

Investigating the memory mechanisms underlying the acquisition of the English past tense.

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Ullman (2004) suggested that two distinct memory mechanisms are used to form the past tense. Irregular past forms are claimed to be retrieved from declarative memory, where they are stored as independent lexical items. Conversely, regular past forms are claimed to be formed by the application of the rule äadd /ed/ to the stemí, an operation for which procedural memory is responsible. This contrasts with the single route approach, which makes no sharp distinction between regular and irregulars. We report on an individual differences study that investigated the contribution of these different memory systems to 4-6-year-old childrenís knowledge of the past tense. One hundred children completed a battery of verbal and non-verbal tests. The results revealed no support for Ullman's model. Instead, the results strongly support the single mechanism approach where declarative memory predicts vocabulary, which in turn predicts performance on both regular and irregular verbs equally.