

The influence of notional number and L1 grammatical gender on L2 agreement

Research shows that words in both languages are co-activated during bilingual speech production (e.g., Kroll et al., 2012) and that L1 syntactic features are co-activated and can influence subject-verb agreement during L2 production (Hatzidaki et al., 2011). Relatedly, Lorimor et al. (2012) found that in L1 Dutch production, notional number and the grammatical gender of each noun in a conjoined noun phrase (NP) can impact agreement. More specifically, Lorimor et al. found that conjoined NPs construed as more notionally singular (e.g., mass nouns, like *het brood en de boter* “the bread and the butter”) were produced with singular agreement more often than conjoined NPs construed as less notionally singular (e.g., count nouns, like *de vork en het mes* “the fork and the knife”). Further, conjoined NPs with the same gender elicited more singular agreement than conjoined NPs with different genders. The present study expands upon the findings of Lorimor et al. (2012) in a bilingual context, examining whether notional and gender effects from the L1 will be found during L2 production.

Twenty-six L1 Dutch-L2 English speakers participated in an oral sentence completion task in a mixed language format. Participants heard a conjoined NP preamble, which varied according to notional number and the L1 Dutch grammatical gender of each noun. They were instructed to repeat the preamble exactly as they heard it and then complete the sentence using the same language (e.g., *het brood en de boter...zijn op de tafel* “the bread and the butter...are on the table”). Sentence preambles were presented in both Dutch and English randomly throughout the experiment.

	Less notionally singular	More notionally singular
Same gender	De tafel en de stoel The table and the chair	De thee en de koffie The tea and the coffee
Different gender	De vork en het mes The fork and the knife	De salami en het spek The salami and the bacon

Analysis of the English stimuli showed that mass/deverbal NPs elicited more singular agreement than animate/count NPs, paralleling previous L1 findings in English and Dutch (Lorimor et al., 2012; Lorimor, 2007). These notional effects were modulated by L1 grammatical gender, in that among the more notionally singular items, the greatest proportion of singular agreement occurred with items containing the same L1 Dutch gender. Analysis of the Dutch stimuli is currently underway. The present study contributes to our understanding of cross-linguistic co-activation at the syntactic level, and, on a broader scale, how L2 speakers juggle two languages simultaneously during language processing (Kroll et al., 2012).

References

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