

Structural elaboration to foster vocabulary retention: Effects of sound repetition and attention direction

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It has frequently been observed that L1 words which share beginnings, such as onset consonants, are especially likely to render each other accessible in memory (Aitchison, 2003). In L2 research several experimental studies have found that learners who have been exposed to a list of decontextualized alliterative and non-alliterative L2 collocations (e.g., full force and full speed) find it relatively easy to recall the alliteratives (Lindstromberg & Boers, 2008; Boers, Lindstromberg & Eyckmans, 2012, 2013). The observed effect appears to be greatest when the learners' attention is directed to the structural properties of the collocations. However, these studies touched on targeted collocations that were familiar to the participants before the study phase. In this paper we will cast light on the effect sound repetition on the long term retention of novel, authentic expressions in L2. In two separate classroom experiments, Dutch-speaking learners of English were asked to study a list of unknown expressions, half of which contain sound repetition. One group of learners was asked to mark occurrences of sound repetition in the content words of the expressions (e.g., miss the mark; get the show on the road). The second group of learners had the same time on task but was not given the attention direction task.

Form recall of the expressions was measured in a cued recall test immediately after the study phase and two weeks later. A comparative discussion of the results of both data sets will divulge whether (1) sound repetition causes expressions to be inherently more memorable, (2) attention direction is at the expense of the recall of the non-distinctive expressions.

References

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