

The Effect of the Spanish Diminutive in Gender Processing of Opaque Nouns

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A Pilot Study

Introduction

- Gender errors are very common in non-native speakers, particularly with opaque nouns (Montrul et al., 2012)
Example: Libro (C – M) vs Cohete (NC – M)
- Spanish diminutives recover the gender marker of nouns, and can become a facilitator of gender acquisition (Savickiene and Dressler, 2007).
Example: Mi flor vs Mi florecita
- L2 learners are sensitive to gender violations in non-adjacent condition with transparent nouns (Keating, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to determine:

- How second language learners process grammatical gender of nouns with non-canonical endings in non-adjacent conditions, and
- how the diminutive morpheme affects the learners' lexical processing of gender in non-canonical nouns during a sentence processing task.

Research Questions

- Does nominal transparency have an effect on gender processing in non-adjacent conditions?
- Are L2 learners sensitive to gender violations with the diminutive suffix in non-adjacent conditions?
If so,
are they more sensitive with or without the diminutive suffix? (*Future experiment*)

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The Eye-Tracking Technique

Materials

- 126 sentences > 40 critical sentences > 80 fillers > 6 practice sentences across 4 lists
- Critical words controlled for length, frequency, transparency, and familiarity.
- Four conditions in a 2 (Transparency) x 2 (Congruency) design:

NC - Match C - Match
NC - Mismatch C - Mismatch

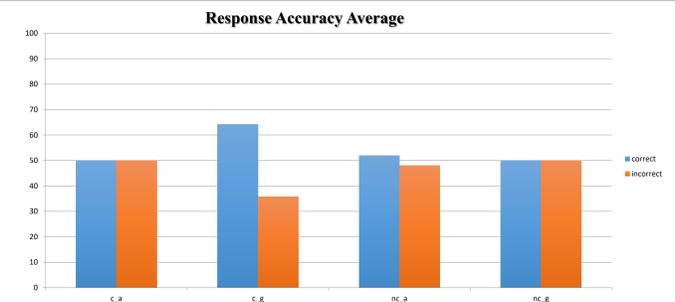
NC_G | Es muy útil tu tenedor porque es más pequeñito para la ensalada.
NC_U | Mira como vuela mi cohete. Se eleva tan rapidita como una bala.

Methods

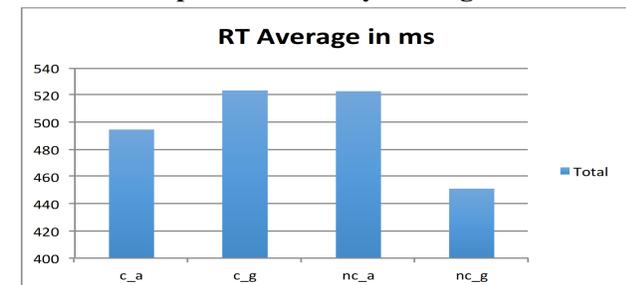
- SR desktop-mounted eye-tracking device
- Advanced L2 learners (N=6)
- One session (1 hour):
 - Language Background Questionnaire
 - Grammar Test (DELE)
 - Experimental Trial
 - Written Production Task



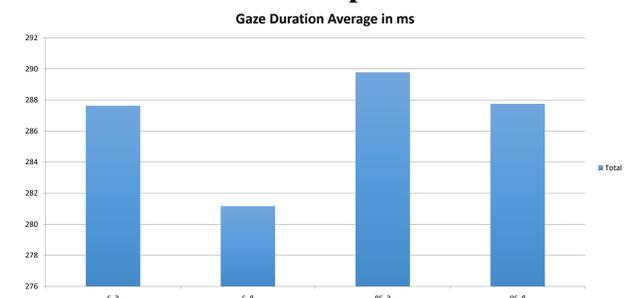
Preliminary Results



- **Response Accuracy Average**



- **Reaction times per condition:**



- **Gaze duration average per condition:**

Future Analysis

- Have more participants; include a second group of Heritage Speakers
- Include online measures:
 - Gaze Duration
 - Regression Path
 - Total Time
- Include in analysis individuals' knowledge of gender (written production task)
- Have a second experiment in which no diminutive is present on adjective
- Determine validity of second RQ