

The use of null and overt subjects in narratives by Romanian-Russian and Romanian-Ukrainian bilinguals

Background. Recent acquisition studies have revealed cross-linguistic interference effects on early subject use in a bilingual context which involves a *pro*-drop and a non *pro*-drop language. One can identify a cross-linguistic pattern: the direction of these effects is from the non-null subject language to the null subject one (e.g. from English to Italian in Serratrice, Sorace and Paoli 2004, from English to Greek in Argyri and Sorace 2007). These studies also show that dominance and directionality of interference seem to be related (Argyri and Sorace 2007, Serratrice 2007).

Aim. The aim of the present study is to investigate whether there is evidence for cross-linguistic interference effects on subject use in the speech of Romanian - (Lipovan) Russian and Romanian-Ukrainian (Hutsul) bilingual children. Given the fact that Russian and Ukrainian are partial *pro*-drop languages (Růžička 1986, Müller 1988, 2011, Benedicto 1993, Perlmutter & Moore 2002) and Romanian is *pro*-drop (Dobrovie-Sorin 1993), the data may shed light on whether the pattern of cross-linguistic interference effects is the same as the one reported for non *pro*-drop /*pro*-drop learning contexts.

Method and participants. For the present study I used frog story narratives (*Frog goes to dinner* and *Frog, where are you?*). The participants were asked to tell the story in Romanian and then in Russian/Ukrainian. The subjects were coded as (i) overt and null; (ii) occurring in past tense and in non-past tense sentences. Three groups of children took part in the study: (i) 10 Romanian-Russian bilinguals, who speak Russian at home, Romanian in the community and at school, where they also have classes of Russian as a native language (3 hours/week); (ii) 14 Romanian-Ukrainian bilinguals, who speak Ukrainian at home and in the community, Romanian in the community and at school, where they also study Ukrainian as a native language (3 hours/week); (iii) 10 Romanian monolinguals. Details related to the participants and the corpus are given in Table 1.

Results and discussion. The results reveal a high rate of overt subjects in the Russian and in the Ukrainian narratives (Table 2). For both languages, the rate of null subjects is significantly lower in past tense sentences. The data show that there is no cross-linguistic interference from Romanian, the *pro*-drop language, to the partial *pro*-drop language. In the Romanian narratives of the bilinguals, the rate of overt subjects is higher than in the narratives of the control group of age-matched monolinguals and also higher than reported in previous studies for younger Romanian monolinguals (Teodorescu 2014). The rate is higher with the Romanian-Ukrainian group than with the Romanian-Russian group (Table 2). I interpret the data as revealing cross-linguistic effects on early subject use in accordance with previous studies. The results show that the direction is from the partial *pro*-drop to the *pro*-drop language. The difference between the two groups of bilinguals with respect to overt subject use in Romanian can be accounted for in terms of language dominance. The Romanian-Ukrainian bilinguals speak Ukrainian both at home and in the community, whereas the Romanian-Russian group speak Russian only at home.

Table 1. Corpus and participants

GROUP	AGE RANGE	TOTAL Verb UTTERANCES
Romanian-Russian (10)	5;9-8;1	Romanian: 425 Russian: 302
Romanian-Ukrainian (14)	5;0-9;1	Romanian: 436 Ukrainian: 331
Romanian monolinguals (10)	5;5–9;1	553

Table 2. Results

Group	Language	Verbal utterances	Overt subjects	% overt subjects
Romanian-Russian	Romanian	425	272	64%
	Russian	302	251	83.11%
Romanian-Ukrainian	Romanian	436	290	97.6%
	Ukrainian	331	335	76.8%

References

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