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MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE ON WORD RECOGNITION IN L2 (RUSSIAN-TATAR CASE STUDY)¹

Olga V. Nagel

olga.nagel2012@yandex.ru

Irina G. Temnikova

irtem@sibmail.com

National Research Tomsk State University (Tomsk, Russia)

The research is focused on the issue of selective and non-selective lexical access studying whether the bilingual word-recognition process in languages sharing the same alphabet involves the initial activation of word representations from a mother tongue only (language-selective lexical access) or whether the words known to an individual, including L2 words, are considered as potential candidates for recognition (non-selective access). The aim of the study is to check how the origin of words influences processing mechanisms in Russian-Tatar bilinguals fluent both in Russian and Tatar but living in the Russian speaking environment, and whether native speakers of Russian can sense a foreign origin of the words which were adopted by the Russian language centuries ago, but still retain some phonological characteristics of the original language.

Stimuli and design. The stimuli used in the present study are nouns controlled for frequency and matched for length measured in number of letters. 100 nouns of Turkic origin in the Russian language and 100 nouns of Russian origin in the Turkic language (Tatar) were used in Lexical Decision Task to identify the traces of native language influences among native speakers of Tatar and Russian. The stimuli also include 100 pseudo words.

Procedure. To conduct the experiment we used E-Prime 2.0 (Copyright 1996-2012 Psychology Software Tools). Two pseudo-randomized lists (words and non-words) containing 200 stimuli were made so that the same condition in the word list was presented no more than 3 times at a run. The participants are tested in a computer class individually. Before the experimental session the participants have a practice session (15 original items, which were not included into the experiment) after which they are free to ask questions if they have any before starting the experimental session. Both the practice session and the experimental session are preceded by the instruction on LDT. Subjects are to make judgments about whether or not a string of letters appearing in the center of the screen is a common Russian word (“press 1 if it is a word, and 0 if it is not a word”). In the experiment each trial starts with a fixation cross ap-

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pearing in the center of the screen (500 ms) followed by a noun in the Cyrillic alphabet in upper case letters (100ms) remaining on the screen till a response, but not more than 2000 ms. The trial ends in an intertrial interval (250 ms). The experiment session lasts for 12 minutes average.

Prior to the experiment, the participants were asked to do a questionnaire to reveal their bilingual language status (the questionnaire is based on Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire by Viorica Marian, Henrike K. Blumenfeld, Margarita Kaushanskaya 2007). The participants were to arrange the languages they speak in the order of domination, and in the temporal order of exposure to languages. Besides, they were asked to assess the amount of time they during which they are exposed to Russian and Tatar now, as well as to determine their identity. Apart from this, they assessed their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in both Russian and Tatar.

The collected self-reported data from 38 Russian-Tatar bilinguals, 24 women and 14 men, aged 19 to 84, showed a considerable diversity in their self-assessment of the level of mastering the language all of them consider to be their native one – the Tatar language, though the participants unanimously display the oral speech bias (24 and 10 participants reported excellent and good listening skills, 14 and 18 – excellent and good speaking skills, while 10 people admitted it was extremely difficult for them to write). The Russian language is determined by the experiment participants as a more active one (they speak Russian much more frequently). The level of their mastering listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in Russian the participants consider to be very high (31 participants consider their listening reading and skills in Russian to be excellent, other participants consider them to be good; 29 participants consider their speaking and writing skills in Russian to be excellent, other participants consider them to be good).

The research is on the go; nevertheless, some preliminary results are available. The first results seem to support the idea that the exposure to the mother tongue, short as it might be, affects the way bilinguals process L2 words, related to L1 origin, which is observed in their decreased RT in LDT, whereas, Russian speakers' RT is increased when they process words of Tatar origin though adopted and assimilated by the Russian language. Further experiments are designed to be conducted on the same material but using priming methodology.

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