The acquisition of concrete, abstract, and emotion words in a second language

Jeanette Altarriba¹ and Dana M. Basnight-Brown¹,²
¹University at Albany, State University of New York, USA
²United States International University, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract
The purpose of the current work was to investigate whether wordtype moderates the learning of vocabulary words in a new language. English-speaking monolinguals were trained on a matched set of concrete (e.g., jewel), emotion (e.g., angry), and abstract (e.g., virtue) words in Spanish. Participants learned a set of Spanish words and then engaged in a Stroop color-word task where they determined the color in which the words appeared (none were related to color). They also engaged in a translation recognition task where foils included semantic associates of the newly acquired word. Results indicated that although the semantic representations of all three wordtypes were acquired, there was a gradient in the degree to which those meanings were automatically activated. The pattern of data indicated that newly learned emotion words vs. non-emotion words produced faster color naming times, longer recognition times, and higher error rates in recognition.

Keywords
abstract words, concrete words, emotion words, second language acquisition

1 Introduction
One of the goals of the current investigation was to uncover the ways in which various wordtypes (concrete, abstract, and emotion) may be acquired, and to discover whether or not there is a gradient in learning these words. That is, is it possible that certain wordtypes acquired in a new language are learned more easily than others? If this is indeed the case, then methods of learning a new language can be directed towards enhancing the memory representation for those wordtypes that are not learned as easily as others.

In first language (L1) acquisition, concrete words (e.g., table, paper) are typically learned prior to abstract words (e.g., liberty, myth) (Schwanenflugel, Akin, & Luh, 1992). Concrete words have also been shown to be processed faster and remembered better than abstract words. Paivio and