1. Introduction

Goals: explore the contrast between different islands in Spanish, and the variation of island effects across different constructions to reveal (a) which structures are indeed islands and (b) whether there is any gradience in the strength of island effects.

Summary: we report and discuss findings from an acceptability judgment test that tested five different islands in Spanish (wh-islands, whether islands, complex NP islands, adjunct islands and relative clause islands), for a relative clause extraction. In order to tease apart fine-grained contrasts between different constructions we applied the factorial definition of island effects (Sprouse et al. 2012).

2. Background

Gradience in island effects: the weak vs. strong island distinction.

Islands can come in different “varieties” – weak and strong:

→ This distinction can refer to the extraction possibilities: while strong islands block all kinds of extractions, weak islands block certain types of extraction elements.

→ This distinction can also refer to the strength of the island effect (see e.g. Cinque 1990, Boeckx 2012): while strong islands show a strong deviance, weak islands are not “strongly felt”. Examples in (1) illustrate this judgment from Boeckx (2012):

(1) a. COMPLEX NP ISLAND: STRONG ISLAND
   *Which girl did Sonia refute [the claim that Bill kissed _?]
   b. ‘WHETHER’ ISLAND: WEAK ISLAND
   *Which girl did Sonia wonder [whether Bill kissed _]?

This contrast is not always straightforward, and has led authors to propose different explanations for islandhood in each case (e.g., Rizzi (1990)’s Relativized Minimality).

Regarding Romance languages, and Spanish in particular, a lot of variation has been found as well (see, e.g. Torrego (1984) regarding wh-extraction, or Saab and Zdrojewski (2012) who report variation of repair effects depending on the island type).

3. Experimental Design

• Task: Acceptability judgment task (Lketch scale 1-7) on Ibox Farm
• Participants: 41 native speakers of Rioplatense Spanish, recruited on social media
• 6 x 2 design:
  - construction type: non-islands, wh-islands, whether islands, CNP islands, adjunct islands and RC islands
  - two extraction types: subject and object
  - one dependency type: relative clause dependences

• Experimental items:
  - 36 lexical items
  - Grammatical (N=18) and ungrammatical (N=18) fillers were included
  - Each participant rated a total of 72 sentences

4. Results: Z-scores and DD-scores

- DD scores show there is a super additive effect in all constructions, henceforth, we can conclude that all constructions are indeed islands.
  - Do some islands give rise to a stronger effect?
    - the analysis on DD scores showed that there is no effect of DD type (p = 0.068), namely, there doesn’t seem to be a difference regarding the strength of the island effect across the different constructions
      - to support these results, an analysis using Differences scores (i.e. D1 and D2) was run: we found a main effect of island type (p<0.0001), a significant effect of extraction type (p<0.0001), but no significant interaction (p = 0.2).
    - We conclude that there is no difference regarding the strength of island types overall, but it might be some difference between particular islands.

5. Discussion and preliminary conclusions

• Our experiment shows that the five constructions tested exhibit super-additive effects, that is, the five constructions should be considered islands in Spanish.
• There is no difference regarding the strength of the island effect, in this respect, there is no clear evidence to maintain a distinction between the different island types.
• Regarding previous claims, it is possible that when authors refer to some islands as having a ‘stronger effect’ than others (e.g. RC islands vs. wh-islands), they only consider the deviance of the island itself, and not the fact that in the non-island condition, one type shows a larger degradation to begin with.
• The results obtained in this study emphasize the prominent place that formal experimental work deserves in linguistic theory.