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How Spanish Native Speakers Reconfigure Event Conceptualization in English-L2: Processing the English Resultative Construction

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language requires more than acquiring new grammatical rules; it involves learning new ways of conceptualizing and encoding events. This study investigates how Spanish native speakers who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) process the English Resultative Construction (ERC), a structure characteristic of satellite-framed languages like English and largely absent in verb-framed languages like Spanish. Using an acceptability judgment task with response time measures, we compared sentence processing of highly proficient Spanish EFL learners with English native speakers across three ERC subtypes (Path, Property, and Fake Reflexive) and Depictive Construction as control structure. Results show that EFL learners exhibit differential processing cost for the different subtypes of ERCs, with increased difficulty for those constructions that diverge most strongly from Spanish configuration patterns. These findings support competition-based models of bilingual processing and demonstrate that even at high proficiency level, L2 learners struggle to automatize form-function mapping of L2.