The pervasiveness of morphological structure in the lexicon of many languages suggests that language communities, which are "responsible" for creating a lexicon, find it more helpful to have morphemes as the constituents of words than not to have them. Quite probably, morphemes serve an important function in the process of verbal communication. As in any other form of communication, correct meaning transmission is central to this process and any factor obscuring this should be avoided. The use of polymorphemic words is one way to help achieve this goal of communicative efficiency. Expressing a novel concept in terms of familiar morphemes probably makes it easier for listeners to arrive at the new meaning than using an entirely novel phonological form. For instance, one has the strong intuition that the small animal that jumps around in the grass is better referred to with the name *grasshopper* than with a name like *clanck* (although the latter would be equally good as a linguistic sign). Quite likely the presence of a morphological make-up contributes to the ultimate goal of communicative success.

If morphological structure has a beneficial effect on the process of understanding new words, it might also affect the nature of a word's representation in the mental lexicon. It seems plausible that language users' perception of a word's morphosemantic structure results in a mental representation that is easy to retrieve on subsequent occasions. The present contribution deals with exactly this issue in the context of second language (L2) learning. What is the role of morphology in learning L2 vocabulary? Language awareness will be an important factor in the discussion. L2 learners, being older than children acquiring their first language, may be expected to have reached a level of language awareness which allows them to apply metalinguistic skills to the task of language learning (see also Corson, 1995). Morphological structure is one linguistic domain where such awareness can play a role, which could lead to beneficial effects in learning certain parts of the L2 vocabulary. As few studies have directly addressed the issue at hand, we will also have to look beyond the L2 domain into research on the mental lexicon for L1.
EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

In the early seventies a number of psycholinguists became interested in the question whether morphemes are salient units in native speakers' perception of (written) words presented out of linguistic context (Gibson & Guinet, 1971; Murrell & Morton, 1974; Osgood & Hoosain, 1974). Word perception, as the term is used here, does not refer to a mental construct that the language user is aware of (i.e., the perceiver does not have to be aware of the salient units in the perceived word) but to information that is retrieved from memory by automatized perceptual processes eluding awareness. Nonetheless, the issue is important for the present topic, for if words are perceived in terms of their morphemes this would suggest that the latter are representational units in the mental lexicon, i.e., that language users treat them as the building-blocks of words. If this is the 'natural' thing to do, one might argue that it would also help when learning L2 vocabulary.

In the studies of word perception referred to above, brief flashes of words were presented in a tachistoscope (a device for presenting stimuli with millisecond accuracy) and adult subjects were asked to report what they had seen. Murrell & Morton (1974) found that prior study of an item like *car* (the so called prime) in a memory task facilitated the perception of this same morpheme in a tachistoscopically presented word like *cars* (the so called target), which was morphologically related to the prime. Such facilitation was absent when the target was only formally related to the prime (e.g., *car* → *card*). On the basis of this pattern of findings the authors proposed that the units functioning as entries to the mental lexicon correspond to morphemes.

The relevance of these early findings to the present topic lies at an inferential level. If morphemic representations are present in the native language mental lexicon, learners of a second language might benefit by building their L2 mental lexicon after the native model. This suggests a learning strategy in which novel polymorphemic words are learnt by relating them to their constituent morphemes (if these are familiar to the learner).

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

In this section I will present the major findings concerning the involvement of morphology at the level of the native language mental lexicon and also report on studies that directly aimed at the role of morphology in an L2 context.

Taft & Forster (1975, 1976) published a set of experimental findings that would determine psycholinguistic research on morphology for the next two decades. On the basis of their results they concluded that a single