

## Does hearing a word one, three, or six times help learners pronounce second language words?

### What this research was about and why it is important

Seeing or hearing previously unknown words repeatedly enhances vocabulary learning in a learner's second language. Thus far, the role of repetition in second language vocabulary learning has been examined in relation to various aspects of vocabulary, including how well learners remember the meanings of new words or their spelling. However, this work has generally focused on the learning of written words, and there is little knowledge about how learners pronounce previously unknown spoken words. Understanding how learners pronounce words is important because being able to say words is a core aspect of vocabulary knowledge and a key contributor to speaking. Therefore, the researchers in this study studied whether presenting previously unknown words one, three, or six times during learning helps learners not only connect the word to its meaning but also to pronounce the word in such a way that it does not sound heavily accented and is easy to understand.

### What the researchers did

- The researchers tested 75 Japanese university students in one of three groups (one, three, and six exposures).
- The students completed a word learning task, where they heard 40 unfamiliar English words with pictures illustrating their meaning. The words were presented one, three, or six times, depending on the group.
- The students' word knowledge was tested by showing them the same pictures and asking them to say the word. This test was given three times: before the learning task, immediately after, and about 1 week later.
- The researchers measured if the students said the correct word for each picture and also asked 24 external raters to evaluate how accented (on a scale between not accented and accented) and how comprehensible (on a scale between easy to understand and hard to understand) the words sounded to them.

### What the researchers found

- Hearing the words more frequently during the learning resulted in better recall and also in the words being perceived by raters as less accented and more comprehensible.
- Hearing the words six times during the learning had a more pronounced effect on how comprehensible than how accented the words sounded to external raters.
- Positive effects of repeated exposure to spoken words during learning dissipated after 1 week.
- Hearing words repeatedly was particularly useful for noncognate words (words which have no similar-sounding Japanese words) than for cognates.

### Things to consider

- Frequency of exposure plays an important role in how learners pronounce previously unknown words.
- Vocabulary learning is incremental, so it might require more than six exposures over a longer time period for the learning benefits to arise and stay, especially for words such as cognates whose pronunciations might be particularly confusable across a learner's two languages.

**Material, data, open access article:** Materials and data are publicly available on IRIS (<https://www.iris-database.org/>) and OSF (<https://osf.io/zersy/>)

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