

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in mirrored properties

CLI takes place when the languages of a bilingual exert influence on one another; vulnerable when the two languages have (i) surface structure overlap, and (ii) at the interface between two modules of the grammar (i.e. syntax & pragmatics) ([Hulk & Müller, 2001](#)). Previous research has found that the overlapping variant is usually produced more frequently in the language with two variants, when compared to monolingual peers ([Bernardini, 2003](#); [Kupisch, 2014](#); [Rizzi et al., 2013](#); [Westergaard & Anderssen, 2015](#)).

The current study explores the outcomes of CLI when both languages have two syntactic variants, but with opposite pragmatic implications: possessive structures in Norwegian-Italian bilingual children. Both languages have the prenominal and postnominal possessive, and their use is context dependent. In Norwegian the postnominal possessive is the unmarked variant used for neutral contexts whereas the prenominal possessive is marked and signals contrast or emphasis, while the opposite is true for Italian (table 1). This combination of factors has good grounds for CLI to occur, but the direction of CLI and which factors play a role is currently theoretically unexplored.

We designed an elicitation task that tested both neutral contexts (characters interacting with their own objects) and contrastive contexts (characters interacting with objects belonging to other characters). Thirty-one Norwegian-Italian bilingual children (15 female) aged 4-10 (mean=6;3) were tested in both languages. Most of the participants were residing in Norway (n=28). Children were tested in both languages.

Our generalized linear model found (i) more postnominals in the contrast condition in Italian ($p<0.05$) indicating some intuition on the pragmatic use of the variants, (ii) more marked forms in the neutral context in Norwegian ($p<0.001$), (iii) a strong interaction of condition and language ($p<0.001$) signaling a higher usage of marked forms in the contrast conditions in Norwegian, thus being more target-like.

To this model, we then added the effects of dominance (Italian-dominant, Balanced, Norwegian-dominant) obtained based on the data of a preliminary task. Dominance had an effect only on Norwegian, since the Italian system was too simplified. We found (i) a marginal significance ($p<0.1$) between balanced and Italian-dominant participants (ii) more postnominal structures in neutral conditions in Norwegian-dominant than the balanced participants ($p<0.05$). Thus, the children are more target-like in Norwegian as their Norwegian dominance/proficiency increases (fig. 1).

Since the responses in the Italian task were almost exclusively prenominal (fig.2). We will thus argue for a simplification of the Italian system to the unmarked and more frequent variant, similar to what the literature on heritage languages reports ([Montrul, 2010](#)). This cannot be attributed to CLI from Norwegian as we would expect the exposure to Norwegian to enhance the use of the postnominal variant. Nevertheless, the simplified Italian system may still influence the use of Norwegian variants: 11 participants were target-like in the contrast condition but overused the prenominal in the neutral condition. This is pragmatically infelicitous, but linguistically in line with the expected effect of Italian on Norwegian. Dominance has an effect, but it cannot influence an already simplified system, such as the heritage language.

	Italian		Norwegian	
	Pre-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	Post-nominal
Example	La mia macchina	La macchina mia	Min bil	Bilen min
Gloss	The my car	The car my	My car	Car-the my
Derivation	Derived	Basic	Basic	Derived
Markedness (contextual)	Unmarked	Marked	Marked	Unmarked
Frequency	More	Less	Less	More
Monolingual acquisition		Slight overproduction	overproduction	
Bilingual acquisition	preferred		preferred	

Table 1: Comparison of Italian and Norwegian possessives

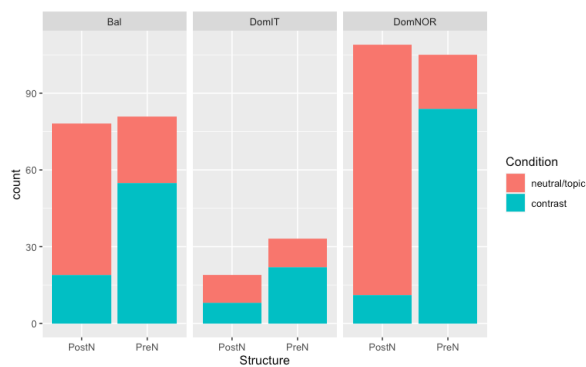


Figure 1: Use of the two variants based on language dominance divided per condition

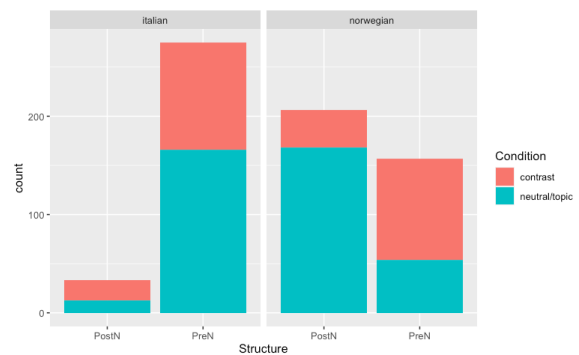


Figure 2: Distribution of the variants divided per condition and language

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