Introduction

What do speakers produce as the gender and number agreement on the participle for conjuncts like (1)?

(1) [Letters[Neut, Pl] and a postcard[Fem, Sg]] have finally arrived

Slovenian has three genders and three numbers, and there is substantial syncratism among agreement forms, as the following table of participle endings indicates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Dual</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>–a</td>
<td>–i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>–a</td>
<td>–i</td>
<td>–e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

The so-called standard account of Slovenian gender resolution holds that conjointed [FEMININE & FEMININE] NPs resolve to FEMININE, and that all other gender combinations (including both mixed gender and [NEUTER & NEUTER]) resolve to MASCHULINE (see references: [2,3,4,5,8,10], though cf. [6] and [1]).

There are also reports of both First Conjunct and Closest Conjunct agreement with preverbal subjects.

We set out to test these in a Sentence Production Study.

Method

Participants: Twenty-seven students from the University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia (10 in Experiment 1, and 17 in Experiment 2).

Materials

Experiment 1: Twelve conditions with 4 items in each condition: 6 Uniform Gender conditions (3 conjoned singular, 3 conjoned plural for each gender), and 6 Mixed Gender Conditions (all conjuncts singular, both orders for each gender combination).

Experiment 2: Eight conditions with 6 items in each condition: [Nn&Nn], [Ff&Ff], [Nn&Ff], [Nn&Nn], [Nn&Ff], [Nn&Ff]. Filler sentences: Sixty-four non-conjoined NPs: Masculine (N=27), Feminine (N=27) & Neuter (N=10).

Procedures: Participants were presented with a model sentence (e.g., *The parcel has finally arrived* followed by a Target Subject NP (e.g., *letters and a postcard*). The participant initiated sentence production with the presentation of the Target Subject. Model sentences for conjoined Subject trials contained MASCULINE Subjects and agreement.

Analysis: Responses were scored for the participial ending and the auxiliary verb form. Gender analyses in the Figures are given in stacked columns as proportions.

Findings

1. Mixed Gender Conjoined NPs Consistently Elicit Masculine Agreement (Exps. 1 & 2), consistent with standard account.

2. For uniformly Neuter NPs, Gender Resolution Varies with the Conjuncts’ Grammatical Number (Exps. 1 & 2): In the case of [NEUTER SING & NEUTER SING], the resolution value was predominantly MASCHULINE.

The comparison with [FEM SING & FEM SING] confirmed the markedness asymmetry [1,7] between NEUTER and FEM.

For conjoined plurals, we compared [NEUTER & NEUTER] to [FEM & FEM] to establish the baseline for resolution rates. Contrary to the standard account, the resolution for [NEUTER & NEUTER] was predominantly NEUTER (see Figure 1).

When compared both to [NEUTER & FEM] and to [NEUTER & FEM], the high proportion of –i participie responses to [NEUTER & FEM] indicates a mix of conjunct agreement and resolution to MASCHULINE (see Figure 3). Neuter dual responses for non-conjoined target Subjects (see Figure 4) indicates that this is not due solely to the markedness of Neuter dual agreement.

3. Experimental Confirmation for Closest-Conjunct Agreement

Both First Conjunct and Closest Conjunct agreement were observed for the Subject-Predicate order (see Figure 2).

Follow-up: If only edges are accessible, prediction is that [Nf & Pf & Nf] should disallow Pf agreement.

4. Apparent Divergence between Auxiliary Number and Participie Number

In mixed number condition (PL & SG), auxiliary responses included Dual Agreement.

Follow-up: May be due to “Conjunction of Two Conjuncts yields sensation of Two-ness”. Solution: Conjoin Three elements.

Comparisons

Table: proportion of responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Resolved N</th>
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Implications & Further Directions

1. Markedness within Gender: Slovenian Gender Resolution is modulated by number for [NEUTER & NEUTER], but not [FEMININE & FEMININE] conjoined NPs.

2. Dependence of Gender on Number: Slovenian Default Masculine occurs more with Dual auxiliaries than Plural auxiliaries only in Conjunct configurations.

References