

Semantic networks in the Korean mental lexicon
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Abstract

Our study investigates the interaction between morphemic ambiguity and semantic transparency in lexical processing of Korean words, including priming effects found between non-categorical relations, all areas where compelling accounts are unavailable. More than seventy percent of the Korean lexicon is borrowed from Chinese, which has resulted in Korean having homophonous homographic morphemes that map onto the semantics of different Chinese characters (Hanja). Depending on the homograph, the number of available meanings, and thus the degree of semantic competition involved in selection of the appropriate meaning, varies considerably. Crucially, unlike polysemy and homonymy, these meanings are not necessarily categorically related. On the evidence of three semantic (one visual, two cross-modal) priming experiments, we find Korean speakers to be sensitive to non-categorically related meanings at the sub-lexical level, mediated through the shared homograph representation. Only in spoken word recognition is priming significantly modulated by the number of competing meanings. Although generally consistent with the swinging lexical network model (Abdel Rahman & Melinger 2009), we argue that there is strong cohort-induced competition at the sub-lexical level, which doubly interacts with the “swinging” effects of the semantics of the Hanja characters at the conceptual level. Our findings represent an important step towards developing a more fully-fledged model of the Korean mental lexicon that, unlike existing conceptualizations, attempts to account for the precise processing contributions of Hanja characters. Furthermore, not only do our findings contribute to the ongoing discussion of the status of morpho-semantic representations, but also sheds light on a new type of cohort characterized by non-categorical semantic relations.

Keywords: *Psycholinguistics, mental lexicon, semantic processing, Korean, Hanja characters*

References

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Biography

I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics at the University of Oxford. I conduct behavioral work investigating the semantic networks that underpin language processing in Professor Aditi Lahiri's Language and Brain Laboratory. I am also a member of the Cultural Brain Group within the Psychology of Language Department at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, where we are currently exploring the statistical regularities of Hangul.