

Gender Assignment Strategies in Basque/Spanish Mixed Determiner Phrases

This study examines gender assignment strategies used by simultaneous bilinguals in Basque/Spanish mixed Determiner Phrases. Parafita-Couto et al. (2014) found that L1 Spanish/L2 Basque bilinguals preferred mixed DPs where the Spanish feminine determiner accompanied the Basque genderless noun. They also found that they favored “double determiner constructions” (i.e. mixed DPs with both Basque and Spanish determiners) over constructions with only the Spanish determiner. We contribute to the discussion by analyzing simultaneous bilinguals, to see whether the gender assignment strategies in Parafita-Couto et al. (2014) hold. Twenty-one Basque/Spanish bilinguals completed a survey that comprised code-switched sentences that they rated on a 1-7 *Likert* scale, a Forced-choice task, a Basque and a Spanish proficiency test and a linguistic background questionnaire. Results from two Linear Mixed Models revealed that participants use two gender assignment strategies. In general, our bilinguals preferred the Spanish masculine determiner for most Basque nouns. However, there is an exception when the Basque noun ends in lexical *a*. In these cases, they preferred the Spanish feminine determiner, as a result of homophony with the canonical ending for Spanish feminine nouns. Additionally, they strongly dispreferred “double determiner constructions”. Therefore, our study shows that L1 Spanish/ L2 Basque and simultaneous use different gender assignment strategies. In fact, the strategies used by our simultaneous bilinguals align with those used by English/Spanish simultaneous bilinguals, as observed in Liceras et al (2008). Our study suggests that the strategy of assigning the default determiner to the genderless noun is characteristic of simultaneous bilinguals regardless of the language pair even though more research is needed.

Examples

1. La *piperra* Spanish/*Basque*
The.fem pepper (masculine in Spanish)
“The pepper”.

(Modified from Parafita-Couto et al. 2014)

2. a el *batzar*
the.masc meeting (masculine in Spanish)
“The meeting”.
- b. el *bikote*
the.masc couple (feminine in Spanish)
- c. la *gona*
the.fem skirt (feminine in Spanish)
“The skirt”
- d. la *makila*
the.masc walking stick (masculine in Spanish).
“The walking stick”.

Works cited

- Liceras, J. M., Fuertes, R. F., Perales, S., Pérez-Tattam, R., & Spradlin, K. T. (2008). Gender and gender agreement in bilingual native and non-native grammars: A view from child and adult functional–lexical mixings. *Lingua*, 118(6), 827-851.
- Parafita Couto, M., Munarriz, A., Epelde, I., Deuchar, M., & Oyharçabal, B. (2014). Gender conflict resolution in Spanish–Basque mixed DPs. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 18(02), 304-323.