated learning of the cross-linguistically dissimilar structure, but not of the cross-linguistically similar structure. There was a learning advantage for the similar structure over the dissimilar one for both groups of participants, but it was smaller for the high frequency group than for the low frequency group. This shows that differences in lexical frequency facilitate L2 syntax learning when structures are not present in the L1.

**References**

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