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How do the Concepts of Native Language Influence Second Language Learning? : Evidence from the Reconstruction of Word Semantic Domain

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Abstract

The meaning of a word is acquired using other words. The current study explores how Japanese native-speakers and adult second-language (L2) learners of Japanese apply the meanings of verbs that belong to the same semantic domain, focusing on the semantic domains of “kai (to open),” “guan (to close),” “kan (to see/to look at/to watch),” and “chuan (to wear)” in Chinese. A comparison of the results from native speakers and L2 learners revealed a marked dissimilarity between the patterns of their semantic domains. Native-speakers were able to use all of the words correctly, whereas L2 learners made errors that were heavily influenced by the word concepts of their native language. Our findings suggest two main points: first, it is possible that adult L2 learners have their own semantic domain influenced by their native language; second, it is important to systematically investigate words that belong to the same domain as a whole.