

Word Recognition - Training Methods

What are the standard methods for training word recognition and which are the most effective for children in the first stage of learning English as a second language?

J. Schleicher, J. Wells
Anglistik – Freie Universität Berlin

Introduction

Word recognition for people who learn English as their second language has various factors to consider: Word Frequency, Morphological Family Size, Word Length, English Orthographic Neighbourhood, Number of Meanings, Syntactic Ambiguity, Semantic Variables, Concreteness, Familiarity, Meaningfulness, Between-Language Variables, Interlingual Cognates and Homographs. The most frequent methods for training better word recognition are categorized in visual, phonic, kinesthetic and a combination or a mix of those three methods. First, we will give you a few examples for methods for each category to give an overview of the methods cores. Later we will give results of a study which analysed their efficiency.

Kinesthetic method – learning through movement and “hands on” activities

Example method: Charade

1. The vocabulary is written on single pieces of paper
2. They all go into a pot
3. Now every child gets a turn to come up and pull out one word
4. Everyone now gets a chance to act out the word in front of the class while the class tries to guess the word

Combination of methods – a combination of the phonic, visual and kinesthetic method

Example method: Word Fetch

1. label different objects in the classroom with the proper vocabulary
2. ask the children to line up in two rows
3. the first two children now get the instruction like: get me something to write with, something blue, something soft etc.
4. the children need to first say the word out loud (the whole row can help) than go and fetch it
5. the first one with the proper object gets to write the word on the blackboard
6. the slower one must create a sentence with the word
7. this method can be used outside as well to give more room to run around

Visual method

The process of visually recognizing words through mapping the orthography onto phonology and semantics. The learner has to familiarize with the phonetic, morphologic, syntactic and semantic features of English. The learner has to recogniz the word over and over again to build up a representation in the mental lexicon. Experienced readers recognize words via the orthographical decoding route

Example method: Read and repeat

1. Reading, Writing, Vocabulary teaching, language transfer
2. Write down the unknown words an flashcards
3. The student has five seconds. If no instant word recognition is shown, the card is put aside to repeat the procedure later, until all words are recognized instantly.
4. Go through them multiple times while sorting out the ones the learner has acquired. Repeat this method until all the words are learned. This way the individually occurring difficulty of the word recognition is being tackled down and precisely solved.
5. Repeat until word recognition is improved

Phonic method - Decoding a sound to its (orthographical) meaning

Phonological information is always used to some degree in word recognition and is the very basis for orthographical decoding. Word recognition in beginning readers is primarily accomplished via the phonological recoding route

Example method: attentiv listening

1. Listening to native speakers
2. Listening to texts which are read aloud

Data

Mean RTs (Absolute and Logarithmic) for Correct Trials (in ms), Error Rates, and Standard Deviations in the Progressive Demasking Task for the Four Participant Groups

Participant group	RT		Log RT		Error rate (%)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
French	1,698	425	7.41	0.24	1.91	13.7
German	1,723	454	7.42	0.26	2.17	14.6
Dutch	1,619	451	7.36	0.26	2.24	14.8
English	1,607	395	7.35	0.24	1.92	13.7

Note. RT = reaction time.

To find out if we had to specify Methods for native Germans to train their English word recognition, we consulted the following study:

This study tested the difference in word recognition, depending on your first language (L1), in English (L2). The participants had three different native languages, which were either German, Dutch or French. Additionally, there was a control group of native English speakers. The aim of the study was to compare the influence of the three different languages on their English word recognition. They only used comparisons from languages with the same alphabet. All of them were from western Europe. In order to test if there are meaningful differences between their word recognition in English, the study used the following factors to analyse the results: Word Frequency, Morphological Family Size, Word Length, English Orthographic Neighbourhood, Number of Meanings, Syntactic Ambiguity, Semantic Variables, Concreteness, Familiarity, Meaningfulness, Between-Language Variables, Interlingual Cognates and Homographs.

Another study tested the four methods on pupils from grade two to four, rating their successfulness on a scale from zero to ten. The subjects were 39 boys and 19 girls of five public schools in Pasco County, Florida. The subjects were divided into nine classifications for purposes of treatment. Each of the three age levels was then divided into three groups of intelligence levels.

The basic purpose of the study was to determine the teaching method or combination of methods most effective in teaching word recognition to various types of individuals. In order to obtain specific techniques or steps that would be typical of a particular method of teaching word recognition, six activities were selected for each method on the basis of frequency of mention in the literature. For each method these specific teaching activities were outlined in the manual of directions for the Learning Methods Test.

AGE GROUP AND METHOD	LOW INTELLIGENCE (65-80)		AVERAGE INTELLIGENCE (85-100)		HIGH INTELLIGENCE (105-20)		ALL GROUPS	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Seven-year-olds:	5 pupils		5 pupils		5 pupils		15 pupils	
Visual.....	4.0	3.24	7.6	1.14	9.6	0.55	7.1	3.03
Phonic.....	1.8	3.03	5.2	1.92	8.8	1.10	5.3	3.58
Kinesthetic....	4.0	2.86	4.8	2.49	6.4	2.51	5.1	2.63
Combination...	3.2	2.77	7.8	1.79	8.6	1.14	6.5	3.09
All methods....	...	...	...	...	...	...	6.0	3.14
Eight-year-olds:	5 pupils		6 pupils		5 pupils		16 pupils	
Visual.....	2.4	1.34	7.5	1.64	9.2	.84	6.4	3.16
Phonic.....	1.8	.45	7.2	1.94	9.0	1.22	6.1	3.33
Kinesthetic....	6.0	.71	7.3	1.96	9.2	1.10	7.5	1.86
Combination...	3.8	.84	8.3	.81	9.6	.55	7.3	2.60
All methods....	...	...	...	...	...	...	6.8	2.80
Nine-year-olds:	9 pupils		12 pupils		6 pupils		27 pupils	
Visual.....	6.0	2.78	8.1	1.57	9.2	1.60	7.6	2.34
Phonic.....	5.1	3.10	7.1	1.97	8.7	1.21	6.8	2.59
Kinesthetic....	5.9	2.20	5.9	1.97	8.2	2.14	6.4	2.22
Combination...	6.0	3.04	7.4	1.38	9.0	2.04	7.3	2.38
All methods....	...	...	...	...	...	...	7.0	2.40
All subjects:	19 pupils		23 pupils		16 pupils		58 pupils	
Visual.....	4.5	2.93	7.8	1.47	9.3	1.08	7.2	2.77
Phonic.....	3.4	3.04	6.7	2.03	8.8	1.11	6.2	3.89
Kinesthetic....	5.4	2.19	6.0	2.18	7.9	2.20	6.4	2.38
Combination...	4.7	2.77	7.7	1.36	9.1	1.39	7.1	2.61
All methods....	4.5	2.80	7.1	1.92	8.8	1.57	6.7	2.74

Results

The results of the first study showed that there are no meaningful differences for learners of English, depending on their native language. Which means that there should not have to be different methods of training English word recognition depending on the native language.

“One possible implication of this result is that during reading in a second language, word recognition is mainly determined by factors within that language itself, and that it should thus be similar for all users of this language.” (K. Lemhöfer. 2008)

The secound study revealed that the different children learn to recognize words most efficiently by different teaching methods and therefore the way of teaching works best when adapting to the individual learners, through offering pupils a variation of the learning methods.

Conclusion

In conclusion one can see that methods across the global community can be used across the board for all learners of English to train word recognition. There is no difference in methods for different native languages. However one should always adjust the methods used, to the individual learners. The best solution would therefor be to always present the students with different methods so they can choose the one that fits them best.

References

K. Lemhöfer, T. Dijkstra, H. Schriefers, R. H. Baayen, J. Grainger. (2008) Native Language Influences on Word Recognition in a Second Language: A Megastudy. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition 2008, Vol. 34, No. 1, 12–31

R. Mills (1956) An evaluation of techniques for teaching word recognition. The Elementary School Journal Vol. 56, No. 5, pp. 221-225.