Is selection of possessive pronouns/adjectives in L2 affected by L1 syntax?
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INTRODUCTION

There is evidence of bilingual speakers’ difficulty in acquiring and processing L2 grammatical gender (Sabourin & Stoos, 2008; Tockswitz & MacWhinney, 2005), even when their L1 also possesses grammatical gender (Foucart & French-Mattei, in press).

Is L2 agreement processing affected by differences between L1 and L2 agreement rules? And do bilingual speakers find processing conceptual gender agreement as difficult as grammatical gender agreement in their L2?

Do L1 gender agreement rules affect conceptual gender agreement production of L2 possessive pronouns?

Hypotheses:

If L1 processing is affected by the “weaker” L2 syntactic representations of bilinguals, we expect larger gender attraction effects for bilinguals than for English monolinguals, with no differences between bilingual groups.

If L1 agreement rules affect L2 processing, we expect larger gender attraction effects for Spanish- and French-English bilinguals than for Greek-English bilinguals.

METHOD

Participants: EXPT 1: 12 English native speakers
24 Spanish-English bilinguals (AoA: 7.4; English proficiency: 5.6 (self-rate: 1-low, 7-high))
24 French-English bilinguals (AoA: 10.6; English proficiency: 5.5)
24 Greek-English bilinguals (AoA: 9.1; English proficiency: 5.9)
EXPT 2: 21 English native speakers
21 Spanish-English bilinguals (AoA: 9.8; English proficiency: 5.5)
21 French-English bilinguals (AoA: 11.3; English proficiency: 5.3)
21 Greek-English bilinguals (AoA: 7.6; English proficiency: 5.8)

MATERIALS: 32 experimental pictures (8 per condition) + 72 fillers

CONDITIONS: 2 (Possessor Conceptual Gender: masc vs. fem) x 2 (Possessee Conceptual Gender: masc vs. fem)

Procedure: 1-Character familiarization task 2-“Describe the picture as fast and accurately as possible.”

RESULTS: Experiment 1

Spanish, French and Greek native speakers’ production of English possessive adjectives.

An English target sentence: The waitress says that the son is hers.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mismatch</th>
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Results suggest that bilinguals’ L2 gender agreement errors during the production of possessive-adjective agreements for English native speakers, a context with no linear intervention of the possessive attractor might not be appropriate to trigger large attraction effects (which should trigger L1 syntax effects).

RESULTS: Experiment 2

Spanish, French and Greek native speakers’ production of English possessive pronouns.

An English target sentence: The waitress says that the son is hers.

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CONCLUSIONS

Possessive’s conceptual gender attracts possessive pronoun’s gender agreement errors:

Native speakers: linear intervention of the possessive attractor is necessary for attraction (though, this might only be a sentence complexity effect)

Bilingual speakers: no linear intervention is necessary for attraction.

At least part of bilinguals’ gender agreement between L2 errors production due to “weaker” syntactic representations.

However, L1 agreement rules that differ from L2 rules also affect gender agreement processing in L2.