

CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTIVENESS IN CHINESE CHARACTERS

PICHUN WU

SHENG-PING FANG

National Chengchi University

National Tsing Hua University

Abstract

In recent studies, some divergent evidences were reported to criticize Treisman and Souther's (1986) illusory words study which is based on the feature integration theory of attention. In the present study, conceptual distinctiveness effects on Chinese characters are proposed to make supplementary explanations on the standpoints of Treisman and her collaborators and on the word recognition model.

Two experiments according to Treisman's illusory conjunctions experimental paradigm were carried out. In the first experiment, Chinese compound characters are divided into the unique compound (e.g. 消愼) and the stem compound (e.g. 路波); In the second experiment, the non-lexicality unique compound (e.g. 屨兗) and the non-lexicality stem compound (e.g. 胃亲) were added to experimental materials. Because stem compounds have higher distinctive value due to conceptual distinctiveness, they are more easily to become basic representations and can be identified in the initial bottom-up stage, without the stage of feature registration. Therefore, the stem compound is less seperable and thus the rate of illusory conjunction in the unique compound is higher than that in the stem compound.

Besides reconciling the controvercies among independent studies and supporting the two route model of word recognition, the results of the present study seem to suggest one kind of explanation to account for the word superiority and word inferiority effect, respectively. In addition, the view-points of conceptual distinctiveness on the word identification may shed light on the teaching strategy on the word learning and suggest a research direction toward the coding methods of Chinese computer.