How far does the awareness go? Results from a written plural preference task on analogous and non-analogous novel noun plurals in German

Peter Horn; Guido Nottbusch

University of Potsdam, Germany

According to Apel's (2014) comprehensive definition, morphological awareness encompasses rules that describe how affixes attach to base words "including changes to those base words" (p. 200). The German plural system has a rich allomorphy containing six plural suffixes, three of which show supplementary Umlaut, i.e., a vowel alternation, which leads to a phonological and orthographic shift of the base as in *Frosch* [fʁɔʃ] – *Frösche* [ˈfʁœʃə] (frog – frogs). The presence or absence of Umlaut within overt plural markers is an interesting research case as it comprises both, rules for obligatory occurrence and complete arbitrariness. We make use of this distinct distribution to investigate, whether regularities of the Umlaut distribution have been identified implicitly and whether speakers are aware of it and can use this knowledge to treat pseudowords adequately. Alternatively, where no rules can be applied, do they make use of word-specific knowledge (analogy strategy)? A total of 106 German-speaking adults participated in this online task on plural preference. Items were presented in written form and either prone to a single-form analogy by significant orthographic overlap to an existing word (analogous pseudowords), and items that exhibit virtually no lexical neighbors (non-analogous pseudowords). The results indicate that speakers make analogies between pseudowords and real words and base their judgments on the plural behavior of the analogous words. However, we could observe an umlaut bias that weighed even more than single-form analogies. In case of pseudowords that mimic real words that undergo Umlaut in plural by rule, participants preferred plural forms with Umlaut over forms without Umlaut. This result remained (albeit slightly weaker) even with non-analogous pseudowords. We interpret these results as evidence for both, awareness of word-specific knowledge and of morphological rules including a change to the base. Results are useful as baseline before testing children with a developing morphological system.

Apel, K. (2014). A Comprehensive Definition of Morphological Awareness: Implications for Assessment. *Topics in Language Disorders*, *34*(3), 197-209. https://doi-org/10.1097/TLD.0000000000000019