# Syntactic change in contact: Romance

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**Abstract**

Language change as a result of language contact is approached in many different ways, and with a number of different methodologies. This article provides an overview of the main approaches to syntactic change in contact, focusing on the Romance language group. Romance languages are widely documented, both synchronically and diachronically; they have been in extensive contact with other language families, both in bilingual contexts (like Spanish and Catalan) and in creolization contexts. Furthermore, they present sensible microvariation, which allows to control for change in single features. Given the breadth of studies targeting Romance in contact, this article only deals with a small number of phenomena, like *pro*-drop, Differential Object Marking, and deixis.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

No language is an island; this is particularly true in the case of Romance languages, which spread to many continents and came into contact with several other language families. Precisely because of this privileged situation, the Romance languages have often been the object of studies on language evolution and language change in contact. There are few other language groups that show the same breadth in contact and the same level of diachronic documentation. Therefore, Romance is one of the key words in contact studies.

Contact is not a univocal concept, as it is instantiated in a number of very different situations with different outputs. Change in contact (CIC henceforth) studies concerned with syntax traditionally revolve around three main lines: contact studies proper, including studies on bi- and multilingualism; change in heritage language contexts, and creole studies. These study areas have been kept quite separate from each other. However, it is not infrequent to find observations like the following "However incomplete, this list of properties [of heritage languages] bears a striking similarity to recurring traits observed in creole languages and often associated with the underlying innate principles of language structure" (Scontras *et al*.

2015:5). This paper will investigate the extent to which this statement is true, by considering some key outcomes of the study of syntactic CIC.

The division of labor between different approaches to contact studies in not completely balanced. For example, studies on multilingualism and heritage languages are mainly embedded within a psycholinguistic framework while diachronic studies are more typological/structural in nature. There is also no precise overlap in the languages studied, which makes it rather difficult to identify one red thread characterizing all CIC phenomena.

The main issue addressed here is CIC from a structural viewpoint. Structural outputs of language contact will be compared without focusing on the cognitive conditions that caused them, in order to show that the output is mostly uniform, and that a line should be drawn between contact situations among maximally different languages, and contact situations between minimally different languages, or dialects, according to a criterion which will become clear in the following sections. Heritage languages and languages in contact will be considered, together with creoles and dialects.

It is obvious that the situation in which contact arises, the exposure to the languages, and the speaker's attitude are very important  factors that influences the output (Andersen 1988; Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Aikhenvald & Dixon 2001; 2007; Ross 2001; Heine & Kuteva 2005); the degree of mastery of the contact language and its frequency of use also play a big role (Ferguson 1964; Appel & Muysken 1987; Berruto 1987); furthermore, the contact situation of simultaneous bilinguals is not the same as that of sequential bilinguals or heritage speakers (Lambert 1955; Flynn 1983; Flynn *et al.* 2005).

However, the grammatical output of contact is very often the same, it seems that the reactions of structures in contact is similar and very much depends on how close the languages are and how similar the structures. This overview aims at highlighting some basic structural considerations related to CIC; the import of structure itself on CIC, independent of other cognitive factors, is crucial, and it can be seen mostly when the other conditions have been factored out; structural and microvariational explanations, based on the featural setup of the elements involved in CIC have been abandoned too soon, and psychological and cognitive considerations, as well as socio-historical ones, have often shaded then. This often-quoted statement by Thomason & Kaufmann (1988:35) is an example of this tendency: "it is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary    determinant    of    the    linguistic    outcome    of    language    contact."

The shift from a mainly structural to a mainly cognitive approach to contact studies as a result of bi-/multilingualism can be probably set to correspond to Hulk & Müller's (2000) and Müller & Hulk's (2001) articles. These scholars propose that language change in bilingual children is favored in phenomena involving the interfaces between syntax and pragmatics. This hypothesis will be then developed very successfully by Serratrice, Sorace and many others, to which we will return below. Importantly, Hulk and Müller underline the importance of superficial structural similarity between the phenomena in contact. If two structures in two languages look similar, the child will transfer the analysis of one structure to the other more easily (see also Paradis & Genesee 1996 and Döpke on the impact of structural similarity on language change).

While typological similarity has often been taken into account as a cause of structural transfer, structural similarity between language phenomena has been almost completely discarded from contemporary contact studies. A consequence of this is that most of the studies on language acquisition in contact situations (L2, bilingualism, heritage) do not offer one single example of syntactic structure: researchers seem content with naming a structure "dislocation" or "topic continuation" and proceed to provide the list of occurrences of one specific phenomenon. This is a rather unfortunate turnout if one wants to study syntactic change in contact.

Given that change in contact involves every language phenomenon, to a larger or smaller extent, a selection is necessary to illustrate the general point. In this paper, I have chosen to focus on null-subjecthood, Differential Object Marking, and indexicality (particularly in the case of demonstrative forms). The reasons for this choice lie in the fact that novel data on these phenomena have just been collected through fieldwork on Italo-Romance languages in contact with Romance varieties in the Americas, performed withing the ERC project *Microcontact*.

The next section will provide and overview of the reasons why one should look at Romance languages when studying CIC. Section 1.3 outlines an important distinction between the multilingual speaker and multilingual society. Section 1.4. focuses on L2 and L3 studies. Section 2 offers an overview of null subjects in contact, while Section 3 discusses Differential Object Marking in contact. Section 4 present a short summary of deixis in contact. The overview is in no way comprehensive. A selection has been made taking the criterion of comparability in mind between the phenomena considered.

**1.2 The Romance languages in contact**

The Romance languages are particularly well suited for the study of CIC, as they show abundant structural microvariation but very little typological variation. Ledgeway (2012; in press) and Ledgeway & Roberts (2017) provide an overview of Romance macro-typological commonalities. According to Ledgeway (in press:3) Romance languages share the following typological settings:

(1) a Head-initiality: (S)VO, postnominal adjectives/genitives

b Configurationality: grammatically fixed word order

c Nominative-accusative alignment

d Non-polysyntheticity

e Subject prominence

f Proliferation of functional categories: articles, pronominal clitic, auxiliaries, complementizers

g Relatively rich inflectional agreement, null subjects (but cf. modern Fr.), subject clitics

h Predominant finite complementation, notably que/che- clauses

i Presence of periphrastic active/passive paradigms

j Preverbal, discontinuous and/or postverbal negation

As we can see, there are some deviations, most notably French non null-subjecthood, to which we will return in Section 2.

Romance languages also offer what Kellerman (1978) calls "psychotypological similarity", a concept underlying many of the core language transfer theories nowadays. Not only are the Romance languages typologically almost equivalent: they are also perceived as such, due to the fact that they share most vocabulary.

Furthermore, they have been in contact with most language families, due to their worldwide spreading.

An important difference, which is seldom made in the literature, is that between the results of contact within Romance and that of contact between Romance and other language families. Recent studies on Romance microcontact situations among Italo-Romance varieties and other

Romance languages have shown a radically different outcome of contact with respect to that which is found when Romance languages are in contact with other language families, like the Germanic or the Slavic ones.

In what follows I will provide an overview of change in contact (CIC) involving Romance languages, both standardized and substandard, both as majority and minority languages. I will make a division between macrocontact, i.e. contact between languages belonging to different families and typologically distant; and microcontact, i.e. contact between languages belonging to the same family and typologically identical; within macrocontact I will also include the creole languages, representing an extreme case of macrocontact between multiple varieties. The microcontact dimension proves important to identify the triggers of language change in contact that are sometimes shaded when the factors involved are more than one.

### 1.3 Multilingual speaker vs. multilingual society

The study of language change in contact can be approached from different perspectives. This article will offer some reflections on only a selection of them.

The first big divide within change in contact (CIC henceforth) studies is the one between studies focusing on syntax itself, i.e. grammatical structures, and studies focusing on linguistic competence, i.e. the bilingual or multilingual speaker(s). The division of labor is not completely balanced: studies on bi-/multilingualism  and heritage languages are mainly performed with a psycholinguistic slant, while studies on structural change are mainly typological in nature.

Regarding the works on contact as a result of multilingualism, we need to distinguish further between approaches targeting multilingual speakers, such as those on L2/L3 acquisition or heritage language competence, and approaches targeting the multilingual society (see for instance Clyne 1997). The latter are more concerned with the sociolinguistic situation of the community of speakers. While both approaches usually observe and analyze the changes introduced to one language because of the effect of contact with another language, their perspective is rather different: in one case, the language is taken as a psychological reality, in the other it is taken as a socially-determined object of study. Therefore, the second kind of approach will focus on the social triggers for language change, such as language prestige or attitude of the speaker, while the first will focus on the mental mechanisms of language learning: the extent to which acquisition is complete, exposure to the other language, time of first learning, attrition, and so on. Despite the fact that they are meant

to investigate the psychological reality of language structures, and that therefore they are more concerned with structure than their sociolinguistic counterpart, most cognitive studies on bilingualism and change focus on the speaker's psychological reality rather than on the syntactic structures as mental representations. The stress is put on whether the speaker has started learning the language early on, or whether the input has been complete or incomplete, rather than on what happens to the structures involved in the change.

In general, very few contact studies observe grammar by itself, independent of cognition and/or the conditions upon which change emerged. In this respect, typological studies offer an exception. This article will try to extrapolate information about syntactic change from all sorts of studies. It will not be concerned, instead, with cognitive, social, or psychological causes of language change. What I will try to show is that there is a sense in focusing on purely structural change, and that sometimes focusing too much on the boundary conditions shades the general observations that we would otherwise be able to make on grammar. For reasons of space, CIC in diachrony will also not be discussed.

### 1.4 L2 and L3 acquisition

The term multilingualism is usually intended as a phenomenon whereby a speaker masters more than one language. Change in contact happens through multilingual speakers, obviously. Importantly, the multi-lingual situation is not unique, as we saw in Section 1.1. A fecund field of bi-/multilingualism study regards second language (L2) acquisition. L2 acquisition studies usually focus on the errors that L2 learners make, and often have the aim to draw an evolution line in the acquisition of a second language, often comparing it to L1 acquisition. We will report findings of L2 and L3 line of studies when appropriate, without focusing too much on the cognitive mechanisms underlying acquisition (for an overview of this field see Ritchie & Bhatia 1996; 2009; Thomas & Mennen 2014; de Houwer & Ortega 2018).

A rather original line of studies on L2 and L3 acquisition has been developed in the last years by Rothman (2010; 2011; 2013; 2015). Rothman outlines a model for the transfer of a phenomenon (or impediment thereof) in contact, called the Typological Primacy Model (TPM). TPM is mainly designed to account for L3 acquisition, and to establish from which language the transfer happens. Rothman studies L3 acquisition of speakers with an L1 or an L2 which is typologically similar to the L3, in order to ascertain whether the typological similarity determines transfer or the fluency in the language, or the status of L1 or L2 by themselves. He shows that if a language is typologically similar to another, transfer of

syntactic structure will happen independent of the similarity of the particular construction at issue and of the order of acquisition. In a study on word order and Brazilian Portuguese (BP) L3 acquisition by speakers of Spanish with L2 English and speakers of English with L2 Spanish, Rothman (2010) observes that Spanish is the language whose word order and relative clause structure are invariably mirrored by L3 BP speakers; according to Rothman *et al.* (2015), this is due to the typological similarity of Spanish and BP, independent of whether Spanish is spoken by the L3 learner as an L1 or L2. An important point made by Rothman is that holistic typological similarity between languages is the key factor for transfer, be it facilitating (i.e. bearing the "right" target) or non-facilitating (i.e. bearing the "wrong" target).

In a study on French L3 learners with English and Spanish as L1 or L2, Rothman *et al* observe that L3 French learners acquire *pro*-drop from Spanish, be it L1 or L2, rather than acquiring obligatory overt pronouns from English. French is considered typologically similar to Spanish, or at least more similar than English, despite the study involves *pro*-drop. Transfer is believed to happen at the very moment in which the speakers become conscious of some structural similarity between the languages (psychotypological similarity, in the spirit of Kellerman (1978; 1983; 1986).

While Rothman acknowledges the structure-by-structure effect in non-facilitating transfer, he maintains that transfer involves the typological similarity of languages as a whole; this overrides the single structural similarity. While studying L3 acquisition offers indeed a great window into the factors involved in grammatical transfer, this whole architecture does not help too much when considering microcontact between languages that are typologically identical, with some minor twitch.

## 2. Null subjects in contact - macrocontact

### 2.1 Null subjects in Romance

Most Romance languages, with the notable exception of French, are null subject, or *pro*-drop; *pro*-drop in contact is a widely studied topic. In what follows I will list some of the most well-known generalizations regarding *pro*-drop in macrocontact, i.e. as a result of the contact between Romance languages with other language families.

### 2.2 Creoles

Romance-based creoles are mostly non *pro*-drop. In a situation of extreme contact among many different languages, with one or two dominating ones, overt argumental subjects tend to

be used. For example, out of 76 languages exemplified in the *APICS* (Haspelmath and the APICS consortium 2013), 49 require an obligatory pronominal subject, while 18 have optional pronominal subjects. In general, many Romance-based creoles present null expletive subjects, but they very rarely exhibit null argumental subjects. Among those creoles that exhibit expletive pro-drop we find Chabacano, Kriyol, a Portuguese-based creole language spoken in Guinea-Bissau, and Saramaccan, an English-Portuguese-based creole spoken in Suriname.

Some creoles do allow argumental pro-drop. Ternate Chabacano allows pro- drop in coordination and topic-continuation structures, as in the following example:

(2) Ternate Chabacano, Sippola (2013)

| *Múʧo* | *péhro, kel* | *el* | *kompanyéro* | *de* | *mi* | *na* | *kása,* |
|--------|--------------|------|--------------|------|------|------|---------|
| Many | dog | that | DEF | companion | of | 1SG.POSS | LOC | house |

| *kabándu,* | *ta* | *le,* | *ta* | *sintáw ya* | *numá [...].* |
|------------|------|-------|------|-------------|----------------|
| then | IPFV | read | IFPV | seated already | just |

'Many dogs, they are my companions in the house. Then, I read, I just sit [...]'.

The *pro*-drop status of Cape Verdean Creole (Baptista 2002; Costa & Pratas 2012; Bayer 2013), as well as Haitian Creole (DeGraff 1993, Déprez 1994), has often been debated. Bayer 2013 presents an overview of *pro*-drop phenomena in Cape Verdean Creole, providing examples like the following:

(3) Cape Verdean Creole, Bayer (2013:69)

pro$_i$ Ben ta subi, pro$_i$ ben ta subi dos merés, pro$_i$ ben subi tres, pro$_i$ ben ta subi dja, ti ki pro$_i$ ba aitura.

'pro came to rise, pro came to rise by two cents, pro came to rise by three, pro came to rise, until, pro went way high.'

Notice that Bayer observes that argumental *pro*-drop obtains in topic continuation contexts.

### 2.3 Contact and bilingualism

In one of the first studies on bilingual children, Paradis & Navarro (2003) studied the realization of subjects in two Spanish monolingual children comparing them to one English-Spanish bilingual child living in the UK; they observed an overextension of overt pronouns in

the child's Spanish to contexts in which monolingual children would not insert an overt subject; specifically, while monolingual children produced 20% of overt subjects, in line with the monolingual children in Spain, the bilingual child produced 35% of overt subjects.

If a null-subject language is in contact with a non-null subject languages, and if the acquisition of null pronouns is influenced by the contact language (as also argued by Hulk & Müller 2000), we expect two possible outputs of bilingual acquisition: the non-null subject language can feature more overt pronouns than that of monolingual speakers of the null-subject language, as in the case just discussed and reported in Paradis & Navarro (2003); or there can be a larger number of null subjects in the non-null subject language. In a widely-cited article, Serratrice *et al.* (2004) test the two possibilities through the observation of one English-Italian monolingual child compared with English and Italian monolingual children.

They show that the first scenario, i.e. the insertion of overt subjects in contexts where monolingual children would not have them, is what actually happens. There is no overuse of null subjects in the non-null subject language instead. They conclude that there is an asymmetry in the vulnerability of the contact languages: the language with the less economical system, i.e. Italian in this case, which displays both null and overt subjects, is more vulnerable than the one with a clear-cut, unique system for the realization of subjects. Overt subjects in English are less specified than overt subjects in Italian, due to the fact that their distribution does not depend on discourse information, such as if the subject is a topic or a focus, like in Italian. This under-specification is transferred, according to Serratrice *et al* (2004) to the language with a higher degree of specification, resulting in an overuse of overt subjects in the latter (*structural priming*, Branigan 2006; Ferreira & Bock 2006).

In a subsequent paper, Serratrice *et al.* (2009) examine both English-Italian and Italian-Spanish bilingual children, to ascertain whether the extension of overt subjects to pragmatically infelicitous contexts is to be attributed to the typological difference of the languages involved or to bilingualism itself. Serratrice *et al* examine 167 children, divided between English-Italian bilinguals living in the UK, English-Italian bilinguals living in Italy, Spanish-Italian bilinguals living in Spain, and monolinguals, both young and adults. The result of the experiments is that Spanish-Italian bilingual children extend overt subjects to pragmatically infelicitous contexts exactly like English-Italian children, and that therefore the extension or overuse of overt pronouns needs to be attributed to the fact that children are bilingual, not to the specific languages in contact.

A very interesting study by Pinto (2006) shows that not all pronominal subjects are equal: while children acquire 1st and 2nd person subjects rather early, 3rd person pronouns are acquired late and are the ones that present more errors, in contexts in which they should be omitted. Furthermore, Pinto examines pronoun omission in two bilingual children: one Dutch-Italian child, and one English-Italian child. 1st person overt subjects are attested in most cases, especially for the English-Italian child. If structural similarity, and in particular feature overlap (following Serratrice *et al.* 2004), were relevant, we would expect Dutch-Italian children to have a more coherent *pro*-drop system than English-Italian ones. English pronouns are in fact not pragmatically marked: they are used indifferently as foci, as topics, or in unmarked contexts. The distribution of Italian overt and null pronouns is instead largely determined by pragmatics. This pragmatic-based division of labor between pronouns is an option that Dutch shares with Italian, to the exclusion of English. The data confirm this expectation, Pinto argues.

In similar studies, Müller *et al.* (2002; 2006) observe 5 German-Italian children and find a sensitive overextension of overt pronouns to contexts where monolinguals use null subjects.

## 2.4 Interfaces

We have just seen that many studies on the bilingual acquisition of null subjects have been performed on the basis of macrocontact between a Romance language and usually English (or another Germanic language). The label "language change in contact" is however not often attributed to children, but to adult languages. Starting from similar considerations as those just seen, adult L2 acquisition, be it the mere result of extended contact in a balanced situation (like that of Spanish and Basque, or Spanish and Catalan) or a heavily unbalanced one like that which us found in creoles, has been studied extensively, mainly to determine the factors involved in "incomplete" or "deviant" systems as compared to the baseline monolingual grammars.

Sorace and Filiaci (2006), Sorace (2011) and many following works examine the situation of adult bilinguals (in particular L1 speakers undergoing attrition or L2 learners), and find that null subjects are consistently replaced by overt subjects in pragmatically incongruent contexts also in this case. In a study on Catalan in contact with English, Helland (2004) presents evidence of null-subjechtood erosion. Similar results are found in studies on Italian/English and Greek/English bilinguals by Tsimpli *et al* (2004) and about Spanish/English bilinguals by Montrul (2004). The generalization to be drawn is that language change in bilingualism

contexts always moves in the direction of inserting overt subjects in contexts in which monolingual speakers wouldn't use them.

To explain these facts, Sorace, together with Serratrice, and in different studies, following Hulk and Müller (2010), formulates the Interface Hypothesis (IH), according to which change is more likely to happen for phenomena involving more than one grammatical module (see Sorace 2011 and references therein). The conditions in which a subject can be left unexpressed are determined by the interaction of several modules: syntactic, morphological, and information structural. The limited mastery of all these modules results in the weakening of *pro*-drop.

The IH has seen many reformulations, from a more radical to a more gradient one (Sorace 2000; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2011; 2012; Montrul 2011; White 2011; Montrul & Ionin 2012): according to the original, radical, IH, L2 acquisition errors (that give rise to change, for our purposes) are to be found in contexts involving the external interface, i.e. the interface of core grammar with other systems, like discourse. The concept of "the more modules involved, the more difficult to master" has remained. In particular, the discourse conditions are the most difficult to master. The same has been maintained in much of the L2 literature, where the CP is recognized as being the part of structure which is more difficult to master. In this respect, the seminal paper by Hulk and Müller has set a first stone in the development of the Interface Hypothesis, both because it pointed out the vulnerability of the CP (which is the part of the sentence encoding information structure, see also Platzack 2001) and because it mentioned the difficulty in parsing complex structures, especially when they superficially rather similar.

While L2 literature usually refers to children, and change in contact mainly to adults, we still see that the generalizations regarding language change all consider the CP, hence the interface with discourse, as the most vulnerable part to change. Interestingly, the solution for L2 speakers seems to be to insert overt pronouns rather than drop them all. This is in part different from what happens in some creole languages, as we saw in Section 2.1.1, and different from what happens in microcontact, as we will see in Section 3.

## 2.5 Heritage languages

The IH is considered relevant also in the case of heritage languages, as extensively argued by Aalberse *et al.* (2019). According to the work of Montrul (2004), Carvalho *et al.* (2015), and Polinsky (2018), *pro*-drop weakens in heritage varieties of Spanish in contact with English in the US. Montrul (2004) observed the behavior of 24 intermediate and advanced

Spanish heritage speakers, and compared them with monolingual speakers of Spanish. While the speakers all showed mastery of null elements, intermediate heritage speakers had difficulty with the pragmatics governing their distribution. These speakers in particular showed convergence with English regarding the distribution of overt subjects. Montrul reports many examples of this overproduction, including the following (Montrul 2004:133-134):

(4) Había una vez una niña Chiquita que se llamaba Caperucita. Ella vivía con su mamá y **ella** quería mucho a su abuelita. Y **ella** le dijo a su mama, mami quiero ir a visitar a mi abuelita. . . .Y cuando llegó la Caperucita, **ella** pensó que el lobo era su abuela. . . .Y cuando se levant´o el lobo, **él** tenía piedras dentro y no pudo caminar.   (subject # 209, intermediate)

"Once upon a time there was a little girl whose name was Little Riding Hood. She lived with the mother and she loved her grandmother very much. And she told her mother, mommy I want to go visit my grandmother. . . . And when arrived the Little Riding Hood, she thought that the wolf was her grandmother. . . . And when the wolf got up, he had stones inside and could not walk."

The insertion of overt pronouns where monolinguals would use a *pro* is calculated as redundant in 8.7% of the cases.

Interestingly, Montrul (2004) also finds cases of pragmatically illicit null subjects, in 15,5% of the cases, as in the following sentence:

(5) Montrul (2004:133)

Entonces la Caperucita Roja encontró, *pro* fue a ver quién estaba en la cama, entonces *pro* encontró que era el lobo. ?*pro* estaba corriendo del lobo y entonces *pro* salió fuera, o **pro** se la comió, **pro** se comió a la abuelita y a la Caperucita.          (subject # 209, intermediate)

"So, the Little Red Riding Hood found, *pro* went to see who was in the bed, so *pro* found that was the wolf. *Pro* was running away from the wolf and then *pro* went out, or *pro* ate her up, *pro* ate up the grandmother and the Little Riding Hood."

While Montrul's data do not contradict the IH directly, they do show that the insertion of overt subjects in pragmatically infelicitous contexts is not the only error in heritage speakers. In fact, the overextension of null subjects shows not only that the speakers master them, or they have a *pro* in their lexicon to say with Rizzi (1982), but that they do not have difficulty in using silent elements, though their distribution differs from that of monolingual Spanish

speakers. This contradicts the findings about other varieties, like Japanese and Korean in contact with English (see Polinsky 2006, Laleko & Polinsky 2016).

### 3. Null subjects in contact - Microcontact

The term microcontact is sometimes used in sociolinguistic or area studies to refer to a smaller or shorter instantiation of a contact situation. There can be micro-contact between two speakers only, which does not necessarily involve a full community, or there can be contact between a larger number of speakers for a short time. The term microcontact will be used here with a very different meaning. Here, microcontact means "contact between two minimally different syntactic systems (grammars)." (D'Alessandro 2018). The idea behind microcontact is that if two languages are structurally very similar, at least for the phenomena considered, it is possible to zoom in in the actual change feature by feature. It is like one of those "find the difference" games that children play: everything else is the same but for one detail. That detail proves crucial when we wish to explain language change.

If we now take 3 or more grammars that are identical but for that one little detail, and we observe all them in contact with each other, the direction that change takes with respect to that detail can tell us what influences what (if that influence exists at all). At micro-level, holistic typological considerations fall short because too coarse-grained, while microcontact can tell us a lot about grammar change. Microcontact between languages that are typologically very similar, or belong to the same family, bears in fact results that are rather different from macrocontact between languages that are typologically divergent.

We have seen in Section 1.2 that the Romance languages are more or less typologically similar. We also know that topicality plays a very big role in Romance, which present a much freer word order than their Germanic counterparts, for instance, as far as topicalization in concerned, but a less flexible order with respect to Latin (Ledgeway 2012, in press).

Null subjects in microcontact behave rather differently than those in macrocontact, but similarly, to some extent, to those in creole languages that have *pro*-drop.

In a study on Catalan and Spanish in contact in the Balearic Islands, de Prada Perez (2014) compares the percentage of null and overt subjects produced by Catalan-Spanish bilinguals as compared to monolingual Spanish and Catalans. She shows that no significant difference can be found between bilinguals and monolinguals in the distribution of subjects. Furthermore,

she shows that *pro* is heavily used in topic continuation contexts, both in bilinguals and in monolinguals, as expected.

A similar result is found by Carvalho & Child (2011) in a study on Spanish in contact with Portuguese in the Uruguayan border. Interestingly, Carvalho and Child also notice that not only the distribution of null subjects, but also the distribution of overt subjects, depends on topic continuation: if a speaker uses an overt subject, they will continue using the overt subject in topic continuation; if they use a null subject, they will continue to use null subjects throughout. This shows that interface conditions are not an issue by themselves: speakers can understand and master topics; rather, bilingual speakers tend to select only a subset of discourse conditions to determine null-subjecthood.

Not only do bilingual speakers of macro-typologically related languages exhibit the same behavior in the production of null or overt pronouns, they also show, in some cases, monolingual (or native-like, in the case of adult L2 learners) ability to assign an antecedent to null and pronominal subjects. In a seminal paper on the resolution of null anaphora, Carminati (2002) shows that in sentences like the following native speakers tend to select the higher DP as an antecedent of *pro*, despite the fact that both DPs are equally able to license it[1]:

(6) (Carminati 2002 in Filiaci 2010:172)

Quando Maria$_i$ e andata a trovare Vanessa$_j$ in ospedale, $\emptyset_{i(/j)}$ le ha portato un mazzo di fiori.

'When Maria went to visit Vanessa at the hospital, she brought her a bunch of flowers.'

In a study on Italian elementary and advanced L2 learners of European Portuguese, Madeira *et al.* (2012) show that these speakers master null subjects like monolingual Portuguese speakers, and can also correctly resolve null-pronoun anaphora antecedent, in the way described by Carminati. Note, incidentally, that they also find that Chinese L2 speakers of European Portuguese do not exhibit the same level of mastery of null pronouns. Given that Chinese is a topic-drop language, and that superficially EP and Chinese might look similar with respect to *pro*-drop, these data are particularly telling regarding the relevance of structure above "perceived" typological similarity. Chinese and EP are arguably perceived as similar, with respect to *pro*-drop, by the learners. The syntactic structures hosting null subjects are

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[1] Carminati formulates this generalization under The Position of Antecedent Strategy (PAS): "The null pronoun prefers an antecedent which is in the SpecIP position (or in the AgrS position under Pollocks split INFL hypothesis), while the overt pronoun prefers an antecedent which is not in the SpecIP position.

however rather different (see D'Alessandro 2015 for an overview), and therefore the speakers do not immediately transfer their own *pro*s to EP.

### 3.1 Heritage microcontact

Data from fieldwork research conducted in Argentina and Brazil on heritage Italo-Romance varieties in contact with Spanish and Portuguese show that the *pro*-drop status of these varieties does not disappear, but gets in fact enhanced in some cases. Moreover, the behavior of these varieties in microcontact breaks down in different directions, confirming Roberts' (2019) idea about the unpredictability microparametric variation, linked to lexical items, in comparison with the uniformity of macroparametric setting.

Frasson (in press) shows that subject clitics in heritage Veneto in Brazil are pronominal in nature by testing their behavior with respect to negation and appearance in coordinated conjuncts. Interestingly, their development diverges from what is happening in Italy, as shown in Casalicchio & Frasson (2018). In the Veneto spoken in Italy, the younger generation tends to drop subject clitics, in particular 3rd person ones, in contexts in which they are obligatory for older generation speakers. Frasson (in press) attributes this difference to the contact language: BP is a partial *pro*-drop language, while Italian is a full *pro*-drop language.

In heritage Friulian in contact with Rioplatense Spanish, subject clitics also have the tendency to behave like full pronominals with respect to negation, coordinated structures, and they are not sensitive to clustering restrictions imposed on clitic clusters (A. Frasson, R. D'Alessandro, B. Van Osch, in preparation). *Pro*-drop is very much alive in this variety, but it is conditioned by a subset of factors with respect to those that are active in fully *pro*-drop languages. In particular, and once again in the same conditions that we find in other multilingual situations, the subject is dropped in topic continuation contexts; they conclude that the change between baseline Friulian and heritage Friulian in contact with Rioplatense Spanish has happened in two steps: first, subject clitics have become real pronouns, and then they get dropped. Another interesting result is that, contrary to what happens (at least superficially) for heritage Veneto, speakers of heritage Friulian in contact with both Rioplatense Spanish and BP are more likely to produce 3rd person subject clitics than 1st person ones.

This might be only concerning the nature of the elements involved, but in general it seems that 3rd person pronouns are omitted in Veneto in contact with Italian, while they are extended (or maintained) in the heritage varieties in Latin America. Once again, this seems to be an

instance of microcontact effect – i.e. contact which is rather erratic as it is linked to lexical items or micro-similarity between structures, and at the very bottom of Roberts's (2019) parameter hierarchy, and do not present a consistent, macroparametric-like, behavior. Notice that the languages involved are typologically identical: Veneto and Friulian differ only for the fact that Friulian presents a full set of subject clitics and Veneto an incomplete one. They are in contact with languages that are typologically identical as far as *pro*-drop is concerned, like Italian and Spanish. Yet, their reaction is slightly different.

Two remarks are in order here: the output of microcontact is different than that of macrocontact, and therefore microcontact deserves its own label as an independent part of contact studies (both in heritage or balanced bilingual situation). Furthermore, it seems that output of microcontact patterns with the output of Romance languages in contact on the one hand, and with those few creole varieties that show *pro*-drop on the other.

## 4. Differential Object Marking in contact - Macrocontact

Some Romance languages, most notably Spanish, Catalan, Romanian, and Upper-Southern Italo-Romance languages, display Differential Object Marking (DOM, Bossong 1985), which is also known as prepositional accusative in the Romance literature (Diez 1882; Tekavčić 1972). Some objects, the most prototypically animate like 1st and 2nd person pronouns, animate/humans, and sometimes animals, are given a dedicated marker, which is mostly *a* in Romance (with the exception of Romanian, which uses *pe*).

Like pro-drop, DOM is also heavily determined by information structure: DOM is often found with topics or dislocated elements, even in those Romance languages that do not usually display it, like Italian (Benincà 1986; Nocentini 1985; 1992; Berretta 1989, 1991). In Italian, the dislocation of a 1st or 2nd person object triggers DOM. Observe that the construction without DOM is not felicitous:

(7) a.    A      me      non      mi      ha      invitato

           to     me      NEG     me      has     invited

           'As for me, s/he hasn't invited me'

    b.    *Me     non      mi      ha      invitato

           me      NEG     me      has     invited

    c.    A      te      non      ti      ho      visto

|     | to  | you | NEG | you | have | seen |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

'As for you, I haven't seen you'

d.   *Te   non   ti   ho   visto

|     | you | NEG | you | have | seen |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

These DOM-marked objects are avoided in the written form, as the clash of the two pronouns *a me mi, a te ti* is considered bad Italian in classical grammars; they are however the only possibility in spoken Italian.

Focus and animacy, and to some extent definiteness, are all "interface features", which means that they are predicted to thin out or disappear in contact as they involve the mastery of interface conditions.Once again, Romance languages in contact do not form a unique category with respect to DOM.

## 4.1 Creoles

It not clear whether creoles display DOM or not, and that is due to the fact that many Romance-based creoles tend to use a generalized object marker. A creole that has been claimed to show DOM is again Chabacano, which uses the object marker *kon* or *kung* (Steinkruger 2008). The distribution of this object marker, which sounds very similar to that of other Luso-Asiatic creoles like Ternateño, Zamboagueõ, Malacca, etc, is restricted to animate objects or to inanimate topics. This group of Luso-Asian languages constitutes an exception within Romance-based creoles, but the issue is how this exception can have possibly emerged.

## 4.2. Contact and heritage contexts

DOM in macrocontact has mostly been studied in heritage studies.

Heritage speakers of languages with DOM have been shown to master object and indirect object clitics rather well. Luján & Parodi (1996) as well as Silva-Corvalán (1994) reported for example very few cases of object omission in Spanish-English speakers in Los Angeles; likewise, Polinsky (1997) showed that direct and indirect argument pronouns (i.e. accusative and dative clitics) are mastered much better than subject pronouns by Russian heritage speakers in the United States. However, when the marking of the object involves also considering other features, like definiteness or animacy, or topicality, the marking of the object becomes more difficult to obtain for heritage speakers.

The DOM marker for Spanish is *a*, which is also used for datives and locatives. Montrul (2004), as well as Luján & Parodi (1996) and Silva-Corvalán (1994), observe that the DOM marker tends to be omitted both by bilingual Spanish-English speakers and by heritage Spanish speakers in the US. In a follow-up article, Montrul & Bowles (2009) examine the possible causes of this loss. They identify several factors that can possibly have triggered this change; Aalberse *et al.* (2019) reformulate the first cause cause, through the words of Polinsky's (2011) Indeterminacy Hypothesis:

(8) Indeterminacy Hypothesis

Form X is suitable for multiple syntactic contexts, and the same syntactic context allows for more than one form                    (Polinsky 2011 in Aalberse *et al.* 2019:151)

*A* in Spanish covers several functions, and heritage speakers tend to avoid indeterminacy by selecting only one of the uses and dropping the others. Other factors that Montrul & Bowles (2009) consider are the input that speakers receive (also studied by Montrul & Sánchez-Walker 2013 who checked also the language background of the learner's caretaker) or acceleration of endogenous change, and leaving also aside the age of acquisition. We leave them aside and concentrate on the grammar-internal factors they discuss. The first one is grammatical complexity and the other one is the influence of English. Regarding grammatical complexity, DOM is an obvious candidate for the IH: it requires knowledge of syntax as well as discourse conditions, in particular when it involves topics. The contact language is also relevant, given that English does not show any DOM, and might have therefore influenced its non-realization in Spanish.

The generalization that macrocontact studies offer regarding DOM is, from a purely structural viewpoint, rather robust: the DOM marker tends to be dropped, for one or the other reason.

In order to determine which of the factor carries more weight, the observation of microcontact situations can be of help. Microcontact studies show in fact rather different results: not only does DOM not disappear, but it gets even extended to contexts in which it was not found before.

## 5. Differential Object Marking in contact - Microcontact

On the basis of macrocontact studies like those by Montrul and Polinsky, we have seen that heritage languages, like creoles, are mostly claimed not to feature DOM. Historically, it has

been claimed that upper-southern varieties of Italo-Romance, most notably Neapolitan (Ledgeway 2009; Sornicola 1997; Fiorentino 2003; Formentin 1998) reinforced their DOM because of extensive contact with Spanish rather than acquiring it from scratch from the contact language.

In Standard Catalan, the DOM marker *a* is obligatory with pronouns and with dislocated DP objects, but it is usually dropped with full DPs when they are adjacent to the verb (Benito 2017:13). According to Escandell-Vidal (2007, 2009), Catalan DOM is sensitive to definiteness; it is obligatory with topics as well as with foci and in several other contexts (see also Irimia & Pineda 2019), including when disambiguation between an inanimate subject and an animate object is required.

In substandard Catalan, however, especially in areas in contact with Spanish, some uses of DOM are found that are not found in the standard language (Sancho 2002). For instance, the DOM marker is used to mark a DP which is immediately adjacent to the verb, like in the following example:

(9) (Substandard Catalan in Benito 2017:16)

a. Esperant a la mare.

'Waiting for the mother.'

b. Coneixies a la seva família.

'You knew his/her family'                    [Corpus Oral de Conversa Col·loquial]

Benito reports that this overextension of Spanish DOM to Catalan is perceived by the bilingual speakers as an hispanism, and it is in fact referred to as *castellanisme* (Moll 1991, Badia Margarit 1994). Moll (1991) claims that DOM in Catalan is entirely borrowed from Spanish, as it did not exist in old Catalan. This claim has been proven wrong by Irimia & Pineda 2019. Going back to microcontact: contrary to what happens to Spanish ad Russian in contact with English, Catalan in contact with Spanish overextends the contexts of application of DOM. Not only does DOM not decrease: in increases, in fact.

## 5.1 Heritage languages

A similar behavior is witnessed in heritage Italo-Romance varieties in contact with Rioplatense Spanish. Like in the case of Catalan and Spanish, the Italo-Romance varieties that

feature DOM (upper-southern and southern ones) present it in a reduced number of instances; other Italo-Romance varieties (like northern ones) do not exhibit any form of DOM.

Fieldwork data on three Italo-Romance varieties (Friulian, Abruzzese, and Sicilian) in contact with Rioplatense Spanish and Quebecois French show a very heterogeneous behavior of DOM in contact (Sorgini 2019).

Sorgini (2019) selects three Italo-Romance varieties: a northern one, Friulian, with no DOM in the baseline; an upper-southern one, Eastern Abruzzese, with person-driven DOM in the baseline (D'Alessandro 2017), and an extreme southern variety, Sicilian, with Spanish-like DOM in the baseline: animate and definite objects are marked with *a*.

The behavior of these varieties in contact is rather interesting, both because it varies according to the contact language, and because it contradicts the generalizations we just saw that were drawn on the basis of macrocontact.

Sorgini checks the behavior of the varieties in contact with respect to four variables that have been universally identified as triggering DOM (in those varieties that have it): animacy, definiteness, topicality, and "human" feature. On the basis of spontaneous speech and a forced choice test, she observes the following:

Friulian, a language that has DOM in the baseline only occasionally with topics, introduces DOM in contact with Rioplatense Spanish with topics. It does not show any change in contact with French, instead. Specifically, Friulian heritage speakers use DOM on 68,8% of the objects, as opposed to the 46,67% of the 1st generation speakers.

Sicilian, a language that has very extensive DOM and only avoids it with inanimates and indefinites, in contact with Rioplatense Spanish produces DOM in every instance checked, in 100% of the cases. These data, surprising as they may look, need to be taken with a grain of salt, given that it was not possible to check the distribution of DOM in the original varieties spoken in Italy, where microvariation is huge. The correct generalization that we can draw from these data is that DOM has certainly not gone lost in Sicilian in contact with AS. The same holds for Sicilian in contact with Quebecois.

An extension of DOM in contact with AS is also registered for Eastern Abruzzese, at least as far as 3rd person pronouns and full DPs with the feature [animate] are concerned. EA spoken in Italy does not exhibit DOM in the 3rd person, while heritage speakers extend it to

these contexts. DOM with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person does also not disappear in contact with Quebecois French.

To sum up, the generalization that we can draw from Sorgini's (2019) data is that DOM, in contact with AS, a language with heavily extended DOM, gets enhanced in some varieties that have it very restricted in the baseline (like Friulian); it gets slightly enhanced in varieties that have some restrictions to it (like Eastern Abruzzese) and for sure retained in varieties with a very extended DOM in the baseline (Sicilian). In contact with French, a non-DOM language, DOM does not increase but also does not disappear; there are no signs of decrease or erosion in any variety, contra what is reported in macrocontact. Sorgini *et al.* (2020), on a closer inspection of the data, notice however 5 instances of DOM omission with kinship terms in Sicilian heritage speakers in contact with Quebecois. It is not clear at the moment whether these are due to contact with French or with English (given that all speakers are bilingual).

In general, perceived typological similarity can explain why these varieties in contact with Spanish expand or retain DOM. However, if this similarity were the cause of loss, as predicted, we would expect an erosion of DOM in contact with languages that do not have it. The data show that this prediction is not borne out.

This mismatch between the micro and the macrolevel is particularly interesting when considering the featural models proposed for syntactic parametric variation. Macroparameters are coarser-grained generalizations on given linguistic phenomena, and they should include microparameters. That does not seem to be the case, however. We can say that within the Romance macro-grammar contact and heritage have outputs that are radically different from the outputs given by contact between typologically distant languages.

## 6. Deixis in contact – Macro- and microcontact

I examined some phenomena in contact that clearly highlight the factors underlying language change, and argued that we should not assume a parallelism between the behavior of features in microcontact and in macrocontact; furthermore, the factors triggering change do not all have the same weight. Microcontact is an important tool to ascertain the ranking of these factors; it seems clear that neither typological similarity, nor the internal factors like complexity or markedness can determine the exact output of contact. At microvariational level, even if we are observing the same varieties, with the same features, in the same sociolinguistics conditions, in contact, the output seems to depend on features of the contact languages and the structures involved.

The fact that structures are actually important when determine the output of contact is testified by the fact that not all structures react the same to contact, which is obvious, but also by the fact that some elements are not affected by contact in any possible way, while they in theory could be.

We have seen that person features can be involved in change; for instance, only 1st and 3rd person pronouns seem to be affected by the change in *pro*-drop; 3rd person pronouns are also involved in the DOM change, to some extent. Some other features, like topicality, respond very strongly to contact (as largely predicted by Hulk & Müller, Polinsky, and many others). One category, however, seems to be resilient to change, and that's the deictic one. Indexicality is expected not to react quickly to contact (see Polinsky 2018 for a long discussion of that). An interesting generalization that has emerged from the study of demonstratives and person pronouns in microcontact is that in fact they behave exactly as the same elements in macrocontact: they are very resilient to change.

Terenghi (2019), on the basis of fieldwork data on Italo-Romance varieties in contact with Quebecois French, Rioplatense Spanish and BP, shows that the only change that one can appreciate is that from a tripartite system to a bipartite system in demonstratives. This change is also attested in diachrony.

Some Romance varieties use a binary system for demonstratives, in which they specify the position of the referent with respect to the speaker (close to the speaker, *this*; far from the speaker: *that*). Some others however use a ternary system, i.e. they specify the position of the referent with respect to the speaker and the addressee (roughly: close to the speaker, close to the addressee, far from both). Not many studies target demonstratives in contact. When referring to indexicality, however, we know that macrocontact studies report that usually one demonstrative is selected as a definiteness marker or determiner (in creoles, McWhorter 2018); or that in general the system is not affected (Polinsky 2018). Terenghi (2019), after an investigation of Romance ternary and binary systems in microcontact, concludes that in fact they are not affected by contact. Specifically, they may change, but only in the same direction that they follow diachronically: the ternary system can be reduced to a binary system, but nothing more.

If compared to CIC in the other two phenomena, we can appreciate an important difference: while *pro*-drop changes in a patchwork fashion, targeting some lexical items before others, and DOM change likewise, demonstrative systems are completely unaffected

by contact; all contact can do is accelerate the diachronic change (that we witness, historically, in some varieties that displayed a ternary system and now exhibit a binary one, like Neapolitan, Ledgeway 2019).

## 7. Conclusions

This review has taken a structural perspective on syntactic change in contact. It collects the main results with respect to two well-studied phenomena, which were selected to exemplify the various approaches and methodologies to the study of CIC. The review attempts to show that microcontact and macrocontact bear different but coherent outputs, and that it is therefore worth making this distinction when dealing with contact studies.

## Acknowledgments

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