

The processes governing first language vocabulary acquisition involve learning phonological/orthographic forms, syntactic frames, and associating these with new conceptual features. In second language vocabulary training, it appears that the learning burden is lightened since conceptual information has normally already been acquired. Nonetheless, this process is an intricate part of second language acquisition development. Learners often find that a single form can map onto multiple concepts and that some lexical forms lack equivalents in the first language.

Recently, Tokowicz & Kroll (in press) show that the number of available translations for concrete and abstract words also determines the organization in the bilingual mental lexicon. The research reported here investigated, the existence of a correlation between concreteness and translation ambiguity.

A translation recognition task from Spanish to English was conducted with incipient bilinguals. It was expected that the number of translation equivalents would not affect the performance for concrete words but that abstract words with a single translation would be recognized faster than abstract words with multiple translations. Furthermore, concrete words with a single translation would be recognized as fast as abstract words with a single translation but that concrete words with multiple translations would be recognized faster than abstract words with multiple translations.

Reaction times were obtained using DMDX, a reaction time software. A significant interaction was observed between concrete words with a single translation equivalent and abstract words with multiple translation equivalents. The results are discussed and linked back to the predictions of the Distributed Feature Model (de Groot, 1992a).