(Grammatical) Gender Feature as a Cue in L2 Learners’ Reflexive Resolution

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Introduction

Anaphoric dependencies with reflexive pronouns

- The use of gender-biased nouns [1]
  He/James/She/Helen noticed that the soldier had wounded himself/herself while on duty...


- Gender-mismatch effect: Longer RT when the coreferring entity mismatches with the pronoun in gender
- Observations from eye-tracking experiments:
  a) Initial search: Gender-mismatch effect for the structurally inaccessible antecedent
  b) Only at the late processing stage: Gender-mismatch effect for the accessible antecedent
- L2 learners are primarily guided by discourse prominent information

The Present Study

Pronoun vs. Proper noun [3]

- Pronouns: gender feature embedded within its lexical entity
- Proper noun: gender feature NOT embedded within its lexical entry

Speculation on F&C’s results

- Discourse prominence possibly confounded by pronouns’ gender feature

Goals

- Evaluating the role of gender feature in reflexive resolution
- Manipulation: Pronoun vs. Proper noun @Inaccessible entity

Key predictions

- Gender feature is influential in L2ers’ reflexive resolution
- Earlier/correct reflexive resolution with proper noun > pronoun

Experiments

- Exp. 1: 71 native speakers (pronoun, n=34; proper noun, n=37)
- Exp. 2: 63 Korean L2ers (pronoun, n=29; proper noun, n=34)
- Materials adapted from F&C (2012) / 24 target + 46 filler item sets / SPR, comprehension question

Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Between</th>
<th>Inaccessible entity</th>
<th>Inaccessible entity</th>
<th>Reflexive pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Match (M)</td>
<td>Match (M)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper noun</td>
<td>Mismatch (MM)</td>
<td>Mismatch (MM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Context sentence] Roger/Sarah knows athletes work hard to keep fit.
[Target sentence]
  a) He/She read that the wrestler had trained himself/herself at AM by running four miles every day.
  b) Roger/Sarah read that the wrestler had trained himself/herself at AM by running four miles every day.

- ROIs: Reflexive (Refl.), Spill-over 1 (Sp1), Spill-over 2 (Sp2)

Exp 1 Results (Native Speakers)

- Main effect found only for the Accessible entity (@Refl., p<.01, @Sp1, p<.001, @Sp2, p<.01)
- Accessible Mismatch > Accessible Match (p=.05)
- Pronoun-Proper noun manipulation made no difference

Exp 2 Results (Korean L2 English learners)

@Refl. No interaction, no main effect
@Sp1. Main effect: Accessible entity, Inaccessible entity
Interaction: Accessible entity : Group
- Post-hoc: Effect only from the proper noun (MM > M)
@Sp2. Main effect of the Accessible entity
- Pronoun-Proper noun manipulation made resolution difference

Discussion

Native speakers

- Reflexive resolution mainly based on binding theory [e.g.,4-6; cf.7-8]

Korean L2 learners of English

- Reflexive resolution affected by factors in addition to binding theory
- More correct resolution with proper noun (No gender cue) > pronoun
- The effect from gender feature of the discourse prominent entity

Implication

- Gender feature working as an influential cue for L2ers’ reflexive resolution [9]

Selected References