

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

Marta Velnić

marta.velnic@ntnu.no

NordLang, Firenze

14.11.2024

Rationale

- The study examines cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in possessive structures among Norwegian-Italian bilinguals
- CLI studies are usually conducted on combinations of languages in which there was one overlapping structure: **Language A** with **two structures**, and **Language B** with one **of these two** (Hulk & Müller 2001)
- Mirrored properties: both languages allow prenominal and postnominal possessives, but their contextual distribution is the opposite

Mirrored properties

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%)
Markedness	Unmarked	Marked	Marked	Unmarked
Base-generated	Derived	Basic	Basic	Derived

Ref for Italian: Cardinaletti 2011, Voghera 2014

Ref for Norwegian: Anderssen 2010, Lødrup 2011, Westergaard 2015

Previous studies

- For monolingual children the process seems to be easier in Italian than in Norwegian (VeInić, 2024)
- Robust body of work for CLI effects in production
- Effect of overlap of the two languages: the overlapping structure is used more in the language that has both structures available, even when it is pragmatically infelicitous structure is **used** (Anderssen 2018 , Kupisch 2007, Licerias 2012, Müller & Hulk 2001, 2007, Nicoladis 2006, Serratrice 2004, Westergaard 2015)
- CLI was found to affect acceptability : structure a (overlapping Languages A /B) is accepted in contexts where the structure b (Language B) is more appropriate (Sorace 2009)

Aim

- 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.

Research questions

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

Participants

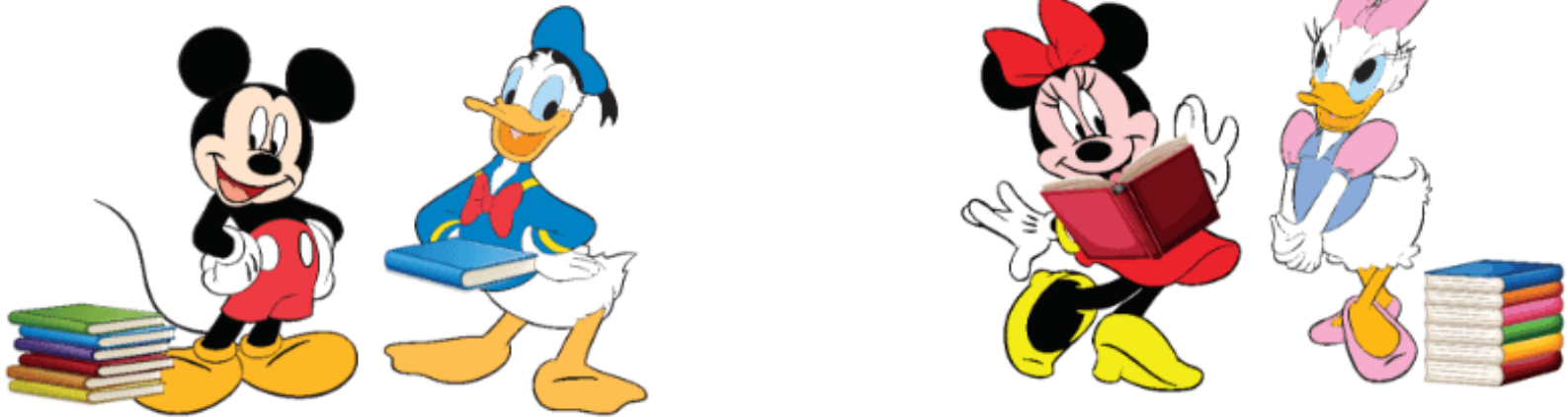
- 28 Norwegian-Italian bilingual children (15 female) aged 4-10 (mean=6;5), all residing in Norway
- Italian is the heritage language (HL)
- 27 bilingual controls: 12 Italian English (ages 4;0-7;5), and 15 Norwegian-English (ages 4;4-9;8).
- Recruited in the UK or in Norway
- Italian kept constant as the HL
- Norwegian was either the HL or the majority language

The task

- **2 forced-choice (one for each language) acceptability judgment tasks in OpenSesame Web (Mathôt et al., 2012)**.
- 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**).
- **Fillers: contrast between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences**

Storyline of the task

- Disney characters were learning Norwegian/Italian
- They described what was happening
- The child had to choose who said it better



Neutral condition - Italian



Guarda qui! Topolina ha una
tazza rossa.

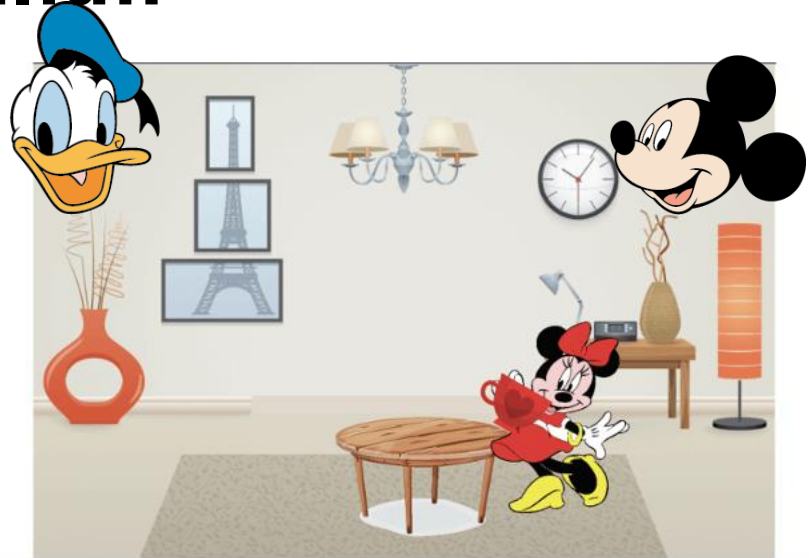
(Look! Minnie has a red cup)

Neutral condition -Italian



Guarda qui! Topolina ha una
tazza rossa.

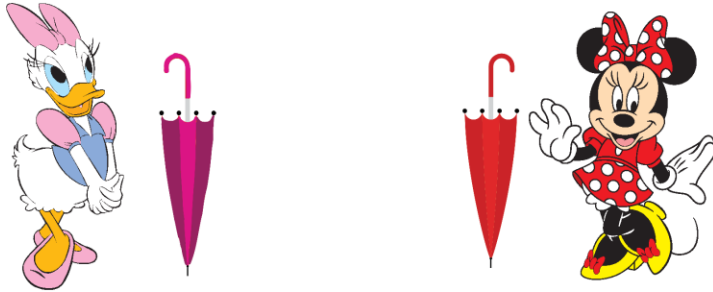
(Look! Minnie has a red cup)



Topolina beve dalla **sua** tazza.
Topolina beve dalla **tazza sua**.

Minni is drinking from **her cup/cup her**.

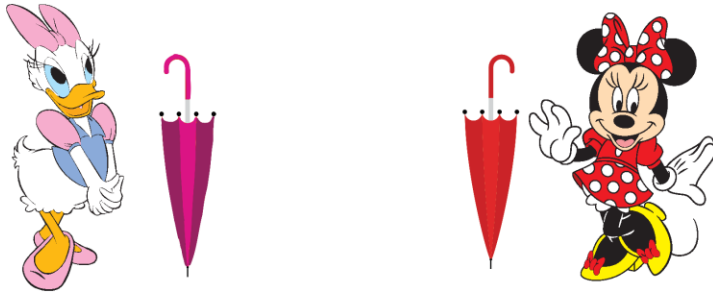
Contrast condition- Italian



Guarda qui! Paperina ha un ombrello rosa, e topolina ha un ombrello rosso.

Look! Daisy has a pink umbrella, and Minnie has a red umbrella.

Contrast condition -Italian



Guarda qui! Paperina ha un ombrello rosa, e topolina ha un ombrello rosso.

Look! Daisy has a pink umbrella, and Minnie has a red umbrella.



Oh no! Topolina é uscita col **suo ombrello.**

Oh no! Topolina é uscita col **ombrello suo.**

Oh no! Minnie went out with **her umbrella/umbrella her.**

Language adjustments

- Norwegian has reflexive pronouns which always refer to the subject

Minnie_i sover i sengen *sin*_i / sengen *hennes*_i

Minnie is sleeping in bed-the her-refl. / bed-the her.

- The target sentences in the two language tasks were slightly different to accommodate for this difference

Norwegian task

Intro

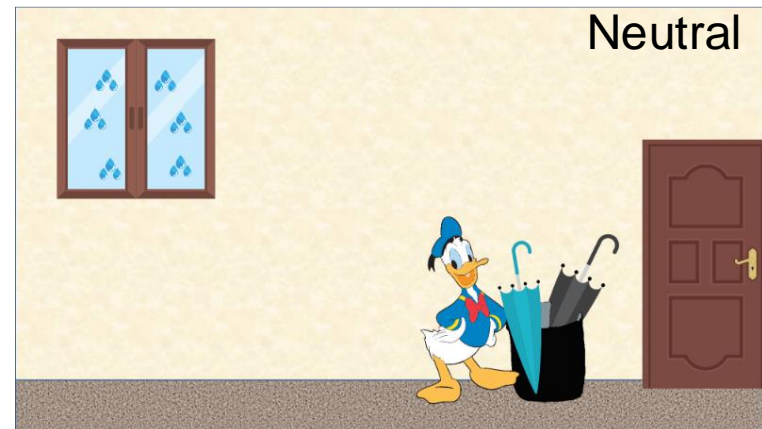


Se. Donald har en blå paraply og Mikke har en svart paraply.

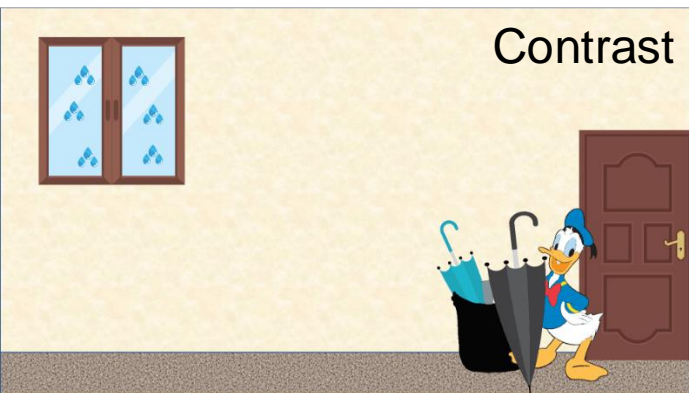
Look, Donald has a blue umbrella and Mickey has a black umbrella

Se. Donald går ut. **Paraplyen hans** er stor/
hans paraply er stor.

Look. Donald is going out. **Umbrella his/ his umbrella** is big.



Neutral



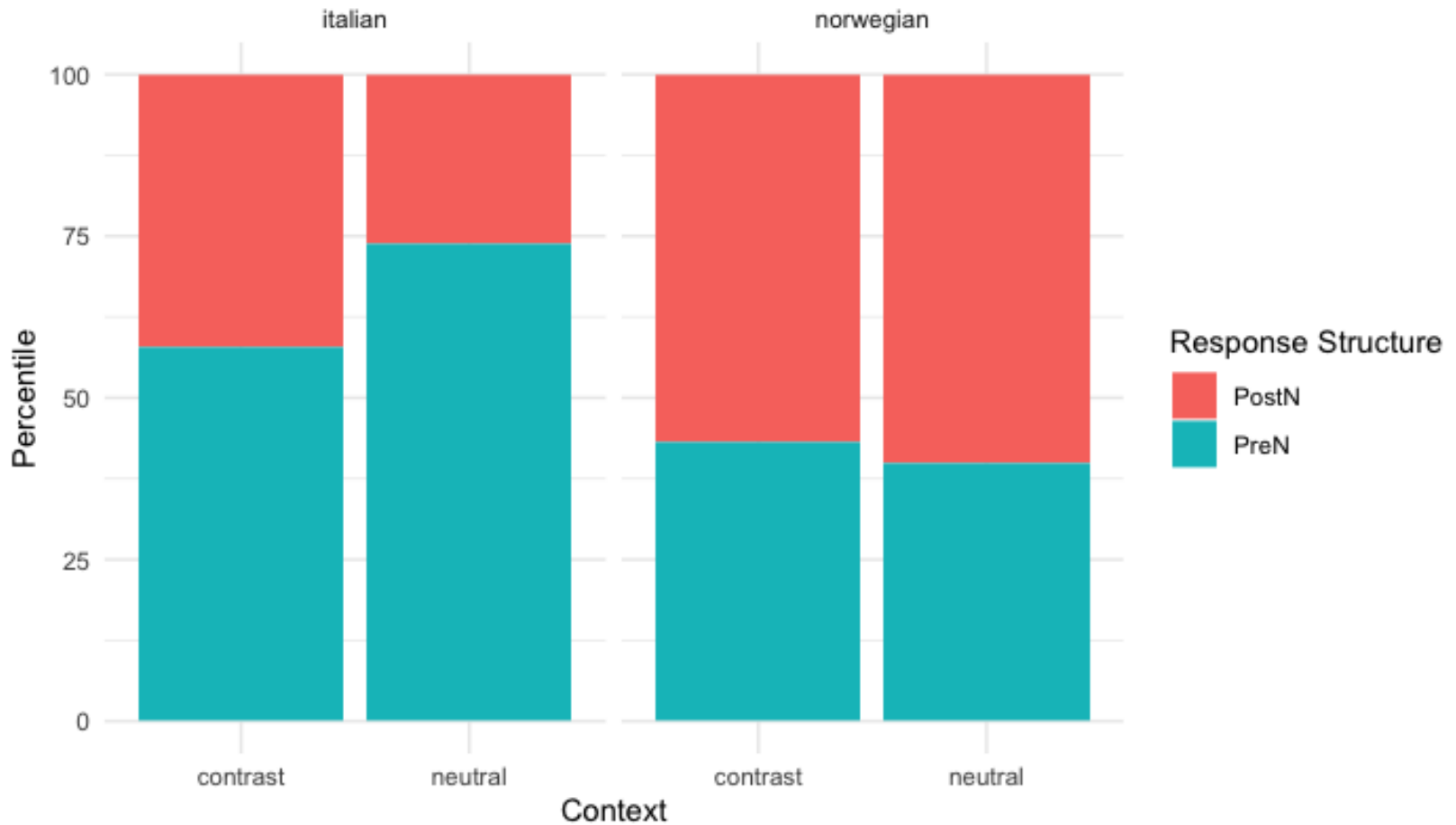
Contrast

Se nå! Donald tar Mikke sin paraply. **Paraplyen hans** er større/
hans paraply er større.

Look now! Donald is taking Mickey's umbrella.
Umbrella his/ his umbrella is bigger.

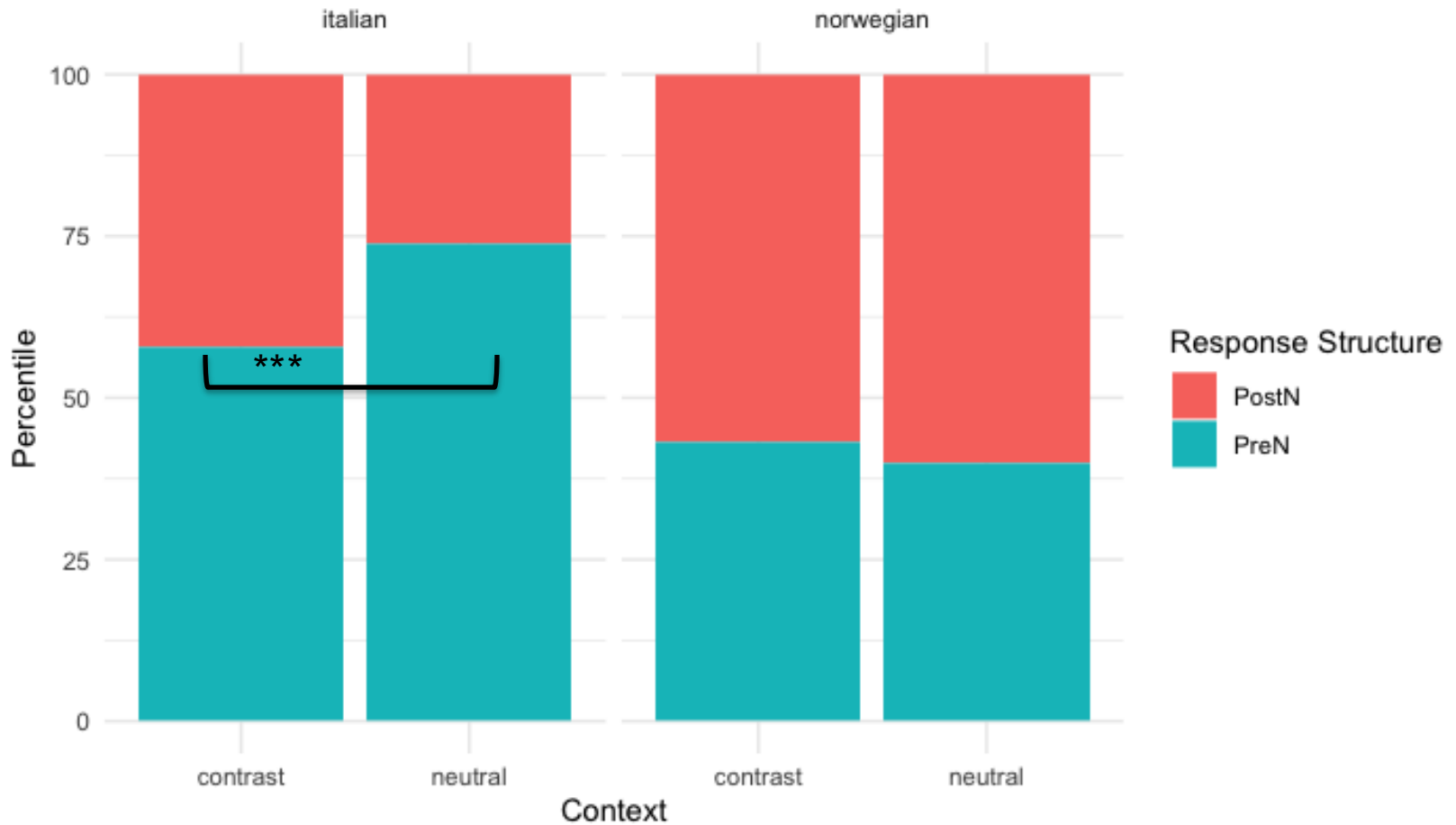
Results

Proportion of responses in each condition

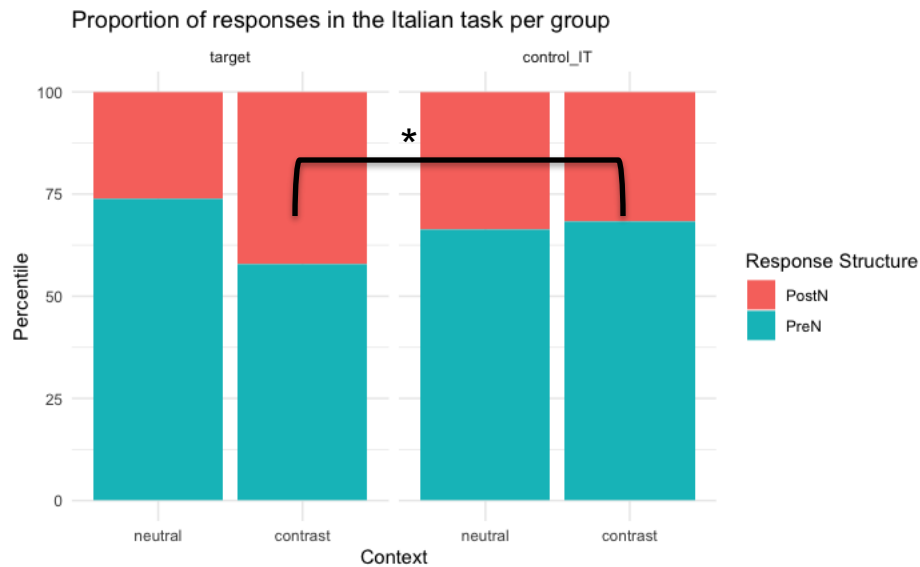


Results

Proportion of responses in each condition

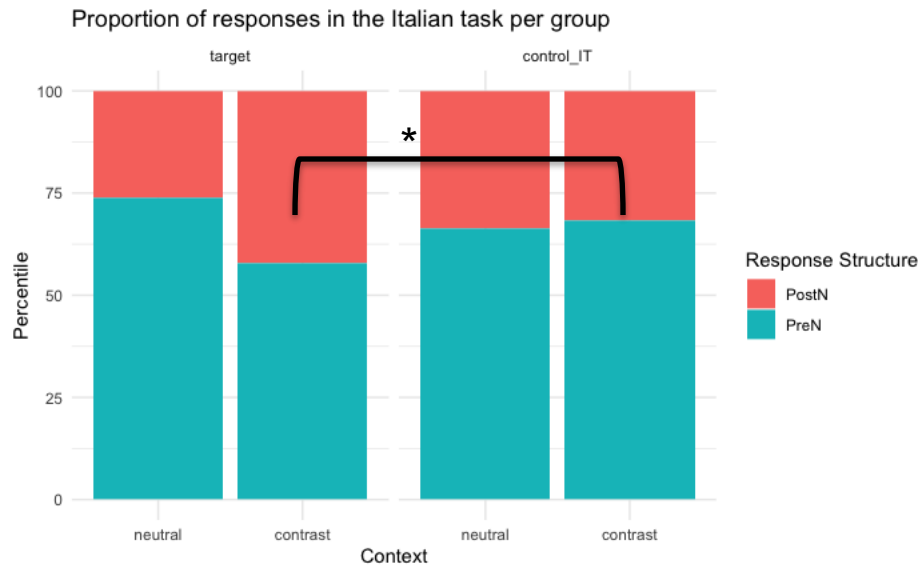


Comparison to controls



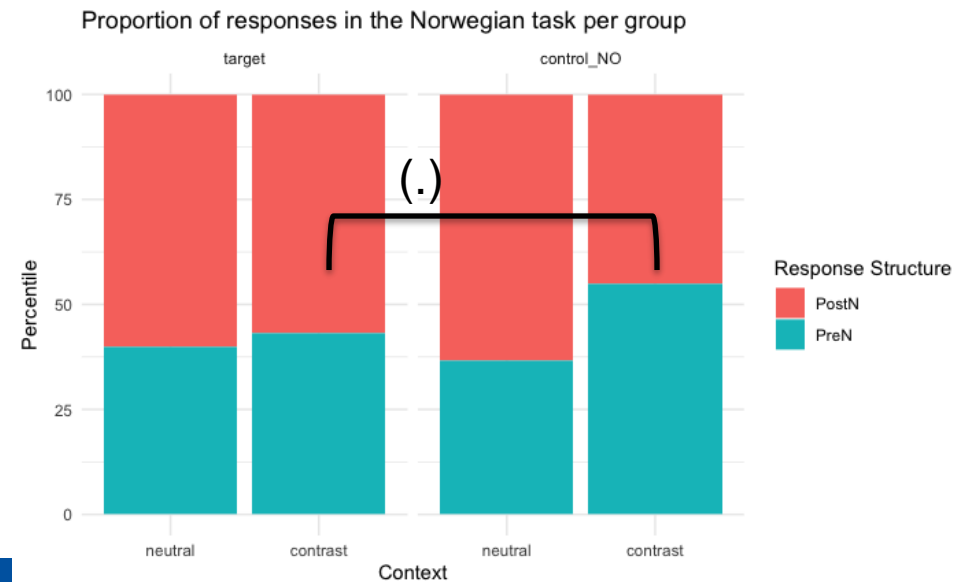
Interaction: the controls chose more PreN in the contrast condition

Comparison to controls



Interaction: the controls chose more PreN in the contrast condition

Marginal interaction:
Norwegian-English bilinguals
accepted the marked variant
more in the contrast condition
(target-like)



Discussion: Norwegian-Italian bilinguals

- The Italian-Norwegian bilinguals were more attuned to the differences in the variants in Italian than in Norwegian
- This is unusual because (i) Italian is the heritage language, and (ii) they produced very few marked variants in an elicitation task in Italian, but they used both variants in the Norwegian counterpart of the same task (Velnić, in preparation)
- The selection of variants was not well defined in Norwegian- could this be CLI from Italian?
- Or a task effect due to the language adjustments that were made?

Discussion: comparison to controls

- We checked for CLI through comparison with controls
- The controls were bilingual children with one of the target languages + English
- English only has the PreN possessive, so directions of CLI are predictable based on previous studies
- Italian task: the controls were significantly weaker in choosing the PostN variant- effect of English
- Norwegian task: stronger difference between conditions in the controls.

Conclusions

- A combination of languages with both variants in each has a positive outcome for the HL
- The HL still has an effect on the majority language
- The majority language does not seem to benefit from the dual variants in both languages
- Bi-directional CLI: the presence of the two variants in Norwegian makes the bilingual child more aware of this structure in Italian; but the same effect shows disadvantage in Norwegian, likely linked that the variants are harder to acquire to begin with

Questions?

References

- Anderssen, M., Lundquist, B., & Westergaard, M. (2018). Cross-linguistic similarities and differences in bilingual acquisition and attrition: Possessives and double definiteness in Norwegian heritage language. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 21(4), 748-764.
- Anderssen, M., & Westergaard, M. (2010). Frequency and economy in the acquisition of variable word order. *Lingua*, 120(11), 2569-2588.
- Cardinaletti, A., & Giusti, G. (2011). The Acquisition of Adjectival Ordering in Italian. In M. Anderssen, K. Bentzen, & M. Westergaard (Eds.), *Variation in the Input: Studies in the Acquisition of Word Order* (pp. 65-93). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9207-6_4
- Hulk, A., & Müller, N. (2001). Bilingual first language acquisition at the interface between syntax and pragmatics. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 3(3), 227-244. <https://doi.org/undefined>
- Kupisch, T. (2007). Determiners in bilingual German-Italian children: What they tell us about the relation between language influence and language dominance. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 10(1), 57-78.
- Liceras, J. M., Fuertes, R. F., & de la Fuente, A. A. (2012). Overt subjects and copula omission in the Spanish and the English grammar of English-Spanish bilinguals: On the locus and directionality of interlinguistic influence. *First Language*, 32(1-2), 88-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142723711403980>
- Lødrup, H. (2011). Norwegian possessive pronouns: Phrases, words or suffixes. Proceedings of the LFG11 Conference, Mathôt, S., Schreij, D., & Theeuwes, J. (2012). OpenSesame: An open-source, graphical experiment builder for the social sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 44(2), 314-324.
- Müller, N., Hulk, A. J. B. L., & cognition. (2001). Crosslinguistic influence in bilingual language acquisition: Italian and French as recipient languages. 4(1), 1-21.
- Nicoladis, E. (2006). Cross-linguistic transfer in adjective-noun strings by preschool bilingual children. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 9(1), 15-32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s136672890500235x>
- 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. 119(3), 460-477.
- Velnić, M. (2024). The acquisition of grammatical alternates: a comparison of Italian and Norwegian possessives. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics*, 27(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10828-023-09150-6>
- Voghera, M., Iacobini, C., Savy, R., Cutugno, F., De rosa, A., & Alfano, I. (2014). VoLIP: a searchable Italian spoken corpus. Olomouc Linguistics Colloquium: Language Use and Linguistic Structure., Olomouc: Palacký University.
- Westergaard, M., & Anderssen, M. (2015). Word order variation in Norwegian possessive constructions: Bilingual acquisition and attrition. In J. Bondi Johanessen & J. C. Salmons (Eds.), *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Acquisition attrition and change* (pp. 21-45). John Benjamins Publishing Company.