



Switching On and Off Spanish Grammatical Gender in Bilingual Scenarios

Dr. Maria del Carmen Parafita-Couto, Leiden University

MONDAY OCTOBER 21 • 5:30 PM • Ortega Hall Reading Room (335)

Join the LAll, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and Department of Linguistics for a presentation with Dr. Maria del Carmen Parafita-Couto, lecturer in Latin American Studies and Chair of Latin American Studies BA, MA and MA programs at Leiden University, The Netherlands.

Gender agreement in Spanish is relatively transparent (Roca 1989). Spanish-speaking children acquire gender agreement before the age of five (Mariscal 2009) and adult speakers do not generally show any difficulties with agreement. However, what happens in bilingual situations when a speaker of Spanish also speaks another language that lacks a grammatical gender distinction? This talk will report a series of production and acceptability tasks designed to explore the behavior of Spanish grammatical gender when Spanish is spoken alongside a language that lacks grammatical gender (English, Purepecha, Basque, Papiamentu). Dr. Maria del Carmen Parafita-Couto will focus on two linguistic phenomena:

(i) Code-switching, in which nouns from the language without gender are inserted into an otherwise Spanish sentence or phrase and need to be assigned masculine or feminine Spanish gender.

(ii) Suppression, in which bilingual speakers of two languages with highly cognate lexicons (Spanish and Papiamentu) have to suppress the Spanish features responsible for gender agreement when using Papiamentu.

Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of comparing multiple language pairs using similar tasks. The differences and similarities between the bilingual's linguistic systems evidenced by this approach offer insight into the representation of grammatical gender in the lexicon and how this is borne out in bilingual use.

Dr. Maria del Carmen Parafita-Couto is a Lecturer (Tenured- equivalent Associate Professor in the U.S.) in Latin American Studies at Leiden University (Europe). She is also the Chair of Latin American Studies BA, MA and MA programs at Leiden University, The Netherlands. Her fields of interest include bilingualism, language contact, code-switching, dialect syntax, linguistic interfaces, sociolinguistics and Integration of corpus studies and experimental research. Dr. Parafita-Couto's research studies the impact of bilingualism and language contact on language structure, mostly the syntax of code-switching. Her research program takes a cross-disciplinary approach using converging methodological tools ranging from corpus data to behavioural methods, and more recently also electrophysiological measures.

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Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for Code-Switching Research: Insights from Romance in Multilingual Contexts

Monday, Oct. 21 • 11 am • Ortega Hall Reading Room (335)

Bilinguals can produce and comprehend sentences that integrate elements from their apparently different grammatical systems ("code-switching"). Different theoretical accounts of code-switching (e.g. Bhatt 1997; Myers-Scotton, 2002; MacSwan, 2005; Eppler, 2010; Muysken, 2013; Goldrick, Putnam & Schwarz, 2016; Grimstad, Riksem, Lohndal & Áfarli, 2018; López, 2018) have been developed, based on different methods and bilingual populations. Theories proliferate, but cross-fertilization remains limited (Munarriz, Parafita Couto & Vanden Wyngaerd, 2018). Hence, the question that will guide my presentation is how can we get closer to the layout of a theory that can be tested empirically in different bilingual populations?

This workshop will show how a multimethod, comparative approach that links linguistic, psycholinguistic and social factors will help us draw a distinction between phenomena that are indicative of code-switching competence (i-language) and those that may only reflect the vicissitudes of code-switching performance (e-language). Focusing on code-switching within the nominal and verbal domains, Dr. Parafita-Couto will present findings from a series of comparative studies on different language pairs (e.g. Spanish-English or Papiamentu-Dutch) that investigate how bilinguals from different communities (e.g. Spanish-English in Miami, Nicaragua, Belize, New Mexico or Puerto Rico) produce, judge, or process bilingual structures. She will also discuss to what extent bilinguals (i) produce strings that can be seen as having the same syntactic structure within and across communities, (ii) make the same linguistic judgments, and (iii) converge in their processing of these strings, in addition to highlighting the importance of surveying the patterns that emerge across communities (e-language/performance) in bringing our understanding of code-switching (and language as a whole) forward.