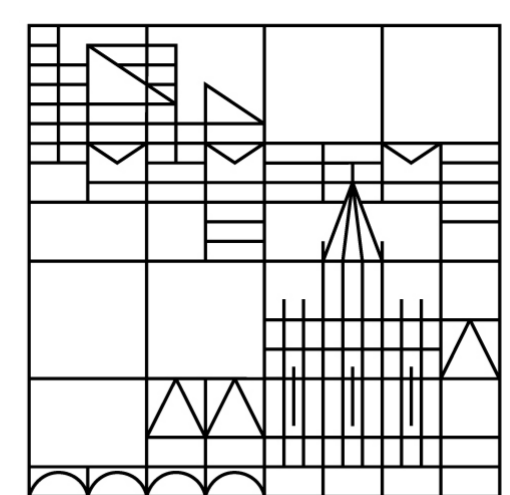


Transfer effects or learning mechanism? Pronoun resolution in adult L2 learners of German by speakers of null- and overt-subject languages



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Background

	OSL: German	NSL: Italian, Greek	OSL: English, Dutch
Null pronouns	-	subjects → topic continuation	-
overt personal pronouns	subjects → topic continuation	objects → topic shift [3,4] – GR more flexible than IT	subjects → topic continuation
d-pronouns	objects → topic shift	objects → topic shift	NL: objects → topic shift [10], E: ?
stressed personal pronouns	prediction: objects	prediction: subjects [2]	E: objects → topic shift, NL: ?

OSL German: Der **Tiger**_(i) will den **Igel**_(j) vorsichtig auf die Hand küssen. Aber **er**_(i) / **der**_(j) / **ER**_(j) kann nicht stillstehen.
'The tiger wants to kiss the hedgehog carefully on the hand. But he.personal pron / d-pron / stressed pron cannot hold still.'

NSL Greek: Ο **πιλότος**_(i) θέλει να ζωγραφίσει τον **κτηνίατρο**_(j) με ένα μικρό πινέλο. Αλλά **pro**_(i) / **αυτός**_(j) / **ΑΥΤΟΣ**_(i) είναι πολύ κουρασμένος.
'The pilot wants to draw the vet with a small brush. But pro / he / he stressed is very tired.'

Do pronoun resolution preferences in L1 influence the acquisition of pronoun resolution preferences in L2?

Mixed results: L1 speakers and L2 learners show ...

Similar performance [6,7]

→ no L1 transfer (L1 Greek / L1 Spanish – L2 English);

Different performance [8]

→ L1 transfer for topic shift interpretation (L1 Turkish – L2 Dutch).

So far, no studies

- investigating L2 learners (of an overt-subject-language) with **different L1 null-subject languages**.
- comparing these L2 learners to L2-learners with different L1-overt-subject-languages
- testing the role of stress in pronoun resolution for OSL-German as L1 and L2 [expectation: adding stress reverses resolution pattern [2]]

Research questions

A. Do L2 learners transfer pronoun resolution preferences from the L1 to the L2?

B. Do L2 learners interpret stress as a cue in pronoun resolution?

C. Can we distinguish L1-L2 transfer from general learner strategies? (see [9])

Method

Tasks

- Picture selection task for German pronoun interpretation
- German vocabulary test (DIALANG)
- Working memory task (2-back)
- Background questionnaire

- 3 practice items (non ambiguous)
- 8 filler items (non ambiguous)
- 32 experimental items (ambiguous)
 - 8 x personal pronoun 'er'
 - 8 x demonstrative pronoun 'der'
 - 8 x stressed personal pronoun



The elephant wants to tickle the starfish softly with a feather.

But **he** / **he** / **HE** has to answer the phone.

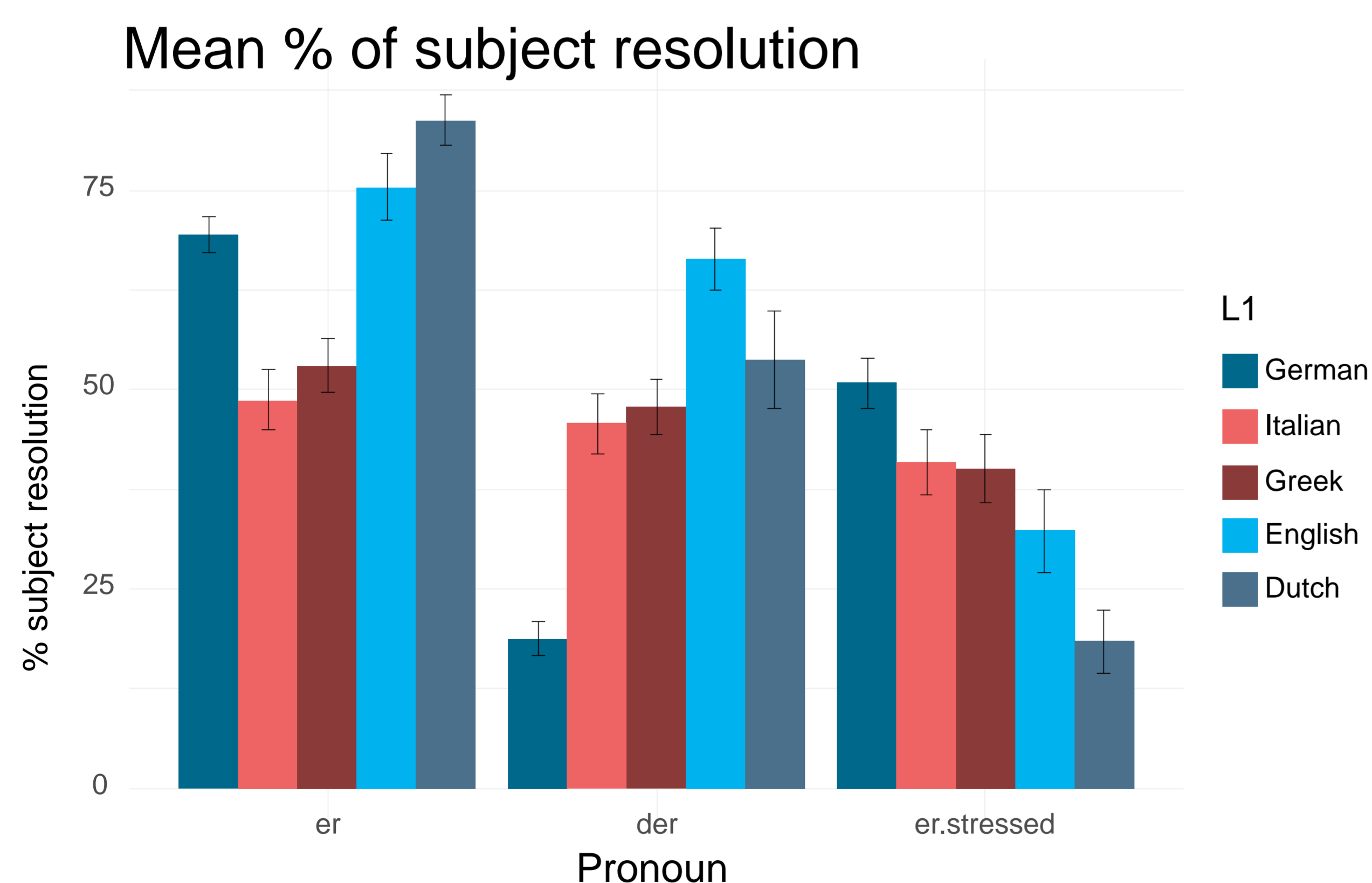
er **der** **ER**
personal demonstrative stressed

Who has to answer the phone?

Participants

L1	age	AoO German	LoE in years	n
German (control)	25.35, (7.06), 19-56	-	-	74
Italian	31.71 (7.08), 21-48	26.04 (5.10), 18-38	5.45 (4.39), 1-20	29
Greek	30.93 (7.03), 20-49	25.3 (5.81), 18-44	5.63 (3.99), 0-18	30
English	27.52 (6.07), 20-47	ongoing	ongoing	29
Dutch	26.76 (3.86), 22-35	ongoing	ongoing	17

Results



- Significant ($p < 0.001$) difference between L2 learners and L1 speakers
- NSL-L2** learner groups (Italian, Greek): No sign. difference → chance level resolution for personal pronoun and d-pronoun; object preference for stressed personal pronoun. No sign. effects of L1 proficiency, AoA, LoE
- OSL-L2** learner groups (English, Dutch): Sign. difference, similar tendency
- All L2 learners** prefer resolving stressed pronoun towards the object, unlike L1 speakers (no preference).

Discussion

L1-NSL:

- Chance level resolution for *er* and *der* → 'in between' stage? L1-L2 transfer of resolution preferences?

L1-OSL:

- Subject preference for *er* (L1- and target-like) and *der* (unlike target, unlike L1 for Dutch – see also [11], English n.a.) → neither 1:1 transfer nor same strategy as L1-NSL-learners.

Both learner groups:

- Acquisition of L2 pronoun resolution preferences still ongoing at high proficiency levels
- Stress → interpreted as cue for object resolution, unlike target

Conclusion

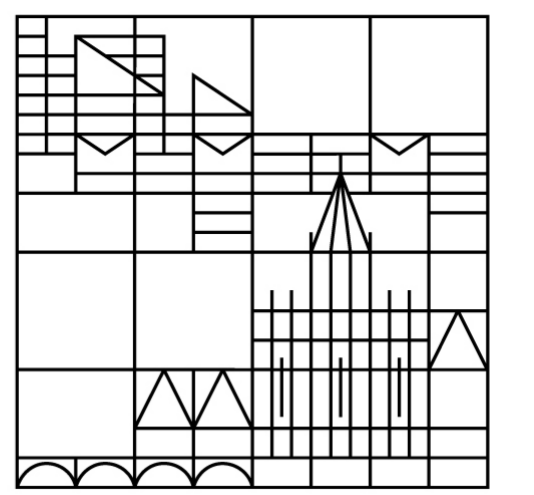
- Stress is a robust cue for learners from different L1 backgrounds, cannot be reduced to transfer → reliance on pragmatics?

- Learner groups differ for personal / d-pronoun resolution
 - IT, GR, E: Complex interplay of transfer and current L2 stage
 - NL: A puzzle! (But data acquisition still ongoing)

Neither L1 transfer nor universal learner strategy can explain all results.



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