The acquisition of differential object marking in 2L1 Romanian

Veronica Tomescu
University of Bucharest
veronica.tomescu@lls.unibuc.ro

Introduction. The general picture which emerges from the literature on the acquisition of differential object marking (DOM) is that both L2 learners (Guijarro-Fuentes, Marinis 2007, 2009) and simultaneous bilinguals (2L1) (Montrul 2011, Ticio 2013) encounter difficulties in the acquisition of DOM. This is in stark contrast to the early and practically flawless acquisition of the system by monolinguals (Rodríguez Mondoñedo 2008, Avram 2015). The contrast between L1 and 2L1 is, at first sight, unexpected; a considerable number of studies provide support in favour of the autonomous development hypothesis (Meisel 1989, 2001, Paradis, Genesee 1996). On the other hand, 2L1 development is not fully free of vulnerable domains. The Interface Hypothesis (Sorace 2011) predicts that discourse-built features might be vulnerable in bilingual acquisition. Extending the investigation to other languages might shed light on the role of language-specific properties in the 2L1 acquisition of DOM and, more generally, on the acquisition of interface phenomena. **Aim**. In this study we focus on the acquisition of DOM in Romanian by simultaneous Romanian-Hungarian bilinguals. Romanian has an overt DOM marker whose use is constrained by animacy and specificity (Ticio & Avram 2015) (see 1-3). At discourse level, *pe* signals prominence and topicality (Avram & Coene 2009, Chiriacescu & Heusinger 2010). **Method and participants**. We investigate two types of data: the use of *pe* in spontaneous speech (the corpus is described in Table 1) and in narratives (*Frog, where are you?*) (the corpus is summarized in Table 2). Obligatory and optional DOM contexts have been identified. The marked objects were uniformly coded for: (i) lexical category: proper name, pronoun, lexical DP; (i) semantic features: [+/-animate], [+/-definite]; (iii) omissions, overgeneralizations, and substitutions. **Results and discussion**. Our results (Tables 3 and 4) show that in Romanian DOM is not a vulnerable domain in a 2L1 Romanian-Hungarian context: age of emergence is very early with both monolingual and simultaneous bilingual children, the error rate is low with both groups, the error pattern is identical (very few omissions and overextensions). Adult-like use of DOM is attained by age 3;0 by both groups. The marking pattern is also similar: DOM applies earlier and more robustly to proper names and pronouns, i.e. DPs with which marking is obligatory irrespective of discourse considerations. The number of marked indefinite DPs, whose marking requires integration and updating of contextual information, is very low in all the corpora investigated. Our results are different from what has been reported for the acquisition of the Spanish DOM in a bilingual context: low accuracy rates and different error pattern in L1 vs. 2L1 (Montrul 2011, Ticio 2013). We suggest that this difference can be accounted for building on the different properties of the DOM systems of Romanian and Spanish as well as on the possible facilitating effect of Hungarian. In both Romanian and Spanish, correct use of DOM requires integration and updating of contextual information. But the number and the weight of relevant factors involved in this update is different. The two DOM systems are constrained by the same semantic features, but DOM domain widening is more discourse dependent in Spanish (Mardale 2007). Our findings show that semantic features are not problematic for simultaneous bilinguals, whereas discourse-built features might be vulnerable, in support of the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace 2011).

(1) Maria a   vizitat ***(pe) Elena/ (*pe) Londra**.   [+ animate]
    Maria has visited *(PE) Elena / (*PE) London
    'Maria has visited Elena/ London.'
(2) Maria le-   a vizitat chiar ea   ***(pe) ele/acestea**. [+specific]
    Maria CL$_{ACC\ 3rd\ fem\ pl}$ has visited even she PE them/these
    'Maria herself has visited them.'
(3) Maria cunoaşte **(*pe) studenţi**. [- specific]
    Maria knows   PE students
    Intended: 'Maria knows students.' (kind)

Table 1. Longitudinal corpora used in the analysis

Setting	Child Age MLU Hours No.of (Romanian) utterances
2L1	T. 1;11-2;11 1.94-4.51 31 6,587
	P. 2;0-2;8 1.47-3.79 18 6,645
L1	I. 1;10-3;1 1.11-3.63 16 8,006
	A. 1;9-3;0 1.51-3.17 17 15,526

Table 2. Frog stories corpus

Setting	No. of participants	Age range	Total number of *pe* utterances
2L1	19	3;3-5;10 (mean age 53 months)	79
L1	19	3;2-5;10 (mean age 53 months)	33

Table 3. Longitudinal data. Results

Setting	Child	1st DOM	DOM contexts	DOM used	Omission	Overextension
2L1	T.	1;11	254	89.4%(n=227)	10.6%(n=27)	40
	P.	2;1	145	86.8%(n=126)	13.1%(n=19)	1
L1	A.	1;9	121	76.4%(n=110)	7.6%(n=11)	5
	I.	2;2	197	97.5%(n=192)	2.5% (n=5)	22

Table 4. DOM in narratives. Results

Setting	DOM contexts	DOM used	Omission	Overextension
2L1	60	60	0	9
L1	33	33	0	0

References. **Guijarro-Fuentes, P., T. Marinis 2007** 'Acquiring the syntax/semantics interface in L2 Spanish: the personal preposition *a*. *Eurosla Yearbook 2007* (7): 67-87; **Guijarro-Fuentes, P., T. Marinis 2009** 'The acquisition of the personal preposition *a* by Catalan-Spanish and English-Spanish bilinguals'. In J. Collentine, M. García, B. Lafford, F.M. Marín (eds.) *Selected Proceedings of the 11th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, 81-92. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project; **Montrul, S.** (2011). Interfaces and incomplete acquisition. Lingua 121 (4), 591–604. **Rodríguez Mondoñedo, M. 2008** 'The acquisition of differential object marking in Spanish'. *Probus* 20: 111-145. **Ticio, E. (2013)** 'Differential object marking in Spanish-English early bilinguals'. Ms. Syracuse University