

Alex Zaba: On the naturalness levels of phonological harmony types

This study uses an artificial grammar learning paradigm to investigate whether cross-linguistic frequency equals naturalness/ease. More specifically, does the higher frequency of vowel than coronal harmony and the higher frequency of coronal than dorsal harmony equal corresponding naturalness levels? Naturalness was assumed to trigger cognitive bias, and bias to improve learnability (Gomez and Schvaneveldt, 1994). Results reveal that participants exposed to words with a tacit vowel harmony pattern learn better than participants exposed to coronal harmony, and that the latter outperform participants exposed to dorsal harmony. This suggests a relationship between cross-linguistic frequency, learnability, and naturalness.