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Null and Overt Subjects in the Narratives of Speakers of Heritage Romanian in Contact with Italian and Dutch

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Abstract This study investigates the distribution of null and overt subjects in child heritage Romanian in the narratives of Romanian-Italian and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals compared to those of age-matched monolinguals. The results reveal that heritage speakers use subjects similarly to monolinguals with one exception. In intrasentential contexts the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals, unlike the other groups, do not use significantly more null than overt subjects. Since in Dutch topics can be dropped in main but not in embedded clauses, we suggest that this different distribution pattern can be explained in terms of crosslinguistic influence effects.

Keywords Subjects. Heritage Romanian. Romanian-Italian bilinguals. Romanian-Dutch bilinguals. Crosslinguistic influence.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 On Null and Overt Subjects in Romanian, Italian and Dutch. – 3 Null and Overt Subjects in Heritage Languages. – 4 The Study. – 5 Conclusions.

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1 Introduction

In *pro*-drop languages, both overt and null pronominal subjects are syntactically licit in finite clauses. The former generally signal topic shift (TS), the latter are used mainly in topic continuity (TC) contexts. A growing number of studies provide evidence that in bilingual settings narrow syntax properties are not problematic whereas properties at the syntax-pragmatics interface, as is the case of subject use, whose acquisition requires a relevant amount of input, are more likely to be affected (Sorace 2011).

Heritage languages are acquired under conditions of reduced input which generally becomes even more limited after onset of schooling in the environmental language. This is why they offer a good testing ground for the possible effects of reduced input on the use of null and overt subjects. Additionally, since heritage languages are acquired in contact with the environmental language, they also offer a good testbed for the role of crosslinguistic influence.

The studies which investigated the distribution of subjects in heritage languages provide controversial findings. Some report overt pronominal subject (OPS) overuse (Montrul, Sánchez-Walker 2013; Flores, Rinke 2024), others show that null pronominal subjects (NS) are actually the vulnerable ones (Montrul 2004; Giannakou 2018). In contrast, the results in Brehmer, Sopata, Canzi (2023) reveal that child heritage speakers do not differ significantly from monolingual children with respect to subject use.

These divergent findings may not be fully indifferent to the structural properties of the languages of the dyad. Extending the investigation to understudied pairs of languages could contribute to our understanding of some of the factors that affect subject use in bilingual development. In the current study, we examine subject use in child heritage Romanian in two language pairs, Romanian-Dutch and Romanian-Italian, both understudied in the field of heritage languages.

2 On Null and Overt Subjects in Romanian, Italian and Dutch

Romanian (1a) and Italian (1b) are null subject languages in which (referential and non-referential) NS are allowed in (main and subordinate) finite clauses:

(1) a. *pro* a spus că *pro* a citit cartea.
pro has said that *pro* has read book-the
b. *pro* ha detto che *pro* ha letto il libro.
pro has said that *pro* has read the book
'She/he said that she/he read the book.'

In both languages, NS have a [–switch reference] feature and are preferentially used in TC scenarios (Carminati 2002; Cardinaletti 2004; Zafiu 2008). They usually co-refer with a prominent antecedent, in line with their weak pronoun status (Cardinaletti, Starke 1999; Giurgea 2010). They can also be used in TS, but only if the referent is salient, or morphological and/or contextual cues disambiguate their reference. For example, in (2), agreement on *vesel* 'happy' indicates that *pro* in the *when* clause takes the matrix object as its antecedent.

(2) Ea$_i$ l- a strigat pe copil$_j$ când *pro*$_j$ intra vesel
she cl.3m.sg.acc has called dom child when *pro* entered happy.m
în casă.
in house
'She called the child when (he was) entering the house happy.'

OPS have a [+switch reference] feature. In some null subject languages, they can be pragmatically appropriate in TC as well even when there is no contrast. In such languages they behave both like weak pronouns (as defined in Cardinaletti, Starke 1999), i.e. like *pro*, and like strong pronouns. This is the case of Romanian; though there is a TS preference, OPS can occur in TC as well (Giurgea 2010). This hybrid behaviour predicts a weaker bias with respect to antecedent choice. In (3) the OPS could, in principle, pick out either the matrix subject or the matrix object as its antecedent.

(3) Nicu$_i$ l- a strigat pe Marcel$_j$ când el$_{i/j}$ intra
Nicu cl.3m.sg.acc has called dom Marcel when he entered
în clădire.
in building
'Nicu called Marcel when (he was) entering the building.'

In Italian, OPS generally signal TS but the language is possibly undergoing a change, with overt pronouns being used in TC as well (Cardinaletti 2004), even in the absence of a contrast feature. In colloquial Italian, *lui/lei* can behave like weak pronouns (Cardinaletti 1997; 2004) and hence be used for TC.

(4) Magari *pro*$_i$ non si ricordava […]. Passano i tre bambini
maybe *pro* not refl.3 remembered pass the three children
con le pere in mano. Quindi lui$_i$ li guarda.
with the pear in hand so he them looks
'Perhaps he did not remember. The three boys with the pears in their hands pass by. So he looks at them.' (Di Domenico, Baroncini, Capotorti 2020, ex. 31)

Dutch allows only overt subjects in finite clauses (5) (Koeneman, Neeleman 2001).

(5) *(Hij) zegt dat *(hij) het boek leest.
he says that he the book reads
'He says that he reads the book.'

In spoken Dutch, topics can be dropped in main (6) but not in embedded clauses (7). In this respect, Dutch behaves like a V2 language, where topic drop is restricted to the Spec of CP in the matrix.

(6) A: Wat is er met Jan aan de hand?
what is there with Jan on the hand
'What is the matter with Jan?'
B: 0$_i$ moet t$_i$ morgen naar de tandards.
must tomorrow to the dentist
'He must go to the dentist tomorrow.' (Ackema, Neeleman 2007, ex. 5a)

(7) *Ik geloof dat niet op vakantie gaat.
I believe that not on holiday go-2/3.sg
'I believe that (you/he/she) does not go on holiday.' (Ackema, Neeleman 2007, ex. 6b)

In anaphoric contexts, (unstressed) OPS preferentially pick up the subject as their antecedent, i.e. there is a TC bias, whereas demonstratives pick up the object as an antecedent (Kaiser 2011).

Lexical DP subjects (LDP) signal TS across languages.

Summing up, the Romanian-Italian pair is one of proximity. The two languages are typologically similar, they are both consistent null subject languages and the discourse use of null and overt subjects in terms of TC and TS is similar. The Romanian-Dutch pair is one of linguistic "distance": the two languages are typologically different, one is a consistent null subject language, the other one bans null referential subjects. But in terms of surface similarity, Dutch also allows NS as an instance of topic drop, restricted to non-embedded clauses.

3 Null and Overt Subjects in Heritage Languages

Bilingual children acquiring a *pro*-drop language were shown to produce more OPS in TC contexts than monolingually-raised children (e.g. Schmitz 2007 and Schmitz, Patuto, Müller 2012 for heritage Italian). According to some studies, this divergent use is temporary. Italian-English bilinguals, after the age of 8, no longer overuse OPS (Serratrice 2007; Wolleb 2013). In contrast, older Spanish-English bilinguals (ages 6-17 years) continue to use more OPS in TC contexts than Spanish monolinguals (Montrul, Sánchez-Walker 2013). Similarly, Portuguese-French bilingual children (ages 10-12 years) have been found to overuse OPS (in intersentential contexts) in written narratives. They used more overt subjects to maintain topics than Portuguese monolinguals (Flores, Rinke 2024).

The use of NS has also been shown to be problematic. Giannakou (2018) reported NS overuse in heritage Greek in contact with (Chilean) Spanish. The adult heritage speakers in her study used more NS and fewer LDP in TS in narratives. They also used more LDP than NS in TC. Importantly, both NS and lexical subject use were pragmatically appropriate. However, pragmatically infelicitous NS were attested with adult speakers of heritage Spanish (Montrul 2004).

In contrast, Brehmer, Sopata, Canzi (2023) found that child heritage speakers of Polish living in Germany (ages 4;11-13;01) did not differ from monolingual children with respect to the distribution of subjects. Similarly, Toșu (2022), who examined subject use by speakers of heritage Romanian (ages 6;00–14;01) in contact with Italian, reported no differences between heritage and age-matched monolingual speakers. But the Italian-dominant bilinguals in her study used more overt subjects than the balanced ones.

Research on heritage Spanish showed that Spanish-English bilingual children (ages 4-5) produced pragmatically appropriate subjects (Austin, Sánchez, Perez-Cortes 2017). Similar results were reported for child heritage speakers of Italian living in Germany (Scherger, Schmitz 2019).

The findings summarized here show that whether the use of null or overt subjects is vulnerable in heritage language acquisition differs from one language dyad to another.

4 The Study

4.1 Questions

The research questions addressed in the current study are:

(i) Do child heritage speakers of Romanian, simultaneous Romanian-Italian and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals acquire the

properties of subjects? Do they use null and overt subjects similarly to monolingually-raised Romanian children?

(ii) Is there any developmental difference between subject use in inter- and intrasentential contexts and between subject use in TC and TS contexts?

(iii) Is subject use pattern the same irrespective of the properties of subjects in the environmental language, i.e. irrespective of linguistic proximity/distance?

4.2 Participants

36 children[1] participated in this study **[tab. 1]**.

Table 1 Participants

Group	No	Age range	Mean age
Romanian-Italian bilinguals	12	6;00 – 12;07	9;07
Romanian-Dutch bilinguals	12	7;09 – 12;03	9;05
Romanian monolinguals	12	5;08 – 12;05	9;03

The two groups of heritage speakers consisted of children born to Romanian families living in Italy (Zelarino and Mirano)[2] and in the Netherlands (Amsterdam and The Hague), respectively. Their parents are all first-generation immigrants who had been living in the country of residence for at most 20 years. According to the parents' responses to a sociolinguistic questionnaire which focused on the linguistic profile of their children, the heritage speakers in the current study are all simultaneous bilinguals who speak Romanian at home with both parents and with siblings and Italian or Dutch at school and in the community. They occasionally read Romanian books or watch cartoons or films in Romanian. They attend optional Romanian classes (two hours per week) organised at the Romanian School in their community. They are all balanced bilinguals, as confirmed not only by their parents' responses to the questionnaire but also by their

1 Subject use by 20 first-generation immigrants living in Italy and the Netherlands, and 10 Romanian adults living in the homeland was also analysed. No difference between these groups was found.

2 The narratives of the Romanian-Italian bilinguals were collected by Bianca-Elena Babei-Popa and Alicia Toșu as part of the research for their MA dissertation, coordinated by Anna Cardinaletti, within a joint MA programme of Ca' Foscari University and University of Bucharest. The narratives of the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals were collected by Bianca-Elena Babei-Popa, as part of the research for her doctoral dissertation and supported by ICUB under Grant 292/11.01.2024.

teachers of Romanian. The comparison of the length of their "frog story" narratives (in words) and their fluency in these narratives in the two languages confirmed that they are balanced bilinguals. Fluency was determined on the basis of the comparison of speaking rate per one minute (randomly selected) while telling the story in the two languages (as in Polinsky 2008).

4.3 Corpus and Coding

We used a corpus of "frog story" narratives, audio-recorded and transcribed. For the bilingual children, who told the story in both languages, only the Romanian narratives were analysed. All finite clauses were extracted. Sentences with no true choice between null and overt subjects, such as existential sentences, subject relatives or complements of aspectual verbs were excluded. Sentences in which a discourse referent was introduced for the first time (and could only be an overt LDP) were also excluded. The quantitative details of the analysed corpus are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Total number of analysed sentences per group

Group	No of finite clauses	Excluded	Analysed
Romanian-Italian bilinguals	792	118	674
Romanian-Dutch bilinguals	493	61	432
Romanian monolinguals	747	77	670

The sentences were coded for subject type: NS, OPS, and LDP. Subjects were further coded for syntactic context: intersentential (i.e. main clauses) and intrasentential (i.e. subordinate clauses). Subject use was also examined in terms of discourse pragmatics. We distinguished between TC and TS scenarios. For example, the sentence in (8) illustrates NS use in intersentential context where the topic in the previous sentence (the subject) is maintained. The sentence in (9) exemplifies OPS in intrasentential context, signaling TS; the antecedent is the object in the main clause.

(8) Copilul$_i$ a căutat într- un copac. *pro*$_i$ şi- a dat seama…
child-the has searched in a tree *pro* refl.3.dat has given account
'The child searched in a tree. He realized …' (T. 9;06)

(9) Au început să- l$_i$ fugărească în timp ce el$_i$ fugea.
have started sbj cl.3m.s.acc chase in time what he ran
'They started chasing him while he was running.' (B. 12;05)

For the statistical analysis, to address the first two research questions and examine within-group differences with respect to subject use, we conducted a series of Friedman tests, followed by pairwise Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni correction (using the *rstatix* package in R (Kassambara 2023)). To assess between-group differences regarding subject use, we employed a series of beta regression models (using the *betareg* package in R, Cribari-Neto, Zeileis 2010), with monolinguals as the reference group. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using estimated marginal means (*emmeans* package; Lenth 2023) with Bonferroni correction.

4.4 Results (I). Subject Use in Inter- and Intrasentential Contexts

4.4.1 Descriptive Results

We first examined the distribution of subjects in inter- and intrasentential contexts. Table 3 gives an overview of the raw data for the three groups. The number of OPS was by far the lowest within each group, irrespective of syntactic context. Given these very low numbers, in what follows we will report the results of the analysis with a focus on the comparison between NS and LDP. The data also show that NS were more frequently used than LDP in intrasentential contexts. In intersentential contexts their rate was relatively similar.

Table 3 Null and overt subjects (% and raw counts) per inter- and intrasentential context

Context	Subject type	Romanian-Italian bilinguals	Romanian-Dutch bilinguals	Monolinguals
intersentential	NS	53.6% (n = 294/548)	52.3% (n = 200/382)	48.6% (n = 245/504)
	OPS	3.8% (n = 21/548)	1.8% (n = 7/382)	3.5% (n = 18/504)
	LDP	42.5% (n = 233/548)	45.8% (n = 175/382)	47.8% (n = 241/504)
intrasentential	NS	81.7% (n = 103/126)	60% (n = 30/50)	74.5% (n = 123/166)
	OPS	3.9% (n = 5/126)	0	1.8% (n = 3/166)
	LDP	14.2% (n = 18/126)	40% (n = 20/50)	24.1% (n = 40/166)

4.4.2 Statistical Analysis

The differences revealed by the raw data are statistically significant. A series of Friedman tests showed that there was an effect of subject type within all groups, irrespective of context. The comparison is summarized in Figures 1-2 below.

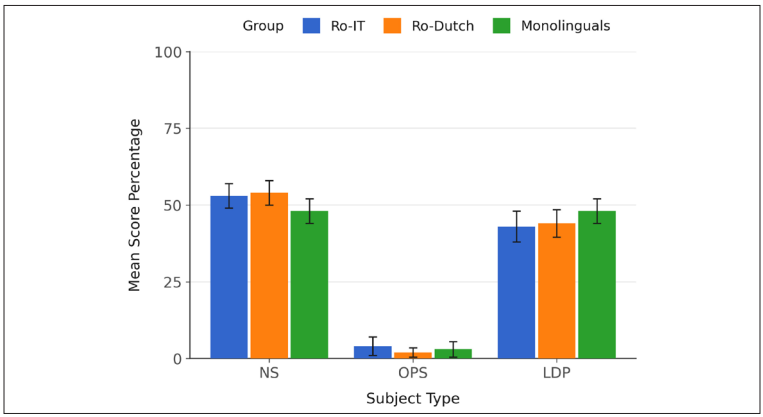


Figure 1 Null and overt subjects in intersentential contexts per group

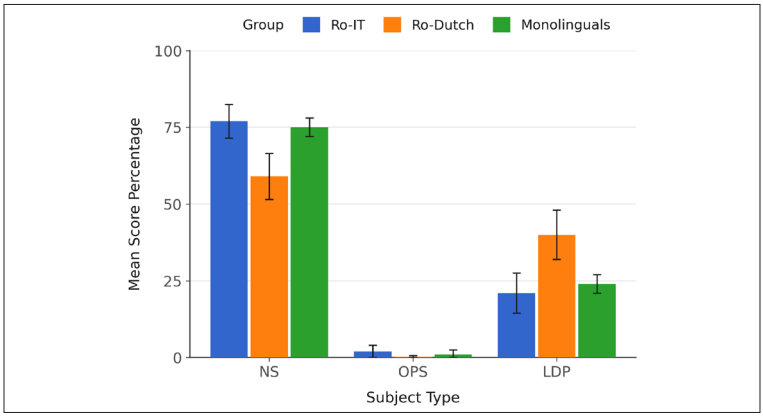


Figure 2 Null and overt subjects in intrasentential contexts per group

In intersentential contexts, there was an effect of subject type with the monolinguals ($\chi^2(2) = 18.00$, $p < .05$), the Romanian-Italian bilinguals ($\chi^2(2) = 18.56$, $p < .05$) and the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals ($\chi^2(2) = 18.42$, $p < .05$). A series of Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni correction revealed no statistically significant difference

between NS and LDP within any group. To test whether there were any statistically significant differences between the three groups with respect to subject use, we ran a beta-regression with Group as the predictor and Subject use as the dependent variable. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Italian bilinguals (β = 0.01, SE = 0.1, z = 0.01, p =.98) and no difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals (β = 0.03, SE = 0.1, z = 0.03, p =.97). A pairwise comparison also revealed no difference between the two bilingual groups (p >.05). The same results occurred when we ran beta-regressions for each individual type of subject in turn.

In intrasentential contexts, a series of Friedman tests revealed a significant effect of subject type in the group of monolinguals ($\chi^2(2)$ = 23.3, p <.05) and of Romanian-Italian bilinguals ($\chi^2(2)$ = 18.71, p <.05); both used NS significantly more than LDP (p <.05). The effect of subject type reached significance with the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals as well ($\chi^2(2)$ = 17.12, p <.05) but, although they also used NS more than LDP, this difference did not reach statistical significance (p >.05).

A beta-regression with Group as the predictor and Subject use as the dependent variable was conducted to test for any potential differences between the three groups. The model showed no statistically significant difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Italian bilinguals (β = 0.01, SE = 0.2, z = 0.04, p =.96) and no difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals (β = 0.05, SE = 0.2, z = 0.2, p =.83). A pairwise comparison also revealed no difference between the groups of bilingual speakers (β = 0.04, SE = 0.2, z = 0.16, p = 1). No differences arose when we analysed the use of each subject type in turn either.

4.5 Results (II). Subject Use in TC and TS Contexts

4.5.1 Descriptive Results

Table 4 below gives an overview of the raw data for subjects in TC and TS contexts. The distribution in TC is similar across groups: NS are by far the most frequently used ones in both inter- and intrasentential contexts, and the rates of overt subjects are low across the board. In TS scenarios, the pattern in intersentential contexts is similar for the three groups: they all used more LDP than NS, and percentages are similar across groups. In intrasentential contexts, though, there is a difference between the two groups of heritage speakers. The Romanian-Italian bilinguals used more NS than LDP whereas the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals used more LDP than NS.

Table 4 Null and overt subjects (% and raw counts) in inter- and intrasentential contexts in TC and TS scenarios

TC/TS	syntactic context	Subject type	Romanian-Italian bilinguals	Romanian-Dutch bilinguals	Romanian monolinguals
TC	intersentential	NS	85.1% (n = 246/289)	85.9% (n = 153/178)	81.4% (n = 219/269)
		OPS	2.4% (n = 7/289)	1.1% (n = 2/178)	5.2% (n = 14/269)
		LDP	12.5% (n = 36/289)	12.9% (n = 23/178)	13.4% (n = 36/269)
	intrasentential	NS	97.2% (n = 70/72)	96.1% (n = 25/26)	96.9% (n = 96/99)
		OPS	2.8% (n = 2/72)	0	0
		LDP	0	3.9% (n = 1/26)	3.03% (n = 3/99)
TS	intersentential	NS	18.5% (n = 48/259)	23.03% (n = 47/204)	11.1% (n = 26/235)
		OPS	5.5% (n = 14/259)	2.5% (n = 5/204)	1.7% (n = 4/235)
		LDP	76.1% (n = 197/259)	74.5% (n = 152/204)	87.2% (n = 205/235)
	intrasentential	NS	62.3% (n = 33/54)	20.8% (n = 5/24)	40.3% (n = 27/67)
		OPS	5.6% (n = 3/54)	0	4.5% (n = 3/67)
		LDP	33.3% (n = 18/54)	79.2% (n = 19/24)	55.2% (n = 37/67)

4.5.2 Statistical Analysis

Since the raw data in TC contexts are transparent with respect to significance, we will only be reporting the statistical analysis for subjects in TS scenarios. The comparison is summarized in Figure 3. We focused on intrasentential contexts where the raw data suggested some possibly significant differences. Since the number of OPS was too low in these contexts we excluded them from the statistical analysis.

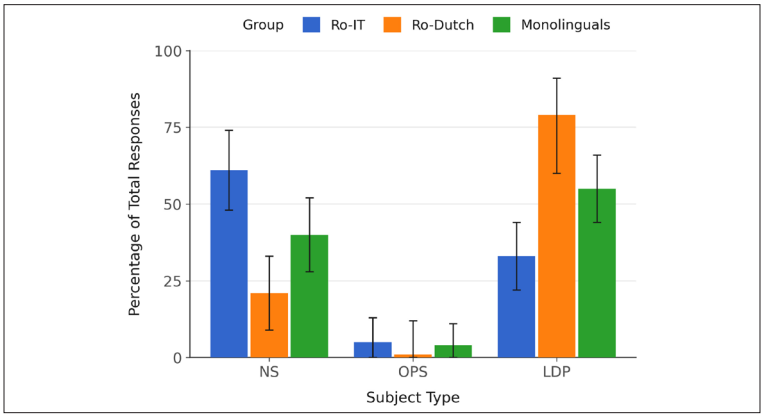


Figure 3 Null and overt subjects in TS scenarios in intrasentential contexts

A series of Friedman tests showed an effect of subject type in TS with both groups of heritage speakers, but not with that of monolinguals. The heritage speakers in Italy used significantly more NS than LDP (p <.05), whereas the mirror image was found with the heritage speakers in the Netherlands, who used significantly more LDP than NS (p <.05). A beta-regression (with Group as the predictor and Subject use as the dependent variable) was conducted to test for any potential differences between the three groups. When looking at both types of subjects together, the model shows no statistically significant difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Italian bilinguals (β = 0.01, SE = 0.09, z = 0.2 p = 1) and no difference between monolinguals and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals (β = 0.03, SE = 0.09, z = 0.3, p =.1). A pairwise comparison also revealed no difference between the two groups of bilingual speakers (β = 0.004, SE = 0.09, z = 0.1, p = 1). However, a beta-regression for each type of subject (NS and LDP) revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups of bilinguals, both when looking solely at NS (β = 0.2 SE = 0.1, z = 2.6, p =.02) and solely at LDP (β = 0.02 SE = 0.1, z = 0.2, p =.01), in line with the picture provided by the raw data.

Though NS can be felicitous in TS scenarios in Romanian, they can be so only if context or morphological cues disambiguate them. It is therefore plausible to assume that a higher number of NS in subordinate clauses in TS contexts could be indicative of pragmatically inappropriate NS use. To address this issue a qualitative analysis was conducted to evaluate the pragmatic appropriateness of NS in subordinate clauses in TS contexts in the narratives of the Romanian-Italian bilinguals. The results indicate felicitous use, i.e. the NS used in TS contexts were unambiguous.

4.6 Discussion

The current paper examined the use of subjects in child heritage Romanian in inter- and intrasentential contexts, in TC and TS scenarios. The main goal was to see whether speakers of heritage Romanian, balanced Romanian-Italian and Romanian-Dutch bilinguals, acquire the properties of subjects similarly to monolingually-raised children. Data from "frog story" narratives revealed that child heritage speakers use null and overt subjects similarly to monolingual children, irrespective of the value of the null subject parameter in the environmental language.

The number of OPS was very low within all groups, i.e. no overuse of OPS was attested. Since low counts of OPS were also found in other studies on the distribution of subjects in narratives (Pinto 2013; Torregrossa, Andreou, Bongartz 2020; Brehmer, Sopata, Canzi 2023) this may be a possible data effect.

The distribution pattern was similar across groups, with one difference attested in intrasentential contexts, where *pro* picks out its antecedent in terms of discourse prominence and c-command (Carminati 2002; Rizzi 2018), i.e. a context in which subject use is a genuine interface property. In these contexts Romanian-Italian bilinguals and Romanian monolinguals used significantly more NS than LDP whereas the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals used NS and LDP at similar percentages. This difference is more obvious in TS scenarios, where the monolinguals used NS and LDP at similar percentages, the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals used significantly more LDP than NS and the Romanian-Italian group used significantly more NS than LDP. Subject use was pragmatically felicitous within all groups, irrespective of context or scenario, indicating that the different pattern observed in intrasentential contexts cannot be an effect of divergent pragmatics.

The different value of the null subject parameter cannot have affected subject use in heritage Romanian in contact with Dutch either; this would have resulted in overuse of overt subjects across the board. In fact, different subject distribution was attested only in intrasentential contexts in TS scenarios. We suggest that this different pattern can be interpreted as a crosslinguistic influence effect (in line with Hulk, Müller 2000; Müller, Hulk 2001). Dutch bans NS in finite clauses but in the spoken language topics can be dropped. Topic drop is licit in main but not in embedded clauses, in accordance with the V2 property of this language. The superficial similarity between NS use in the two languages (Inflection-licensed NS in Romanian, topic drop in Dutch) may facilitate crosslinguistic influence. This account is further supported by the higher percentage of NS than of LDP in intrasentential contexts in TS scenarios in the narratives of the Romanian-Italian bilinguals, who are acquiring two null

subject languages. The use of NS in their narratives is pragmatically appropriate, indicating that the difference is only quantitative. This result is not singular. Adult heritage speakers of Greek in contact with (Chilean) Spanish, both null subject languages, just like the Romanian-Italian dyad in the current study, were reported to use more (pragmatically felicitous) NS and fewer lexical subjects in TS scenarios in narratives (Giannakou 2018).

Overall, our findings are similar to those in Brehmer, Sopata, Canzi (2023), Austin, Sánchez, Perez-Cortes (2017) and Toșu (2022), which show that child heritage speakers use subjects similarly to age-matched monolinguals.

5 Conclusions

The present study examined null and overt subject distribution in child heritage Romanian in contact with Italian and Dutch. The results showed that properties of subjects in the heritage language are acquired irrespective of linguistic proximity/distance between the languages of the dyad. The heritage speakers used subjects similarly to age-matched monolingually-raised children in spite of having been exposed to reduced input in the heritage language.

The results revealed two asymmetries: differences among the groups in the current study were found in intra- but not in intersentential contexts, in TS but not in TC scenarios. The distribution pattern of subjects in the narratives of the Romanian-Dutch bilinguals differed from the one of the other two groups: they were the only group who did not use a significantly higher number of NS than LDP in intrasentential contexts. This quantitative difference, more obvious in TS scenarios, was accounted for in terms of crosslinguistic influence, possibly induced by the superficial similarity between topic drop in Dutch (restricted to main clauses) and NS in Romanian. The fact that the Romanian-Italian bilinguals used more null than overt subjects in intrasentential contexts in TS scenarios further supports this account.

More generally, the present study showed that properties at the syntax-discourse interface can be acquired under conditions of language contact and reduced input. On a more tentative note, our results also point to a difference between the vulnerability in bilingual settings of subject use in intra- and intersentential contexts. The former, which involve both c-command and discourse prominence, are prone to crosslinguistic influence whereas the latter, which involve discourse accessibility alone, are probably unproblematic and free of crosslinguistic influence.

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