

Facilitation in Second Language Word Meaning Evaluation from Masked Primes

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Abstract: An experiment with 90 students learning Spanish as a second language was conducted to investigate 1) the ability of cross-language primes to facilitate semantic decisions which required L2 meaning retrieval of recently learned words, and 2) the relationship between prime facilitation and prime awareness. The priming task consisted of a Spanish word presented in the upper third of the computer display, followed by two pictures in the lower left and right corners of the display. Our results indicated facilitation in vocabulary response time was substantial at both 67 and 83 ms prime exposure duration. There was no dependable facilitation at 50 ms exposure. It was concluded that automatic prime effects, independent of strategic processing of primes, might offer an important tool for reducing the working memory load inherent in initial L2 acquisition which could allow greater opportunity for the acquisition of semantic and structural elements of the new language.