Psych Verbs in Spanish Agrammatism

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Background

Argument structure has been found to play a role in the success of agrammatic individuals’ performance (Kim & Thompson, 2000). The most widely documented case is that of unaccusative structures (e.g. Bastiaanse & van Zonneveld, 2005; McAllister, 2007; Dragoy & Bastiaanse, 2010; Sánchez-Alonso, 2010). However, psychological verbs have been less explored (Thompson & Lee, 2009).

Aim

This presentation explores both sentence production and comprehension of psych verbs in 5 agrammatic Spanish subjects in order to further explore the repercussions of two main theories: the Argument Structure Complexity Hypothesis (ASCH; Thompson, 2003), and the Trace Deletion Hypothesis (TDH; Grodzinsky, 1990, 1995, 2000).

Method

To do so, a forced-choice task and an elicited production task including 50 items each were run with our clinical sample. In the comprehension task, a sentence was given after watching a short video. Subjects were expected to identify the right character by answering the question “who + verb?”. In the production task, a verb was given for subjects to build a sentence matching the video.

Results

Total results for comprehension show 23.6% (59/250) errors across subjects and conditions. Most errors (62% (31/50)) were found in the dative experiencer-theme condition (A Juan le preocupa Maria [lit: to John-dat CL. worries Mary-nom]). In production, error rates rose to 46.63% (90/193). Again, for tokens where the order dative experience-nominative theme was the only possible one – or where inversion was clearly a marked option (A Juan le importa Maria [lit: to John-dat CL. matters Mary-nom]) – the percentage of error increased to 88.23% (15/17).

Discussion & Conclusion

Argument structure plays a role both in agrammatic production and comprehension with levels of success decreasing as a function of the increased complexity. Complexity is related not only to moved constituents but to thematic roles, as clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

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Figure 1: Percentages of comprehension errors across conditions.

References


