Factors affecting the processing of compounds in the L2

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Compound processing has a particular place in the psycholinguistic literature since it contributes to our understanding of the mental representation/processing of multimorphemic words and allows us to examine the role of factors such as constituency, frequency, and semantic transparency in processing complex words. Previous studies involving different languages have revealed the role of semantic transparency and headedness in compound processing (Jarema et al., 1999; Libben et al., 2003). In second language (L2) acquisition, the effects of semantic transparency and headedness are found to vary on the basis of L2 proficiency (Wang, 2010).

The present study investigates the processing of nominal compounds in L2 Turkish, a language with right-headed and productive compounding. In a masked priming experiment, 35 advanced, 36 intermediate level learners of Turkish with L1 English and 73 Turkish monolinguals were tested. The stimuli consisted of 10 transparent-transparent, 10 partially-opaque compounds, 10 pseudocompounds and 60 monomorphemic words together with 90 nonwords matched on length and frequency.

A 2x3x3 Mixed ANOVA for the RTs revealed that for monolinguals, semantic transparency plays a role in constituent activation as both constituents are accessed in partially-opaque compounds and only the head is accessed in transparent-transparent compounds. L2 participants, however, exhibited no priming effects irrespective of their proficiency level, implying that neither headedness nor transparency plays a role in processing L2 compounds in late learners.

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