

L1 attrition in Spanish L2 learners of English: An eye-tracking study

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Recent research on L1 attrition has shown attrition to be selective (Gürel 2004) and to be restricted to structures at the interfaces between syntax and semantics or syntax and pragmatics, but not to occur with context-independent structures (Sorace 2006; Tsimpli et al. 2004). The present study contributes to these findings by exploring the interpretation of a structure at the syntax-pragmatics interface, pronominal subjects, in comparison with a context-independent structure, the personal preposition *a*, by attrited speakers of L1 Spanish living in the UK. Using a naturalness judgment task and an eye-tracking-while-reading task, this study explored the prediction that attrition effects take place at the processing level for interface structures, but that no attrition occurs with context-independent structures. This processing account was further tested by exposing attrited speakers to Spanish for a period of time to find out whether attrition decreased or disappeared under prolonged L1 exposure. The results of these experiments revealed that attrition effects decrease as a result of L1 exposure and that they are due to processing difficulties rather than to a permanent loss of the speakers' L1 grammatical representations.

References

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