

## Differential object marking use in heritage Romanian in contact with Dutch: Does linguistic contact accelerate language change?

When children are exposed to a variable input which provides two variants of the same phenomenon, they extend the innovative variant beyond their input (Cournane 2019 and references therein). This extension can ultimately lead to a change in the language. An incipient change in the language tends to get amplified under conditions of language contact. In heritage language acquisition, changes in progress in the target language have been argued to often get accelerated (Kupisch and Polinsky 2021). Some studies, however, show that not every change gets amplified in heritage languages.

Avram et al. (2023) examined the acquisition of differential object marking (DOM) by child heritage speakers of Romanian in contact with French (a language which does not have overt morphological DOM) and showed that the undergoing change attested in the DOM system of the Romanian language spoken in the homeland is not advanced in this language pair. Babei-Popa (submitted) examined DOM use by child heritage speakers of Romanian in Italy. Italian, just like French, lacks an overt morphological DOM marker<sup>1</sup>. The results in her study are in line with those reported in Avram et al. (2023), indicating that child heritage speakers of Romanian in contact with Italian do not advance the change in progress attested in the Romanian DOM system.

The current study extends their investigation to child heritage speakers of Romanian in contact with Dutch (a non-overt DOM language<sup>2</sup>). The study provides another language pair in which the potential acceleration of a linguistic change under conditions of language contact can be tested.

The Romanian DOM system is currently undergoing a linguistic change, from a system which allows two DOM markers: (i) single *pe* and (ii) clitic doubling (see the examples in 1a-b) to one which uses exclusively clitic doubling (CD) (Avram and Zafiu 2017, Hill and Mardale 2021) (see the example in 2). Following the view that language change is accelerated under conditions of language contact, child heritage speakers in this study are predicted to use the innovative variant (CD as DOM) at a higher rate than single *pe*, possibly exclusively CD.

In order to test this prediction, I examine DOM use in the ‘frog story’ narratives (Berman and Slobin 1994) of 16 balanced simultaneous Romanian-Dutch heritage speakers (age range 06;00-13;01, mean age 09;03) living in the Netherlands. DOM use by child heritage speakers is compared to DOM use by age-matched monolingual children living in the homeland.

Results indicate that the Romanian-Dutch heritage speakers use DOM (both single *pe* and CD) at a rate of 23% ( $n = 15/65$ ), whereas monolinguals use DOM at a higher rate of 46% ( $n = 46/101$ ). The difference reaches statistical significance ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 7.64$ ;  $p = .005$ ). A closer look at the type of DOM marker (single *pe* or CD) used reveals that child heritage speakers use CD as DOM (i.e. the innovative variant) at a rate of 67% ( $n = 10/15$ ), whereas monolinguals use almost exclusively CD (95%,  $n = 44/46$ ). Even though the heritage group uses CD as DOM at a relatively high rate, they lag behind monolingual children who perform at ceiling. The results in this study are in line with those reported in previous studies and suggest that the change in progress in the Romanian DOM system is not advanced in heritage Romanian in contact with Dutch either. I tentatively account for the data in terms of DOM being a phenomenon at the interface between morpho-syntax and pragmatics. Interface phenomena have been argued to be vulnerable in bilingual settings (Sorace 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> See Cassarà & Mürmann (2021) and Belletti (2022) for a discussion about an incipient DOM use in Italian.

<sup>2</sup> See de Swart (2014) for a discussion about a possible (paradigmatic case of) DOM in Dutch.

- (1) a. Am căutat **pe** copil în tot parcul. DOM = *pe*  
 have searched *pe* child in all park-the  
 b. **L-** am căutat **pe** copil în tot parcul. DOM = CD  
 CL.3SG.M.ACC have searched *pe* child in all park-the  
 ‘I looked for the child in the whole park.’
- (2) **L-** am căutat **pe** copil în tot parcul. DOM = CD  
 CL.3SG.M.ACC have searched *pe* child in all park-the  
 ‘I looked for the child in the whole park.’

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