

Inflectional regularity and gender in agreement processing: evidence from Russian

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Many experimental studies examined different aspects of number agreement, while agreement in other features received less attention. We report a self-paced reading experiment studying how the inflectional class (declension) a noun belongs to and its gender influence the processing of gender agreement in Russian.

Russian has two numbers and six cases, and every declension has a different set of endings associated with them. About 46% of Russian nouns are 2nd declension masculine (*syn* 'son'), 29% are 1st declension feminine (*zhena* 'wife'), 18% are 2nd declension neuter (*okno* 'window'), 5% are 3rd declension feminine (*mat'* 'mother'), 1% are 1st declension masculine (*djadja* 'uncle'), and 1% are classified as irregular (the numbers are taken from (Slioussar & Samojlova, 2015)). Thus, most consonant-final Nom.Sg forms are masculine, and most feminine Nom.Sg forms end in *-a*, with 3D feminine nouns being less usual. Verbs show gender agreement in past tense.

We had 36 target sentence sets. Sentences in one set contained the same six words except for the first one, the subject noun (2D-M / 1D-F / 3D-F, balanced in frequency and length) and the second one, the verb form (M or F). This yielded six experimental conditions, three of them with a gender agreement error.

Reading times were analyzed using RM ANOVA. Agreement errors were noticed significantly later with 3D-F nouns than with 1D-F or 2D-M ones. However, error-related delay on subsequent words was significantly more pronounced for M subjects than for F ones (both 1D and 3D). The latter result suggests that predictions we make about predicate gender are stronger for M subjects (see also (Slioussar & Malko, 2016) for agreement attraction). The former shows that interestingly, the speed of error detection is at least partly independent from that, being affected by inflectional regularity.

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