Interaction of gender assignment rules in Spanish-English bilingual speech

Ashlyn Winship (alk541@nyu.edu) *Department of Linguistics, New York University*

1. Introduction

- Spanish nouns possess morphological gender features which must agree with their associated determiners and adjectives
- English nouns do not typically possess morphological gender
- *Codeswitching*: the use of multiple languages within a single utterance

Aim: To investigate how the gender assignment rules of Spanish and English interact at sites of codeswitched NP ellipsis

2. Methodology

An acceptability judgment survey was administered to self-reported Spanish-English bilingual speakers

- 26 participants, aged 20-55 years
- Each sentence was presented twice: once with masculine agreement on the remnants, and once with feminine agreement
- All deleted nouns possessed feminine morphological gender in Spanish, for the purposes of testing presence of FEM gender assignment vs. default MASC assignment (see below)

Possible results:

- Presence of +FEM markers on the remnants suggests feminine gender assignment according to principles of *gender transfer* (assigning gender of Spanish translation to English noun) (Cruz 2021)
- Presence of MASC markers on the remnants suggests that MASC default is being assigned by gender-neutral English nouns (along the lines of Valdés Kroff 2016)
- Presence of biological gender in referent may affect acceptability rating (Cruz 2021)

3. Results

Sentences were rated on a scale from 1 ("bad") to 7 ("good"). If the difference in average ratings for a sentence pair was significant, the preferred gender assignment is indicated below.

| Test sentence	L of Det	L of Adj	Animacy	L of antecedent	Preferred agreement
1. *Hay muchas* <u>*alfombras*</u> *que podría comprar aquí; prefiero el/la gray* ___.	Span	Eng	inanimate	Span ('rug')	**Both were acceptable** masc avg: 3.62 fem avg: 4.25
2. This store sells the blue <u>bikes</u>, but I prefer *los/las blancos/as* ___.	Span	Span	inanimate	Eng	**FEM** masc avg: 3.00 fem avg: 4.73
3. *Tengo dos* <u>*tías*</u>, *y mi favorita es el/la oldest* ___.	Span	Eng	animate	Span ('aunt')	**FEM** masc avg: 2.42 fem avg: 4.12
4. There are three <u>girls</u> over there, and my daughter is the *rubio/a* ___.	Eng	Span	animate	Eng	**FEM** masc avg: 2.04 fem avg: 4.38

4. Discussion

The language of the referent is initially assumed to be the language of the antecedent. The remnant adjective signals whether the NP is marked for gender, which is represented with the privative feature [GEN]. Spanish adjectives will possess the [GEN] feature, as they require morphological gender agreement; English adjectives will not. A [GEN] marker requires that the referent be marked [±FEM]. If gender agreement is not required, the remnants will bear MASC default markers. This produces several possibilities:

- Adjective does not possess [GEN] feature → language switch is optional
- Adjective possesses [GEN] feature
    - Referent is not marked [±FEM] → language switch is forced
    - Referent is marked [±FEM] (survey results indicate that this is possible with either morphological or biological gender; see below) → language switch is optional
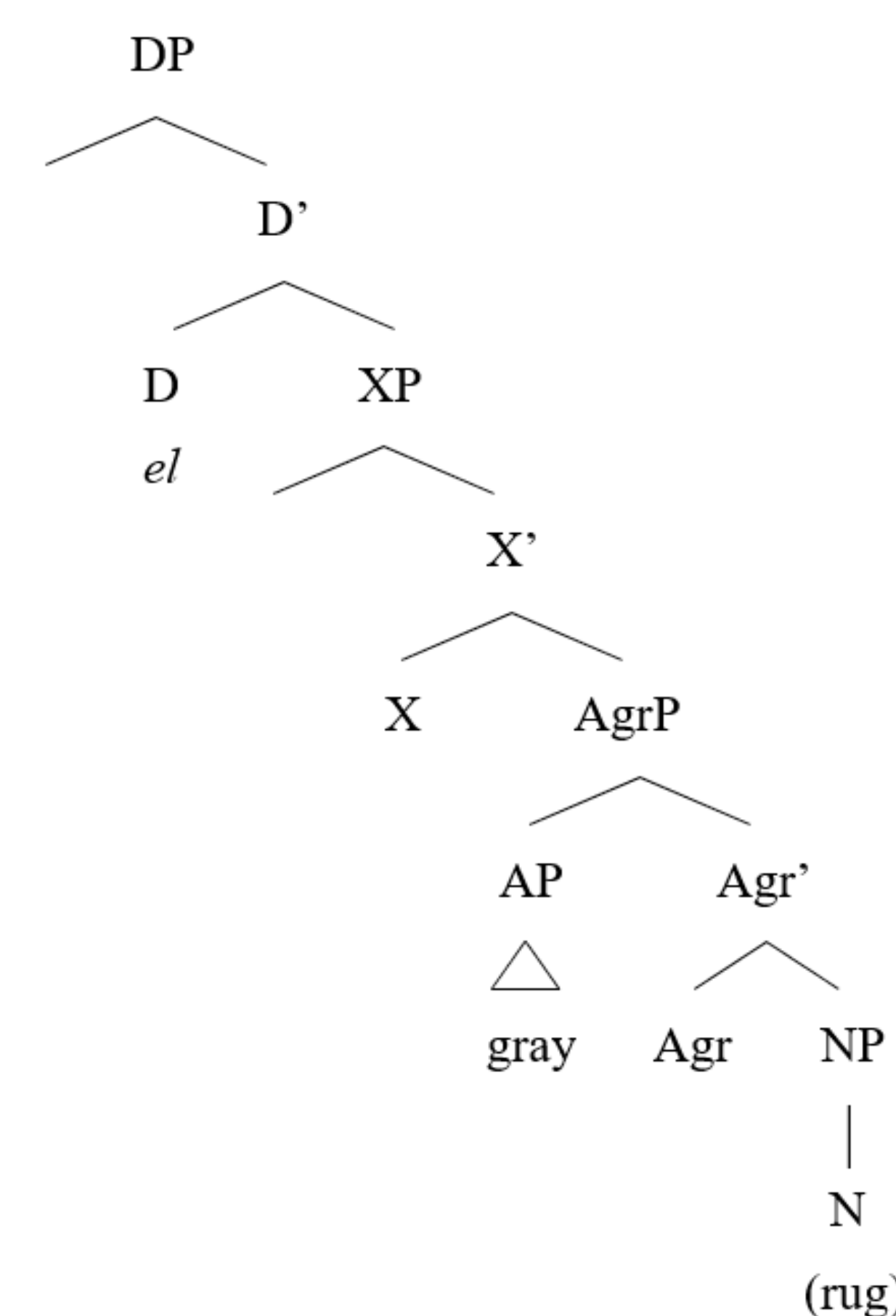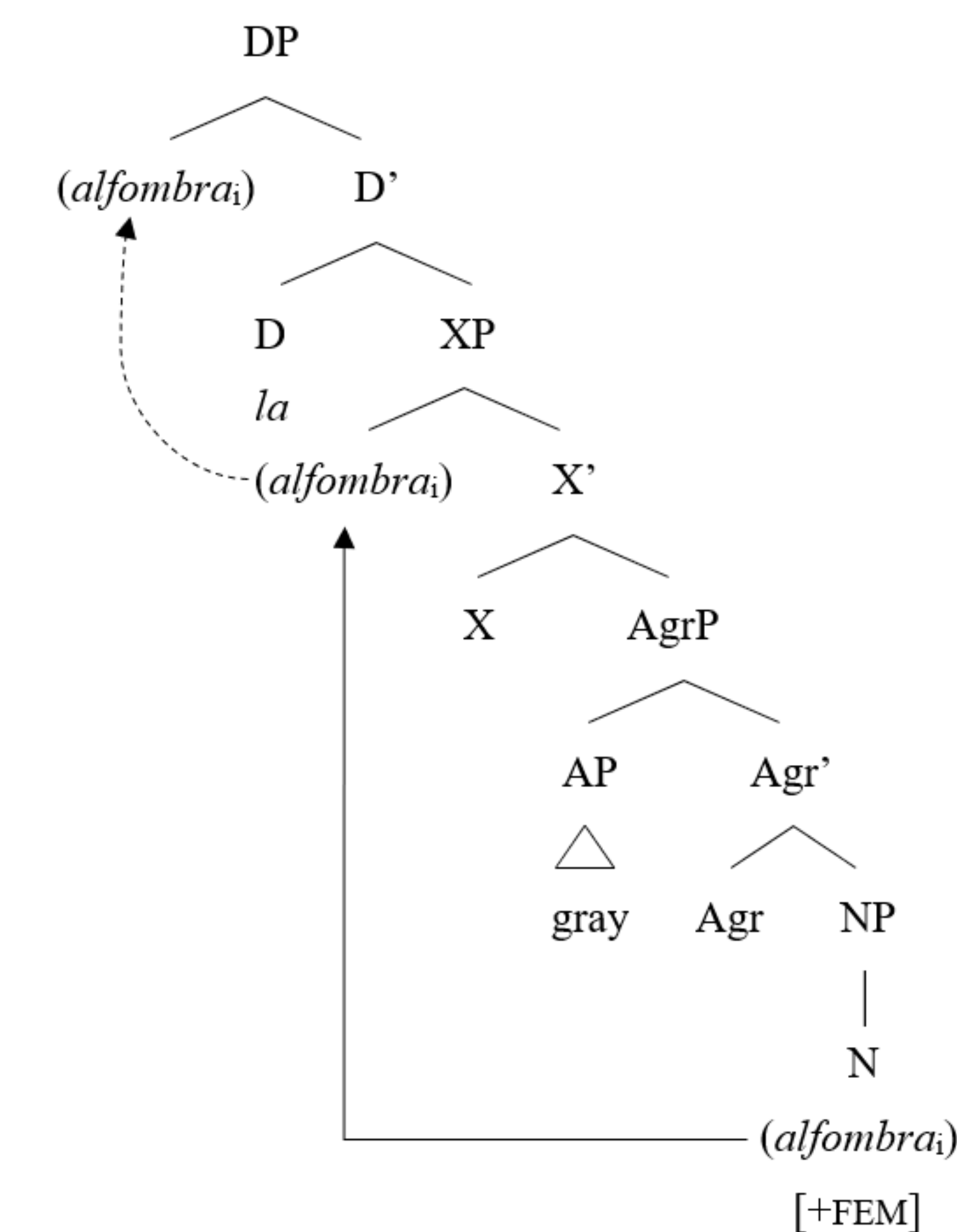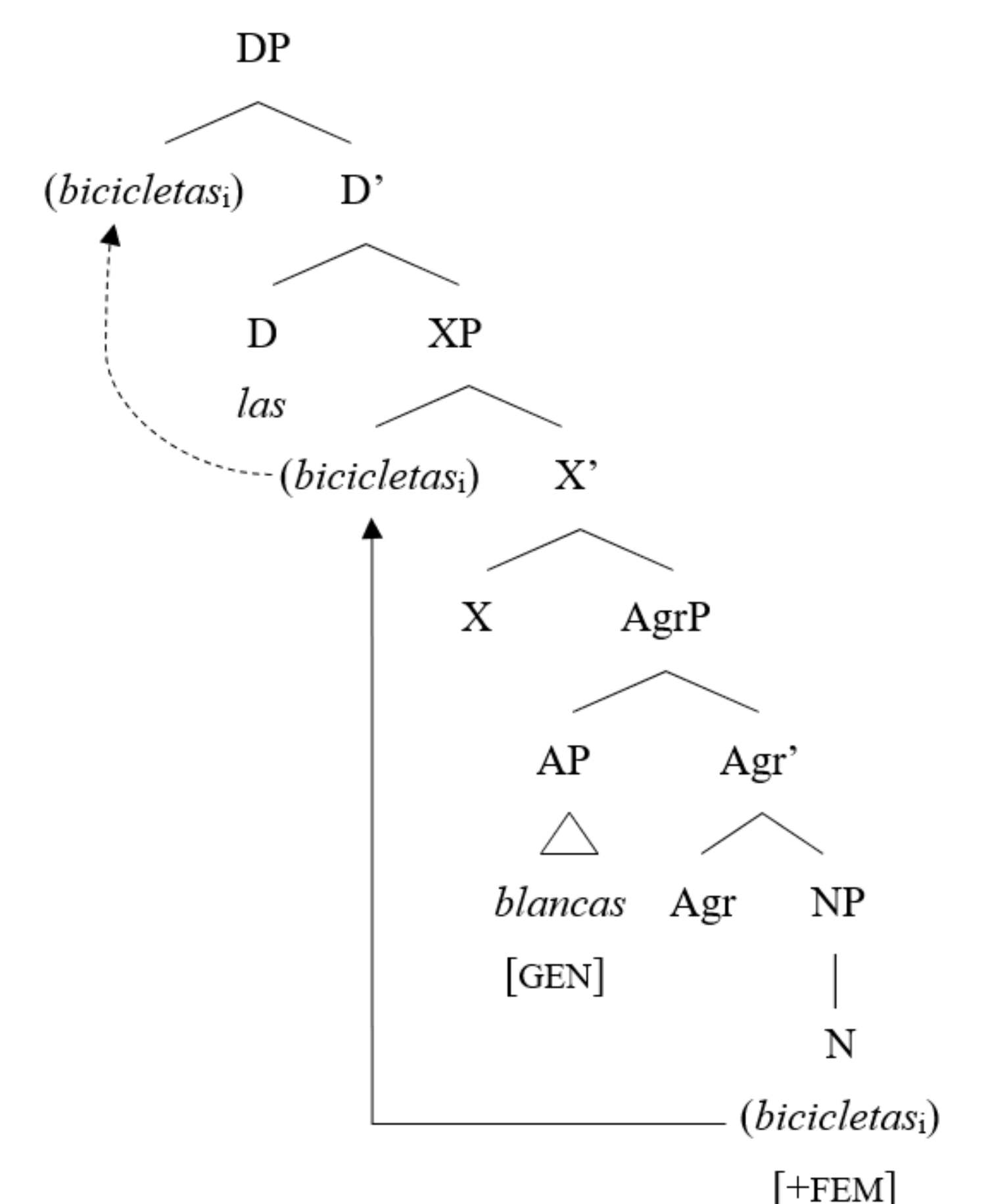

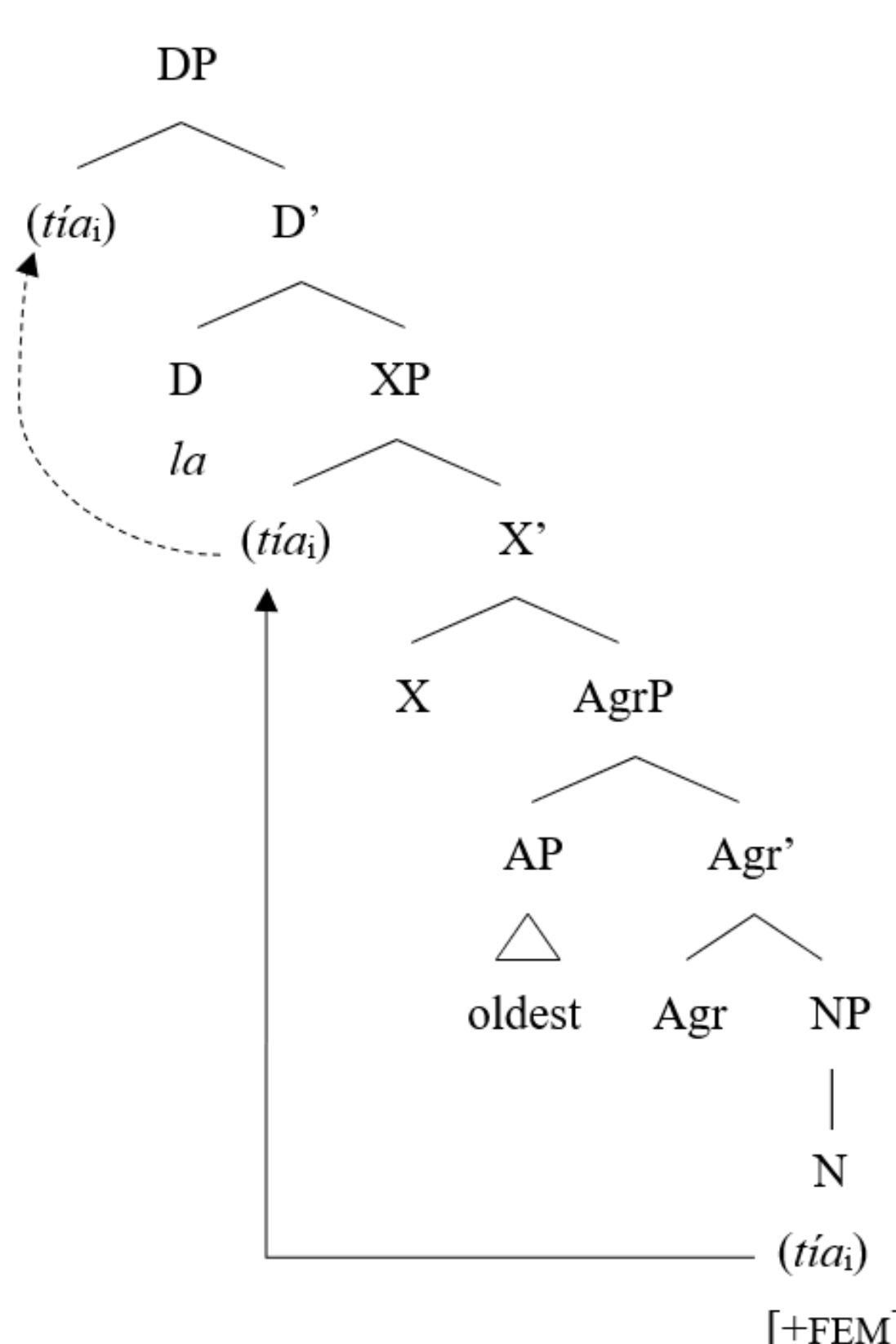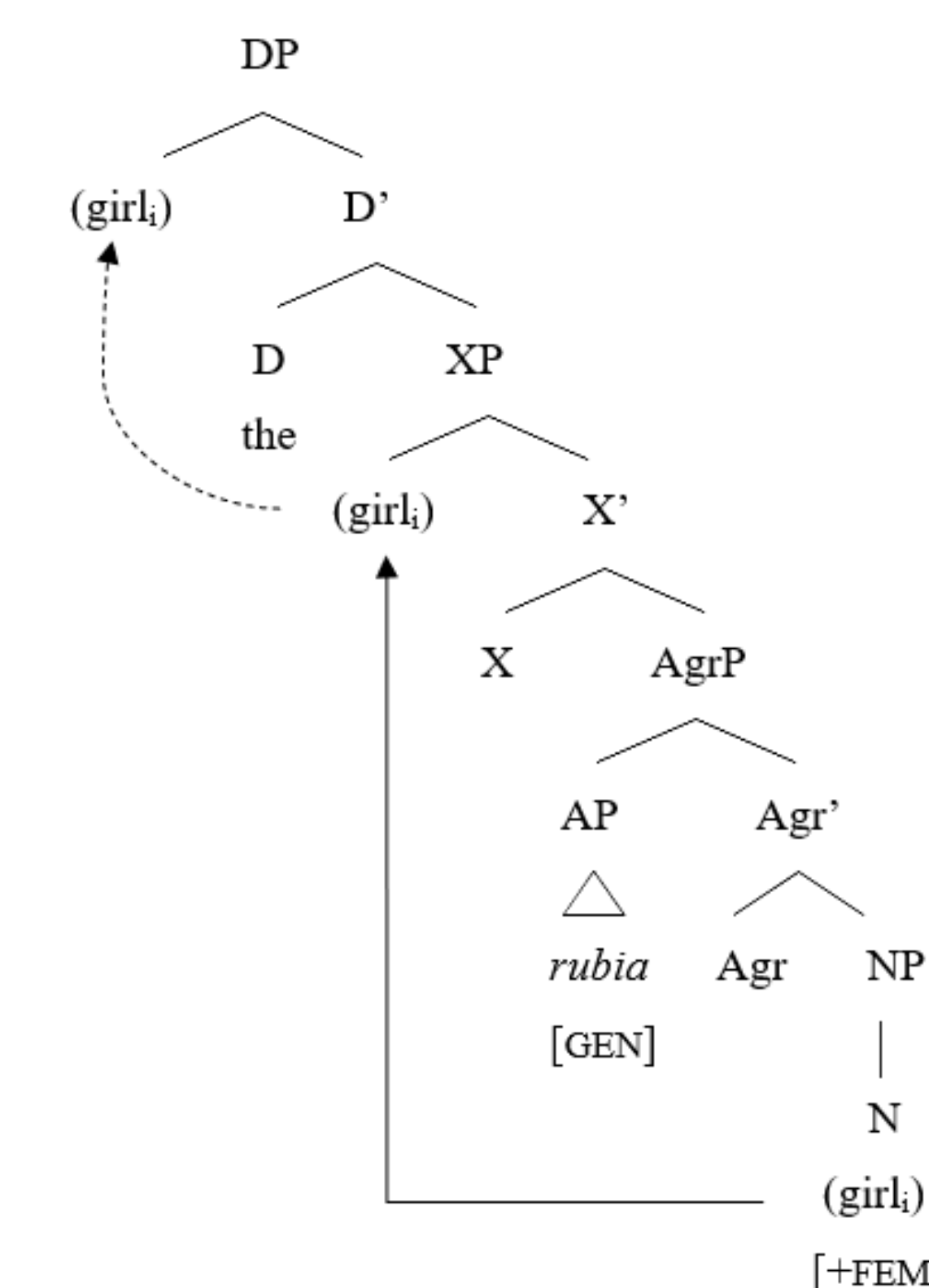- The trees representing sentence (1) demonstrate the optional switch
- (2) shows the forced switch from "bikes" to "*bicicletas*"
- (3) and (4) demonstrate the role of biological gender in marking [+FEM]

Further findings:

The acceptability judgment survey also tested codeswitched *one*-substitution constructions; the results indicated similar patterns to those displayed here, and also suggested that *one*-substitution is a form of ellipsis, rather than a replacement of the noun with the word "one".