

Pseudorelatives, Relatives and L1-Attrition: Resilience and vulnerability in attachment ambiguities

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Given ambiguous strings as in (1), speakers of Spanish (or Italian) resolve this ambiguity by preferentially attaching the non-matrix clause to the first DP ('high attachment') while speakers of English preferentially attach it to the second DP ('low attachment'; Cuetos & Mitchell, 1988).

- (1) Pedro se enamoró de la hija₁ del psicólogo₂ que estudió en California.
'Peter fell in love with the daughter₁ of the psychologist₂ who studied in California.'

Following Grillo and Costa (2014), the difference in biases owes to a structural difference. Namely, Spanish and Italian admit pseudorelatives (PR) but English does not. PRs, while string identical to relative clauses, are a type of small clause and force attachment to the first DP (Grillo & Costa, 2014). When PRs are locally blocked, Italian display a low attachment bias (Grillo & Costa, 2014). Under L2-English immersion, L1-Spanish speakers have been observed to exhibit a low attachment bias (Dussias, 2003). However, as previous studies have not divided items by PR availability, it is unclear whether their attrition results indicate an across-the-board effect or a change only in PRs.

In response, a sentence interpretation task was conducted in Italian. Sentences were presented written alone and followed by a who-question with the possible DP responses. Critical items like (2) consisted of 24 sentence pairs from Grillo and Costa (2014) in which PR availability is manipulated by the matrix predicate (PR Condition: perceptive; RC-Only Condition: stative).

- (2) Gianni (ha visto / vive con) il figlio del medico che correva.
'Gianni (saw / lives with) the son of the doctor who was running.'

Participants consisted of a control group (Italians in Italy, N = 33) and an experimental group (N = 29). The experimental group had lived in an English-speaking country for a minimum of 6 years (average = 14.27 years) and were proficient L2-English speakers.

Global attachment preferences are presented in Table 1. Responses were coded as \pm high attachment and entered in a mixed effect logistic regression as the dependent variable with *condition* and *group* as predictors and *item* and *participant* as random effects. This model indicated a significant *group* by *condition* interaction ($p < 0.01$). Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated both groups exhibited an effect of *condition* ($ps < 0.01$), but a *group* effect (i.e. attrition) surfaced only in the RC-only condition ($p = 0.02$) with the experimental group exhibiting a stronger low attachment bias. As such, the present study (i) extends Dussias's (2003) findings to a new language pair (ii) suggests PR availability is stable under L1-attrition, (iii) and suggests attrition in attachment biases is driven by a change in the processing of *bona fide* relative clauses.

Group	PR	RC-Only
Control	71.91%	29.57%
Experimental	67.18%	16.38%

Table 1: High Attachment Rates

References

- Cuetos, F., & Mitchell, D. C. (1988). Cross-Linguistic Differences in Parsing: Restrictions on the use of the Late Closure strategy in Spanish. *Cognition*, 30(1), 73–105.
- Dussias, P. E. (2003). Syntactic Ambiguity Resolution in L2 Learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25(4), 529–557.
- Grillo, N., & Costa, J. (2014). A Novel Argument for the Universality of Parsing Principles. *Cognition*, 133(1), 156–187.