(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…

Felser & Cunnings (2012) on L2 learners' reflexives [2]

- 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 entry
- 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

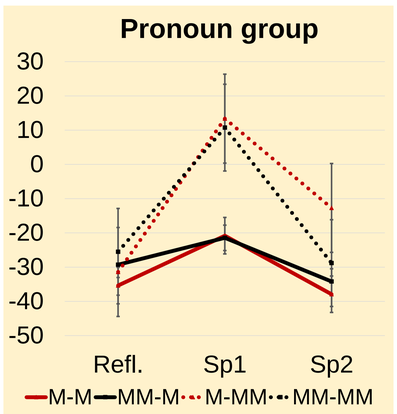
Method

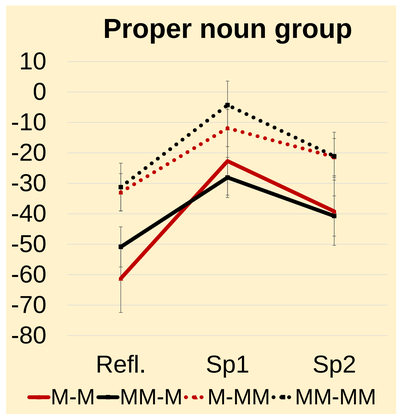
Between		Within (Gender mismatch with the embedded subject)		
Inaccessible entity		Inaccessible entity		Reflexive pronoun
Pronoun	*	Match (M)	*	Match (M)
Proper noun		Mismatch (MM)		Mismatch (MM)

[Context sentence] Roger/Sarah knows athletes work hard to keep fit.
[Target sentence]
a) He_M/She_{MM} read that the wrestler had trained $himself_M$/$herself_{MM}$ by running four miles every day.
b) $Roger_M$/$Sarah_{MM}$ read that the wrestler had trained $himself_M$/$herself_{MM}$ by running four miles every day.

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

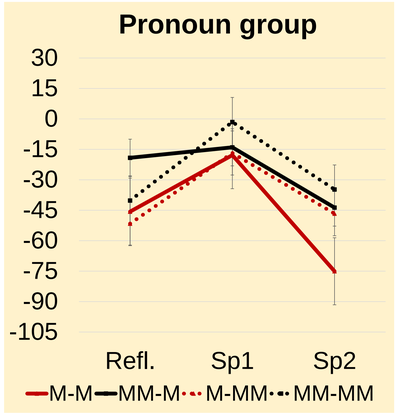
Exp 1 Results (Native Speakers)

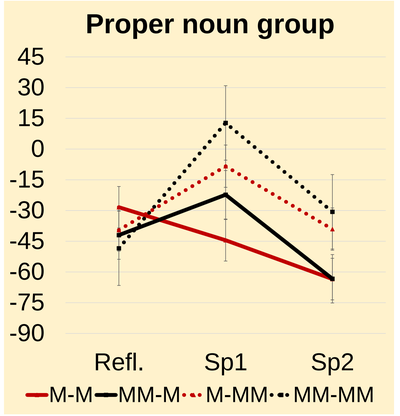




- Main effect found only for the Accessible entity (@Refl., p<.1, @Sp1, p<.001, @Sp2, p<.01)
- Accessible Mismatch > Accessible Match (ps<.05)
- Pronoun-Proper noun manipulation made no difference

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

[1] Sturt (2003). *JML,* 48, 542-562. [2] Felser & Cunnings (2012). *AP,* 33, 571-603. [3] Sag et al. (2003). Syntactic Theory: A Formal Introduction. Stanford: CSLI Publications. [4] Nicol & Swinney (1989). *J of Psycholing,* 18, 5-19. [5] Xiang et al. (2009). *Brain & Lang.* 108, 40-55. [6] Dillon et al. (2013). *JML,* 69, 85-103. [7] Badecker and Straub (2002). *JEP: LMC,* 28, 748-769. [8] Patil et al. (2016). *Front. Psychol.* 7, 329. [9] Cunnings (2017). *BLC*, 20, 659-678.