

THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 11/06/2026

16:15-17:45

Webb 103

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Agreement attraction in VS word order: Evidence from Hebrew comprehension

Agreement attraction is a phenomenon indicating memory interference in sentence processing. It occurs in sentences such as (1), where the verb matches the features of an “attractor” noun. Such sentences, although ungrammatical, are often momentarily perceived as grammatical (Wagers et al., 2009).

(1) The key to the cabinets were rusty.

Theories attempting to explain this phenomenon were based predominantly on languages with subject-verb order (Lewis & Vasishth, 2005; Engelmann et al., 2019; Eberhard et al., 2005). The current study investigates agreement attraction in Hebrew, a language with relatively free word order where the verb can precede the subject. Two experiments were conducted in which participants performed a speeded grammaticality judgment task, manipulating (1) WORD ORDER (the subject phrase appears before or after the verb) and (2) ATTRACTOR MATCH (the attractor matches or mismatches the verb in number).

We found that participants were more likely to erroneously judge the sentences as grammatical when the number of the attractor and the verb matched. We argue for the existence of number agreement attraction in Hebrew comprehension, similar to findings in other languages. More interestingly, attraction occurs in similar rates when the subject and the attractor precede the verb, and when they follow it, calling into question cue-based memory retrieval accounts of attraction (Lewis & Vasishth, 2005; Engelmann et al., 2019).

Click [here](#) to see the colloquium program.