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Sentence cues or semantics? Using eye tracking to study sentence processing in heritage Spanish-English bilinguals.

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Abstract

This study investigates how heritage Spanish-English bilinguals process sentences with canonical and non-canonical word orders, focusing on inanimate (IA) subjects and objects in subject-verb-object (SVO) and object-verb-subject (OVS) structures. By examining whether participants rely on sentential cues or semantic processing, we aim to test predictions from the Competition Model, which emphasizes cue reliability and validity, and the Good-Enough Processing Model, which suggests reliance on heuristics in challenging syntactic contexts.

Using the Tobii Pro Fusion eye tracker, we are collecting eye movement data from 50 bilingual participants (Spanish AoA: 0-3 years; English AoA: 0-8 years) as they read 80 sentences (40 per language), balanced for verb agreement and randomized to control for order effects. Participants will identify the subject after each sentence and complete tasks assessing language dominance (BLP), vocabulary (LexTALE, LexTALE-ESP), and literacy skills in English and Spanish.

Results will advance our understanding of current theories of sentence processing.