Spanish Nominalizations and Case Assignment

Dr. Jeff Renaud  
*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

Tania Leal  
*University of Nevada, Reno*

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1. BASIC DATA and THEORETICAL ACCOUNT

(1) Verbal nominalization (VN): nominative + adverb

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[El and-ar el niño tan tarde] nos preocupa
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“The child’s walking so late worries us.”

(2) Nominal nominalization (NN): genitive + adjective

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[El constante fum-ar de Juan] es molesto
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“Juan’s constant smoking is bothersome.”

(3) VN

(4) NN

(Alexiadou et al. 2011: 13)

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a. (How) Do the proposed structures account for the co-occurrence of (subject) case and adverbal or adjectival modifiers in each type of nominalization?

b. How can the following apparent contradiction be explained?:

(5) [Su continuo conducir camiones imprudentemente] representa un peligro

“[Her/his continuous careless truck-driving] presents a danger.”

(Ramirez 2003: 122)

3. PARTICIPANTS

- 42 monolingual Spanish speakers (24 women, 18 men)
- Mean age: 30.04 years (SD 10.17 years)
- Minimal formal study of other languages (self-reported >1 year English)
- No (self-reported) auditory or visual impairments
- Tested at computer laboratory at University of Guanajuato, Mexico

4. METHODOLOGY

- Self-paced reading via moving, non-cumulative, word-by-word display
- Each participant saw 40 constructed sentences + 40 fillers
- Presentation of each experimental token was randomized
- Latin square, four lists (each participant saw one version of each item)
- 2x2 design: nominalization type (nominal/verbal) and grammaticality
- Control: length, frequency, animacy, definiteness

5. RESULTS

- mixed-effect model (lme4, R)
- main effect of grammaticality ($\beta$=−90.71, SE=37.24, $t$=−2.436, $p$=0.014) and type of nominalization ($\beta$=120.65, SE=26.32, $t$=4.585, $p$<0.0001)
- modulated by an interaction between grammaticality and type ($\beta$=−157.4, SE=37.17, $t$=−4.234, $p$<0.0001)

| Estimate | SE  | df  | $t$ ratio | Pr>|t| |
|----------|-----|-----|-----------|-----|
| nominal gram. vs. ungram. | -248.11 | 52.92 | 1415.52 | -4.689 | <0.0001 |
| verbal gram. vs. ungram.   | 66.69  | 52.31 | 1413.27 | 1.275 | 0.25791 |

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Both grammatical combinations (NN: adj. + gen.; VN: adv. + nom.) were read faster by participants (relatively lower RTs)
- Ungrammatical NN combination (*adj. + nom.) read slower by participants (higher RTs), as expected.
- However, ungrammatical VN combination (*adv. + gen.) read comparably fast (low RTs indistinct from grammatical conditions).