Directionality Effects and Exceptions in Learning Phonological Alternations

Anqi Wang
Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, United States

Abstract

The present study explores learning vowel harmony with exceptions using artificial language learning paradigm. Participants were exposed to a back/round vowel harmony pattern in which one affix (prefix or suffix) alternated between /me/ and /mo/ depending on the phonetic feature of the stem vowels. In Experiment 1, participants were able to learn the behaviors of alternating and non-alternating affixes, but were more likely to generalize to novel affixes for non-alternating items than alternating items. In Experiment 2, participants were exposed to learning data that contains non-alternating affixes in prefix position while alternating affixes were all suffixes, or vice versa. Participants were able to extend the non-alternating affixes to novel items. Overall, the patterns of alternating affixes are harder to learn than patterns of exceptions, which aligns with previous results of non-alternation bias. Our study raises the question of how biases towards exceptionality and directionality interact in phonological learning.