

Title: L2 vocabulary learning at different proficiencies: Do the rich really get richer?

Presenter: Irina Elgort, Victoria University of Wellington

Abstract: What is the role of lexical proficiency in learning new words in a second or foreign language? Is its effect on learning quantitative, qualitative, or both? Studies in applied linguistics suggest that there is a quantitative effect, with more proficient bilinguals being able to learn more new words from reading (Pulido, 2007; Horst, Cobb & Meara, 1998). There is also evidence from psycholinguistic studies that the learning of meaning proceeds differently for less and more proficiency bilinguals (Finkbeiner, Forster, Nicol, & Nakamura, 2004; Kroll, Michael, Tokowicz, & Dufour, 2002). Recent neurolinguistic studies suggest that there are qualitative differences in lexical processing, as L2 processing involves more extended activity of the neural system for less proficient than more proficient bilinguals and native speakers, with brain areas related to cognitive control involved in the former (Autalebi, 2008).

In this presentation, results from two experimental studies (Elgort, Perfetti, Rickles, & Stafura, 2014; Elgort & Piasecki, 2013) will be used to provide evidence of quantitative and qualitatively differences in the outcomes of intentional and incidental L2 vocabulary learning. In the first study, deliberate learning using bilingual flashcards resulted in high quality lexical-semantic representations for higher but not lower proficiency adult German-English bilinguals, even though there were no differences in their ability to connect meaning and form in a pen and paper test. In the second study, higher proficiency but not lower proficiency adult L2 participants were able to access abstracted meanings of incidentally learned words in a speeded semantic judgment task. Implications of these findings for L2 vocabulary learning will be discussed.

Elgort, I., Perfetti, C.A., Rickles, B., & Stafura, J.Z. (2014). Contextual learning of L2 word meanings: Second language proficiency modulates behavioural and ERP indicators of learning. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 30(5), 506-528.

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Elgort, I. & Piasecki, A. (2013). The effect of a bilingual learning mode on the establishment of lexical-semantic representations in the L2. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 17(3), pp. 572-588.

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