

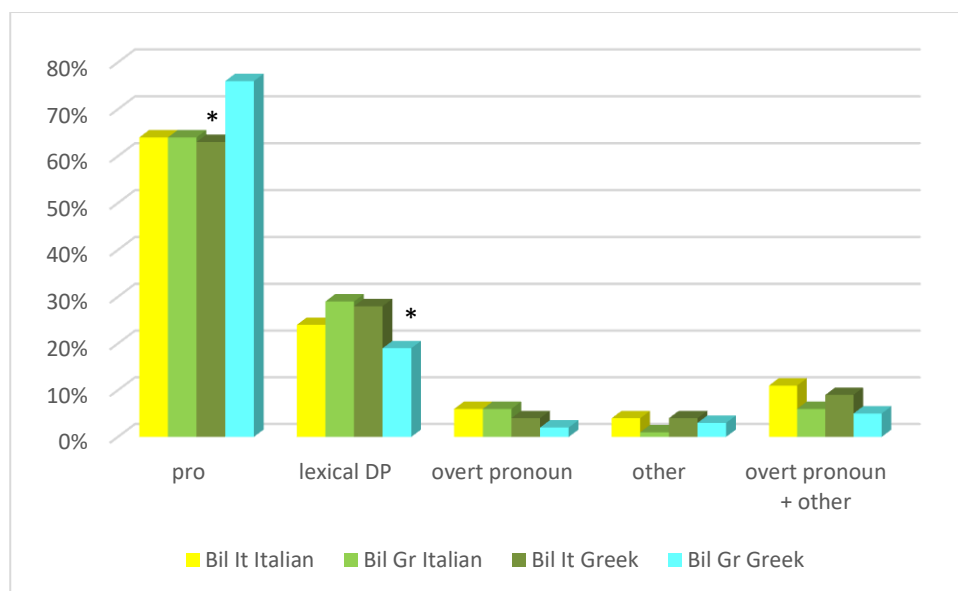
Null vs lexical subjects in bilingual speakers of two null subject languages: amplifying micro-differences in language contact

Elisa Di Domenico¹ and Ioli Baroncini^{1,2}

¹Università per Stranieri di Perugia, ²Università per Stranieri di Siena

Null subject languages may differ in the division of labor between different referring expressions, as is the case of Spanish and Italian for what concerns overt and null subject pronouns (Filiaci, Sorace and Carreiras 2013). In previous work (Di Domenico and Baroncini 2017) we have shown that Italian and Greek instead do not: though Greek native speakers employ slightly more null pronouns and less lexical DPs and overt pronouns than Italian natives, these differences do not reach statistical significance. In this work we analyze the productions of two groups of Greek-Italian bilinguals from birth: Bilinguals living in Greece ($n=10$), henceforth Bil Gr, and bilinguals living in Italy ($n=10$), henceforth Bil It. Both speakers groups reached a near-native level of proficiency in Greek as well as in Italian: for Bil Gr, mean 8.97/10 in Italian and mean 9.34/10 in Greek; for Bil It, mean 9.03/10 in Italian and mean 8.79 /10 in Greek, determined through an adaptation of White and Genesee's (1996) test. Besides a small difference in proficiency (with Bil Gr slightly more proficient in Greek and Bil It slightly more proficient in Italian), i.e. in one of the two factors characterizing dominance (Birdsong, 2014), the two groups of speakers mainly differ in the other factor, i.e. use: Bil Gr daily use both Greek (they live in Greece) and Italian (they attend or graduated at the Italian State School of Athens and/or use Italian for their work), while Bil It daily use Italian only, reserving Greek basically for contacts with their family living in Greece. Subjects had to watch a short movie containing no linguistic material (The Pear Film, Chafe 1980) and then tell the story, first in their less proficient language and then in their most proficient one. Subjects were tested individually in a quiet room and the interviewer did not linguistically interact with them during their narration. Their productions were recorded and then transcribed with the help of the CLAN system (part of the CHILDES tools, Mac Whinney 2000). From the total of sentences, we extracted only the ones in which a true choice between a subject pronoun (null or overt) or a subject lexical DP is possible, i.e. finite and copular sentences, non-subject relatives, non-subject clefts. We also excluded first mentions of Discourse Referents (which are always lexical) and sentences referring to the narrator, or narrator+ interviewer (which are always pronominal). Within this 'Reference Total' (for Bil Gr: 267 sentences in Greek and 241 in Italian; for Bil It: 251 sentences in Greek and 234 in Italian) we counted the occurrences of null and overt subject pronouns and of lexical DP subjects. We also singled out another resumption device which we call 'other' and consists in various quantificational expressions such as It. '*uno*' (one), '*uno dei tre*' (lit. one out of the three), '*tutti*' (all of them), Gr. '*enas apo aftous*' (one of them). We then compared results in the two languages in each group as shown in Figure 1. A χ^2 -test revealed no significant differences in the production of overt pronouns. We found however an unexpected significant effect in one group, in the language in which they are more proficient: Bil Gr produce significantly more null pronouns and less lexical DPs in Greek compared to Bil It, amplifying a (non- significant) difference between Greek and Italian noted in native monolingual speakers of these languages. We interpret this effect as stemming from the need to differentiate the two languages that these bilingual speakers have to handle in everyday life. Interestingly, this instance of divergence (as a sub-case of non- convergence, Kaufmann 2010) is found in the language in which these speakers are more proficient, rather than in the one in which they are less proficient. Finally, this instance of divergence does not involve overt pronouns, but consists in a wider use of null pronouns which charges lexical DPs. This suggests that overt pronouns are a marked option, questioning accessibility marking scales such as those in Ariel (1990, 2001) which place overt pronouns near to null ones.

Figure 1



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