Ellipsis and AGREE: Parallelism effects in Spanish noun drop

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Description: In Spanish it is possible to drop nouns in order to avoid repetition. Noun drop is very productive (Ticio 2001; 2005).

(1)A María le gusta la blusa amarilla pero Cecilia prefiere la blanca.
'María likes the yellow blouse but Cecilia prefers the white (one).'

According to Aelbrecht (2010) "ellipsis is licensed via an AGREE relation between an [E] feature and the ellipsis licensing head" (87). I suggest that the licensing head is the antecedent noun phrase (*la blusa amarilla* in (1)) and the element carrying the [E] feature is the determiner on the elided phrase.

Interestingly, the gender of the dropped noun must match the gender of the noun in the main clause (2). However, the two nouns may differ in number (3) (Masullo and Depiante 2005).

(2) a. Ayer visité a mi tío, y tú visitaste al tuyo.
Yesterday I visited my uncle and you visited yours-M.
b. *Ayer visité a mi tío, y tú visitaste a la tuya.
Yesterday I visited my uncle, and you visited yours-F
(3) Ayer visité a mis tíos, y tú visitaste al tuyo.
Yesterday I visited my uncles, and you visited yours-S

This distinction allows us to test learners' knowledge of the underlying representation of gender and number.

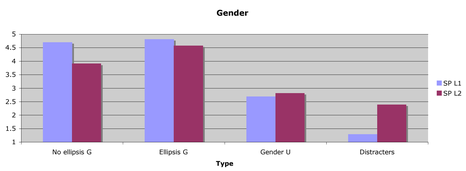
Hypothesis: Given the high level of accuracy in gender concord found in previous studies (Bruhn de Garavito and White 2002; White et al 2004, among others) I predict that adult learners of Spanish have the appropriate representation of number and gender in their L2. They will therefore distinguish between these two features under ellipsis.

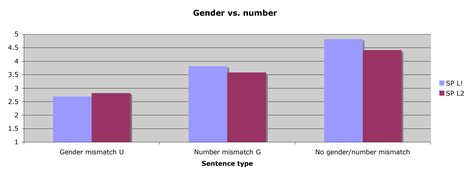
Previous research: White et al (2004) looked at knowledge of number and gender in L2 Spanish using methodology based on noun-drop. However, they did not look at acceptance of noun drop itself.

Bruhn de Garavito (2009) looked at a group of intermediate learners using the same methodology used here. Learners did not distinguish between number and gender mismatches.

Methodology: a Grammaticality judgment task and a production task were administered to 10 advanced learners of Spanish and a control group of 9 speakers. The GJ task consisted of 82 sentences that alternated gender and number matches and mismatches. It included also 20 distracters.

Results





Conclusions: Unlike the intermediate learners (Bruhn de Garavito 2009) the advanced learners were indistinguishable from the native speakers regarding number and gender. Interestingly, both groups exhibit gradient intuitions: no mismatches at all are preferred, followed by number mismatches and finally gender mismatches are clearly dispreferred. Gradience was also found by Duffield and Matsuo (2009) who looked at parallelism effects in cases of ellipsis in English.

Future research: I intend to examine constraints on Spanish noun phrases, such as those illustrated in (4).

(4)El libro de Chomsky y el de Jackendoff (C's book and J')

(5)*El libro sobre Chomsky y el sobre Jackendoff (The book about C and the one about J)