Distant relatives: Resumptive pronouns can inherit agreement features of implied antecedents
Maayan Keshev & Aya Meltzer-Asscher, Tel-Aviv University

Introduction
How do lexical items interact during encoding & retrieval and what types of linguistic representations affect these processes?
Agreement attraction effects are a window to linguistic representations during production and comprehension (Eberhard et al., 2005; Wagers et al., 2009).
We investigate how the discourse representation of the distractor modulates agreement attraction.

Experiment 3
Offline ratings, 32 participants, 24 sets (+24 fillers).
We tested whether the intrusion observed in Exp. 1&2 is due to the semantic association of the distractor and the filler or to their shared discourse referent. The same noun pairs were used with the phrase “another x that”, thus implying that the first noun can be subsumed under the category of the second (3a, “shared semantics”). However, in this case the nouns refer to distinct discourse entities.

Results: We replicated the attraction effect in definitional sentences (3b, p < .001), but found no effect in “shared semantic” sentences (interaction p > .001).

Experiments 1 & 2

Exp. 1: SPR, 48 participants, 24 sets (+24 grammatical fillers).
Results revealed decreased RTs for the matching distractor condition when RP mismatched the filler (p < .009). No corresponding effect in grammatical conditions (interaction p > .047)

Exp. 2: Offline ratings, 32 participants, 24 sets (+24 ungrammatical fillers).
Results revealed higher acceptability ratings for the matching distractor condition when RP mismatched the filler (p < .001). No effect in grammatical conditions (interaction p > .001).

Discussion
Our results provide evidence from comprehension for discourse representation effects on agreement, and for attraction beyond the nominal head of an RC.
The results suggest that formation of agreement is sensitive to the distractor’s discourse referent, and that this is true even when features are not semantically meaningful (i.e. grammatical gender).

Implications:
• Under cue-based retrieval (Lewis et al., 2005): Context-specific cues for co-activation of the referent.
• Under marking & morphing (Bock et al., 2001): Conceptual/discourse representations modulate the consolidation of agreement features.

References:
This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation, grant 216/18 (PI: Aya Meltzer-Asscher) and by Arian de Rothschild Women Doctoral Program (fellowship to Maayan Keshev).