From the SelectedWorks of Maria Eugenia De Luna Villalón

April 2009

# WHAT CODE-MIXED DPS CAN TELL US ABOUT GENDER

Contact Author

Start Your Own SelectedWorks

Notify Me of New Work

Available at: http://works.bepress.com/maria_eugenia_de_luna/10

# WHAT CODE-MIXED DPS CAN TELL US ABOUT GENDER

Elena Valenzuela, Joyce Bruhn de Garavito, Ewelina Barski, Maria Eugenia de Luna, Ana Faure, Alma Ramirez, Yolanda Pangtay
*The University of Western Ontario*

## I. LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

### Gender

- Spanish nouns have inherent gender (Carroll 1989), masculine or feminine, which is an inherent lexical feature.

| Nouns with canonical gender marking: | | Nouns with non-canonical gender marking | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **MASCULINE-o** | **FEMININE-a** | **MASCULINE-e/-consonant** | **FEMININE-e/-consonant** |
| libr-o | mes-a | coch-e | clas-e |
| *book(MS)* | *table(FS)* | car(MS) | class(FS) |
| | | | luz |
| | | bar | light(FS) |
| | | bar(MS) | |

- Harris (1991) argues that only words ending in –a are gender marked and that –o words present the default; words ending in –e are so marked for purposes of syllabicity.
- Gender is a ϕ-feature which is interpretable and is found on the head noun (Chomsky 1995; 2001) while determiners and adjectives have uninterpretable features. Although the gender feature on the noun is interpretable, it is not crucial for semantic interpretation. Nevertheless, if the interpretable gender feature is not acquired on the noun, agreement features may not match within the DP.

### Code-mixing

- Heritage speakers receive input for the home language from birth therefore age is not an issue.
- The treatment of code-mixed DPs (lexical-functional DP mixing) is different for L1 Spanish speakers who speak English than for bilingual L1 speakers of Spanish English (Liceras et al. 2008).
- The Liceras et al. (2008) code - mixing data has shown that in situations where the determiner is in Spanish and the noun is in English, a Spanish speaker will agree the determiner with the inherent gender of the noun in Spanish (as in (1)) while a bilingual speaker will use the default masculine form of the determiner regardless of the gender of the noun (as in (2):

1. el book — la table
   the(MS) libro(MS) — the(FS) mesa(FS)
2. el book — el table
   the(MS) libro(MS) — the(MS) mesa(FS)

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION

- Q: Do heritage speakers treat gender selection differently in code-mixed DPs than in code-mixed copula constructions (agreement)?
- We argue that if gender is treated differently in these two constructions, it is not a reflection of the interpretable feature [gender] not having been acquired but rather of the underlying representation being Spanish or English.

## III. METHODOLGY

### Participants

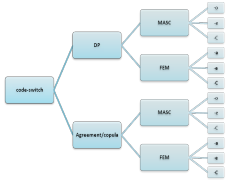
| GROUP 1: Heritage Spanish speakers | GROUP 2: L1 Spanish / L2 English |
|---|---|
| - living in Canada at time of testing<br>- simultaneous bilinguals<br>- dominant English<br>- advanced / near-native proficiency in Spanish<br>- n=12 | - living in Canada at time of testing<br>- post-childhood learners of English<br>- intermediate, advanced and near-native proficiency range<br>- n=30 |

### Tasks

- Elicited Production
- Vocabulary Test
- Sentence Selection Task (SST)

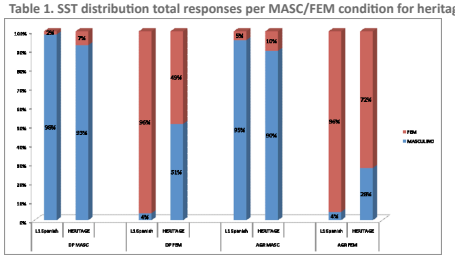
Participants read a dialogue between two bilingual speakers. They were asked to choose the most acceptable concluding sentence.

Conditions




## Results

**Table 1. SST distribution total responses per MASC/FEM condition for heritage and L1 Spanish speakers**



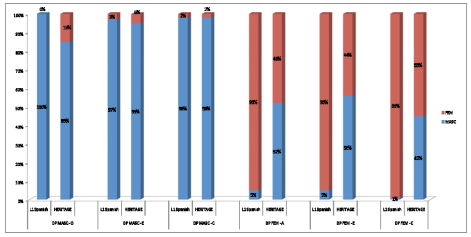

L1 Spanish speakers: chose the Spanish determiner based on the gender of the noun in Spanish
e.g. *el* book (*libro* MASC) / *la* chair (*silla* FEM)

L1 Spanish speakers: in copula constructions agreed the Spanish adjective with the gender of the Spanish translation of the English noun:
e.g. "… the party (*fiesta* FEM) *fue fantásticaFEM*"

Heritage speakers: preferred *el* (MASC determiner) with masculine nouns and chose optionally el or la (MASC or FEM, respectively) for feminine nouns:
e.g. *el* book (*libro* MASC) / *el*/*la* chair (*silla* FEM)

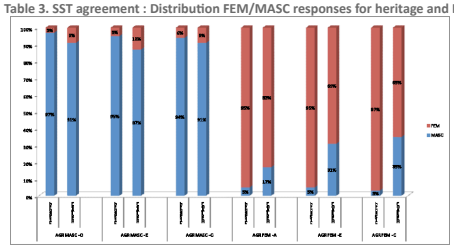
Heritage speakers: like the L1 Spanish speakers, agreed the Spanish adjective with the gender of the Spanish translation of the English noun in copula constructions:
e.g. "… the party (*fiesta* FEM) *fue fantásticaFEM*"

**Table 2. SST code-switch DP: Distribution FEM/MASC responses for heritage and L1 Spanish speakers**




Heritage speakers: Do not show an effect for ending of noun. That is, canonical (MASC-O / FEM-A) versus non-canonical ending (-E / -C) of the noun in Spanish does not seem to help.

**Table 3. SST agreement : Distribution FEM/MASC responses for heritage and L1 Spanish speakers**




Heritage speakers: slightly higher accuracy (gender matching) with nouns whose gender in the Spanish translation are FEM with canonical –*a* ending.

## IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- Heritage Spanish speakers patterned with the L1 Spanish speakers on agreement but not on the "lexical-functional" code-mixed DPs. Thus optionality was present for DPs but not for agreement.
- This seems to indicate that heritage Spanish speakers, as opposed to L1 Spanish/L2 English speakers who always opt for the Spanish underlying representation, favour an English representation for code-mixed DPs and a Spanish representation for code-mixed copula constructions.