Structural priming and second language learning

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Abstract

Structural priming and second language learning

This thesis investigates L2 structural priming in learners of English and the possible role of structural priming in second language acquisition. Three picture description production priming experiments were carried out in which speakers were exposed to prime sentences exhibiting a specific target structure. A pre- and post-test design was deployed to measure learning effects. In Experiment 1, fifty two L2 English speakers took part in a structural priming experiment targeting the production of get passives (e.g., the woman got arrested). Priming and learning effects were weak and were manifested in production of non-get passives. In contrast, in Experiment 2, where thirty eight L2 English speakers took part in another structural priming experiment targeting the production of stranded prepositions in relative clauses (e.g., a bed is something you sleep on), priming and learning effects were strong. The findings of learning through structural priming are interpreted as evidence of implicit learning of L2 structure. However, when the stranded preposition structure was primed in a different sentential context (i.e., the bed was too uncomfortable to sleep on) in a third experiment (n=40) only a weak priming effect emerged and there appeared to be no significant learning effect. These disparate findings suggest that the strength of L2 structural priming and subsequent learning effects might be modulated by the target structure. Implications for second language teaching and learning and theories of second language acquisition are discussed.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>adjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjP</td>
<td>adjectival passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allP</td>
<td>all passives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APT</td>
<td>Acquisition by Processing Theory (Truscott &amp; Sharwood-Smith, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bareP</td>
<td>bare passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beP</td>
<td>be passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALL</td>
<td>computer-assisted language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>double object (dative construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERP</td>
<td>event-related potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>the English get passive construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE-GB</td>
<td>the British component of the International Corpus of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Input Processing (VanPatten, 2002, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>first language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLL</td>
<td>mobile language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOGUL</td>
<td>Modular On-line Growth and Use of Language (Sharwood-Smith &amp; Truscott, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>null prep</td>
<td>L2 English interlanguage structure in which an obligatory stranded preposition is omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVS</td>
<td>object-verb-subject word order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Processing Instruction (VanPatten, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>prepositional object (dative construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Processability Theory (Pienemann, 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>second language acquisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>specific language impairment</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOEIC</td>
<td>an English language test published by the Educational Testing Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>the tough movement construction (e.g., in English: John is easy to please)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>