

The role of morphology in L2 reading vs. reading for translation

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A number of studies have shown an advantage for morphologically complex compared to simple words, in both auditory (Balling & Baayen 2008) and visual word recognition (e.g. Burani & Thornton 2003, Fiorentino & Poeppel 2007). In L1, it seems that the presence of morphological structure and the availability of morphemic information alongside whole-word information make word recognition easier (though see Lehtonen et al. 2007 for a different result). Based on these findings, one could expect that morphological structure would also play a beneficial role in L2 reading and that morphological structure might aid translators when rendering an L2 text in their L1.

This study presents analyses of eye-movements measured for native speakers of Danish during normal reading of a Danish text, normal reading of an English text and reading of an English text with the object of translating the text into Danish after reading it (see Jakobsen & Jensen 2008). The study has three aims: The first aim is to establish whether the difference between morphologically simple and complex words observed in auditory and visual recognition of single words is replicated in reading of coherent text, as reflected in various eye-movement measures. The second aim is to investigate whether the advantage for morphologically complex words generalises to L2 reading. The third aim is to explore whether morphological structure plays a role in reading for translation and whether a possible beneficial effect of morphological complexity is larger in reading for translation than in normal L2 reading, indicating that translators use the morphological structure in L2 words when considering possible translations into L1.

All three questions are addressed in mixed-effects regression analyses which investigate the effects of morphological parameters when other relevant variables are statistically controlled. The focus is on differences between morphologically simple and complex words and on various morpheme frequencies, and on the interaction of these variables with differences between normal L2 reading and L2 reading for translation. The use of mixed-effects models means that certain problems of experimental control are avoided and allows the simultaneous investigation of a number of variables, including considerations of translation equivalence.

References

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