The syntax-pragmatic interface in bilectal acquisition

This paper investigates the syntax-pragmatic interface in bilectalism, namely the bilingualism originating in contact situations between a standard language and a non-standardized local minority language (ML). The focus lies on the syntax of left and right peripheries related to topicality in two language-contact situations, Italian-Carnic Friulian and Italian-Fodom Ladin, which differ in the make-up of either periphery. Whereas in Italian both peripheries can host given topics, aboutness and shift topics are admitted only in the left periphery (Cruschina 2021). Conversely, preliminary results indicate that the two MLs have a more restricted left periphery, not allowing all recursive topics/foci possible in Italian. We ask how the peripheries of the two languages in contact interact in bilectal children, a rather unexplored line of research. Indeed, while much research has focused on the acquisition of two major standardized languages, identifying interface phenomena as vulnerable domains (Sorace 2005, 2011; White 2011), little is known on bilectal acquisition (Kupisch/Klaschik 2017; Sanfelici/Roch 2021). We demonstrate that interface phenomena are vulnerable also in bilectal acquisition, but, differently from standard L2 acquisition, the syntax-pragmatic strategies are transferred from the ML into Italian, despite Italian being the dominant language.

18 preschool children exposed to both Italian and Carnic-Friulian from birth and 17 exposed to both Italian and Fodom from birth (*Table 1*) plus 2 adults for each language-pair were tested with the Italian version of the "Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives" (Levorato/Roch 2020), translated into Carnic Friulian and Fodom. Information on the quantity of the child's production in both languages and of the input was collected through the Questionnaire for Parents of Bilingual Children (Italian: Dicataldo/Roch 2020) (*Tables 2,3*). Each participant was tested first in the ML and then in Italian on narrative telling and retelling.

Our findings revealed **(A)** substantial differences in production between Italian and MLs. Whereas all children properly comprehended both Italian and MLs, qualitative differences in children's productions emerged only for MLs: if a child produced some ML-syntactic structures (e.g., subject clitics), s/he also produced ML-elements at the phonological, morphological, and lexical levels but not *viceversa*. Positive, though not significant, correlations were detected between the quantity of input in the ML and the quality of ML-elements produced: children with more than 60% of ML-input produced ML-syntax. **(B)** Moreover, independent of the ML-input quantity and of the language used in the production, pragmatic information was mapped onto specific syntactic positions. Taking finite predicates as our reference marker, in **preverbal position** (i) only one specifier is available in children's sentences, always hosting the grammatical subject DP, which was definite, agentive, and Aboutness Topic, usually [+Shift] (1). (ii) Conversely, both adults and one 6-year-old child produced also adverbials (ModP) preverbally, yielding the order Subject>AdvP>V. (iii) Left dislocations were almost absent in children's and adults' productions. At the **postverbal position**, there are (i) no constraints on the number and syntactic quality of the constituents; (ii) at least three pragmatic positions, i.e., for focus/contrastive information, for continuity topics and for given topics (2-4); (iii) no aboutness topics in the right periphery. (iv) Unambiguous right dislocations were produced by all children and subjects were right-dislocated when they were Continuity Topics (5). (v) Adults did not produce right dislocations but pragmatic movements in the vP periphery were detected.

In conclusion, bilectal children overuse the right periphery to mark pragmatic information of focus and given/continuity topicality. The left periphery/preverbal position hosts only one specifier [+Shift/Aboutness-Topic] and undergoes a developmental change, leading to a more granular COMP domain. We suggest that bilectal children initially assume a strict isomorphism between semantics, syntax and pragmatics (Roeper 2018): preverbally, subjects are only agentive and Aboutness/Shift Topic DPs. This isomorphism is revised during acquisition: the [topic] feature is dissociated from [aboutness], eventually yielding to the presence of object DPs in preverbal position, when topical (6). Conversely, the postverbal periphery is more granular from early on. We propose that pragmatic information is mapped onto syntax in bilectal acquisition, obeying the syntactic possibilities of the ML, i.e., fewer positions in the left periphery and more in the right one, as it represents a subset of the positions allowed in Italian in accordance with the subset principle (Berwick 1985; Clark & Roberts 1993). Theoretically, our findings are compatible with analyses that treat right dislocations differently from left dislocations (e.g., Cecchetto 1999; Cruschina 2022) and not as a single phenomenon (Cardinaletti 2002; Frascarelli/Hinterhölzl 2007; Giorgi 2015).

	ITALIAN-CARNIC	ITALIAN-FODOM
AGE 3	4 (2F) 3;3-3;9 (SD 3,1)	4(2F) 3;2-3;10 (SD 3,6)
AGE 4	5 (2F) 4;0-4;8 (SD 3,8)	4 (3F) 4;2-4;10 (SD 3,7)
AGE 5	6 (4F) 5;1-5;9 (SD 3,8)	5 (4F) 5;2-5;10 (SD 2,9)
AGE 6	3 (1F) 6;2-6;3 (SD 0,6)	4 (4F) 6;2-6;5 (SD 1,5)

Table 1. Participants' overview (only children) (SD months).

PARTICIPANT	AGE	INPUT IN ITALIAN	CHILD'S PRODUCTION IN ITALIAN	INPUT IN FODOM	CHILD'S PRODUCTION IN FODOM
P1	6	20%	20%	80%	80%
P2	6	10%	10%	90%	90%
P3	5	14%	14%	86%	86%
P4	4	52%	100%	48%	0%
P5	4	53,4%	96,7%	46,6%	3,3%
P6	5	93,4%	93,4%	6,6%	6,6%
P7	3	10%	70%	90%	30%
P8	3	15%	40%	85%	60%
P9	3	28%	70%	72%	30%
P10	4	34%	100%	66%	0%
P11	6	0%	5%	100%	95%
P12	4	55%	80%	45%	20%
P13	6	78%	100%	22%	0%
P14	3	0%	20%	100%	80%
P15	5	36%	98%	64%	2%
P16	5	2%	0%	98%	100%
P17	5	10%	90%	90%	10%

Table 3. Quantity of input children were exposed to and quantity of children's productions in Italian and Fodom (on a scale of 10 points), during their interaction time with caregivers as reported in the Italian version of The Questionnaire for Parents of Bilingual Children.

PARTICIPANT	AGE	INPUT IN ITALIAN	CHILD'S PRODUCTION IN ITALIAN	INPUT IN FRIULIAN	CHILD'S PRODUCTION IN FRIULIAN
P1	5	75%	75%	25%	25%
P2	5	85%	100%	15%	0%
P3	6	50%	80%	50%	20%
P4	6	52,5%	100%	47,5%	0%
P5	6	44%	100%	56%	0%
P6	3	42%	100%	58%	0%
P7	3	100%	100%	0%	0%
P8	4	37,5%	92,5%	62,5%	7,5%
P9	3	37%	40%	63%	60%
P10	4	40%	40%	60%	60%
P11	5	27%	27%	73%	73%
P12	4	45%	55%	55%	45%
P13	5	50%	50%	50%	50%
P14	4	60%	100%	40%	0%
P15	3	62%	70%	38%	30%
P16	5	80%	80%	20%	20%
P17	5	32%	38%	68%	62%
P18	4	84%	92%	16%	8%

Table 2. Quantity of input children were exposed to and quantity of children's productions in Italian and Carnic Friulian (on a scale of 10 points), during their interaction time with caregivers as reported in the Italian version of The Questionnaire for Parents of Bilingual Children.

1) *Poi* **[**AT/ST ***la mamma pecora***] *ha tirato fuori quell'agnellino e* **[**AT/ST ***il lupo***] *è saltato per prendere la pecora ma dopo* **[**AT/ST ***il piccolo***] *ha smesso di mangiare e* **[**AT/ST ***mamma pecora***] *stava bevendo*. **[**AT/ST ***La volpe***] *ha preso la gamba dell'agnello*. 'Then the mother goat saved the baby goat and the wolf jumped to chase the goat, but then the baby stopped eating and the mother goat was drinking. The fox grabbed baby goat's leg.'

2) e cemut ca si sint achi la volp? *triste*. Perchè? *perchè ha preso* **[**ContrT ***l'aquila***] **[**GT ***col becco***] **[**GT ***la coda***]
'How does the fox feel? Sad. Why? Because the eagle grabbed the tail with the beak'

3) e cemut ca si sint achi la volp? *dispiaciuta.* Parcé? *perchè le aquile la stanno picchiando.* E parcè il corvac a gli muart la code? *perchè è triste…si è arrabbiato e dopo ha morduto la coda della volpe.* E parcé al è inrabeat? *perchè* ***le*** *hanno prese* **[**GT ***le capre***] **[**ContinT ***le volpi***] 'And how does the fox feel here? Sad. Why? Because the eagles are beating her. And why does the crow bite her tail? Because he is sad… he was angry and then he bit the fox's tail. And why is he angry? Because the foxes took the goats.'

4) Second te il fantant cemut si sint se al iout il gjat? *gli dice che ha mangiato tutti i pesci… arrabbiato … deve pescare ancora perchè li ha mangiati* **[**ContrT ***il gatto***] **[**GT ***i pesci***]. 'How do you think the baby feels when he sees the cat? He tells him that he has eaten all the fish… angry… he has to fish again because the cat has eaten the fish.'

5) *C'era una volta un gatto che voleva prendere gli uccellini*, [AT/ST *la mamma*] *volava via e poi si arrampica* **[**ContinT ***il gatto***] *e poi vede il topo*. 'Once upon a time there was a cat who wanted to catch the birds, the mother flew away and then the cat climbed up and he saw the mouse.'

6) *il mio papà abbocciava i pessi che abbiamo preso* **[**AT-OBJ ***tre***] **[**SBJ ***il gatto***] ***li*** *ha mangiati.. non tutti .. quando ha taiato la coda.* 'My father fished and the cat ate three of the fish we caught… not all of them… when he cut its tail.'

Selected References: Cruschina, S. (2021). Topicalization in the Romance languages. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press. Levorato, M. C., & Roch, M. (2020). Italian adaptation of the multilingual assessment instrument for narratives. ZAS Papers in Linguistics, 64, 139-146. Sorace, A. (2011). Pinning down the concept of "interface" in bilingualism. *Linguistic approaches to bilingualism*, 1(1), 1-33.