

# Interlingual homophones affect human gender representations in language learners – Evidence from eye tracking

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Can one's native (L1) language affect gender representations while hearing one's second language (L2)? Previous studies suggest that there is either a pervasive influence of the L1 while performing tasks in the L2 or there is a shift in gender representation depending on which language is used. This study adds online evidence to the debate employing a visual-world paradigm. We presented German L2 Dutch learners, and a control group of Dutch L2 German learners, with sentences that described gender-neutral roles (e.g. stranger, participant). In German, these roles were accompanied by grammatically male and female articles (e.g. *der*, *die*), whereas in Dutch gender neutral articles and demonstratives (e.g. *de*, *die*) preceded roles. While participants listened to sentences, we presented them with pictures of wo/men and tracked their eye movements. We analyzed proportion of fixations to male and female referents. Results show that, upon hearing the interlingual homophone *die*, German L2 Dutch learners fixate female characters in Dutch, despite its gender neutral meaning. This adds evidence to the hypothesis that L1 grammatical gender has pervasive effects while performing tasks in the L2. Results, discussed in the thinking-for-speaking framework (Slobin 1996; 2003), are significant to our understanding of comprehension processes in the bilingual mind in general and mental models of gender in particular.

**References:** • Slobin, D. 1996. From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking." In J. Gumperz & S. Levinson (eds.), *Rethinking linguistic relativity. Studies in the social and cultural foundations of language*, vol. 17, 70–96. Cambridge: CUP. • Slobin, D. 2003. Language and thought online. Cognitive consequence of linguistic relativity. In D. Gentner & S. Goldin-Meadow (eds.), *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought*, 157–192. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.