

I want another life: An experimental approach to the disambiguation of otro

Anaphoric words like *other* present challenges for reference resolution and disambiguation (Mantenuto 2020). The literature on the semantics of *other* and its counterparts in the Romance languages, including Spanish *otro*, has identified an ambiguity between an additive [AD] interpretation (i.e., ‘additional, more tokens of the same type’), as in (1a), and a non-identity [NI] interpretation (i.e., ‘different, a different type in substitution for the antecedent’), as in (1b) (Cinque 2015; Gianollo & Mauri 2020). Languages like German lexicalize this distinction through different items, hence using *eine weitere Tüte* for AD in (1a), but *eine andere Tüte* for NI in (1b), cf. Gianollo & Mauri (2020), FirstAuthor (2025). In this paper we use empirical data from Spanish and ask: *how do languages that do not lexicalize the AD vs. NI distinction, like English and all Romance varieties, disambiguate between both interpretations?* Our experimental results show that both lexical and contextual information play a role in disambiguation, but context tends to override lexical information, especially for the AD interpretation.

While in Italian the presence of a definite vs. an indefinite article has been known to play a role in the disambiguation of *altro* ‘other’, correlating with NI vs. AD readings, this factor cannot be used for Spanish, where the compatibility with an indefinite article is marginal (Cinque 2015, Eguren & Sánchez 2004). A corpus-based study of Italian argues that lexical information of the noun modified by *altro* favors one type of interpretation (Gianollo & Mauri 2020): nouns like ‘minute’, ‘hour’, that are units of measurement, favor AD (*Give me another minute!*), while nouns meaning ‘culture’, ‘perspective’ favor NI (*I need another perspective!*). We ask: what is the role of lexical factors, specifically the lexical semantics of the N, in the disambiguation of *otro*? Based on Gianollo & Mauri (2020), we hypothesize that the meaning of the noun will guide the interpretation of the expression containing *otro*. Moreover, we examine: to what extent can context override the meaning of N in the disambiguation of *otro*?

Methodology and experiment: The experiment consisted of a forced-choice question-answer task with a 2×2 design (Lexeme type, Context type, within subjects, see Table 1), administered through Qualtrics to 46 native speakers of Spanish in Spain. Stimuli included: 12 NI nouns, 12 AD nouns (based on the findings from Gianollo & Mauri 2020), for a total of 24 critical items presented in pseudo-randomized order with 32 fillers. All critical items have the same structure with three sentences: The first sentence contains a proper name and describes a situation (i.e., a context that biases either the AD or the NI interpretation). The second sentence consists of “He/she says: ____”. The third sentence is the reported sentence, either in 1st or 3rd person singular (person being balanced across stimuli), and it contains a desiderative verb (e.g., *necesito* ‘need’, *quiero* ‘want’), *otro*, and a noun, see Table 2. Participants were prompted to answer a question based on their interpretation of the target stimuli (see Table 3): whether the speaker of sentence 3 meant option A or B (corresponding to the AD or NI interpretation).

Predictions: We predict that both lexeme type and context type play a role in the disambiguation. Specifically, when given the option of interpretation between AD (‘one more’) and NI (‘a different one’), expressions with an AD lexeme (e.g. *otro minuto* ‘another minute’) and a context of the same type would result in an AD interpretation, and same for NI. Yet, when the lexeme is paired with the context of the opposite type (e.g. AD-NI, NI-AD), the likelihood of an interpretation aligned with the lexeme type would be lower.

Results: As expected, in the match conditions (NI-NI, AD-AD), subjects’ responses were almost at ceiling. On the other hand, in the non-match conditions (NI-AD, AD-NI), overall, context tends to override lexical information. Both non-match conditions show a preference for answers that align with the type of context, not with the type of lexeme. The preference for context is stronger when the context biases the AD interpretation (i.e., comparing AD-NI and NI-AD, this difference is significant, and the effect of AD as context-type is stronger than NI). For the data analysis, we used generalized linear mixed logit models in the *lme4* package (Bates et al., 2015) in R version 4.5.0 (R Core Team, 2025). The models included Lexeme Type (AD/NI) and Context Type

(AD/NI) as fixed effects and Item, Participant, and List as random effects (the model including List has a better fit). We found a significant effect of Lexeme Type ($\beta = -2.7492$, $SE = 0.5$, $z = -5.498$, $p < .0001$) and a significant effect of Context Type ($\beta = -4.1970$, $SE = 0.27$, $z = -15.454$, $p < .0001$), and no interaction between Lexeme and Context.

Discussion and Conclusion: In our study, both lexical and contextual information play a role in disambiguating *otro*. Importantly, context overrides the lexical bias of the noun towards one interpretation, and more so with AD-biasing contexts. A closer look at the nouns shows that there are differences among them in how strongly they favor one interpretation; as time units cannot be substituted and they are ordered along a scale, AD nouns like *minuto* ‘minute’ are strongly additive-biased based on world knowledge. On the other hand, some NI nouns like ‘opinion’ allow for interpretations compatible with both ‘different’ and ‘one more’: e.g., getting another opinion from a doctor means getting a different yet inherently additional one. In future work, we would like to further explore components of lexical meaning that play a role in favoring the NI vs. AD interpretation. Besides contributing to studies on the pragmatics of *other*, this paper advances our understanding of aspects of lexical information that interact with context in disambiguation.

- (1) Quiero **otra** bolsa. ‘I want another bag’
- one more (=an additional)** bag: the bag I have is too small to carry all the groceries. (AD)
 - a different (=a different type of)** bag: I don’t use plastic, so I need a bag of a different material (in substitution for the one I have). (NI)

	NI Context	AD Context
culture NI	NI-NI	NI-AD
week AD	AD-NI	AD-AD

Table 1: Types of N and the 4 conditions

	<u>NI-NI</u>	<u>NI-AD</u>
S1 (Context)	<i>Pepe tiene muchos problemas en el trabajo.</i> ‘Pepe has many problems at work’	<i>Pepe está jugando un videojuego y acaba de perder una vida.</i> ‘Pepe is playing a videogame and he just lost a life.’
S2	<i>Él dice:</i> ‘He says:’	
S3 (Lexeme)	Quiero otra vida. ‘I want another life’	

Table 2: Example of stimuli for lexeme *vida* ‘life’ (type: NI)

<i>Pepe quiere _____</i> ‘Pepe wants _____’	
una vida distinta ‘a different life’ (NI)	una vida más ‘an additional life’ (AD)

Table 3: Forced-choice prompt and answers (the choice display order was randomized to prevent side-bias)

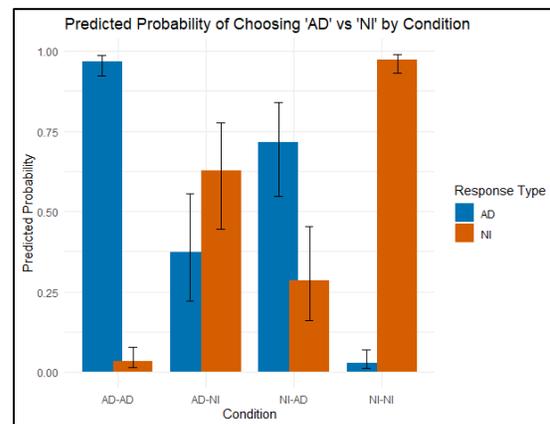


Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Participant Responses (Conditions are coded as LexemeType-ContextType)

References: Cinque, G. 2015. A note on ‘other’. In *Webschrift for Josef Bayer*, 22–27. • Eguren, L. & Sánchez, C. 2004. Contrast and Addition in Romance: A case study in microvariation. In *Contemporary Approaches to Romance Linguistics*, 159-176. Amsterdam: JB. • Gianollo, C. & Mauri, C. 2020. *Uno, l’altro e un altro* ancora: ambiguità dell’alterità tra sincronia e diacronia. In *L’ambiguità nelle e tra le lingue* 131-174. • Mantenuto, Iara. 2020. ‘Other’ and ‘More’ in *San Sebastián del Monte Mixtec and Beyond*. Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA.