

The ranking of internal and external factors in heritage language syntactic change

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The study of heritage language (HL) syntax has identified several factors that can enhance or inhibit grammatical change. These factors are usually grouped into internal, i.e. linked to the changing (heritage) grammar, or external, i.e. linked to the contact, dominant grammar. It has been noted that heritage speakers (HLSs) tend to **avoid indeterminacy** (Generalization 1, **GEN1**): if an item has several syntactic functions, only one of them will be selected by the HL (Polinsky 2011). One example is Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish, where the DOM marker *a* is also used as a locative as well as dative marker; DOM tends to be affected in heritage Spanish in the US because of indeterminacy avoidance (Montrul & Bowles 2009). The same holds for DOM in heritage Russian in the US (Polinsky 2006). HLSs also avoid structures that involve several grammatical modules (**Interface Hypothesis**, **GEN2**, Sorace 2011). One notable example is *pro*-drop, which requires competence in both structural and discourse-pragmatics notions like topichood. The real-time integration of syntax and discourse information is computationally heavy, which leads to an overextension of overt subjects in HLs. Moreover, *pro*-drop is vulnerable as HLSs are **not comfortable with silent elements** (**GEN3**, Polinsky 2006, Laleko & Polinsky 2016) and therefore tend to avoid them.

The **contact language** is also assumed to play a role in HL change, but the extent of its relevance is a matter of debate. The relative weight of internal factors (among which those captured in GEN1-GEN3) and external factors (the contact language) has not been assessed to date, and these factors are usually considered to be equally, or randomly, relevant. Typological proximity is proposed to play an important role (Rothman 2010, 2011), but actual structural proximity between the phenomena in the languages in contact is not.

In this paper, we show that the contact language plays a much bigger role than previously assumed. We also show that microsyntactic variation offers a better view on what is involved in the change, and that structural similarity should be considered at featural level, not at macroparametric level, when trying to identify the causes of change. We argue that GEN1-GEN3 are partially flawed because they have been established on the basis of structurally distant languages; our data suggest that macroparametric choices can bleed microparametric ones.

Our study compared 7 Italo-Romance HLs (Venetan, Piedmontese, Friulian, Neapolitan, Abruzzese, Calabrian, Sicilian) in Argentina, Brazil and Canada, in contact with Argentinian Spanish (AS), Brazilian Portuguese (BP), and Quebec French (QF) respectively. The study targeted 51 between 1st generation emigrants and heritage speakers in Brazil, 36 in Canada, and 106 in Argentina. The data were collected during fieldwork. The speakers were asked to perform spontaneous production, grammaticality judgment tasks, picture description, and sentence completion tasks.

In southern Italian varieties with DOM in the baseline, DOM is not affected by contact with BP and QF: no appreciable changes were detected. DOM increased sensibly instead in the HLs in contact with AS, a variety with intense DOM, also extended to inanimate referents (Saab 2018). (1) is an example of DOM extension to non-prototypically

marked objects in heritage Abruzzese, whereas in the baseline variety DOM is restricted to 1st and 2nd person pronouns (D'Alessandro 2017):

- (1) Lu lopə s'a magnatə a nu gnillə (Heritage Abruzzese, Argentina)
 the wolf ate DOM a lamb
 'The wolf ate a lamb.'

Furthermore, contact of Italo-Romance HLs with AS resulted in the introduction of DOM in some varieties that do not have it in the baseline. In (2), the heritage Friulian personal pronoun 'him' is DOM-marked, while the following kinship phrase 'my mother' is not. Baseline Friulian does not have DOM.

- (2) no ai vidut a lui, ai vidut me mari (Heritage Friulian, Arg.)
 not have.1SG seen DOM him, have.1SG seen my mother
 'I have not seen him, I have seen my mother.'

While the instance of *a*-marking in (2) might be allowed if the pronoun were fronted, a common phenomenon in Romance non-DOM varieties, in (2) it appears on an *in situ* object with a contrastive interpretation, i.e. in an exceptional environment for DOM. This sort of marking is not found in other non-DOM varieties but rather mirrors DOM in AS.

Data like those in (1) and (2) contradict GEN1. Not only is DOM extended in HLs that have it in the baseline, it is also introduced from scratch in HLs that originally lack it. Indeterminacy is not resolved in the HLs, but is preserved or strengthened, in measure directly proportional to the presence of DOM in the dominant language.

GEN1 is also defied by demonstratives: more complex demonstrative systems (i.e. ternary systems that display three contrastive forms) sometimes turn into simpler binary ones:

- (3)a. chistu / chissu / chiddu (Standard Sicilian) >
 this (close to me) that (close to you) that (far from the participants)
 (3)b. chistu / chiddu (Heritage Sicilian, Argentina)
 this (close to me and you) that (far from me and you)

In (3b), one form is used to refer to the deictic domain of two discourse participants, enhancing indeterminacy where originally the two domains were contrastively expressed and therefore kept separate (3a). The complexity of the determiner systems in the contact languages plays a role also in this case, as demonstratives in contact with AS (that exhibits a ternary demonstrative system) remain more stable than those in contact with BP or QF.

Regarding GEN2: Heritage Friulian exhibits extensive *pro*-drop: subject pronouns can be dropped when they refer to a particularly salient referent, in topic-continuity contexts. While in the baseline variety subject clitics are agreement markers (Rizzi 1986, Poletto 2000), in the heritage variety they are fully-fledged pronouns (Frasson 2018), witness the fact that they can be omitted in the second conjunct of conjoined subject structures. This means that we are dealing with genuine *pro*-drop rather than with loss of inflection.

- (4) AI à comprat sedis colonis e pro veve vot fis (Heritage Friulian, Brazil)
 he has bought seven farms and pro had eight children
 'He bought seven farms and had eight children.'

These data contradict, at least partially, GEN2, as Friulian HLSs do not seem to have any trouble with grammatical phenomena involving interface factors. Even more interestingly, they introduce discourse-related constraints on *pro*-drop that are unavailable in the baseline, like topic continuity. These data also suggest that GEN3 is partially untenable, as HLSs are perfectly comfortable with silent elements, given the appropriate discourse conditions.

- (5) I soi nasut tal pais Ivorà (Heritage Friulian, Brazil)
 I am born in=the village Ivorà

'I was born in the village called Ivorà.'

- (6) *pro* soi crisude fevelant furlan (Heritage Friulian, Argentina)
pro am grown speaking Friulian
'I grew up speaking Friulian.'

Once again, the specific contact language plays an important role, since speakers in Argentina allow for more null subjects than speakers in Brazil, arguably due to the fact that BP has partial *pro*-drop whereas AS is a fully *pro*-drop language.