

## **Semantic features processing by monolingual and bilingual speakers**

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L1 transfer is a hallmark of bilingualism. Studies describing how L1 transfer affects late pubertal L2 grammatical systems abound in SLA research. This research has found L1 transfer to be linked to 3 key phenomena, divergence between L1 and L2 representations, interlanguages, and L2 fossilization (Vainikka & Young-Scholten 2011; Schwartz & Sprouse in Press). In contrast, far less is known of the role of L1 transfer when the two grammars come into contact earlier in life, otherwise dominant language transfer in heritage language grammars (Polinsky, 2018). Unlike adult L2 speakers, the dominant language of the heritage speaker potentially affects the weaker language already from childhood. The best evidence to date of dominant language transfer comes from studies focusing on L2 syntax exploiting language production tasks (Fenyvesi 2005; Cuza & Frank 2015; Cuza & Strik 2012). These studies, however, employed elicited imitation which has been criticized for failing to evaluate capacity to produce (rather than imitate) language (Vinther 2002) and bias monolingual populations when compared to heritage speakers (Polinsky 2018). Another method which has been shown to tap into abstract representations fairly validly is structural priming (Jackson, 2018 for a state-of-the-art). Intrinsically linked to the use of priming and L1 transfer is the Basic Continuity Hypothesis (BCH) (Romano 2018) which maintains the sentence production mechanisms of monolingual (L1) and highly proficient L2Ss are similar enough for the latter to be able to integrate semantic and syntactic information in native-like manner despite any associated structures being absent in the L2Ss' L1 grammar. Thus, in the study we present, we extend the BCH to heritage speakers. The questions we address are as follows:

RQ1: To what degree does transfer affect L2 and heritage grammars?

RQ2: How similar are the language production mechanisms in L2 and HL to monolingual speakers, particularly when a structure requiring integration of semantic/syntactic information is absent from the L1/dominant language of the bilingual?

To address these questions, an oral structural priming task was employed to compare advanced Swedish speakers of Italian ( $n = 13$ ), proficiency-matched adult heritage Italian speakers ( $n = 14$ ) dominant in Swedish, and Italian monolinguals ( $n = 18$ ). The production of 4 clitic structures requiring coordination of syntactic/semantic information, namely proclisis with lexical, modal, and causative verbs and *si*-passives which are only possible in Italian (1-4), in comparison to a structure shared by both Italian and Swedish, namely transitives (5) was measured. If L1 transfer (RQ1) occurs, it was predicted that the transitive structures would lead to higher priming rates than clitic structures in the L2 and HL groups as the bilinguals are eased by an overlap in L1/L2 transitive structures. Moreover, if the BCH applies to both L2S and heritage speakers (RQ2), priming rates will be significantly high (above 60%) and comparable to native speakers. Results showed that bilinguals are not primed any more on transitives than some clitic structures, rejecting transfer. Moreover, they are primed higher than 60% on all but clitics + modals structures with most contrasts by structure not being statistically significantly different from monolinguals, supporting the BCH. Finally, an analysis of divergent structures produced shows L2/HL passive structures to be remarkably compatible with those produced by monolinguals at earlier developmental stages reported in previous research.

(1) Lexical

- a. I pesci, Pietro li cucina all'aperto  
the fish Pietro cl.ACC.3PL cooks.v in-outdoors  
'the fish, Pietro cooks them outdoors'
- b. \*I pesci, Pietro cucina li all'aperto  
The fish Pietro cooks.v cl.ACC.3PL in-outdoors

(2) Modal

- a. I pesci, Pietro li vuole cucinare all'aperto  
the fish Pietro cl.ACC.3PL want.MOD cook.v-INF in-outdoors  
'the fish, Pietro cooks them outdoors'
- b. I pesci, Pietro vuole cucin-ar-li all'aperto  
the fish Pietro cl.ACC.3PL cook.v-INF-cl.ACC.3PL in-outdoors

(3) Causative

- a. I pesci Pietro li fa cucinare all'aperto dalla zia  
the fish Pietro cl.ACC.3PL make.CAUS cook.v-INF in-outdoors by auntie  
'The fish, Pietro has them cooked outdoors by auntie'
- b. \*I pesci Pietro fa cucin-ar-li all'aperto dalla zia  
the fish Pietro cl.ACC.3PL make.CAUS cook.v-INF in-outdoors by auntie

(4) Si-passives

- I pesci si cucinano all'aperto  
the fish cl.PASS cook in-outdoors  
'the fish need be cooked outdoors' or 'the fish cooks outdoors'

(5) Transitives

- Pietro cucina i pesci all'aperto  
Pietro cooks.v the fish in-outdoors  
'Pietro cooks the fish outdoors'

## References

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