

The role of Differential Object Marking, thematic roles and language dominance in the anticipation of direct objects in Spanish and Catalan

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This study examines the anticipation of direct objects in Catalan-Spanish bilinguals. Catalan and Spanish can mark [+animate] objects, but not [-inanimate] objects. Crucially, in Spanish all [+animate] objects can be marked (*Veo a la mujer* ‘I see the woman’), whereas in standard Catalan only [+animate] personal pronouns are always marked (*Et veig a tu* ‘I see you’ vs. *Veig Ø la dona* ‘I see the woman’). Moreover, bidirectional cross-linguistic effects have been attested in DOM (e.g. Puig- Mayenco et al., 2018).

Three groups of bilinguals with different dominances performed a Visual World Paradigm eye-tracking task with words (1 in Spanish, 1 in Catalan). Based on Andringa & Curcic (2015, 2016), participants heard transitive sentences while looking at two words. The task had 2 conditions (see examples): animacy of the object ([+animate, +DOM], [-animate, -DOM]) and animacy of screen words (different or same animacy).

In Spanish when there is DOM Spanish-dominants anticipate the inanimate object, whereas Catalan-dominants anticipate the animate one. In Catalan, when there is DOM Catalan-dominants do not anticipate any object, whereas Spanish-dominants anticipate the animate one. Balanced bilinguals do not show clear patterns in none of their languages in this context. When there is no DOM, the three groups anticipate the inanimate objects in both languages. We discuss that DOM is an anticipatory cue for [+animate] objects only in the non-dominant language and that thematic roles play a role in anticipation (Kamide et al., 2003), modulated by animacy, since inanimate objects (usually themes and inanimate) receive more looks.

Examples in Spanish

(1) [+DOM, ANIMATE]

Los camareros ensucian | **a la misma** | **cliente** con aceite en el restaurante.

(‘The waiters dirty DOM the same client with oil in the restaurant’)

- a. cliente – cazuela (‘client – casserole’) DIFFERENT ANIMACY [+ANIMATE, -ANIMATE]
- b. cliente – persona (‘client – person’) SAME ANIMACY [+ANIMATE, +ANIMATE]

(2) [-DOM, INANIMATE]

Los camareros ensucian | **la misma** | **cazuela** con aceite en el restaurante.

(‘The waiters dirty the same casserole with oil in the restaurant’)

- a. cliente – cazuela (‘client – casserole’) DIFFERENT ANIMACY [+ANIMATE, -ANIMATE]
- b. cazuela – panera (‘casserole–breadbasket’) SAME ANIMACY, [-ANIMATE, -ANIMATE]

References

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