

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 syncretism among agreement forms, as the following table of participle endings indicates:

Table 1:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Masculine	∅	-a	-i
Feminine	-a	-i	-e
Neuter	-o	-i	-a

The so-called standard account of Slovenian gender resolution holds that conjoined [FEMININE & FEMININE] NPs resolve to FEMININE, and that all other gender combinations (including both mixed gender and [NEUTER & NEUTER]) resolve to MASCULINE (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 conjoined singular, 3 conjoined 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: [N_{PL}&N_{PL}], [F_{PL}&N_{PL}], [N_{PL}&N_{SG}], [N_{PL}&F_{SG}], [N_{DU}&N_{DU}], [N_{DU}&F_{DU}], [N_{SG}&N_{SG}], [F_{SG}&F_{SG}].

Fillers for Experiments 1&2: 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 MASC.SG 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 [NEUT.SING & NEUT.SING], the resolution value was predominantly MASC.DUAL.

The comparison with [FEM.SG & FEM.SG] confirmed the markedness asymmetry [1,7] between NEUTER and FEM: FEM.DUAL resolution for conjoined FEMININE is more common than NEUT.DUAL for conjoined NEUTERS (see Figure 1).

For conjoined plurals, we compared [NEUT.PL & NEUT.PL] to [FEM.PL & NEUT.PL], to establish the baseline for resolution rates. Contrary to the standard account, the resolution for [NEUT.PL & NEUT.PL] was predominantly NEUT.PL (see Figure 2).

When compared both to [NEUT.DU & FEM.DU] and to [NEUT.PL & FEM.SG], the high proportion of -i participle responses to [NEUT.DU & NEUT.DU] indicates a mix of conjunct agreement and resolution to MASCULINE.PLURAL (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 [N_{PL} & F_{PL} & N_{PL}] should disallow F_{PL} agreement.

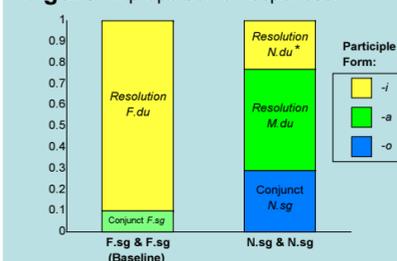
4. Apparent Divergence between Auxiliary Number and Participle Number

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

Figure 1: proportion of responses.



* Complication: -i may signal MASC.PLURAL agreement in the [N.sg & N.sg] condition.

Figure 2: proportion of responses.

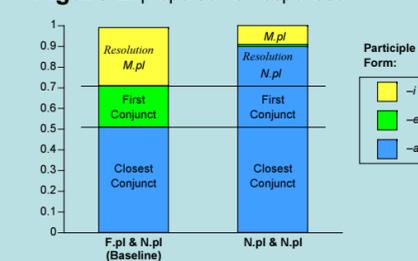
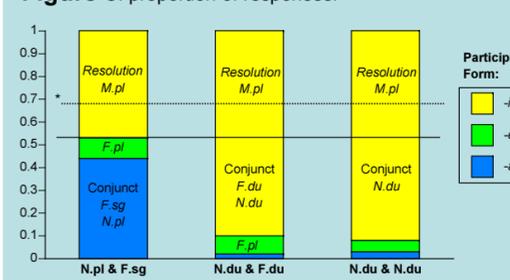
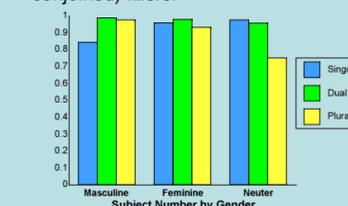


Figure 3: proportion of responses.



* Complication: -i may signal FEM.DUAL agreement in the [N.pl & F.sg] condition, which would elevate the baseline rate for conjunct agreement.

Figure 4: proportion correct participle Number and Gender for simple (non-conjoined) fillers.



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

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