

## Exploring Heritage Romanian in the USA through narrative analysis

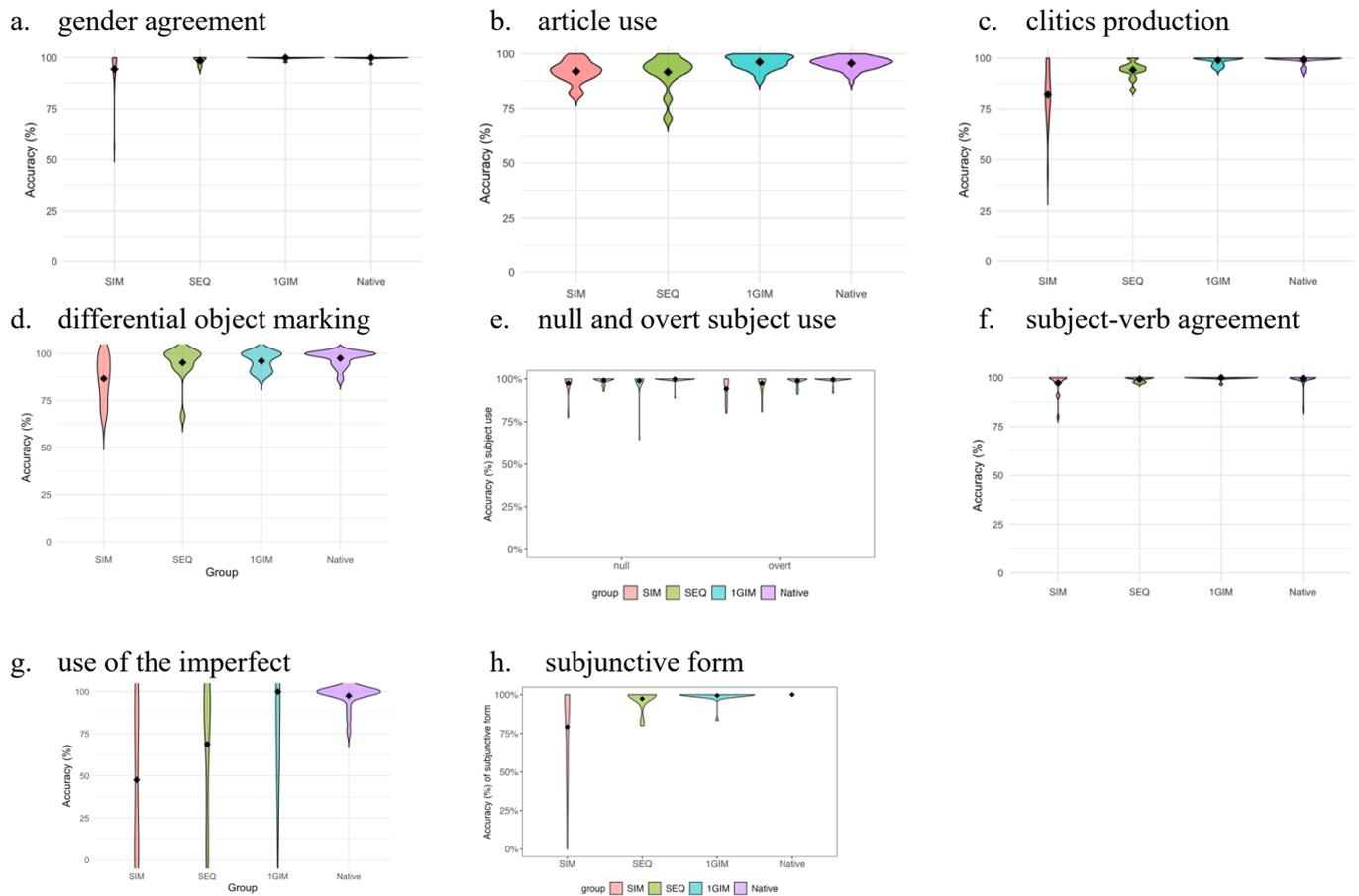
The morphology and morphosyntax of heritage languages (HLs) have received considerable attention over the last decades, with many studies identifying morphology as one of the most vulnerable domains to change and attrition in heritage speaker (HS) populations. Although Romance heritage languages in general have been widely investigated, heritage Romanian is still fairly unexplored. The existing studies have focused on the comprehension and production of filler-gap dependencies (subject and object relative clauses [1] and *wh*-questions [2]), the use of differential object marking [3,4] or the acquisition of clitics [5], in heritage Romanian in contact with various societal languages.

However, to our knowledge, no study to date on heritage Romanian has analyzed different morphosyntactic phenomena in the same group of speakers. This study aims to bridge this gap, by investigating the grammatical system that develops under reduced input conditions. More specifically, it analyzes the linguistic patterns observed in the oral narrative production of adult HSs of Romanian, living in the USA. The analysis focuses on eight phenomena across the nominal and verbal domains: gender agreement, article use, clitics, differential object marking, the realisation of null and overt subjects, the subjunctive, the imperfect and subject-verb agreement.

Participants ( $n = 105$ ) completed a picture-based story-telling task. They were shown pictures from the *Little Red Riding Hood* fairy-tale and were asked to narrate the story in Romanian. The stories were recorded, transcribed and checked by two native speakers of Romanian. Among the 105 adult participants, 54 were Romanian-English bilinguals divided across three groups: 18 simultaneous HSs (mean age 18.94), 14 sequential HSs (mean age 21.14, mean of age of onset of English 8.35) and 22 first (1<sup>st</sup>) generation immigrant speakers (mean age 35.9, mean length of residence in the USA 11.39) [6]. Their data was compared to that of 51 monolingually-raised speakers in the homeland (mean age 49.42). According to [7], age of onset (AoO) of bilingualism is a strong predictor of ultimate attainment of the HL: simultaneous bilingual HSs are more likely to show patterns of incomplete acquisition than sequential bilingual HSs, who experienced a period of monolingualism, and thus substantially more early input, in the HL.

The results (Figure 1) indicate that, overall, Romanian HSs exhibit robust language maintenance across the nominal and verbal domains. A GLMER analysis for each of the eight grammatical phenomena, with response accuracy as dependent variable and group as fixed factor shows, however, that differences emerge between the HS groups and the 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants and monolingually-raised Romanians in the homeland. Specifically, in the nominal domain, both HS groups are significantly less accurate with gender agreement, article production, clitics, and the correct use of overt subjects ( $p < .001$ ). Effects of AoO of bilingualism emerge in the verbal domain for subject-verb agreement, use of the imperfect and use of the correct subjunctive form. The simultaneous HSs show significantly more difficulties with these morphosyntactic phenomena compared to all other groups ( $p < .001$ ), while sequential HSs show similar performance with 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants and monolingually-raised Romanians.

Figure 1. Response accuracy by group for:



**References:** [1] Avram et al. (2024). On the production of subject and object relative clauses by child speakers of heritage Romanian in France; [2] Bentea & Marinis (2022). Multiple wh-interrogatives in child heritage Romanian: On-line Comprehension and Production; [3] Montrul & Bateman (2020). Differential object marking in Romanian as a heritage language; [4] Avram et al. (2023). Differential Object Marking and Diachronic Incrementation in Child Heritage Romanian; [5] Pîrvulescu & Hill 2025. The acquisition of object clitic pronouns in Heritage Romanian; [6] Montrul 2022. Native Speakers, Interrupted: Differential Object Marking and Language Change in Heritage Grammars.; [7] Montrul 2008. Incomplete Acquisition in Bilingualism. Re-examining the age factor.