Native Spanish and English Speakers’ Judgments for Causative and Intransitive Constructions Using Manner-of-motion Verbs

Ibana Vargas1, Shinita Manzanires2, Stephanie Perez3, Eve Higby4

1Department of Psychology, Queens College, CUNY
2Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences Doctoral Program, The Graduate Center, CUNY
3Linguistics & Communication Disorders, Queens College, CUNY

Introduction

Causatives:
- Certain manner-of-motion verbs can be used to create a causative construction when paired with two animate nouns in English but not in Spanish.
- Fernandez and Souza (in press) found that high proficiency Portuguese-English bilinguals comprehended (ungrammatical) causative constructions in Portuguese as fast as English speakers.
- Transitive constructions with uncontrolled motion verbs (‘pseudo-causatives’) are ungrammatical in both languages and serve as a control.

Research Question 1:
Is there a difference between English and Spanish speakers for judgments on causative, intransitive and pseudo-causative sentences using motion verbs?

Motion Event Typology (Intransitives):
- English is a satellite-framed language, in which the preferred means of expressing Path of motion (i.e., direction) is through the preposition while manner-of-motion is expressed through the verb.
- MANNER VERB + PATH SATELLITE
- Spanish is a verb-framed language, in which the preferred means of expressing Path of motion is through the verb, with manner-of-motion expressed through a subordinate-ing form.
- PATH VERB + SUBORDINATE MANNER VERB (ING)

Research Question 2:
Which of the intransitive constructions (Verb framed vs. Satellite framed) do English speakers prefer and which do Spanish speakers prefer?

Research Question 3:
Does living in the U.S. or level of English proficiency affect the judgments of Spanish speakers for any of these constructions?

Method

Participants
- 26 English Speakers in the US (21-64, m=36.0)
- 18 Spanish Speakers in the US (26-38, m=31.5)
- 20 Spanish Speakers abroad (23-37, m=29.9)

Task
Participants completed an online acceptability judgment task.
Participants read the sentences and rated them on how natural they sounded using a scale from 1 (unnatural) to 7 (natural). The task took approximately 15 minutes.

Materials
There were 4 conditions:
1. Causatives using controlled motion manner-of-motion verbs
   The lieutenant marched the troops through the streets of the town.
   El teniente marchó la tropa entre las calles de la ciudad.
2. Intransitives using controlled motion manner-of-motion verbs
   The troops marched through the streets of the town.
   La tropa marchó en las calles de la ciudad.
3. Intransitives using path-of-motion verbs and manner-of-motion adjuncts
   The troops crossed the streets of the town marching.
   La tropa cruzó las calles de la ciudad marchando.
4. Pseudo-causatives using uncontrolled motion/controlled non-motion verbs
   The doctor cried the patient in his office.
   El doctor lloró al paciente en su consultorio.

Results

Causatives:
There was a significant difference between English and Spanish speakers on causative sentences. But there was no difference between the two Spanish groups.

The pattern of responses was different for the two Spanish groups.

Intransitives:
English speakers were significantly different from both of the Spanish-speaking groups on both constructions, but the two Spanish groups were not different from each other.
- All three groups preferred the Intransitive MM constructions (p < .001).

Pseudo-Causatives:
There was no significant difference between English and Spanish speakers for pseudo-causative sentences.

Conclusions

RQ1: English speakers prefer causative constructions whereas Spanish speakers do not.

RQ2: The results of the English speakers are consistent with Talm's designation. However, the results of the Spanish speakers contradict the classification of Spanish as a verb framed language because they also showed a preference for constructions with manner-of-motion verbs.

RQ3: Spanish speakers in the U.S. are more variable than Spanish speakers abroad. Even though the difference between the two Spanish groups was not significant, the pattern suggests that living in an English-speaking environment may have some impact on sentence processing in Spanish. A larger number of participants would provide a better indicator of cross-linguistic influence.