Definite-article omissions in the heritage Italo-Romance varieties of New York City

Luigi Andriani (Universität Hamburg) *& Manuela Pinto* (Universiteit Utrecht)

This contribution presents novel data from heritage Italo-Romance varieties spoken in the New York area and seeks to give an account of the structural representations that may underlie the *differential* heritage grammar. We examine the interplay among different sources of linguistic input, and how these computations may result in formal representations of novel DP-structures which are not the result of direct transfer, but of an independent reorganization of the DP-internal requirements and constraints, which are *different* from those found in the input.

Our corpus (https://microcontact.hum.uu.nl/#contributions) includes a large wealth of non-standard heritage varieties from Italy in contact with English: Italo-Romance (Nònes Trentino, E. Abruzzese, Cilentano, Apulo-Barese, Sicilian) and Rhaeto-Romance (Friulian) varieties, as well as spoken Italian – in particular, the NYC *koine*, an Italian-based contact variety used as the shared 'community language' (Haller 1987). The corpus consists of spontaneous speech elicited from 58 first- and second-generation speakers (G1: 32 vs G2: 26) during semi-guided interviews for control purposes within the *MicroContact* project (D'Alessandro 2018 *et seq.*). The data reveal an incipient tendency to omit/not lexicalise overtly some core functional heads, among which definite articles, i.e. D-heads. Strikingly, such a tendency is detectable in most G2 speakers independently of the Italo-Romance variety they speak, whereas no G1 speaker shows attrition. G2 speakers produce 'non-target'-like DP-structures by omitting definite articles in contexts such as (1)-(5a), except for the opposite tendency in (5b). Parts of these tendencies had already been highlighted in Haller's (1987 *et seq.*) work on NYC Italian, as well as Sydney and Montreal Italian (Bettoni 1991; Reinke 2014). While transfer cannot be excluded for some structures, the general behaviour of the heritage DP should be understood as the result of a *differential* 'feature reassembly' (Lardiere 2008) of D-related features, responsible for the (c)overt distribution of definite articles (cf. Longobardi 1994; Chierchia 1998; *i.a.*). We suggest that this feature-reassembly process is holistic and taps into the many varieties and variation of syntactic options present in the input (cf. Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018), so that G2 learners create their own mental representation of DP-structures by assessing all the structural variation in the input against a principle of *relative economy on derivation*. This allows a broader range of structural options involving null Ds, yielding interpretative ambiguity.

From a broader diachronic and typological perspective, definite articles are the product of grammaticalisation and are only present in roughly half of the world's languages (308 on 620 surveyed languages on the WALS). Being heritage contexts the perfect circumstances for linguistic changes to become visible in synchrony (Kupisch & Polinsky 2022), what we observe in our G2 in NYC could be an incipient shift to a new parametric (re)setting in these contact varieties (provided that transmission continues), whereby D becomes lexicalized in less and less cases, rather than moving towards the overproduction of articles – expected if G2s avoid silent elements especially at the syntax-pragmatics interface, which leads to overgeneralising overt subject pronouns (Sorace 2004). Moreover, according to the 'Inertia Principle' of Syntax (Longobardi 2001, a.o.), syntactic change needs a morpho-phonological trigger to happen. Evidently, silence, i.e. omission, is one of the cues these G2 speakers have started to gradually generalise in their grammars. This might to be linked to the changes in the encoding of NUMBER features in the DP, as well as in the verbal domain (e.g. loss of subject-verb agreement on T; cf. Andriani & D'Alessandro 2022).

Examples

(1) <u>Plural NPs in subject position</u>: **Ø$_D$-NP$_{[PL]}$**

stanno a parlare **Ø$_D$** *llingue sue (=loro)… ma io non gapisco,* **Ø$_D$ italiani** *non vogliono capire… non vogliono pratticare* **Ø$_D$** *italiano adesso*   [Barese (F, 65)]

'they're all speaking their own languages… but I don't get it, **Italians** do not want to understand… they don't want to practice Italian now'

(2) <u>Singular bare NPs (± generic)</u>: **Ø$_D$-NP$_{[SG]}$**

i ai dudj (**Ø$_D$**) *credits, ma i na i ai* **Ø$_D$ diploma**   [Friulian (M, 93)]

'I have all the credits, but I do not have **the diploma**(/certificate)'

(3) <u>Locative (and other) PPs</u>: PP-**Ø$_D$**-NP

Però, mó, se vai **in-Ø$_D$ ristorante**, *pagano.*   [Abruzzese (F, 47)]

'But, now, if you go **to the restaurant**, they do pay.'

(4) <u>Numerals (4a), Quantifiers (4b), and '-sective' APs (same, other)</u>: **Ø$_D$**-AP-NP/Q-**Ø$_D$**-NP

    a.   **Ø$_D$ primma vota,** *jì avev'òtt'annə,* **Ø$_D$ primma votə** *ca so gghiutə* [Cilentano (F, 30)]

        '**(The) first time** I was 8 years old, **the first time** I went (to Rimini to visit my cousins)'

    b.   *perché el l'ha fat el panetier* **tuta Ø$_D$ sua$_D$ vita** *in Italia*   [Nònes (F, 71)]

        'because he was a baker for **all his life** in Italy'

(5) <u>Possessives with common nouns (5a) vs kinship terms (5b)</u>: **Ø$_D$**-Poss-NP vs **D**-Poss-NP

    a.   *prima stavan'i tagliani, come* **Ø$_D$ mia$_D$ compagna** *A.*   [Barese (F, 42)]

        'before there were Italians, like **my friend** A.'

    b.   *cə sta la famijja purə də mamm'e ppapà, e anche* **<u>del mio</u> marito** [Abruzzese (F, 47)]

        '(In Abruzzo) there is also mum and dad's family, as well as **my husband's**'

Selected References

Andriani, L. & R. D'Alessandro. 2022. D, C, T drop in heritage Italo-Romance in NYC. In G. Alboiu, D. Isac, A. Nicolae, M. Tănase-Dogaru & A. Tigău (eds), *A life in Linguistics: A festschrift for Alexandra Cornilescu on her 75th birthday*, 41-78. Bucharest: Bucharest UP.

Benmamoun, E., S. Montrul & M. Polinsky. 2013. Heritage languages and their speakers: Opportunities and challenges for linguistics. *Theoretical linguistics*, 39(3-4): 129-181.

Cardinaletti, A. & G. Giusti. 2018. Indefinite determiners: Variation and optionality in Italo-Romance. In D. Pescarini & R. D'Alessandro (eds), *Advances in Italian dialectology*. 135-161. Leiden: Brill.

Chierchia, G. 1998. Reference to kinds across languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6: 339-405.

D'Alessandro, R. 2018. Microcontact, what it is and what it does. *Paper presented at the UiL-OTS Colloquium, Utrecht University, 15 March 2018.*

Haller, H. 1987. Italian speech varieties in the United States and the Italian-American lingua franca. *Italica* 64(3). 393-409.

Kupisch, T., & M. Polinsky. 2022. Language history on fast forward: Innovations in heritage languages and diachronic change. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 25(1): 1-12.

Lardiere, D. 2008. Feature-Assembly in Second Language Acquisition. in J. Liceras, H. Zobl, H. Goodluck (eds), *The role of formal features in second language acquisition*, 106-140. New York (NY): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Longobardi, G. 1994. Reference and proper names: A theory of N-movement in syntax and logical form. *Linguistic Inquiry 25*(4), 609-665.

Longobardi, G. 2001. Formal syntax, diachronic Minimalism, and etymology: the history of French *chez*. *Linguistic Inquiry* 32, 275-302.

Sorace, A. 2004. Native language attrition and developmental instability at the syntax-discourse interface: Data, interpretations and methods. *Bilingualism: language and cognition, 7*(2), 143-145.