

Cross-linguistic influence in acceptability: possessive structures in Norwegian-Italian bilingual children

Marta Velnić – NTNU marta.velnic@ntnu.no

ISBPAC- Tromsø

Aims of the study

Investigate potential effects of CLI on acceptability in the possessive structures on Italian-Norwegian bilingual children. The two variants (prenominal and postnominal) have mirrored properties in the two languages.

Mirrored properties	Italian		Norwegian	
	Pre-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	Post-nominal
Example	<i>La mia macchina</i> The my car	<i>La macchina mia</i> The car my	<i>Min bil</i> My car	<i>Bilen min</i> Car-the my
Context	Topic/Neutral	Contrast	Contrast	Topic/neutral
Frequency	More (86%)	Less	Less	More (73%)

CLI and comprehension

CLI was found to affect acceptability : structure α (overlapping Languages A /B) is accepted in contexts where the structure β (Language B) is more appropriate.

Interpretation of possessives

Mickey has a black cup and Donald; has a blue cup.

(1) a. *Paperino; beve dalla sua; tazza.*
Donald drinks from-the his cup
b. *Paperino; beve dalla tazza sua;*
Donald drinks from-the cup his

(2) a. *Donald; drikker. Koppen hans; er pen.*
Donald drinks. cup-the his is pretty
b. *Donald; drikker. Hans; kopp er pen.*
Donald drinks. his cup is pretty

RQ: Is CLI manifested in the acceptability judgments when both languages have two variants? If yes, what is the direction?

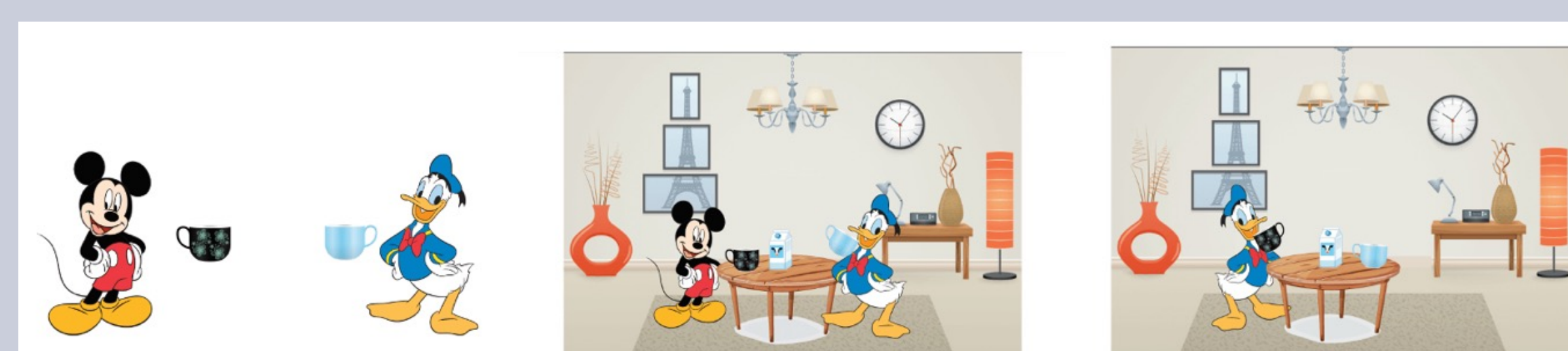
Participants

31 Norwegian-Italian bilingual children (15 female) aged 4-10 (mean=6;5),
27 bilingual controls: 12 Italian English (ages 4;0-7;5), and 15 Norwegian-English (ages 4;4-9;8).

The task

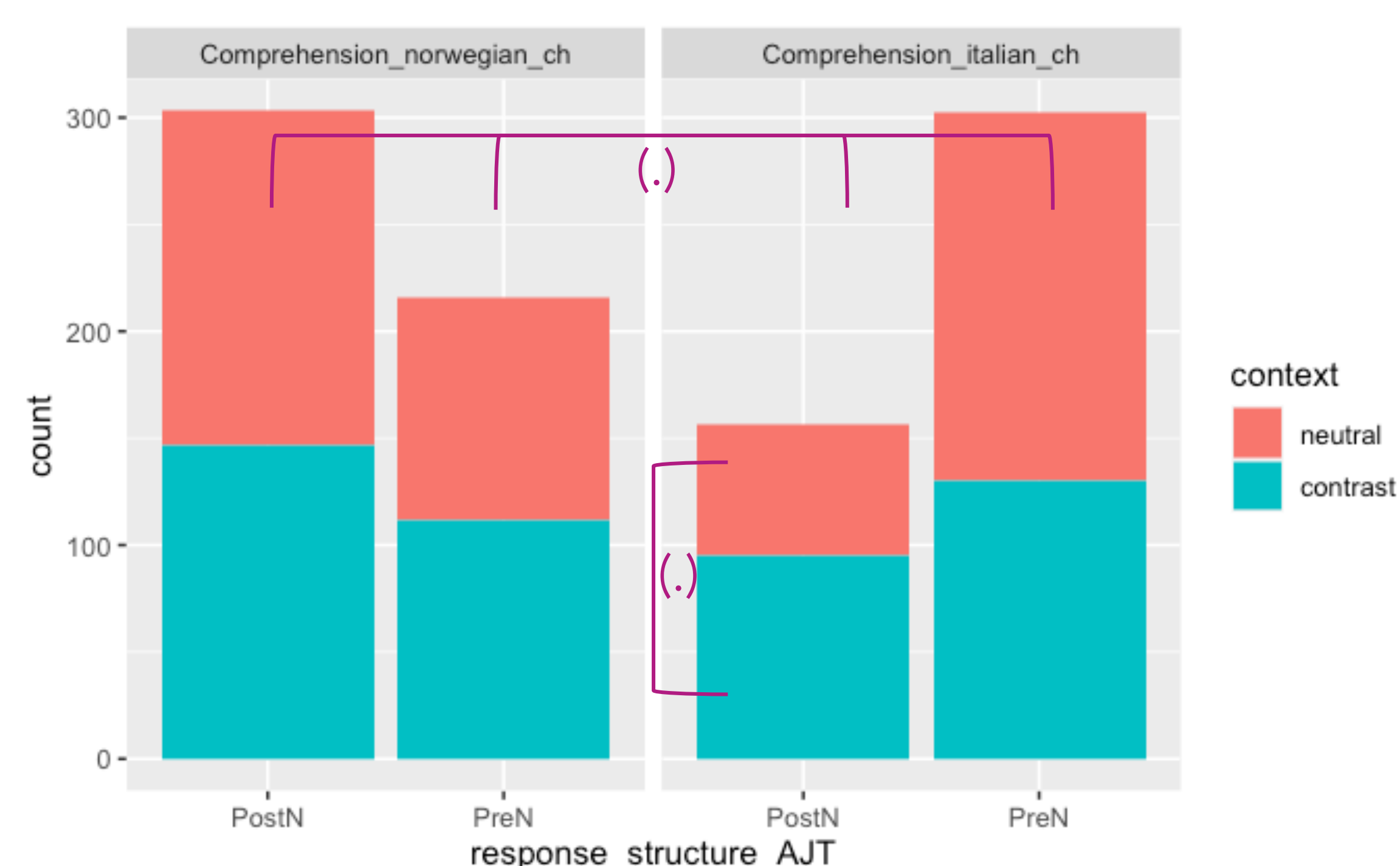
forced-choice acceptability judgment task in OpenSesame Web. The task consisted of short animations in which a character either interacted with their own object (**neutral condition**) or with someone else's object (**contrast condition**). Each scene was described by two other characters, one using the prenominal and the other the postnominal structure. The child had to choose who said it better.

Introduction Neutral Contrast



NB: the tasks in the two languages had slight differences. Shown above is the Norwegian version.

Results: glm in R. The **structure** (dependent variable) was coded as 0 and 1 based on the target contextual use. **Context** (neutral vs. contrast) and **language** (Italian vs. Norwegian) were set as independent variables. Participant and test item were plotted as random effects.



Reaction times: no statistically significant difference

RTs (ms)	Norwegian		Italian	
	PostN (neutral)	PreN (contrast)	PreN (neutral)	PostN (contrast)
Neutral	3333.876	3885.019	3965.844	4617.881
Contrast	3501.033	2862.658	4854.669	5621.303

Conclusions

Interesting interplay between responses and RTs. Children are more target-like in Italian and there is CLI from Italian to Norwegian, but the Italian RTs for the contrast condition are overall the slowest indicating that Italian children still struggle with this choice.

Selected references: Anderssen, M., & Westergaard, M. (2010). Frequency and economy in the acquisition of variable word order. *Lingua*, 120(11), 2569-2588. / Bernardini, P. (2003). Child and adult acquisition of word order in the Italian DP. In N. Müller (Ed.), *(In)vulnerable Domains in Multilingualism* (pp. 41-81). John Benjamins Publishing Company. / Hulk, A., & Müller, N. (2001). Bilingual first language acquisition at the interface between syntax and pragmatics. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 3(3), 227-244. / Serratrice, L., Sorace, A., & Paoli, S. (2004). Crosslinguistic influence at the syntax-pragmatics interface: Subjects and objects in English-Italian bilingual and monolingual acquisition. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 7(3), 183-205. / Sorace, A., Serratrice, L., Filiaci, F., & Baldo, M. J. L. (2009). Discourse conditions on subject pronoun realization: Testing the linguistic intuitions of older bilingual children. *L1*, 11(3), 460-477.



More on the methodology