

Languages in the News

Study Finds Sudden Insights Key to Learning Words

Findings from a recent study revealed insights regarding how language learners acquire new words. Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University conducted four experiments with adults and preschoolers to explore how they learned unfamiliar words. The findings refute popular beliefs about the effectiveness of repetition as a primary way to learn new vocabulary. This study showed that participants learned unknown words through rich and meaningful contexts.

The study employed videos of a mother talking to her child in natural settings such as a kitchen and playroom. During the videos, single nouns, such as ball and horse, were deleted and replaced by beeps or nonsense words. Study participants were asked to identify the deleted words from the context of the video scenes. In the video scenes that portrayed language use in rich contexts, participants accurately identified the deleted words 53 percent of the time. In the video scenes with less rich contexts, participants correctly identified only 22 percent of the words.

Researchers describe this word-learning process as the “first, best guess” model, labeled as fast-mapping. This means that learners make a best initial guess at what the word means based on context. They retain that meaning unless they find out that this meaning does not make sense in another context. Building on this study, other current research has shown that a single fast-mapping experience is not enough for a language learner to remember the word at a later time. Instead, learners must have several encounters with the word in rich contexts for the words to be remembered.

Click here to read [Study Finds Sudden Insights Key to Learning Words](#) by Sarah D. Sparks.

This issue of *Newsworthy* was compiled by Tammy Dann. Send any comments, questions, or information for future issues of *Newsworthy* to Tammy Dann at tdann@nnell.org

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Tips and Tools for Early Language

Around the World with 80 Schools

This website will walk you through the steps to connect with other schools via Skype. It has a detailed list of materials and suggests a structure to use in your Skype connection to other schools. It also offers a list of websites for locating potential educator and school partners.

The recommended format is a five-minute exchange. The majority of mini lessons shown on this website were in elementary school classrooms. There is a video describing the program in English and Spanish and there are many Spanish-speaking schools that have had exchanges through this program. No information is provided for other languages.

This is a way to bring culture directly into the classroom and support direct student-to-student communications and data exchanges.

Click here to access [Around the World with 80 Schools](#).

American Sign Language Dictionary

Use this free online dictionary to learn over 7200 American Sign Language (ASL) signs. The website is divided into the main dictionary, religious signs, conventional phrases, and ASL for babies. Choose a word and watch the person in the video demonstrate the sign.

The next time you need an action to teach vocabulary consult this resource. Then you can teach your students ASL and the target language at the same time.

Click here to access the [ASL Dictionary](#).

Animoto

Animoto.com allows you to create engaging videos using your own digital content (photos, video, or music). After selecting the content you wish to include, Animoto automatically produces a video combining the images, music, and text that you provide. Animoto features several levels of membership. The basic membership is free and allows you to create unlimited 30-second videos. The next membership level (\$5/month) allows you to create longer, higher-resolution, downloadable videos. A free app is also available for the iPhone/iPad.

Click here to access [Animoto](#).

Support for Elementary Educators through Distance education in Spanish

This site is a Title VI Federal Grant project designed to develop three distance education modules on CD-Rom and the internet. The three modules are: 1) Spanish Enhancement, 2) Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language and 3) Internationalizing the Elementary Curriculum. This site provides recordings of all the instruction in pieces, so that if someone is unfamiliar with pronunciation, or just wants to hear the pacing, one can click on the button and hear the lesson. The site has printable vocabulary lists. This resource can be used for professional development to encourage more Spanish instruction outside of Spanish class and for parents to support student learning at home.

Click here to access [Support for Elementary Educators through Distance education in Spanish](#).