Investigating morphological decomposition in L2 German
Mary Grantham O'Brien, University of Calgary
Sarah MacDonald, Brock University
Gary Libben, Brock University

German boasts a productive morphological system (Clahsen et al., 2010), whereby speakers readily create new words through compounding and derivation, two processes that affect lexical stress and gender assignment. Native speakers activate morphological information automatically (e.g., Smolka & Libben, 2017), and researchers have concluded that they decompose complex and compound words into their component parts (e.g., Clahsen, Sonnenstuhl & Blevins, 2003). Relatively little research has looked at the extent to which L2 learners of German rely on morphological information in their processing of L2 words, but studies investigating L2 morphological processing have generally concluded that L2 learners may rely more on lexical storage than on morphological parsing (e.g., Silva & Clahsen, 2008). In addition, these studies have demonstrated L1 (e.g., Alonso & Villegas, 2016) and proficiency effects (e.g., Coughlin & Tremblay, 2015). In the current study we aim to determine the extent to which German L1 and L2 speakers process the constituents of morphologically complex and compound words. We also investigate the effects of L1, L2 proficiency, and word type in L2 morphological processing.

Participants were German native speakers tested in Canada and Austria and adult L2 learners with intermediate to advanced proficiency in German, an equal number of whom were French and English native speakers. They completed a typing task with progressive demasking and word naming. That is, they saw a word that was slowly revealed, read the word aloud, and then typed it. The typing task provides information about where participants place morpheme boundaries. Target items belonged to four categories, as in (1).

(1) Categories

Categories	Example	Translation
stem.stem.stem	Voll.korn.brot	whole.grain.bread
stem.suffix	Vater.schaft	father.hood
prefix.stem.suffix	Erb.krank.heit	inherited.sick.ness
prefix.stem	Erz.engel	arch.angel

Simplex words (e.g., Rosine 'raisin') served as a baseline. Data from the typing task provide information about the extent to which participants differ in their morphological decomposition strategies based on their L1 and proficiency in German. The results are discussed with respect to debates surrounding the notion of communicative competence.

References
Alonso, J. G., & Villegas, J. (2016). English compound and non-compound processing in bilingual and multilingual speakers: Effects of dominance and sequential multilingualism. *Second Language Research, 32*(4), 503-535.

Coughlin, C., & Tremblay, A. (2015). Morphological decomposition in native and non-native French speakers. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition 18* (3), 524–542.

Clahsen, H., Sonnenstuhl, I., & Blevins, J. (2003). Derivational morphology in the German mental lexicon: A dual-mechanism account. In H. Baayen & R. Schreuder (Eds.), Morphological structure in language processing (pp. 125–155). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Silva, R., & Clahsen, H. (2008). Morphologically complex words in L1 and L2 processing: Evidence from masked priming experiments in English. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition 11* (2), 245–260.

Smolka E., & Libben, G. (2017). "Can you wash off the hogwash?" – Semantic transparency of first and second constituents in the processing of German compounds. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience, 32*(4), 514-531.