

Differential object marking in heritage Romanian under conditions of language change: Evaluating the role of crosslinguistic influence

Introduction. Children's grammar may differ from that of the previous generation [1]. When the input language is undergoing a change, an amplification of the innovative grammar may be attested in child language [2]. Under conditions of language contact, the change can be accelerated [3]. Language contact, by itself, however, may not always induce or increment incipient changes [4]. This is the case of differential object marking (DOM) in heritage Romanian. In the baseline, the DOM system is currently undergoing a change [5,6]. Monolingual children do opt for the innovative system, but heritage speakers (HS) of Romanian in contact with English [7], French [8], Italian [9] and Dutch [10] underuse it. Since these studies investigated heritage Romanian in contact with languages which lack DOM, one cannot discard an account in terms of crosslinguistic influence. **Aim.** We extend the investigation to DOM in child heritage Romanian in contact with Spanish, a DOM language [11], with a view to evaluating to what extent linguistic proximity can influence the incrementation of an innovative system. **DOM in Romanian** is optional with animate descriptive DPs. Optional DOM is undergoing a change. The "conservative" system marks objects with single *pe* (1) or with clitic doubling (CD) (2). The "innovative" system uses exclusively CD (2) [5, 6]. In single *pe* configurations, *pe* merges in a functional head K, where it checks a topic and a person feature (3). In CD, *pe* merges in D and checks only a person feature. The clitic merges in K where it checks a discourse topic feature. The D-linking associated with the clitic is transferred to the CD configuration (4) [6]. **Predictions for acquisition.** If children do increment incipient changes, one expects them to use CD significantly more than single *pe*, beyond the rate in the input. Additionally, if language contact accelerates changes, child HSs should use CD to an extent higher than the one attested with monolingual children. **Study.** We examined optional DOM use in narratives by child HSs of Romanian (simultaneous bilinguals, Spanish-dominant, born to Romanian families living in Spain), compared to DOM use in narratives by first-generation immigrants (FGI) in Spain, Romanian adults living in Romania, and age-matched Romanian monolinguals (Table 1). FGIs used DOM at a rate of 15.8% ($n = 9/57$), significantly lower than the one attested with the adults in the homeland (41.1%, $12/29$): $\chi^2(1) = 4.08, p < .05$. But when they did, they used exclusively CD, in line with the diachronic trend. The child HSs, on the other hand, did not differ from the monolinguals with respect to overall marking (single *pe* and CD) (Table 2) but they used CD at a significantly lower rate (40.7%, $n = 11/27$) than the monolinguals (90.3%, $n = 28/31$). The low rate of CD cannot be accounted for in terms of crosslinguistic influence; Spanish has DOM and CD (even though more limited) and similar results were reported for heritage Romanian in contact with languages which lack both. An account in terms of the Interface Hypothesis [12] must also be discarded. The analysis of CD use revealed that it was always used in accordance with its D-linked feature. **Follow up study.** An analysis of obligatory Accusative clitics (AC) in the same narratives was performed with a view to checking if the low rate of CD can be a side effect of a deficient clitic system. ACs can be problematic due to processing reasons [13], especially in bilingual settings [14], heritage Romanian included [15]. They are computationally costly, involving both movement and distance Agree. The HSs showed a relatively high omission rate (14.7%, $n = 16/109$) given their age. In 75% of these cases they used overt DPs instead (5). Gender errors were also attested (14%). The monolinguals used ACs target-like, as expected. **Conclusion.** Our results add to previous evidence that not any diachronic change is accelerated in contact environments. They show that whether incipient changes are/are not advanced in such settings need not be determined by crosslinguistic influence. What seems to be relevant instead is the interaction between the linguistic properties of the novel variant and processing mechanisms.

- (1) *Am desenat pe copil.* (2) *L - am desenat pe copil.*
 have drawn PE child CL.ACC.3M.SG have drawn PE child
 ‘I drew the child.’
- (3) [KP [K_{[TOPIC][PERSON]} *pe* [DP D_{[DEFINITE]...}]] (from Hill and Mardale 2019)
 (4) [KP K-clitic_[TOPIC] [DP D₁ - *pe*_[PERSON] [DP D_[DEFINITE] NP ...]]] (from Hill and Mardale 2019)
 (5) *Și el căuta pe broască. Dup-ai-a, când a găsit broasca ...*
 and he searched DOM frog after that when has found frog-the
 ‘And he was looking for the frog. Then, when he found the frog ...’ (CB, 10;00)

Table 1. Participants

Group	Age range (mean)	Number
Child heritage speakers	9;03 - 12;02 (10;03)	15
Monolingual children	9;01 - 12;00 (10;01)	15
First-generation immigrants	28 - 45 (37;07)	12
Romanian adults in the homeland	19 - 45 (25;02)	10

Table 2. Count distribution of DOM use (single *pe* and CD) in optional contexts in narratives

	DOM use	Normalised occurrences	Analysis
Spanish dominant heritage speakers	28.7% (n = 27/94)	n = 24/82	χ^2 (1, N = 30)
Monolingually raised children	41.5% (n = 34/82)	n = 34/82	= 2.16, p = .14

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¹ Given the low number of tokens, Yates correction was applied.