

## **A comparison between adult heritage speakers and L1 attrited speakers on Italian answering strategies**

This study investigates how different forms of multilingual knowledge shape syntactic phenomena that are the reflex of discourse related conditions, at the syntax-discourse interface. The population types under investigation are Heritage Speakers (HE; heritage language: Italian; majority language: German) and speakers undergoing L1 attrition (AT; L1: Italian; L2: German). Previous studies on Italian L2 speakers with German as L1 (Belletti & Leonini, 2004) and on Italian near-natives with English L1 (Belletti, Bennati & Sorace, 2007) showed that learners do not master native-like performance on answering strategies throughout their L2 development and tend to transfer strategies from their L1. We aim at enriching the picture with data from speakers of Italian and German according to different forms of multilingualism. We will claim that multilingual proficiency affects answering strategies, independently of early exposure to the target language (HE and AT), language overall exposure and dominance (AT). The phenomenon under investigation is the word order necessary to express a given discourse content, such as New Information Subjects (NIS) in answers to questions that prompt the identification of the clause subject. Belletti (2007) showed that languages differ with respect to the answering strategies in use: Italian answers to these questions display the word order VS, thereby realizing the NIS in the immediate vP periphery (1); in contrast, German keeps the SV order and focalizes the NIS prosodically (2):

- (1) *Chi ha chiamato? / Ha chiamato Gianni*      (2) *Wer hat angerufen? / JAN hat angerufen*  
Who has called / has called Gianni      Who has called ? / Jan has called

Answering strategies are investigated in Italian through an elicited production task. Participants (Table1) watch 22 short videos and listen to 34 questions that trigger answers with NISs; their output is recorded and analyzed according to the verb type in the question/answer pair (20 transitives, 10 unergatives, 4 unaccusatives).

Data from controls (MonoL1) reports a very uniform behavior, with the VS strategy consistently adopted across all task conditions ( $\geq 95\%$ ). Both HE and AT speakers diverge from native-like performance by producing a significantly lower percentage of VS answers (Graph1). In the performance of AT speakers, VS structures are attested at 47% with transitives, at 67.2% with unergatives and at 68.8% with unaccusatives. As for HE speakers, VS structures corresponds to the 40.2% of answers with transitives, the 53.9% with unergatives, and the 62% with unaccusatives.

The (most frequent) alternative strategy is SV<sup>1</sup> (Graph2): AT produce SV strategies in answers with transitives (31.1%), unergatives (25.9%) and unaccusatives (31.4%), as well as HE do (transitives: 52.6%; unergatives: 42.8%; unaccusatives: 38%).

In order to interpret these data, we will elaborate on the nature of the syntactic phenomenon investigated and the effects of multilingualism: the results reveal that multilingual proficiency determines an increased variety of adopted answering strategies in use to convey the intended discourse content, thus confirming that phenomena at the discourse-syntax interface are prone to a certain amount of variability (Hulk & Müller, 2000; Sorace, 2004). The produced answers are all grammatical; however, performance profiles reflect neither MonoL1 nor complete transfer from German. Both populations under investigation transfer the German-like SV strategy into Italian, independently of their form of multilingualism, i.e. whether German is their dominant language (as for HE) or their L2 (as for AT). The concurrence of Italian and German in speakers' multilingual knowledge shape their answering strategies to convey NISs.

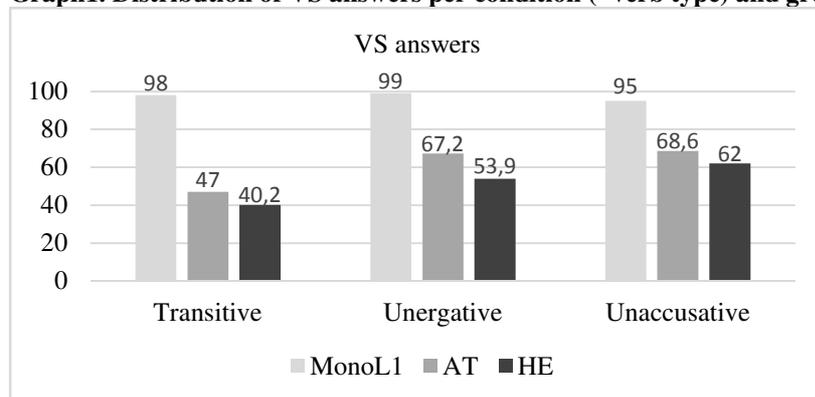
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<sup>1</sup> "Other" answers are omitted from the present abstract and the Graphs for reasons of space, but they will be addressed during the talk.

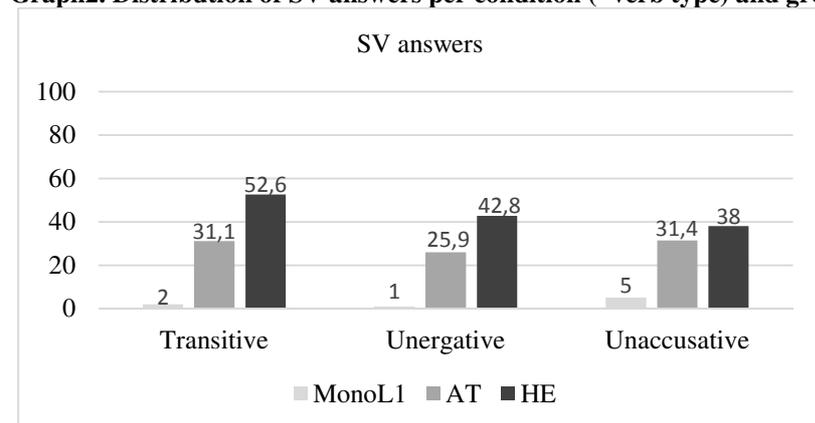
**Table1. Data from the participants in the study: heritage speakers (HE), potentially attrited native speakers (AT) and native speakers of Italian<sup>2</sup> (MonoL1).**

| Participants  | N° | Age        | Years in Germany | Cloze-t Italian (/45) | Cloze-t German (/45) |
|---------------|----|------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>MonoL1</b> | 10 | -          | -                | -                     | -                    |
| <b>AT</b>     | 20 | 41;1 (8;3) | 13;7 (5;1)       | 38.7 (4.1)            | 31 (10)              |
| <b>HE</b>     | 22 | 25;6 (5)   | 25;6 (5)         | 25.4 (7.1)            | 35 (3.8)             |

**Graph1. Distribution of VS answers per condition (=verb type) and group in %.**



**Graph2. Distribution of SV answers per condition (=verb type) and group in %.**



## References

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<sup>2</sup> Data for L1 monolingual speakers of Italian (MonoL1) are reported from Belletti & Leonini (2004).