
Having one or more pizzas is not equally acceptable. A study about the acceptability of number mismatches in nominal right-node-raising in German

Ricarda Scherer, Lisa Schäfer, Robin Lemke, Heiner Drenhaus & Ingo Reich

Universität des Saarlandes
ricarda.scherer@uni-saarland.de

We investigate an ellipsis called Right-Node Raising (RNR) where an expression that occurs in both conjuncts can be omitted, leaving a gap in the position left of the conjunction (*Joe likes __ and John hates pizza.*) [1; 2]. In the literature, there is first the claim that the omitted expression must be **phonologically identical** (PI) to the target expression [3], which is contradicted by attested number mismatches, see (1). This is why Christ [4] states a gradual decrease in acceptance of number mismatches of nouns in German RNR constructions, the less the plural form resembles the singular form, stating a **quasi-phonological identity** (PQI). In contrast, Shiraishi et al. [5] claim that there is only a **lexeme identity** (LI) needed.

- (1) Hans hat einen ~~Vogel~~ und Peter hat mehrere Vögel. [4]
Hans has one ~~bird~~ and Peter has several birds.

As the thoughts on PI and PQI are only introspective and the claim of LI was only made for French and English, we conducted two acceptability rating studies in German, testing if RNR constructions are the more acceptable the more the plural form resembles the singular form. In Exp1, we tested three types of plural forms: syncretic plural (1a, e.g. *Onkel*→*Onkel*), suffix plural (-e) (e.g. *Fisch*→*Fisch-e*), suffix and umlaut plural (-e + umlaut) (e.g. *Ast*→*Ast-e*); we tested them also in a matching context. The results from 48 participants who saw 24 items (+ 48 filler) each did not show a significant gradual effect of plural category. In Exp2, we explored even more strongly diverging plurals involving suffix exchange (-us/-a/-um + -en, e.g. *Pizza*→*Pizz-en*) and compared them to all categories from Exp1 combined (see (2) for an example item). This time, there was a significantly lower rating for the new plural type. The results did not show the need for PI, while also not showing a gradual pattern expected for PQI. However, LI does not hold for the nouns tested in Exp2, because then we should not find significant differences between ratings.

- (2) Anne belegt eine und Leonie belegt fünf Pizz-en.
Anne tops one and Leonie tops five pizza-PL.

References: • [1] Ross, J. R. (1967). *Constraints on variables in syntax*. MIT dissertation.
• [2] Wilder, C. (1999). Right node raising and the LCA. *Proceedings of WCCFL*, 18, 586–598.
• [3] Sternefeld, W. (2009). *Syntax*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
• [4] Christ, R. (2011). Linkstilgung und Phonologische Quasi-Identität. *Linguistische Berichte* 2011(228), 371–411.
• [5] Shiraishi, A., Abeillé, A., Hemforth, B. & P. Miller (2019). Verbal mismatch in Right-Node Raising. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*.