

Investigating responses to borrowed vs. native and unassimilated vs. assimilated words in circumstances when no choice between words is required

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Objective

The goal of this study was to find out whether the distinctions in perception between a lexical loan and its native synonym, or between an unassimilated and assimilated variant of a loan, are strong enough to affect subjects' responses in circumstances when their attention has not been directed to the words in question. Two questionnaires were designed, one containing statements and the other very short stories in Polish, to which the subjects were expected to respond in a certain way. Each questionnaire was prepared in two versions, completely identical with the exception that wherever a loanword was present in one version, its native synonym appeared in the other version, or wherever an unassimilated variant of a loan was present in one version, its assimilated counterpart appeared in the other. Loanwords and their native synonyms were randomly distributed between the two versions of each questionnaire, as were unassimilated and assimilated variants of loans. Each subject answered only one version of a questionnaire, thus being unaware of either the goal of the experiment or even the very existence of the other version. Unlike in some other experiments, the subjects were not expected to choose between words or to base their decisions on comparisons of words; instead, their responses to statements and short stories containing certain words were measured.

Questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 1 began with the following instruction:

<p>W kwestionariuszu tym prosimy Cię o ocenę treści pewnych wypowiedzi. Za każdym razem wyraż ją przez wybór liczby z przedziału od 0 do 100, gdzie 0 znaczy „Zupełnie się nie zgadzam”, 100 znaczy „Zgadzam się całkowicie”, a pozostałe liczby wyrażają ocenę pośrednią. Ankieta jest anonimowa, więc możesz się wypowiadać szczerze.</p>	<p>In this questionnaire we ask you to assess the content of some statements. Each time make your assessment by choosing a number between 0 to 100, where 0 means 'I completely disagree', 100 means 'I could not agree more', and other numbers express an intermediate opinion. The survey is anonymous, so you can express your opinion freely.</p>
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An example statement from the first version of the questionnaire was:

Absurdalne decyzje urzędników zawsze szkodzą gospodarce.	The absurd decisions made by government officials always harm the economy.
Twoja ocena (od 0 do 100):	Your assessment (0 to 100) :

The corresponding statement from the second version of the questionnaire was:

Niedorzeczne decyzje urzędników zawsze szkodzą gospodarce.	The unreasonable decisions made by government officials always harm the economy.
Twoja ocena (od 0 do 100):	Your assessment (0 to 100) :

and differed from the first version only in the use of the native adjective *niedorzeczny* 'unreasonable, preposterous' in place of the loanword *absurdalny* 'absurd'. There were 30 statements of this kind in the first version of the questionnaire and the same number in the second version.

The two versions were saved as spreadsheets by means of the Google documents utility and were made available publicly by placing their addresses on a few websites popular among the students of the University of Warsaw. Different addresses were published on different websites in order to reduce the possibility that the same person would fill in both versions of the questionnaire. The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire only once. They were not informed what the goal of the study was or that the focus was on words rather than facts.

In sum, 140 responses were obtained for the first version and over 180 for the second version. The subjects were students of various faculties of the University of Warsaw, their average age being 22. The ratio of women to men for the first variant was around 4 to 1, while for the second variant it was about 3 to 1.

Questionnaire 2

Questionnaire 2 began with the following instruction:

<p>W kwestionariuszu tym prosimy Cię o przeczytanie krótkich historyjek i wyobrażenie sobie przedstawionych w nich zdarzeń lub sytuacji.</p> <p>Kiedy to zrobisz, za każdym razem wybierz zdanie, którego treść wydaje Ci się bardziej prawdopodobna. Ankieta jest anonimowa i służy tylko celom naukowym. Odpowiadaj zgodnie ze swoimi przekonaniem lub intuicją.</p>	<p>In this questionnaire we ask you to read short stories and imagine the events or situations presented in them. When you do so, each time choose the sentence whose content seems more realistic to you.</p> <p>The survey is anonymous and serves research purposes only. Give answers according to your convictions or intuitions.</p>
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An example story from the first version of the questionnaire was:

<p>W czasie wakacji Michał i Ewa nocowali na campingach. Wrócili zadowoleni i pełni wrażeń.</p> <p>Jak myślisz, gdzie i jak spędzili wakacje Michał i Ewa? Wybierz bardziej prawdopodobną odpowiedź (tylko jedną), ujmując jej numer w kółko.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spędzili wakacje za granicą, podróżując samochodem. Mogli korzystać z kuchni, łazienek i basenu. Wypadło im trochę taniej, niż gdyby nocowali w hotelach. 2. Spędzili wakacje w Polsce, jeżdżąc na rowerach. Gotowali na ognisku, a myli się przeważnie w jeziorze. Za noclegi nie zapłacili prawie nic. 	<p>During their holiday, Michael and Eve stayed at campsites. They returned home satisfied and full of impressions.</p> <p>How do you think Michael and Eve spent their holiday? Choose the more realistic answer (only one) by circling its number.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They spent their holiday abroad, travelling by car. They had access to a kitchen, a bathroom and a swimming pool. It came out a little cheaper than if they had stayed at hotels. 2. They spent their holiday in Poland, travelling on bikes. They cooked on campfires and usually washed in a lake. They paid next to nothing for the lodging.
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The corresponding story from the second version of the questionnaire differed in one word only: the assimilated variant *kemping* took place of the English-based variant *camping* 'campsite'. There were 10 stories of this kind in the first version of the questionnaire and the same number in the second version. The order of the stories was controlled so that loans and native words as well as assimilated and non-assimilated variants were mixed and no story could be seen as a sequel to the previous one.

The questionnaire was printed out and distributed partly among students of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw, and partly among students of Psychology and Cognitive Science at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw. The former had about 10 minutes to fill in the forms at their classes, the latter had about the same time at a lecture, thus making one minute per story on average. After a few incomplete forms were excluded, a total of 114 questionnaires were obtained, 57 for each version. The age of most of the subjects was about 20, with a higher variation among the psychologists than the Polish Studies students. The ratio of females to males was about 7 to 1 and it was higher at the Faculty of Polish Studies than at the Faculty of Psychology.

Results

The results of questionnaire 1 and questionnaire 2 are available in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. On the basis of previous research carried out in this project – in particular, the free association study and the corpus-based studies of borrowed vs. native and unassimilated vs. assimilated words – some responses in the questionnaires were more expected than others. In the appendices, the expected results are set against the actual results, so that it was easy to compare them.

Generally speaking, only half of the results obtained were congruent with expectations. In questionnaire 1, such congruence was observed for 15 statements out of 30 (for 9 statements the results did not differ and for 6 statements they were contrary to expectations). In questionnaire 2, congruence with expectations was observed for 6 stories out of 10 (for 3 stories the results did not differ and for 1 story they were contrary to expectations). Moreover, even

when the preference exhibited by the subjects' responses was in line with what was expected, the difference usually turned out to be statistically insignificant.

In questionnaire 1, the subjects were asked to give numerical assessments of how well they agreed with the content of certain statements. Since the distribution of answers turned out to significantly diverge from normal distribution (in all the cases the Kolmogorov-Smirnoff test was significant), we calculated median answers for each version of the questionnaire. To find out whether the differences between the groups were significant, a U Mann-Whitney test was applied. The difference proved significant, or close to significant, in the case of the following seven statement pairs (ordered the same way as in Appendix 1). It is worth noting, however, that in the second and the second-to-last pairs the difference was contrary to expectations.

Kiedy ważni urzędnicy dają się **przekupywać/korumpować**, prowadzi to do rozkładu państwa. ($p = 0.1$)

Jeśli w mieszkaniu zbierze się gaz, to wystarczy iskra i **wybuch/eksplozja** zniszczy cały dom. ($p = 0.09$)

Wyznawcy kultu **wudu/voodoo**, rozpowszechnionego na Haiti i na południu USA, posługują się magią. ($p < 0.001$)

Rząd powinien reagować na każdy **symptom/objaw** kryzysu gospodarczego ($p = 0.092$).

Już pierwsze **symptomy/objawy** nudy w małżeństwie powinny być powodem do niepokoju ($p = 0.01$).

Trujące/toksyczne substancje nawet w małych ilościach są szkodliwe ($p = 0.083$).

Rząd, który nie potrafi łagodzić skutków **stagnacji** gospodarczej / **zastoju** gospodarczego, powinien ustąpić, nawet jeśli ma sukcesy w innych dziedzinach ($p = 0.053$).

In questionnaire 2, a chi-square test was used to check whether the distribution of the subjects' responses to short stories was significantly different in the first version of the questionnaire than in the second. Only one of the ten stories showed a difference at the tendency level: the one in which the adjectives *komfortowy* 'luxury, luxurious' and *wygodny* 'comfortable' were contrasted ($p = 0.085$).

Coming back to questionnaire 1, it is worth paying attention to how it is constructed. Except for pages 1 and 10, which contained three statements intended to investigate three different words, the remaining eight pages contained three statements meant to investigate just one word each. There are, for example, three statements with the occidentalized, hypercorrect variant *torreador* 'bull fighter' (plus three mirror statements with its etymologically justified counterpart *toreador* in the other version of the questionnaire), there are three statements with the native verb *przekupywać* 'bribe' (plus three mirror statements with its foreign synonym *korumpować* 'corrupt'), etc. By devising the questionnaire this way, it was hoped not only to test different aspects of the words' meaning and use, but also to check whether the subjects' responses to particular words would be consistent.

It should be noted, therefore, that the level of consistency was low. In none of the eight pages intended to test the consistency in the subjects' responses were all three statement pairs assessed in accordance with expectations. Whenever one statement was assessed in line with expectations, another statement was not, or no difference was observed between the results.

Discussion

In view of the discrepancy between the expected results and the actual results, the study reported here can be considered a failure. Obviously, no one would expect one hundred percent agreement between the observations and assumptions, but when the agreement is around fifty percent, as found in this study, it is at a chance level. The lack of statistical significance of most of

the differences observed and the low level of consistency in the subjects' responses are also disappointing, indicating great variability among the participants, which, however, is to be expected when dealing with semantic material.

It is important to try to identify why the expected results and the actual results are so different. For one thing, this could deepen our understanding of how and when the difference in the origin of words may affect the behavior of language users. Moreover, a new study could then be devised, better suited to the goal the present study failed to achieve.

Although it is not certain, there is much to suggest that the subjects' responses were influenced by their knowledge of the referents and real life situations appearing in the materials, rather than the form of the words used to name them. For example, because the incompetence of government officials is often complained about, the responses to the first statement in questionnaire 1 were practically identical, no matter which of the two words was used to describe the officials' decisions: *absurdalny* 'absurd' or *niedorzeczny* 'unreasonable'. Similarly, because crisps are said to be harmful and fattening when consumed to excess, especially by school children who eat them at breaks between lessons, the difference in responses to the second story in questionnaire 2 proved insignificant statistically, although the trend to judge *chipsy* 'crisps' (a more prestigious variant, graphically unassimilated) as less harmful than *czipsy* (a less prestigious and less frequent form, graphically assimilated) did agree with expectations.

It is important to remember that the subjects of both questionnaires were university students, their knowledge and personal experience being determined by their age. In the first story of questionnaire 2, they usually chose the second sentence as more realistic to them, because it reflected their idea of spending holidays on campsites: no caravans, no amenities, no unnecessary expenditures. Were the subjects older, at the age when people are married and independent financially, they would probably choose the first sentence, because their idea of campsite holidays would be different. Whether the campsite was referred to with the word *camping* or *kemping*, had no influence on the subjects' decisions: in both versions of this story the distribution of answers was exactly the same.

Identical distribution was also observed in the answers to another story, in which the words *dealer* and *diler* were contrasted. As before, the subjects' life experience made them imagine the referent as a drug seller rather than a car vendor, irrespective of the form of the name used. Would the subjects' choice be different, if they were at an older age? We cannot be certain, but it is worth noting here that in corpus analysis a clear tendency was observed to associate the word *dealer* with car vendors and its assimilated variant *diler* with drug sellers.

The conjecture that the subjects' responses were guided more by their knowledge of the referents of the words investigated than by the form of the words themselves is further reinforced by the comments the subjects were allowed to make in questionnaire 1. A total of about 140 comments were received, more for some statements of the questionnaire than for others. Often the subjects noted that the statements were imprecise and therefore difficult to assess, but they also expressed their attitudes, thus extending – and explaining – the assessments they made. For example, referring to the statement *Polska ma moralny obowiązek wspierać rebeliantów w krajach rządzonych autorytarnie* 'Poland has the moral duty to support rebels in dictatorially governed countries', one person noted that Poland should not interfere in any conflicts which do not affect Poland, even if they concern neighbouring countries.

All that does not mean, of course, that there is no difference in perception between lexical loans and their native synonyms or between unassimilated and assimilated variants of loans. Indeed, a free association study conducted before this suggests that such a difference does exist. What the

questionnaire studies reported here have shown is that the difference is not strong enough to affect the subjects' responses in circumstances when their attention has not been directed to the words in question. If so, it will be worthwhile to prepare a new questionnaire in which the subjects would be expected to make a choice between words rather than their referents. For example, instead of asking the subjects which of two given options is closer to their idea of campsite holidays, one could ask them which word they find more appropriate in a campsite name: *camping* (coming from English, a prestigious language in Poland) or *kemping* (its assimilated variant).

Conducting a survey of this kind will be the next step in our investigation of the perception of loanwords vs. native words and unassimilated vs. assimilated variants of loans.

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