The representation of headedness in the mind of non-native Spanish speakers:
Evidence from compounding and derivation

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While the relationship between headedness and inflectional morphology in N-N compounding has
been investigated in bilinguals (Gordon, 1985; Nicoladis, 2004), headedness and derivational mor-
phology in compounding has not. Inflectional morphology must attach to the head of the compound
(1a, 1b), and whether this holds for derivational morphology is not clear. Using diminutive affixa-
tion in N-N compounds, in this study we investigate how derivational morphology is represented in
the mind of L1 English-L2 Spanish speakers. Specifically, we address two opposing views: Zwicky
(1988) who posits that only affixes on the head have scope over the whole compound (1a, 2a), and
Cinque (2005) who maintains that affixes on the modifier can also have scope over the compound
(2b).

(1) hombre lobo
man wolf
‘werewolf’

(1a) dos hombre-S lobo
two men wolf
‘two werewolves’

(1b) *dos hombre lobo-S
two man wolves
‘two werewolves’

(2a) hombrec-ITO lobo
man[diminutive] wolf
‘little werewolf’

(2b) hombre lob-ITO
man wolf[diminutive]
‘little werewolf’

L1 English-L2 Spanish (advanced) and L1 Spanish speakers performed a picture selection and an
acceptability judgment task in which they saw a written compound and were asked to either select
the best depiction or provide a rating. The attachment of plural –s or diminutive –ito in the N-N
compound was manipulated to form four conditions [NN (hombre lobo), D[diminutive]N (hombrecito
lobo), ND[diminutive] (hombre lobito) and D[diminutive]D[diminutive] (hombrecito lobito)].

Results show that while both the L1 and L2 Spanish speakers clearly prefer both types of morphology
on the head, they interpret the attachment of the diminutive differently. In parallel to inflectional mor-
phology, L1 Spanish speakers allow only the diminutive on the head to have scope over the compound.
In contrast, L2 Spanish speakers individualize the attachment of –ito, showing that headedness does not play the same role in the non-native Spanish grammar.

Keywords: inflectional affixes, headedness, derivational affixes, L2 representation, NN compounding.