INTRODUCTION

Previous work on agreement attraction has suggested that agreement is sensitive to structural relationships between lexical items [1]. However, linear order also matters [2], and the relative strength of linear and structural effects is relevant to the scope of structural preparation in language production. We evaluated the effects of word order on agreement computation in English using conjoined noun-phrase subjects.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What role does linear word order play in the computation of agreement?
- How do conceptual influences on agreement interact with word order effects?

VERB ELICITATION TASK

- Participants viewed pairs of pictured objects and named them as conjunctions within declarative or interrogative sentences. The sentences were elicited by instructions to provide the color of the objects in simple assertions (e.g., "The king and queen were red") or questions ("Were the king and queen red?").

Factors

Word Order

Between-subject
- Statement Task: (N=20) "Name the objects and tell us what color they were" 
- Question Task: (N=20) "Name the objects and ask us what color they were"

Animacy

Within-subject
- 4 types of conjoined noun phrases (all singular nouns)
  - 8 Mass: snow and lightning
  - 20 Count: tree and whistle
  - 20 Animal: bee and ant
  - 8 Human: cook and maid
- 3 practice items, 112 fillers

CONCLUSIONS

- Significant word order effect
  - More plural verbs produced in declaratives than in interrogatives (94% to 71%)
- Significant effect of noun type
  - More plural verbs produced with conjunctions of count nouns, humans, and animals than with mass nouns
  - No interaction between word order effect and noun type.

These results confirm the ability of conjoined mass nouns to induce singular agreement and provide converging evidence that linear order affects agreement production.

REFERENCES