

**Spanish evaluative affixes and the representation of headedness in the mind of the speaker:
An inflection–derivation divide?**

While the relationship between headedness and inflectional morphology in N-N compounding has been investigated in monolingual and bilingual speech (Gordon 1985; Nicoladis 2002, 2003, 2004; Liceras et al. 2002, 2004), to the best of our knowledge the relationship between headedness and derivational morphology in compounding has neither been described nor investigated and even native Spanish speakers do not seem to have clear-cut intuitions in this regard. In this paper we investigate this relationship in order to determine whether and to what extent the relationship between headedness and derivational affixes mirrors that of headedness and inflectional affixes.

Inflectional affixes attach only to the head of an NN compound, as shown by the grammaticality of the plural in (1b) and the ungrammaticality of (1c). For this reason, Spanish is considered left-headed.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| (1a) un perro policía
a dog police
'a police dog' | (1b) dos perro-S policía
two dogs police
'two police dogs' | (1c) *dos perro policía-S
two dog polices
'two police dogs' |
|---|--|---|

Zwicky (1985) argues that headedness has the same status in inflectional and derivational morphology. However, while there seems to be a clear-cut relationship between headedness and inflection, it is not as obvious that a similar relationship exists with diminutive affixes. In parallel with the plural inflectional affix, in (2b) *-ito* has scope over the entire compound and thus the graphic representation (2b) is the smaller version of (2a). However, the parallel does not hold when *-ito* attaches to the modifier in (2c), which doesn't seem to be ungrammatical but may only have scope over the modifier, even though, according to Cinque's (2005) proposal, affixes on the modifier can have scope over the head (and thus the representation would be the same as (2b)).

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| (2a) hombre lobo
man wolf
'werewolf' | (2b) hombrec-ITO lobo
man _[diminutive] wolf
'little werewolf' | (2c) hombre lob-ITO
man wolf _[diminutive]
'little werewolf' |
|--|--|--|



*scope over the
modifier*

*scope over the
entire compound*

An interpretation of (2c) as having scope over the entire compound, in parallel with (2b), is what Bermudez Otero (2007) would account for as an instance of deponency – in other words, a case of affixation that should be interpreted as having scope only over the modifier but can be nonetheless interpreted as having scope over the entire compound.

In order to investigate whether there is a divide between inflectional and derivational affixation in terms of the status of headedness in the grammar of native Spanish speakers, groups of 50 L1 Spanish speakers completed two NN compound experiments: a Picture Task with NN compounds exhibiting diminutive derivational affixes (*-ito/-ita*) and an Acceptability Judgment

Task with both diminutive derivational affixes and plural inflectional affixes (-s). In the Picture Task, participants were presented with a series of pictures and were asked to select the picture that best depicted each written compound. The experimental stimuli consisted of 8 [+animate] (ie. *hombre lobo*, ‘werewolf’) and 8 [-animate] (ie. *coche cama*, ‘sleeper car’) NN compounds which each had four variants: bare nouns (*coche cama*); diminutive on the head (*cochecito cama*); diminutive on the modifier (*coche camita*); and diminutive on both the head and the modifier (*cochecito camita*).

Results from the Picture Task showed that native speakers do not interpret the affixed modifier as having scope over the entire compound, treating derivational morphology as inflectional morphology. Animacy also seemed to play a role, with the diminutive in [+animate] compounds proving significantly more difficult to conceptualize than in [-animate] compounds (and therefore the speakers’ interpretations were less clear-cut with [+animate] compounds).

In the Acceptability Judgment Task we directly compared the status of inflectional and derivational morphology and also eliminated the noisy data obtained from the [+animate] compounds by focusing on [-animate] compounds. This task included the same 8 [-animate] compounds from the Picture Task, adding plural affix variants (*coches cama*, *coche camas*, *coches camas*) to the diminutive variants. Participants were presented with written compounds and were asked to rate their acceptability.

Results from the Acceptability Judgment Task reinforced the results from the Picture Task, with compounds with a plural affix on the modifier or the head and the modifier rated lowest and compounds with a diminutive on the modifier or the head and the modifier rated somewhat higher, though still significantly lower than either the plural or diminutive affix on the head. With respect to inflection versus derivation, even though it did not reach significance, the acceptance of NN compounds with a diminutive affix on the modifier (*coche camita*) is clearly higher than NN compounds with a plural affix on the modifier (*coche camas*).

This study shows that headedness is very well established in the grammar of native Spanish speakers, as reflected in parallel treatment of derivational and inflectional affixes in their conceptualization and judgments of NN compounds. The fact that the theory (ie. Cinque 2005) allows for a derivational affix on the modifier to have scope over the entire compound doesn’t seem to be a reality for native Spanish speakers who show no divide between derivation and inflection. In other words, based on these results we would like to argue that the default meaning of the diminutive evaluative affix determines left-headedness as it has scope over the entire compound when attached to the head. However, the fact that NN compounds in which the diminutive affix is attached to the modifier are conceivable may support the proposal that that affix only has scope over the modifier. It may also imply that there is a “deponent” interpretation which may be the exact equivalent of (2b), à la Cinque (2005). It is also conceivable that this option differs semantically from the default interpretation in (2b) since diminutive affixes can have an evaluative meaning so that rather than interpreting *hombre lobito* as ‘little werewolf’, it is interpreted as ‘cute werewolf’. Further research will allow us to determine the status of the various options in the grammar of native Spanish speakers.

Selected References

- Bermudez Otero, R. 2007.** Spanish pseudoplurals: Phonological cues in the acquisition of a syntax-morphology mismatch. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 145: 231-269. **Cinque, G. 2005.** ‘Deriving Greenberg’s Universal 20 and its exceptions’. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36 (3): 315–332. **Zwicky, A. M. 1985.** ‘Heads’. *Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1): 1–29.