Suffix combinations in the mental lexicon

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There is much research on how people process words but it has not been investigated whether pieces of words such as suffix combinations play a role in the mental lexicon. Thus this study is the first attempt at discovering the representation of combined suffixes in the mental lexicon.

A derived word may be further derived to create another word of the type BASE-SUFFIX1-SUFFIX2, e.g. *lead-er-ship*. Bulgarian, Russian, English, and Italian data have shown that in such derivations SUFF1 relates to SUFF2 in specific ways and the combinations of the derivational suffixes are either fixed or predicable (Bagasheva and Manova 2013, Manova 2011, 2015, Manova and Talamo 2015). Fixed combinations are those in which SUFF1 is always followed by only one SUFF2 of a major lexical category (noun, adjective, verb). In a predictable combination, SUFF1 is followed by more than one SUFF2 of a lexical category but one of the SUFF2 suffixes dominates over the others, i.e. it derives a great number of words, whereas all other SUFF2 suffixes derive a very limited number of words; or different SUFF2 suffixes of the same lexical category derive different semantics, e.g. an object and an abstract noun. To uncover the status of derivational suffix combinations in the mental lexicon we conducted a psycholinguistic experiment on the processing of existing and non-existing combinations in Polish, a language that is similar to the aforementioned languages with respect to combinability of derivational suffixes. The experiment consists in identification and discriminating between existing and non-existing suffix combinations. Non-existing suffix combinations were generated by manipulating letters or changing the order of the suffixes from the legal suffix combinations. The paper will report on the results of the experiment and discuss what those results reveal about the organization of the mental lexicon.

References

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