

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in mirrored properties

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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). In both languages the unmarked variant can have an emphatic intonational contour, in which case it signals contrast. 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. The controls consisted of Norwegian-English (n=15) and Italian-English (n=12) bilingual children.

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 responses were too uniformed. Our results indicate that 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 the exposure to Norwegian would enhance the use of the postnominal variant. Nevertheless, the simplified Italian system is still found to 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 (overproduction of the prenominal). From our controls we discovered a clear effect of CLI manifested with a significant overproduction of the prenominal in both groups (an effect of English). However, Norwegian-English bilinguals residing in GB had a higher use of the prenominal in the neutral condition ($p<0.01$)(fig.3), whereas the group residing in Norway paired with our target bilinguals in their responses. Thus, CLI is only detectable in the non-simplified system, and thus the direction is from simplified to intact abiding the predictions for CLI. However, factors like dominance and language status influence the accuracy of the non-simplified system.

	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

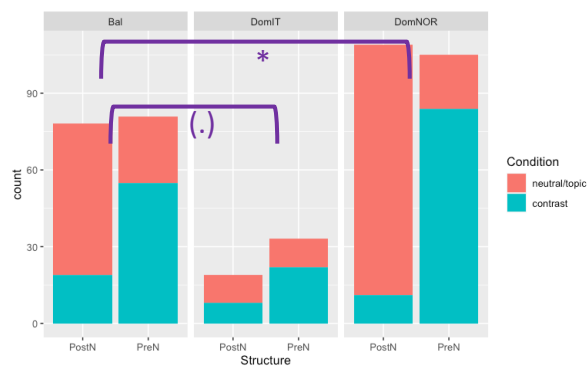


Figure 1: Use of the two variants in Norwegian based on language dominance

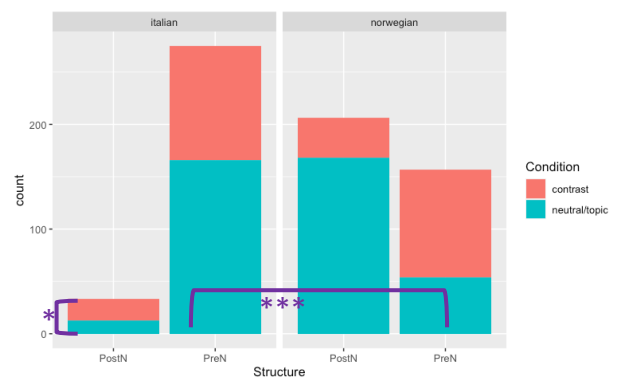


Figure 2: Distribution of the variants divided per condition and language

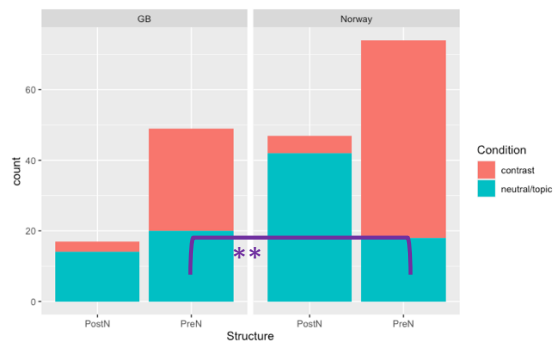


Figure 3: Use of the variants in the Norwegian-English controls based on residence

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