ACQUIRING A MINORITY LANGUAGE IN A TRILINGUAL SOCIETY

THE INFLUENCE OF GERMAN AND ITALIAN ON A RAETO-ROMANCE VARIETY

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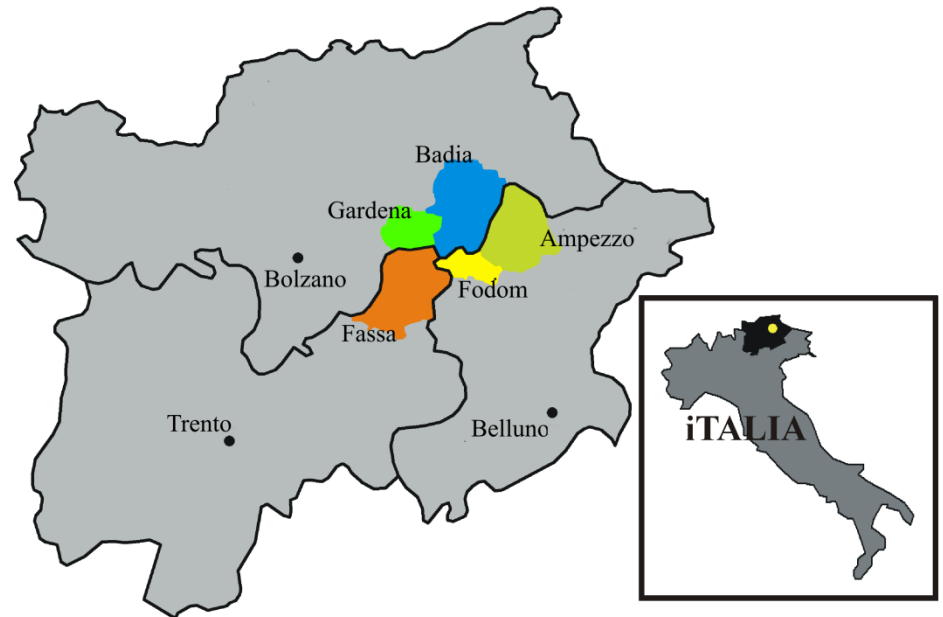
GARDENESE LADIN – BASIC FACTS

- Ladin is considered a subgroup of Raeto-romance;

- ~10,000 speakers;

- Minority language recognized and protected by the Italian law;

- Extremely conservative language, with intense contact with the neighbouring German varieties.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT

- Italian + German: official languages of the province, both are taught at school;

- Tyrolean: Majority language in the area;

- Italo-romance varieties: spoken in the south;

→ Gardenese inhabitants are (at least) trilingual.

Languages in South Tyrol and Trentino - Census 2011
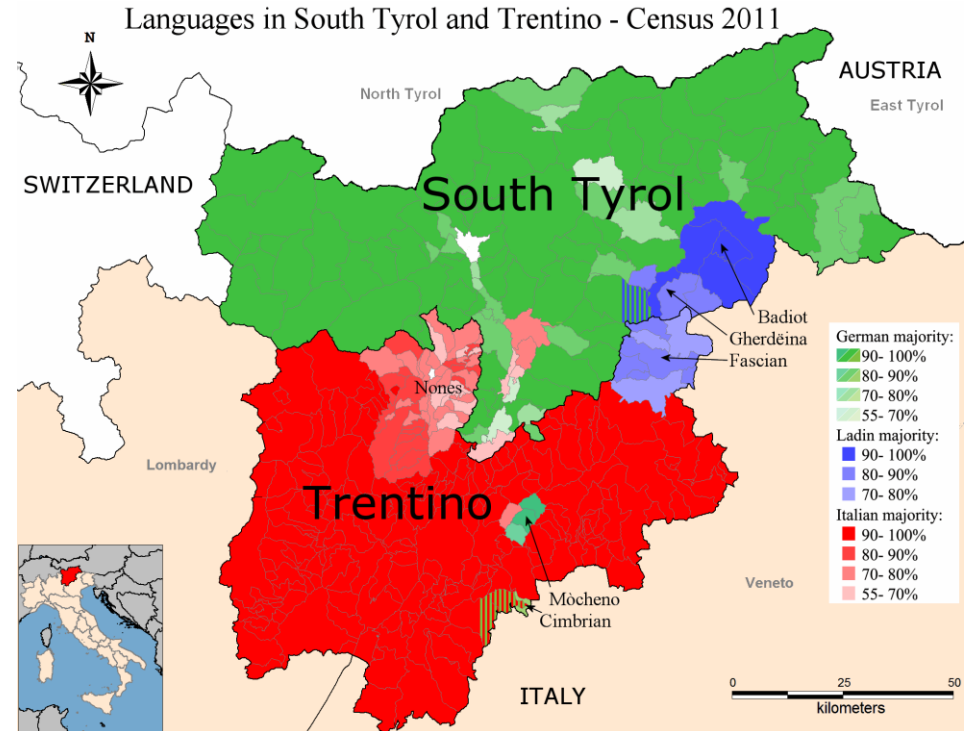
IS LADIN A HERITAGE LANGUAGE?

NO	YES
It is spoken in the society, you can use it in most shops, cafés, offices, etc.	You can spend your whole life just using Italian or German, but not just using Ladin
It is used in written texts and media	Most written texts and media are in German and Italian
It is an official language of the valley	It is not recognized outside the valley,
85% of the inhabitants belong to the Ladin linguistic group (2011)	Not all of the 85% have Ladin as main language; there are no monolinguals.
It is taught at school	German and Italian are the main languages at school

IS LADIN A HERITAGE LANGUAGE?

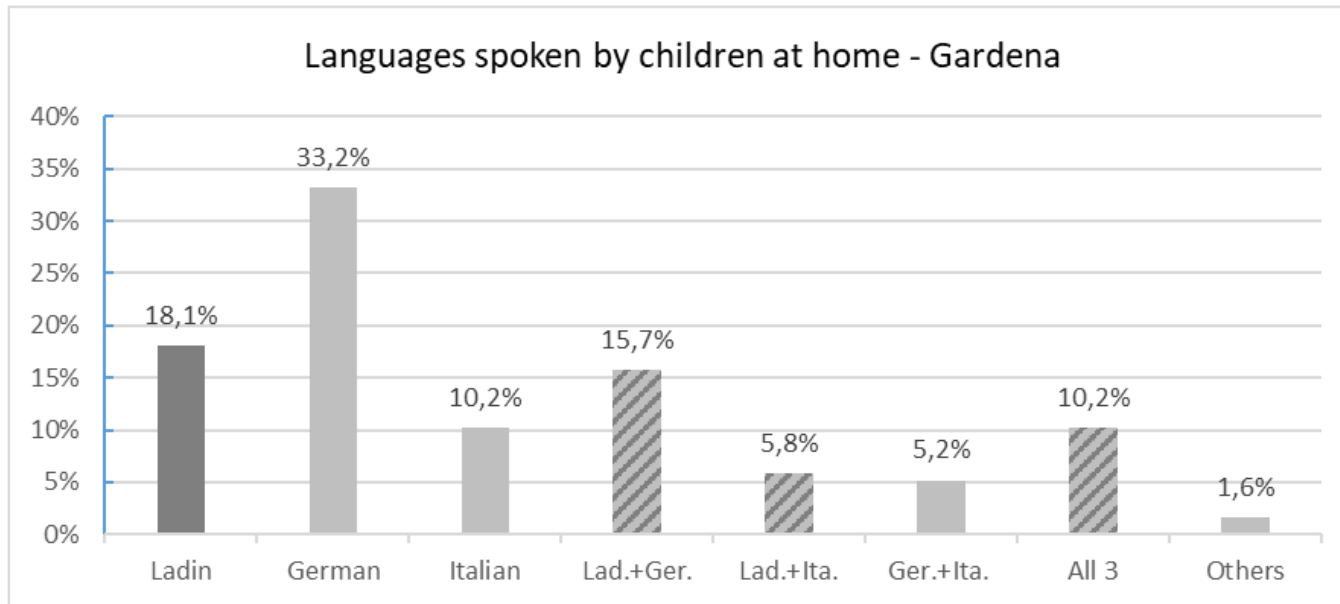| Ladin	Italian	Tyrolean	German	
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In the main village (Ortisei/St. Ulrich/Urtijëi) there is a "diglossia with four codes and some diacrolectic traits"

Ladin is used for all contexts, German and Italian only for high contexts and Tyrolean for intermediate uses .

(Dell'Aquila & Iannaccàro 2006)

THE «REAL» USE OF LADIN

- Is everything ok then? – not completely. In 2007, a survey in the Gardenese kindergartens has given these results:

Languages spoken by children at home - Gardena

Ladin	18,1%
German	33,2%
Italian	10,2%
Lad.+Ger.	15,7%
Lad.+Ita.	5,8%
Ger.+Ita.	5,2%
All 3	10,2%
Others	1,6%

→ only 49% of the children acquires Ladin before age 3 or 4!

MULTILINGUALISM IN GARDENESE CHILDREN

- After the age of 3, there is virtually **no child** in Gardena which is **monolingual**: in the kindergarten all three languages are used (1 language per week);

- However, there is an **asymmetric pattern**: all children are regularly exposed to German and Italian, while exposure to Gardenese might be reduced: children with Gardenese as dominant language become «more» trilingual than the others.

- In any case, all children have in common the **exposure to a minimum of Ladin** in the kindergarten and at school

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What **level of proficiency** have the Gardenese children in general, if we take into account the fact that half of them acquire it after age 3?

- Do we find **Crosslinguistic Interferences** in the Gardenese spoken by the children that acquire it later? And of which type?

- Does the fact that there are **two different languages** besides Ladin play a role in the acquisition process?

- **General question**: is it possible to reach a target-like competence in a minority language if it is not acquired at home?

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Problem of the input and of its quantity

HOW TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

- It is necessary to choose a syntactic phenomenon, in which Gardenese is **different from both German and Italian**:
  ⇨Null subjects

- Cfr. German with Italian:

(1) a. Ich gehe nach Hause

     b. __ vado a casa

- Gardenese is a **partial pro-drop language**: the use of a Null subjects depends on the grammatical person:

(2) a. __ vede a cësa «I go home.»

     b. L va a cësa «He goes home.»

HOW TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

- The syntax of subjects is a particularly interesting field for language acquisition studies (starting at least from Valian 1991, Rizzi 1994, Antelmi 1997):

- In Gardenese, it is particularly interesting because it should be particularly affected by **Crosslinguistic influence**:
  - the phenomenon is at the interface between syntax and discourse (Platzack 2001, Sorace et al. 2009, Sorace 2011 a.o.)
  - there is a partial overlapping with German and with Italian (Hulk & Müller 2000, Müller & Hulk 2001)

THE SYSTEM OF SUBJECT PRONOUNS

	Strong pronoun	Weak pronoun	Use of pro
I	*ie*		pro *dije*
You	*tu*	*te*	*pro *dijes*
He	*ël*	*l*	*pro *dij*
She	*ëila*	*la*	*pro *dij*
We	*nëus*		pro *dijon*
You	*vo*		pro *dijëis*
They_{masc.}	*ëi*	*i*	*pro *dij*
They_{fem.}	*ëiles*	*les*	*pro *dij*

THE GARDENESE DATA

- Data collection in May-June 2018;

- At the primary school of Ortisei/St. Ulrich (main village);

- Participants: 153 (but one excluded);

- Age: 6-11 years;

- Different linguistic backgrounds;

- Tested twice: the first time only in Ladin, the second in German and Italian.

- Control group: 15 adult speakers (above 20 y.o.)

STRUCTURE OF THE EXPERIMENT

- Three steps:

1. **Sociolinguistic questionnaire:** Parents had to answer about the language use of their children;

2. **Tasks to establish the language proficiency:** Picture description task + Lexical retrieval task;

3. **Production task:** Children had to produce sentences that could or could not contain a Null subject.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Parents were asked about when and how much the children use the different languages.

Four parts:

1. Age of onset for each language;

2. Language use at home;

3. Language use outside home (with grandparents, friends/schoolmates, during the holidays, during activities);

4. „Emotional" use.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Example (section «language use at home»):

a. Mutter:

Mit welcher Sprache hat die Mutter die größte Vertrautheit (mehrere Antworten möglich): ....

Wie viele und welche Sprachen sprechen die Mutter und das Kind **regelmäßig** miteinander? (bitte ankreuzen)

☐ 1 Sprache	welche:				
☐ 2 Sprachen	welche: .... und	➔ In welchem Verhältnis werden sie gebraucht?	☐ Hälfte-Hälfte	☐ eine mehr als die andere (welche: ....)	
☐ 3 Sprachen	welche: ...., ... und	➔ In welchem Verhältnis werden sie gebraucht?	☐ alle 3 in gleichem Ausmaß	☐ hauptsächlich zwei (welche: .... und ....)	☐ eine mehr als die anderen zwei (welche: ....)
☐ Anderes	bitte beschreiben Sie die Situation:				

Wie gut kann die Mutter die folgenden Sprachen... (*bitte jeweils ankreuzen: 1= überhaupt nicht; 7 = perfekt/als Muttersprachlerin*):

|	Grödnerisch	Hochdeutsch	Südtiroler Dialekt ("Grödner Deutsch" oder Dialekt eines anderen Ortes)	Italienisch	Eventuelle andere Sprache oder Dialekt (angeben: ....)
- sprechen:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- verstehen:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- lesen:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	(nicht relevant)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- schreiben:	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	(nicht relevant)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Evaluation: The children get points for each part and each language:

	AoO	zu Hause	draußen	"emotional"
1A_BM	1	3	10,00	3
	0	0	3,50	0
	0	0	3,50	0

→ Ladin dominant

	AoO	zu Hause	draußen	"emotional"
3B_MM	0	0	1,00	0
	1	3	10,93	3
	0	0	2,57	0
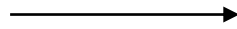
→ German dominant

	AoO	zu Hause	draußen	"emotional"
5C_PG	1	0,33	3,52	0
	1	0,83	5,02	1,2
	1	1,83	7,47	1,8

→ «trilingual» child

	AoO	zu Hause	draußen	"emotional"	
1A_RA	1	0,25	1,69	0	
	1	1,83	3,15	1	
	1	1,58	3,15	1	
	1	1,33	1,50	1	(cz)

→ child with an exotic L1

THE PROFICIENCY TASK

Consists of two parts (tested in all three languages):

a. Picture description task;

b. Lexical retrieval task.

THE PROFICIENCY TASK

a. Picture description task;

1. MLUW (Medium Length of Utterance in Words);

2. Lexical diversity;

3. Number of words per second;

4. Number of complex sentences (embedded clauses);

5. Knowledge of certain target words;

6. Production of non-target-like expression (pragmatic, syntactic and morphological)

THE PROFICIENCY TASK

b. Lexical retrieval task

„Tell me in a minute as many words of animals/things in the picture as you can."

THE PROFICIENCY TASK

Example: child dominant in Ladin

	AoO	zu Hause	draußen	"emotional"
	1	3	10,00	3
1A_BM	0	0	3,50	0
	0	0	3,50	0

	Total number of words	MLUW	Different lexical items	Words per second	Knows specific words	„Errors"	Lexical retrieval Task
Lad.	51	5,67	30	2,13	3/4	2?	15,5
Deu.	48	6,86	28	1,2	2/4	8	12
Ita.	42	7	23	1,75	4,5/5	2	16

THE PRODUCTION TASK

Phenomena tested:

1. Null subjects in the 1st person: LAD + ITA   vs.   DEU

2. Null subjects in the 3rd person: LAD + DEU vs.   ITA

3. Use of the numeral *one*:   LAD   vs.   ITA + DEU

NB: The numeral for one must be followed by the indefinite article in Gardenese:

(1) *una *(na) tëurta*
     one   a   cake   „one cake"

THE PRODUCTION TASK

First problem: how can we test whether the children have acquired the target-like use of null subjects?

In the literature we mainly find:

- acceptability judgements tasks (AJTs) based on 3rd person only (e.g., Sorace *et al.* 2009, Klaschik & Kupisch 2017),

- analyses of spontaneous speech (e.g., Serratrice 2005; Pinto 2006)

BUT: Gardenese has no null subjects for the third person, and I had no possibility of making a longitudinal study.

→ Production task in which children are asked to reformulate sentences using the first person

THE PRODUCTION TASK

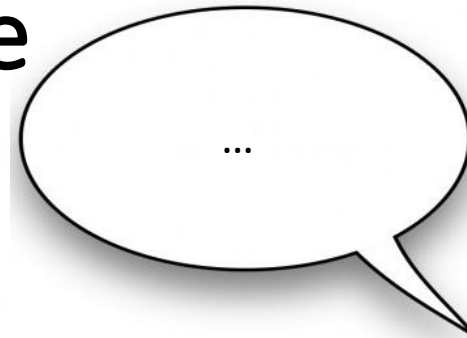→ See example of Cristina's story (1. Version) in the next slides

NB: The first and the third person were tested both in Main Clauses (MC) and in Embedded Clauses (EC).
The embedded clauses were all causal (questions like „Why didn't you do your homework?", „Why does grandma have glasses?")

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Cristina in der Schule
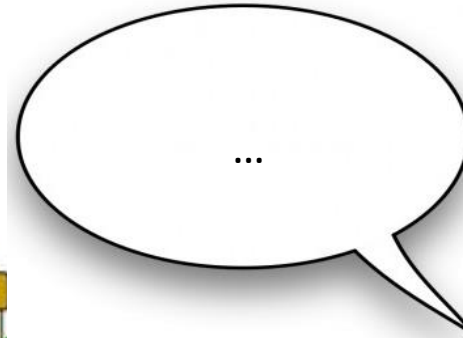
Cristina in der Schule

THE PRODUCTION TASK

Second problem: a number of children seemed not to conceive of the task as expected. Frequent problems were:

a. either the child did not answer spontaneously, but extremely slowly (thus, not spontaneously). In this case s/he had the tendency to always produce subject pronouns;

b. or s/he answered with truncated sentences. If s/he was then asked to use complete sentences, they often behaved as in a.

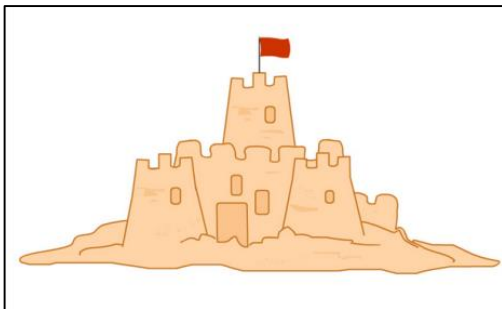→ Addition to the task: spontaneous questions about the child.

THE PRODUCTION TASK

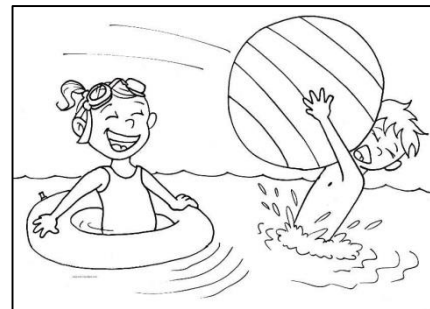→ In the next slides I show the additional part

Cristina va al mer

Śën te damanda
Cristina a ti:

Cie fejes'a plù suvënz al mer?

Fejes'a su n ciastel?   o   Ves'a tl ega?

EXAMPLES OF RESULTS

|	1MC	1EC	1spM	1spE	3MC	3EC	Num
1A_BM (AoO / zu Hause / draußen / "emotional")	1/2 1/2s	4/4	2/2	4/4	2/4 2/4n	5/5	0/5
1B_BR	0/5	1/3 2/3s	0/0	0/3 3/3s	1/1	4/5 1/5s	4/5
1B_CC	0/2 2/2s	1/5 4/5s	0/0	1/1	0/3 3/3n	0/4 1/4s 3/4n	0/0
1A_GV	0/3 3/3s	2/5 3/5s	4/5 1/5s	2/2	0/4 1/4s 3/4n	3/5 2/5s	0/5
1C_SRS	0/2 2/2s	0/4 4/4s	0/1 1/1s	0/1 1/1s	0/1 1/1n	1/5 3/5s 1/5n	0/5

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Transcriptions of 22 children:

- 12 born in 2011 (age 6-7)

- 10 born in 2007 (age 10-11)

- To have a clear result, I have chosen those that had the more clear-cut linguistic situation: either they were exposed only to Ladin until age 3, or they were virtually not exposed to it at all.

NB: the uncomplete answers were not considered in the percentages. This number was especially high for 6-years-old that whose Age of Onset is 3 or later.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS: 6 YEARS OLD

Preliminary results, divided into type of acquisition
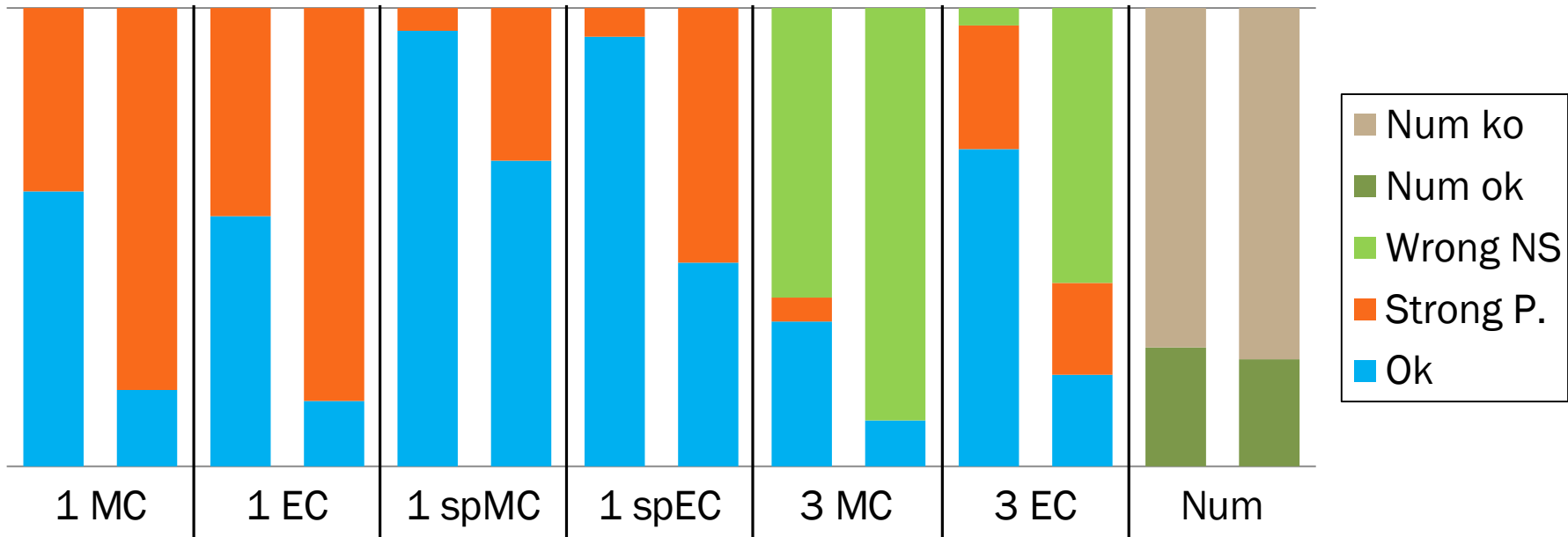
PRELIMINARY RESULTS: 6 YEARS OLD

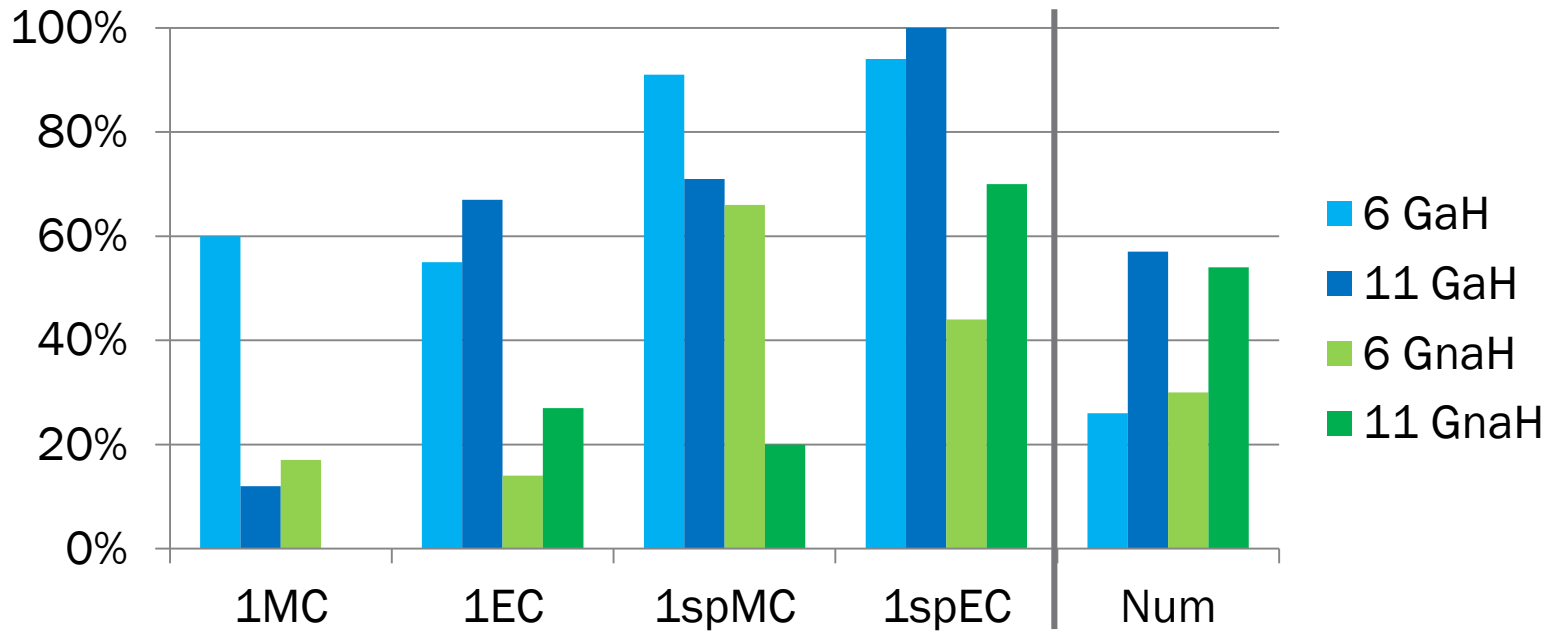|	Lad. at home (n = 6)	Lad. not at home (n = 6)
1H	**60%** (9/15)	**17%** (1/6)
1N	**55%** (12/22)	**14%** (2/14)
1SH	**91%** (19/21)	**66%** (2/3)
1SN	**94%** (15/16)	**44%** (4/9)
3H	**32%** (6/19)	**10%** (1/10)
3N	**69%** (18/26)	**18%** (5/22)
Num.	**26%** (5/24)	**30%** (7/23)

90% NS

54% NS
18% st. Pr.

63% NS
5% st. Pr.
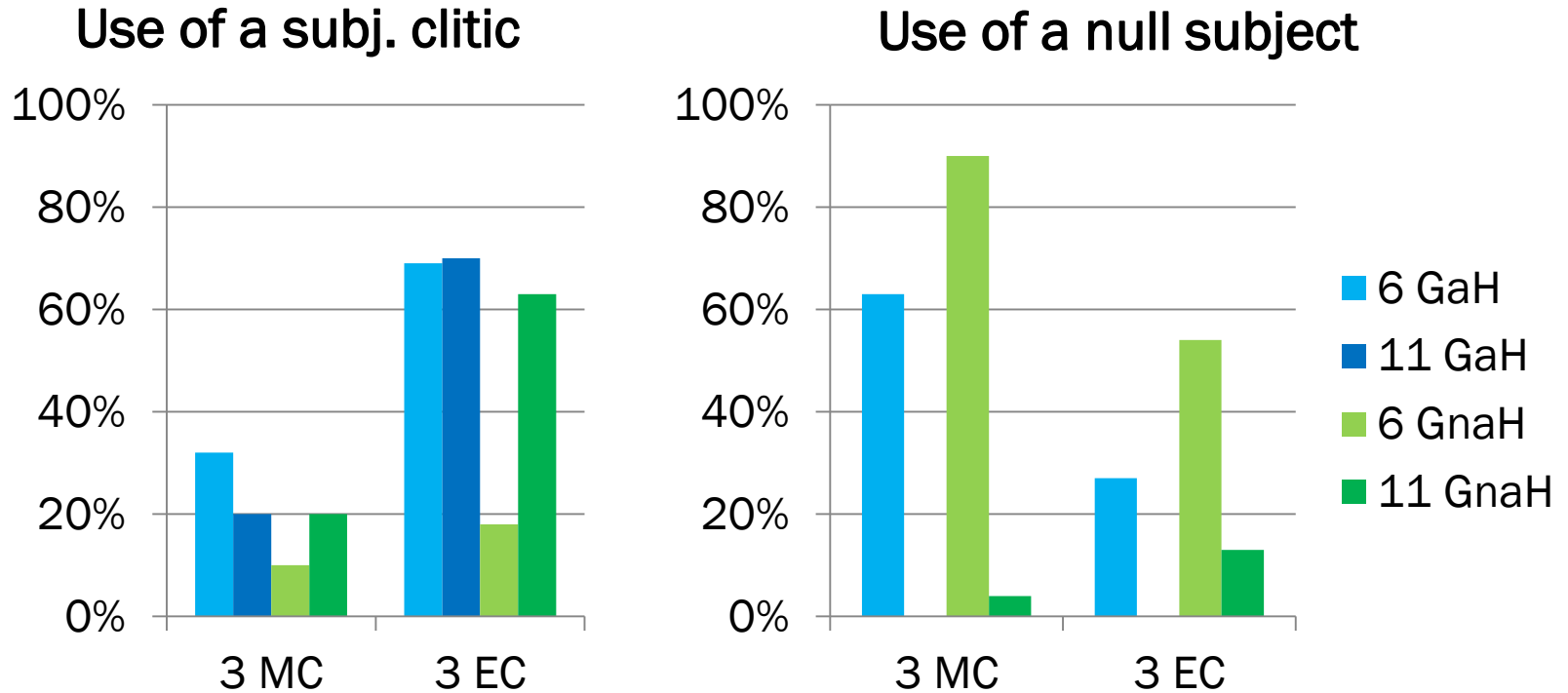
5% NS
27% st. Pr.

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PRELIMINARY RESULTS: 6 VS 11 YEARS OLD

Use of felicitous form

PRELIMINARY RESULTS: 6 VS 11 YEARS OLD

Use of a subj. clitic

Use of a null subject

Legend: 6 GaH, 11 GaH, 6 GnaH, 11 GnaH

PRELIMINARY RESULTS: 6 VS 11 YEARS OLD

	Lad. at home (n = 6)		Lad. not at home (n = 6)	
	6yo	11yo	6yo	11yo
1H	60% (9/15)	12% (4/34)	17% (1/6)	0% (0/35)
1N	55% (12/22)	67% (14/21)	14% (2/14)	27% (6/22)
1SH	91% (19/21)	71% (15/21)	66% (2/3)	20% (4/20)
1SN	94% (15/16)	100% (26/26)	44% (4/9)	70% (14/20)
3H	32% (6/19)	20% (4/20)	10% (1/10)	20% (3/15)
3N	69% (18/26)	70% (16/23)	18% (5/22)	63% (10/16)
Num.	26% (5/24)	57% (13/23)	30% (7/23)	54% (13/24)

RECAP: MANY QUESTIONS ARE STILL OPEN...

Methodological questions: how to deal with...

- answers containing a DP subject?

- incomplete answers?

- children that have acquired two/three languages at home?

- the difference between the results in the two types of task (Cristina's story and the questions about the child herself)?

- the gap between the percentages of correct answers in guided and spontaneous production?

RECAP: MANY QUESTIONS ARE STILL OPEN...

- Are these data statistically relevant?

- How can we interpret exactly the „pro-drop phase" with the 3rd person in non-Ladin dominant children?

- The analysis raises a series of questions about the input. One important issue is that children hardly ever get Gardenese input from monolinguals.

- What about the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses?

THE ASYMMETRY IS REAL!

	Lad. at home (n = 6)		Lad. not at home (n = 6)		Adult control (n=3)
	6yo	11yo	6yo	11yo	24-29 yo
1H	60%	12%	17%	0%	9%
1N	55%	67%	14%	27%	100%
1SH	91%	71%	66%	20%	13%
1SN	94%	100%	44%	70%	100%
3H	32%	20%	10%	20%	0%
3N	69%	70%	18%	63%	100%
Num.	26%	57%	30%	54%	100%

De gra!