Individual differences and incidental learning of novel words in L2 written input.

Veronica Garcia Castro
University of York, United Kingdom

The study focuses on the incidental learning of vocabulary in L2 written input, and its aim is to analyse the effects of the individual differences of L2 educational background, vocabulary size, phonological working memory, and language aptitude, in the learning outcomes of receptive (recognition) and productive (recall) knowledge of the following word’s aspects: meaning and form, grammatical functions, orthographic knowledge, and knowledge of association. The study uses ten English-like nonwords that were created with a nonwords database generator which selected only orthographically existing onsets such as ”kn,” only legal bigrams like ”th,” and no morphologically ambiguous syllables to ensure English-like nonwords. Five of the nonwords function as concrete nouns and five as abstract nouns. The participants of the study are adult Spanish native speakers with an advance level of English as a second language. The written input consists of hundred and twenty short sentences (twelve encounters per target word), twenty words in each sentence, and only one token per sentence. Each target word was matched with a plausible/implausible adjective in a sentence for a self-paced reading task in order to tap into the early stages, and the mental processes associated to incidental vocabulary learning. Participants completed a battery of four pre-tests for individual differences before the main exposure task, which consisted of reading the hundred and twenty short sentences. After reading the sentences, participants undertook the self-paced reading task, and six immediate post-tests for the receptive and productive knowledge of the words’ aspects mentioned above. The partial results of the study will be discussed where reading times, PWM, language aptitude, L2 educational background, and vocabulary size will be analyzed in terms of the recognition and recall of the word’s aspects mentioned above and the differentiation between concrete and abstract nouns.

Keywords: Language Aptitude, Incidental Learning, Individual Differences, Working Memory, vocabulary learning.