Chapter 11
Bilingual Mental Lexicon and Collocational Processing

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ABSTRACT

The chapter starts with a definition and models of mental dictionary. It then builds on the bilingual lexical activation models and goes on to discuss formulaic language (collocations in particular). After explaining the basics of formulaic language processing, the author attempts to address the issue of lexical and collocational priming theory by Hoey, which has its roots in cognitive linguistics and usage-based language models. Last but not least, some suggestions for future research are provided in an attempt to address the needs of the lexical research literature in the Turkish setting.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of monolingual and bilingual mental lexicon has intrigued linguists who are interested in cognitive aspects of language processing and psycholinguistics, in particular, for a long time. There have been controversial issues in the literature regarding how the lexicon is organized, if bilinguals have two separate lexicons, and whether both languages of the bilinguals compete for lexical selection during lexical processing etc. Those who have conducted research exploring lexical processing to model the monolingual and bilingual mental lexicons appear to have concentrated on single lexical units only. Although the processing of formulaic expressions has been investigated in many studies, few or almost none of them, to the writer's knowledge, seem to scrutinize cross-linguistic influence and its reflection on the

structuring of mental lexicon. Furthermore, while studies exploring collocational processing in English seem to be abound, research investigating the case in a morphologically different language (i.e. Turkish) appears to be lacking. With these controversies and unanswered questions in mind, the chapter attempts to shed light on the monolingual and bilingual mental lexicon models proposed so far, draw the attention of the readers to the processing of formulaic expressions (collocations in particular) and question their possible influence on the organization of the internal lexicon. To this end, this chapter addresses monolingual lexicon models, bilingual mental lexicon models, formulaic language, collocations, and collocational priming, respectively in an attempt to raise awareness about the need to explore cross-linguistic collocational priming, searching for a collocational spreading activation framework at a cross-linguistic level, if any.

Mental Lexicon

Many linguists agree that mental lexicon is defined as systematic representation of words in permanent memory (Carroll, 2004). An analogy is drawn between a physical dictionary and a mental dictionary, but this superficial resemblance is regarded very simplistic considering the psycholinguistic aspect of lexis and the interconnected nature of words in the internal lexicon as opposed to a relatively mechanic representation of words in an actual dictionary where words are provided as lists of items with different senses. The way the language is used by exploiting networks of words is too complex to be reflected in a dictionary alone. As Aitchison (2003) states the lexical items in an actual dictionary are static, whereas the internal dictionary is dynamic. Languages evolve in time and language users' linguistic knowledge also tends to transform, as a result of which the mental representations of words seem to change. A more crucial difference between a traditional dictionary and a mental dictionary can be observed in the accessibility of the linguistic information stored. In a paper dictionary, one can access any lexical entry equally regardless of their frequency, salience, context etc. On the other hand, the lexical items that are stored in our mental dictionary have varying levels of accessibility depending on the item's association with other words, its commonly preferred context, its imageability etc. One last difference can be seen in the form of the stored information. A paper dictionary includes verbal information, whereas the mental dictionary consists not only verbal but also conceptual representation. The internal lexicon is similar to a network of interconnected nodes which are comparable to groups of neurons in the human brain (Aitchison, 2003).

Singleton (1999) thinks that the mental dictionary is an integral part of human long term memory containing the language user's all linguistic knowledge. In a recent and a more comprehensive description, Roux (2013, p.82) states that mental

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