

Abstract

More evidences (e.g. Tsang & Chen, 2010) showed that morphological processing exists in Chinese compounds recognition. However, few study has investigated how contextual constrains may affect the morphological processing of compounds. The present study examined the recognition of auditory compound words within three different kinds of sentences: strong context, weak context, and ambiguous context. Visual world paradigm was employed in the present study: subjects listened to a sentence in which the last word was the target (e.g., 龍蝦), and when they heard the target, three pictures (e.g., one for 龍, one for 龍蝦, and one irrelevant) were presented, and they were asked to find the picture of the target. Subjects' eye fixation information was recorded. Results show that in weak and ambiguous contexts, subjects were more likely to fixated on the morpheme picture (i.e. 龍) when they heard the first character, suggesting that the activation of morphemes vary with the sentence contexts. The present study also found that contextual effects initiated at early morphemic level, and revealed the negative association of morphemic activation and word activation when the morpheme meaning is inconsistent with whole-word meaning. Implications of present study's findings on understanding of morphological structure of Chinese compound words and locus of context effects were discussed.