Word-form encoding in spoken language production

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Word-form encoding in spoken language production comprises the late planning steps from morpho-phonological processing to articulation. A functionally important unit guiding the processes through these planning steps is the syllable: in phonological encoding, phonemes are bundled to form abstract phonological syllables. During phonetic encoding, these syllables are converted into motor programs that will be input to articulation. A hypothesized *mental syllabary* located at the interface between phonological and phonetic encoding, offers speakers precompiled motor programs that contribute to the ease and accuracy of fluent speech production. Retrieving such ready-made motor programs from storage requires less attention and is more automatized compared to assembling units from subsyllabic segments. Effects of syllable frequency have been taken as evidence that high-frequency syllables are stored, thereby explaining how they can be produced faster and more accurately compared to low-frequency syllables. While these effects have been replicated across different languages in which syllables constitute more or less transparent units, there are still many open questions with regard to the activation dynamics within the mental syllabary and the integration of the dual-route mechanism of retrieving and assembling motor programs into the course of speech planning. Further questions concern the prerequisites for storage, how syllables are acquired and stored in bilingual speakers and how motor programs are produced when access to stored units is impaired.

After providing a brief overview of the course of word-form encoding and the mental syllabary theory, I will present evidence for the involvement of syllables in phonological and phonetic encoding processes I will touch upon open questions by providing insights from investigations of bilingual speakers and speakers with language and speech impairments. I will close the talk with a brief discussion of how the investigation of linguistic creativity will further our understanding of the late encoding steps in spoken language production.