

D, C, T DROP IN HERITAGE ITALO-ROMANCE IN NYC

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Abstract: The main focus of this paper is the grammar of second-generation heritage bilingual speakers of English and Italo-Romance in New York City. This study, entirely based on spontaneous speech by different heritage Italo-Romance speakers from Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, as well as Jersey City (NJ), reveals a series of systematic differences between heritage and baseline grammars, be they the local languages or standard Italian. We observe that Italo-Romance HL speakers all equally tend to drop D, T, and C from contexts which would require them in the baseline grammars. At a first glance, many of these changes might appear to be a result of transfer; however, we show that most of them do not find any correspondence either in the contact or in the heritage variety; that is, they are novel syntactic options to which our HL speakers resort.

Keywords: Heritage languages; Italo-Romance; determiners; tense; complementizers; language contact.

1. Introduction

The Italo-Romance heritage community in New York City is rather peculiar compared to other heritage communities. This paper describes the syntactic tendencies found in a diverse range of Italo-Romance varieties spoken in the city of New York. The main phenomena discussed regard changes in some core syntactic domains, namely nominal (D-N), verbal (T-V), and clausal (C) domains. Specifically, we focus on the status of determiners (D), tense (T), and complementizers (C): extensive fieldwork in NYC has shown that, contrary to some generalisations put forth in the literature (see, most notably, Polinsky 2018), these functional heads are not as stable as they would be expected to be. Specifically, we observe that the functional heads D, C, and T, i.e. the highest, most salient ones in their respective extended domains, are heavily affected by contact, to the extent that definite articles, and, less often, complementisers and perfective auxiliaries can be dropped, or show a deviant behaviour with respect to their ‘baseline’, i.e. the variety spoken by first-generation migrants (G1). These omissions bear consequences on the hypothesis according to which speakers have difficulties in assigning values to empty elements (Polinsky 2018; Aalberse *et al.* 2019), since our heritage speakers tend to produce such silent elements quite systematically.

We will attempt to shed light on the possible connections among contact-induced change across the different linguistic domains, namely nominal, verbal/inflectional and clausal, considering the parallels between C and D that are observed in the theoretical literature (Chomsky 1986, Grimshaw 1991, 2005, van Riemsdijk 1990 and many others). Our aim is also to ascertain whether some of the claims put forth in the literature on heritage languages, such as Polinsky’s (2018) statement below, also apply to the

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understudied field of Italo-Romance heritage languages (HLs henceforth), or require some sort of refinements:

"Tense is a robust category in heritage production [...]. Heritage speakers of various languages demonstrate remarkable stability in the use of tense. Just as tense is an area of resilience in the clausal domain, determiners are robust in the nominal domain. [...] This stability of tense and determiners is not limited to heritage English but is observed in other heritage languages as well" (Polinsky 2018: 62-63)

Within the nominal domain, we observe the creation of a broader range of syntactic options related to possessives with respect to those found in the baseline varieties or the contact language; in the verbal domain, we note that heritage speakers (HL speakers henceforth) tend to produce 'default' synthetic forms, such as 3rd singular present tense or root infinitives. These phenomena suggest that V-to-T movement (internal merge of V to a higher position in the structure) either takes place but only spells out an impoverished set of phi-features, or is lost altogether.

In this respect, the changes we detect may be ascribed to a multilingual contact with *either* or *both* the local (Italo-American) English or/and (American) Italian, as well as *neither* of these two options. Indeed, we should bear in mind that we may be dealing with the simultaneous presence, to differing degrees, of multiple linguistic systems. As will be discussed in Section 2, such 'language ecology' is frequently attested in much of sociolinguistic work on Italian communities in English-speaking countries (see Sections 2 and 3 for references), to which we shall compare the NYC situation.

The main focus of this paper is the grammar of second-generation (i.e. US-born) bilingual speakers of English and Italo-Romance, who acquired their HLs from first-generation (G1) speakers of Italo-Romance in the first years of their lives. This should allow us to capture the main tendencies of contact-induced change found in the grammatical systems of early bilingual HL speakers who started, or continued, to acquire their Italo-Romance variety in the US, and identify some of the less stable domains of heritage grammars. In such contact situations, more syntactic options become available, and compete to be kept or lost in the HL (somewhat similarly to the 'dual grammar' stage described by Kroch (1989) for diachronic syntactic changes in monolingual contexts). The proliferation of structural options can be argued to lead to a reduced 'structural stability' of the HL, in which optionality is introduced in the language(s). Optionality is heavily instantiated in the hybrid Italian-American *koine*, a community language in which features of the local 'archaic' Italo-Romance variety, regional Italian, and English syntax co-exist. Despite the highly heterogeneous linguistic situation of speakers of different varieties (archaic dialect/Italian American *koine* with different proficiency levels), some general tendencies seem to emerge as the common denominators among these HL speakers, irrespective of the Italo-Romance HL they speak.

These tendencies, which may resemble strategies adopted in both L1 and L2 acquisitional contexts, constitute the main focus of this paper, which is organised as follows: Section 2 outlines the sociolinguistic situation of Italo-Romance varieties in NYC; Section 3 discusses the different case-studies, which correspond to the various

syntactic domains investigated, i.e. nominal (§3.1), verbal (§3.2), and clausal (§3.3); in Section 4, we provide some conclusive remarks.

2. The Italo-Romance-English contact situation in NYC (and beyond)

Although this paper does not aim to provide a complete sociolinguistic profile of Italo-Romance HLs in New York (for details, see Andriani *et al.* 2022), it is crucial to have a clear picture of the community's linguistic wealth when we are faced with identifying which Italo-Romance variety we are dealing with. In this section, we will consider the sociolinguistic observations in Haller's (1987, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 2002; a.o.) extensive work on the Italo-Romance linguistic landscape in New York. This will help us lay out a solid descriptive base for a better contextualisation of our data from both G1 migrants from Italy and American-born HL speakers. Moreover, Haller's work provides us with a reliable data source against which we can check our own data – collected some decades after Haller's – and trace any potential (dis)continuity.

This article is concerned with Italo-Romance varieties, i.e. those languages that developed from Latin and are still spoken on the Italian territory in a bilingual situation, with the dominant language being Italian. These languages have been brought to America by emigrants who left Italy at various points in the past; our study concerns mainly emigrants from the '50s-'60s, who moved to America and kept speaking their language to their children, who are defined here as heritage language speakers (HL speakers). When studying these varieties, it is important to bear in mind that monolingual speakers of Italo-Romance varieties are extremely rare, in Italy as well as in the US. In other words, it is *virtually impossible* to find speakers who do not have any competence in a variety of regional Italian, be that more oriented towards the speakers' own local language or the standard. For our purpose, this implies that most (though not all) of our speakers are trilingual, with different degrees of competence in English, their Italo-Romance variety, and Italian. To different extents, the latter plays an important role in the linguistic repertoire of G1 and HS speakers, as opposed to previous generations of migrants who did not have (much) Italian in their repertoires, but only Italo-Romance varieties.¹

A total of 58 speakers (G1: 32 / HS: 26) from different heritage communities – both from northern (1)-(2) and southern (3)-(9) areas of the Italian peninsula – were interviewed in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, besides one family in Jersey City (NJ). These are listed below according to the linguistic variety and generation of the speakers:

¹ "Empirical studies on different contexts (Moreno and Di Salvo 2012, Rubino 2014a) confirmed the role of the migration wave in the growing Italianization of the Italian varieties migrated abroad, suggesting that migrants (and more so new migrants) have a more diversified repertoire than that of those who preceded them and whose language competence when they left was virtually exclusively in the local dialect." (Di Salvo & Moreno 2017: 7)

Rhaeto-Romance:

- 1) Friulian (G1: 4/HS: 2)

Italo-Romance:

- 2) Nônes (Ladin-Lombard/Venetan transitional varieties from Trentino; G1: 2/HS: 8)
- 3) Ciociaro (upper-southern varieties from southern Lazio; G1: 1)
- 4) Eastern Abruzzese (upper-southern varieties; G1: 2/HS: 2)
- 5) (rural) Neapolitan (upper-southern varieties; G1: 1)
- 6) Eastern Campanian (upper-southern varieties from Avellino/Benevento provinces; G1: 1/HS: 1)
- 7) Cilentano (upper-southern varieties with Sicilian features from southern Campania; G1: 5/HS: 7)
- 8) Apulo-Barese (upper-southern varieties from Central Puglia; G1: 8/HS: 4)
- 9) Western and Southern Sicilian (extreme-southern varieties; G1: 8/HS: 2)

While these Italo-Romance local varieties are employed within the family and within members of the same community, (spoken) Italian also played an important role within NYC's linguistic landscape; this role is larger of what is found in other Italian emigrant communities, like those which are found in Argentina and Brazil (Andriani *et al.* 2022). In fact, the coexistence of several different Italo-Romance varieties, not always mutually intelligible, brought about the need for a shared Italo-Romance variety, the Italo-American *koine*, a *lingua franca* that served as the 'community language' (Haller 1991; 1997a: 401). Documented for other metropolitan areas (e.g. Sidney Italian: Bettoni 1990, 1991; Montreal Italian: Reinke 2014), it is worth noting that this process of 'koineisation' is not dissimilar from the one which led to the spread of Italian in Italy, as also remarked by Haller (1987: 393) in relation to 20th-century internal migration, the main difference being the additional – yet limited – English element.²

Although this *koine* has survived until nowadays, it undoubtedly underwent further Italianisation due to the post-1965 waves of migrants, when the Immigration Reform Law allowed Italo-American families to live and work in the US. This was a turnover point for the linguistic repertoires of Italians in NYC, as the new migrants were more educated; education in Italy takes place exclusively in Italian, hence these speakers were no longer dialect monolinguals like the previous emigrants (Haller 1991: 391-392; De Fina & Fellin 2010; cf. also fn.1). Indeed, already in his 1991 study, Haller (1991: 391-392) highlights that the languages(s) spoken by some informants differed from that spoken by those people who arrived in the US prior to the 1965.

Our investigation, taking place some decades after Haller's, can surely testify to a steep increase in usage and presence of *standard* (spoken) Italian, imported by a different

² "The Italian-American *lingua franca* is striking in its dominant dialectal characteristics which prevail by far over Anglicisms or popular Italian elements. [...] The proportion between Dialectal (and popular Italian) elements and American English elements is 85% vs. 15% of all elements described in this study". (Haller 1987: 397)

Italian migrant population, and now taught in some bilingual schools and at college/university level. Nonetheless, the vitality of both archaic dialects (if preserved at all) and the Italo-Romance *koine* is highly endangered. This is due to a common tendency, described for most of the Italian diaspora in the literature (see Carnevale 2009; De Fina 2014; cf. also Haller 1987, 1993 for NYC), to shift to English by the third generation, if not already the second, for integration purposes. This happens especially because the active knowledge of the Italo-Romance HLs, beyond culturally relevant expressions and lexical items, is no longer crucial for cultural identification (De Fina 2014).

Bearing this in mind, Haller (1987, 1993, 1997a, 2002) proposes the following continuum of Italo-Romance varieties, “used, besides English, with various degrees of competence, according to generation, time of emigration, and education” (Haller 1987: 396): “*Standard*” *dialectal Italian*, *Italianized dialect*, *pidginized American Italian*, and *archaic dialects*. In later studies, he further subdivides this continuum into sets of H(igh) and L(ow) varieties, which essentially include

“a regional or dialectal popular H variety and a hybrid L variety with significant admixture from English. These varieties, which embrace several intermediate ones, are unstable and are fading from one generation to another. [...] Hybridity and attrition are thus primary features of Italian language and dialects abroad” (Haller 1997a: 402).

For convenience, Haller’s description is schematised in Table 1 and further adapted from Haller (1991: 398-400) to include some considerations on HS speakers:

G1 speakers	Prestige	Heritage Speakers
<i>Italo-American English</i>	High	<i>(Italo-)American English</i>
“Standard” Italian		Dialectal/Regional Italian
Dialectal/Regional Italian		Archaic dialects
Italianized dialect		Pidginized American Italian
Pidginized American Italian		
Archaic dialects	Low	

Table 1. Italo-American English varieties according to Haller’s (1991) classification

Our HL speakers’ repertoire usually includes all three Italo-Romance varieties listed above: besides the archaic dialects of their families, many HL speakers have knowledge of Italian to various degrees, which can be mapped on a (socio)linguistic continuum ranging between *dialectal/regional Italian* (high prestige, usually learnt or perfected through education) and *pidginized American Italian* (low prestige, usually acquired in the multi-dialectal environment of the Italian communities, who have to resort to a *koine*).

Once the sociolinguistics context is provided, we can now turn to presenting and examining the data.

3. Structural Tendencies in NYC Italo-Romance

This study is entirely based on spontaneous speech, collected on fieldwork between October 2019 and January 2020 in New York City. The spontaneous speech was produced by different heritage Italo-Romance speakers from Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, as well as Jersey City (NJ), and reveals a series of differences when compared to the G1 baseline, or the homeland varieties spoken in Italy, be they the local languages or standard Italian.

A striking feature of these data is that Italo-Romance HL speakers all equally tend to drop determiners, tense and complementizers from contexts which would require them in the corresponding Italy-based varieties, as will be shown in the remainder of the section.

At a first glance, many of these changes, affecting the D, T, and C functional heads, might appear to be a result of transfer; however, most of them do not find any correspondence either in the contact or in the heritage variety; that is, they are novel syntactic options to which our HL speakers resort. Note that these phenomena are not attested across the board, but rather occur as tendencies common to HL speakers of all varieties. In what follows we provide an overview of the main ‘deviant’ structures considered.

The most frequently attested tendency is the omission of the definite article, illustrated in (1), in a number of syntactic contexts, which we present and discuss in §3.1. This is followed by changes related to the T domain, exemplified in (2) and discussed in §3.2, while the least frequent interference can be observed to affect the C domain, as in (3), discussed in §3.3. In the following examples we indicate the form produced by the HL speakers, with its translation, and the corresponding Italian form. Further, we present a rough syntactic analysis of the phrases at issue. For the examples in (1)-(3) we compare the heritage data with Italian, given that these utterances are all in spoken Italian. We use the null set Ø to mark the position where the D, T, or C head should occur.

(1) *Determiners: empty D or prenominal Poss_{CL}*

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|------------------|-------|-----|-----------|----------------|
| a. | \emptyset | dialeotto | (HIT) | il | dialeotto | (IT) |
| | | dialetto | | the | dialetto | |
| a'. | [_{DP} \emptyset_{D} [N(P)]] | | | | | |
| | (<i>il</i>) | <i>dialeotto</i> | | | | |
| b. | mio | dialeotto | (HIT) | il | mio | dialeotto (IT) |
| | my | dialetto | | the | my | dialetto |
| b'. | [_{DP} [_D Poss _{CL} [N(P)]]] | | | | | |
| | <i>mio</i> | <i>dialeotto</i> | | | | |

(2) *Inflection: default 3SG or root infinitive replacing synthetic forms of V*

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------|--------|-------|----------------|------------|-------|------|
| a. | gente | parla | (HIT) | la | gente | parla | (IT) |
| | people.FSG | speaks | | the | people.FSG | speak | |
| | ‘people speak’ | | | ‘people speak’ | | | |

- a'. [TP (DP) [T V_[3SG] [_{(v-)VP} **V**]]]
 (gente) parla
- b. gente parlare (HIT) *gente parlare (IT)
 people.FSG to.speak people to.speak
 ‘people speak’
- b'. [TP (DP) [T Ø_T [_{(v-)VP} V_{INF}]]]
 (gente) **parlare**
- empty T_{AUX}: Present perfect with only past participle and no auxiliary*
- c. gente parlato (HIT) la gente ha parlato (IT)
 people.FSG spoken.MSG.PPT the people.FSG has spoken
 ‘the people have spoken’
- c'. [TP (DP) [T Ø_{AUX} [_{(v-)VP} V_{P,PART}]]]
 (gente) **parlato**
- (3) *Complementisers: empty relative and clausal C*
- d. dice viene
 says comes
- d'. ...[_{TP1} V₁ [_{(v-)VP2} **V** [_{CP} [C Ø_C [_{TP2} V₂ [_{(v-)VP2} **V**]]]]]]]]]

Most of these omissions are likely due to transfer from English, as well as Italian, but some appear as novel syntactic options which deviate from either one of the contact-languages.

We start by examining D-drop.

3.1 The Nominal Domain

We mentioned above that change occurs both in the nominal and verbal domains; the former is certainly the most affected, as already observed by Polinsky (2018 among others). In our corpus, we observe three plausible sources of structural change in the DP:

- i. contact with English;
- ii. Italian;
- iii. creation of hybrid strategies that do not belong to any of the contact varieties.

New structural options that are not present in the homeland or G1 varieties have emerged in the grammars of HL speakers, yielding a certain degree of optionality among the available structures. Such optionality may also be ascribed to the great variation already present in the DP-structures of the different Italo-Romance varieties considered, especially in the (co)occurrence of definite articles and possessives with kinship terms and common nouns (cf. Tables 2 and 3, §3.1.4).

In the following sections, we present a selection of occurrences in which the semantic properties of the referent, as well as the presence of certain elements within the DP (and outside of it, e.g. prepositions), favour the omission of the definite article in D.

In particular, we find cases of D-drop with generic NP-referents (§3.1.1), after prepositions (§3.1.2), as well as with numeral and quantified modifiers (§3.1.3), and with possessive adjectives (§3.1.4). We shall first focus on those contexts in which NPs are allowed to appear bare, namely as complements of verbs and prepositions (cf. Longobardi 1994; Chierchia 1998; a.o.), and then analyse the cases in which there are other modifiers inside the DP.

3.1.1 Bare nouns

Singular and plural bare nouns, i.e. ‘those denoting a whole class or mass rather than an individual member, a plurality of members, or a part’ (Lyons 1999: 51), often appear in our corpus both in subject and object position. This happens even in contexts where D-less bare nouns would not be allowed in the baseline varieties.

Determiner drop with plural NPs is illustrated in example (4):

(4) *Friulian*

- a. Salame de mezogiorno, me mama faceva **Ø_D** **polpete**
 my mum made meatballs
 ‘(we’d eat) salami at noon, my mum used to make meatballs’

Cilentano

- b. **Ø_D cose** cambia
 things.F.PL changes.3SG
 ‘Things change’

Sicilian

- c. *these women especially*, unn’eranø (n)segnate come **Ø_D** **americane**
 NEG were taught like Americans.F.PL
 ‘Especially these women, they weren’t as educated as American women’

The omission of definite articles with generic plural nouns is limited to direct objects in Italo-Romance (see Longobardi 1994, 2001, *et seq.*), but it would be ungrammatical, or at best marginal, in all contexts provided above. In particular, a plural bare noun in subject position is not allowed in Italo-Romance, but it is the norm in English and, indeed, is not surprising in contact with languages like English. In this respect, observe that Kupisch & Rothman (2008), in their discussion of the incidence of formal education in the HL, also found that two thirds (66%) of their heritage Italian informants in Germany (educated in German) would accept and use generic (bare-)plural nouns in subject position (cf. also Kupisch & Polinsky 2021).

We now turn to consider (morphologically) singular NPs with either plural or mass interpretation:

(5) *H Cilentano*

- a) \emptyset_D gente³ che c'erano s'hanno spostatə fuori, \emptyset_D gente nuove
 people.F who there-were.PL people.F new.F.PL
 so vvenutə [...] sime state fortunate ca i ggende ca sono venuto,
 are come the.M.PL people.F.SG who are come.M.SG
 hanno apprezzato la cultura italiana
 ‘The people who were(/lived) here moved away, new people arrived [...] we
 were lucky that the people who came here appreciated Italian culture’
- b) \emptyset_D gente non aiuta \emptyset_D gente ppiù
 people.F.SG NEG helps.3SG people.3SG more
 ‘People no longer help people (i.e. each other)’

H Sicilian

- c) i femmini stavano dintro, a ccòcere, incinte, \emptyset_D
 the women
mangiare in tavola pe $\emptyset_{D/(Poss?)}$ mmaritə
 food
 ‘women stayed indoors, cooking, pregnant, with food on the table for their
 husbands’
- d) Meditare con la musica che inforza \emptyset_D femmena, la femmena
 woman the woman
 ‘Meditate with music which empowers women’

In all the varieties, mass singular nouns, e.g. *gente* ‘people’ with specific (5a) and generic (5b) interpretation (yet triggering plural verbal agreement), *mangiare* ‘food’ (5c), and *femmena* ‘woman’ (intended: ‘women’) (5d), and generic plural nouns, e.g. *polpette* ‘meatballs’ (4a), *cose* ‘things’ (4b) and *americane* ‘American (women)’ (4c), appear without a definite article irrespective of their syntactic function (i.e. subject or object). However, we also observe that determiner omission does not occur across the board, as speakers alternate determinerless nouns with nouns with overt determiners, such as underlined (*i*) *ggende* ‘(the) people’ (5a) and (*la*) *femmena* ‘(the) woman (intended: women)’ (5e). Note that the interpretation of these bare noun in heritage varieties does not change, as in most cases the articles are semantically void (and absent in English), rather than providing referential import.

In addition to the contexts just discussed, we also observed that definite-article omission occurs with non-generic referents, similarly to the case in (5) where the specific mass noun *gente* ‘people’ appears without determiner. Some examples are given in (6):

³ *Gente* (people) has been glossed as feminine singular for Italian. However, its status varies considerably from dialect to dialect, with the most common featural specification being feminine plural. In these varieties, *gente* seems to be plural; however, it can trigger both singular and plural agreement, and masculine as well feminine agreement. Therefore we leave the glosses non completely specified.

(6) *Abruzzese*

- a) a Ssan Giuànnə tsə davə li garùfənə [...] alli fidanzatə.
 Jevə **lu jurnə də llu fidanzamendə**
 the day of the engagement
 [...] ma ci scṭà nu mutivə pəcché tsə davə,
jèvə (Ø_D) ggiornə də-Ø_D fidanzamendə,
 was day of engagement
Ø_D giorno də San Giuannə, per noi
 day of st John
 ‘On Saint John’s day couples exchanged carnations. It was the day of engagement [...] but there’s a reason why carnations were exchanged, it was the day of engagement for us, Saint John’s day’

Cilentano

- b) Ø_D **dialèttə** u parlàmmə po’ quannə ghiamm’ a Ssassàne
 dialect it we-speak
 ‘as for the dialect. we speak it when we go to Sassano’

Sicilian

- c) ma iddu era cchiù mericano, **la pàpa e Ø_D mmamma** è ccresciutə qqui
 the dad and mum
 ‘but he was more American, his dad and mum grew up here’

The examples in (6) show that, even when we would expect the overt realisation of D both in English and Italo-Romance, the definite article is dropped with definite referential DPs, such as ‘(the) day of engagement/Saint John’ in (6a) and ‘(the) dialect’ in (6b),⁴ as well as in cases of coordinated structures, e.g. (6c). In (6b) we observe an instance of topicalisation in which the fronted direct object lacks the overt determiner, while in (6c), the coordination in the expression ‘the/(his) mum and dad’ allows for the omission of the overt determiner with the second conjunct of the coordinated structure. This omission is allowed in English with an overt possessive, e.g. *his father and mother*, but not in Romance, e.g. *il papà e *(la) mamma*. Moreover, (6a) shows once again the optionality of the alternation between presence vs absence of D within the same exact nominal expression ‘(the) day of engagement/Saint John’.

These facts can be represented by the structure $[_{DP} \emptyset [N(P)]]$, where the N(P) can either be specified for [+plural, +generic], like in (4), as well as [+mass(/singular), +generic], like in (5), and, exceptionally, [+singular, -generic], like in (6).

In English, the contact language, bare common nouns can only occur in the contexts of [+plural, -generic] and [+mass(/singular), +generic] both positions (as

⁴ Going beyond Romance, another instance of contact-induced omission of definite articles is discussed in McWhorter (2020: 265) for Kanak Sprak, or Kiezdeutsch, the German-based sociolect of the heritage Turkish youth. In this variety, speakers may drop articles, leading to potential ambiguity between definite and indefinite interpretation, as in *hab isch gekauft neue BMW* (vs *ich habe den(/einen) neuen BMW gekauft*) ‘I have bought the(/a) new BMW’.

external or internal arguments (cf. Longobardi 1994 among others). The heritage Italo-Romance varieties extend these possibilities further to include [+plural, +generic] and [+mass(/singular), +generic] in both subject and object position. Moreover, these varieties exceptionally allow D to be dropped with [+singular, –generic] nouns:

Absence (\emptyset) of overt D with:	English	Italo-Romance	heritage Italo-Romance
N [+mass(/singular), +generic]	\emptyset	D	\emptyset (both S and DO)
N [+singular, –generic]	D	D	\emptyset (exceptionally: cf. (6))
N [+plural, +generic]	\emptyset	\emptyset (only DO)	\emptyset (both S and DO)
N [+plural, –generic]	D	D	D

Table 2. Extension of D drop in heritage Italo-Romance

It should also be highlighted that some of these heritage Italo-Romance varieties with D drop also tend to weaken the morphosyntactic encoding of specificity in the v -domain (cf. Andriani *et al.* 2022). This is observed in the loss of Differential Object Marking in a number of contexts, especially with those DPs which are lower on the specificity/definiteness scale (see also Montrul 2004, Polinsky 2018, Laleko & Polinsky 2016, *i.a.*).

It could be argued that the two functional heads, i.e. D within the DP and the v -related one (variable depending on its analysis) hosting the *a*-marking, are not always needed in the heritage grammars to encode specificity, a semantico-pragmatic feature retrievable from the context. After all, definite articles are typologically common, but can hardly be considered as fundamental in the world's languages. Indeed, in the WALS (Dryer 2013), 243 out of 620 languages entirely lack definite articles, totalling 312 if we include the 69 languages that exploit the demonstrative for definite-article functions, while the remaining 308 languages have some forms of it (either free morpheme or affix).

On the basis of these considerations, the facts described in Table 2 can be checked against a broader typology of languages allowing null D-heads in different contexts. According to the typology proposed by Crisma (1997) and Longobardi (2001), presented below in (7), the heritage Italo-Romance varieties considered here optionally embody different stages of the scale proposed by Longobardi (2001:584)

- (7) a. Languages with no bare nouns (French)
- b. Languages with *stricter* bare nouns (apparently the rest of Romance: Spanish, Italian...)
- c. Languages with *freer* bare nouns (English and perhaps most of Germanic)
- d. Languages with indefinite bare singulars (and only a definite lexical article: Icelandic, Celtic, Hebrew...)
- e. Languages with ambiguous bare singulars (i.e. articleless languages: Russian, Czech, Latin...)

With respect to the optional occurrence of bare nouns, our heritage Italo-Romance varieties in NYC can be found at an intermediate stage oscillating between ‘*stricter* bare nouns’ (7b), typical of Romance (with the exception of French) and ‘*freer* bare nouns’ (7c), typical of English/Germanic.

3.1.2 Prepositions

Another context in which definite articles are very frequently omitted by our Italo-Romance HL speakers is after prepositions, irrespective of their type/function and nature of the NP embedded under them. Example (8) offers an illustration of this phenomenon:

(8) *Friulian*

- a) su-Ø_D trentaquattro stradis [...] il prim post al era al 34,
on 34 street
dop a è giuta a-Ø_D 28 (sc. stradis)
at 28 street
‘on the 34th street [...] the (club’s) first location was on the 34th, then it moved to the 28th’
- c) alora i soi zut at(-Ø_D?) Queens
then I am gone at Queens
‘Then I went (i.e. moved) to Queens’
- d) a soi zut su-Ø_D cement, su-i gratacieli
SCL am gone on concrete on-the skyscrapers
‘I went to work with concrete, on skyscrapers’

Cilentano

- f) adesso parlamo co nnonna, chø mmamma, chø ppapà, *you know*, [...]
Sì, e con Ø_D parenti
with relatives
pure ca abbitano nel-la... Williamsburg. [...] Ogni ggiorno.
also who live.3PL in-the Williamsburg
Chø-Ø_D ggenitori, nonna, Ø_D famijari, e cose così.
with parents relatives
‘Now we speak (dialect) with grandma, mum, dad, you know, [...] Yes, also with the relatives who live in Williamsburg [...] (I speak dialect) Everyday. With my parents, grandma, relatives, and similar’
- g) Se andiamo a-Ø_D cclub, a quello di Teggiano, San Cono,
if we go to club
ma... parliamo dialettø lo stesso.
‘If we go to the club, the one from Teggiano, San Cono, but... we still speak dialect’
- j) Adesso non c’è neanche posto su-Ø_D treno... e prima non
now NEG there.is not.even place on train and earlier NEG
andava fino a(-Ø_D) città
went until at city
‘Now there’s not even room on the train... and before it wouldn’t get to the city (Manhattan)’

Abruzzese

- k) parlévə più ddialecto quannə erəvə picculə, e nno mmò... però mmo più
vverso Ø_D italiano
 toward Italian
 ‘I spoke more dialect when I was a child, compared to now... now (I speak a variety) closer to Italian’
- l) Però, mó, se vai **in-Ø_D ristorante**, pagano.
 but now if go.2SG in restaurant pay.3PL
 ‘But, now, if you go to the restaurant, they’re willing to pay.’
- o) Ji èi cresciutə propriə dendrə alla communità ursignésə, perchè lu clobbə
də-Ø_D ursognésə sctevə propriə attaccatə alla proprietà nosctra
 because the club
 of Orsognese
 ‘I’ve grown up within the Orsognese community, because the club of the Orsognese was right next to our property’

Sicilian

- r) io ero tanto *proud* di venire **di-Ø_D Siscilia**
 I was very *proud* to come of Sicily
 ‘I was so proud to come from Sicily’
- s) e cci detto che u dàialetto differente **de-Ø_D italiano**
 the dialect different of Italian
 ‘and I told her that the dialect is different from Italian’
- t) Oh, **con Ø_{Poss(D)} fratello and Ø_{D-Poss} sorelle**
 with brother and sisters
 ‘(during school, who did you speak Sicilian to?) Oh, with my brother and my sisters’
- v) *a sense of pride, with the...* **con-Ø_D parata de Columbus**, sembe èramu nt̪raförə
 with parade of Columbus
 ‘(we had) a sense of pride, with the Columbus (day) parade, we were always outdoors’
- x) Quanno io jevə alla Sisilia per guardare la nonna e Ø_D nnonno, io ero nt̪raförə,
 n’o campo, e *a rusty nail*, l’ho messo my... **in-Ø_D perə**
 it-have.1SG put my in foot
 ‘When I went to Sicily to visit my grandparents, I was outdoors, in the field, and I got a rusty nail in my foot’

In the long list of examples in (8a) to (8x), it appears that many different prepositions (e.g. *in* ‘in’, *a* ‘at/to’, *di* ‘of’, *su* ‘on’, *da* ‘from’, *con* ‘with’, as well as *verso* ‘towards’) lead to the omission of the definite article. These are mainly loco-temporal prepositions, but we also find examples of comitative and other indirect functions. Moreover, this omission takes place irrespective of the nature of the NPs, which can be

generic and non-generic common nouns, proper nouns, toponyms, as well as numerals. Observe that the speakers do produce some P+D, like in example (8d), *su-i*, ‘on the’.

Notice that some of these NPs may also appear as bare, i.e. without an overt determiner, whenever embedded under certain locative prepositions both in English (Lyons 1999: Ch.2) and in Romance (Ledgeway 2012: 107; fn. 33), e.g. (7j) *alla città* vs *in città* ‘to/in the city’ and (7u) *sul treno* vs *in treno* ‘on (the) train’ (cf. also Lyons 1999: 51). Furthermore, Iliescu (1972) notes that Friulian does allow bare NPs embedded under prepositions such as *di*, *a*, *in*, *con*, *su*, and *per*.

In the specific case of Italian, Longobardi (1994) shows that bare nominals are allowed whenever they are in the sister-node of a lexical head, namely as complement of verbs (as discussed in §3.1.1) and prepositions. Hence, it appears as if the ‘exceptional’ behaviour of bare NPs within PPs is further extended to a larger number of contexts which would not be allowed in the contact variety, nor in homeland/baseline Italo-Romance.⁵

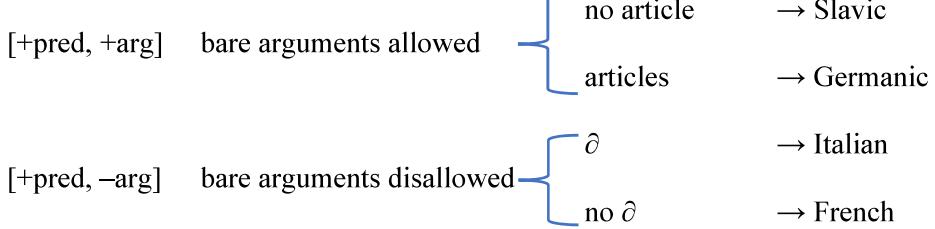
3.1.2.1 A note on bare noun complements

Longobardi’s (1994) claim regarding the occurrence of bare nouns in complement position can be considered in the light of the work by Chierchia (1998) on bare nominals. Chierchia’s (1998: 400) Nominal Mapping Parameter, presented below in (9), analyses the crosslinguistic behaviour of bare nominals in terms of mapping between nominal syntactic categories and semantic types (cf. also Chierchia, Guasti & Gualmini 1999):

- (9) The Nominal Mapping Parameter (NMP): $N \rightarrow [\pm\text{pred}, \pm\text{arg}]$

$[-\text{pred}, +\text{arg}]$ every (lexical) noun is mass → Chinese

Mass/count languages



Languages such as Chinese show the most basic, unmarked setting as every lexical noun appears bare and, as such, is interpreted as kind-denoting/mass. Hence, Chinese bare nouns can only be defined as *arguments*, whose setting is specified as $\langle N [+\text{arg}] [-\text{pred}] \rangle$, as they appear in argumental position without the need of a D (the functions of which are fulfilled by the classifier system). Note that this does not concern us directly, except for the fact that it features as the most basic logical setting in the model.

⁵ In this respect, it is also interesting to note that Leonini (2006: 97-99) attests that PPs are the most frequent context of definite-article omission in German-speaking L2-learners of standard Italian.

In contrast to Chinese, Romance would have bare nouns mapped as *predicate-denoting*, i.e. <N [-arg] [+pred]>, as they either do not feature bare nouns at all (French) or have them restricted to complement position with kind-denoting interpretation (Romance; cf. also Longobardi 1994). In order to occur as arguments, they need an overt determiner. Finally, Germanic languages and, in a different fashion, Slavic languages allow both (lexically determined) mappings as *argument* and *predicate*, i.e. <N [+arg] [+pred]>, albeit with a different morphosyntactic encoding. This means that Germanic nouns, such as with mass and plural Ns, can occur in argumental position without a D in both subject and object position, and with an overt D in other contexts (like singular count Ns).

Drawing on these insights, Chierchia, Guasti & Gualmini (1999) argue that definite-article omission in early L1 acquisition can be characterised as the incorrect mapping of N onto the semantic type [+Arg]. They also propose (cf. also Kupish 2007: 62) a directionality for the acquisition of Chierchia's (1998) semantic types, distinguishing a 'bare-noun' stage (Chinese), a 'variation' stage (Germanic), and a 'target' stage (Romance). According to this and later work in the same spirit (Guasti, Gavarró, de Lange & Caprin 2008: 112-113), the cross-linguistic acquisition of determiners would proceed unidirectionally irrespective of the input language, starting from the Chinese-stage (10a), moving then onto the Germanic-stage (10b), to then further restrict article-omission to the Romance-stage (10c):

- (10) a. N [+arg -pred] Classifier languages (Chinese)
b. N [+arg +pred] Germanic (English/Dutch)
c. N [-arg +pred] Romance (Catalan/Italian)

If we now consider HL production in the light of what we have just discussed, it can be claimed that our HL speakers adopt an unstable (i.e. optional) hybrid mapping of the type <N [\pm arg] [+pred]>, an intermediate stage showing alternation between the Germanic (10b) and Romance (10c) ones as far as plurals are concerned, with further extensions of [-mass, -generic] bare singular nouns occurring in contexts where only Slavic (cf. 9 above) would allow them. In particular, this last extension equally applies to bare nouns mapped as *arguments* [+arg] in subject and object position, as well as within PPs, e.g. (\emptyset_D) *ggiorna da(- \emptyset_D) fidanzamendə* '(the) engagement day' (6a) and *a- \emptyset_D cclub* 'to (the) club' (8g), respectively. Indeed, even though complements of VP and PP are the 'natural' environments in which bare nouns occur in Romance, such a mechanism has been optionally extended to other contexts in these heritage varieties, without being generalised.⁶

⁶ However, we do find isolated cases of overextension of overt articles with generic plural nouns embedded under a PP:

Abruzzese

i) Mó c'èi da ponzà, pacché nə llə saccə, tutta... jè un gruppo **dell'uomonə**
is a group of.the men

'now I have to think (about it), because I don't know, everyone... it's a men-only group'

Once again, this output cannot be ascribed to contact with English 'a group of men-only', nor to the homeland/baseline varieties *mu gruppə d'uomonə* (Abr.)/*un gruppo di uomini* (It.), as both languages would

- e) Ti posso dire l'esperienza soltando di essere, disciamo, (\emptyset_D) **prima ggenerazione** italoamericana qquà, in- \emptyset_D uni-versità
 'I can only tell you about my experience of being, let's say, the first Italo-American generation here, at the university'
Cilentano
- f) \emptyset_D **primma vota**, jì avev'òtt'annə,
 first time I had 8 years
 \emptyset_D **primma vota** ca so gghiutə
 first time that am gone
 'The first time I was 8 years old, the first time I went (to Rimini to visit my cousins)'

Definite-article omission may occur with both cardinal (12a)-(12b) and ordinal (12c)-(12f) numerals modifying an NP. Hence, the structure that these speakers (optionally) adopt can be schematised as [_{DP} \emptyset_D [NumP [NP]]]. However, we observe that there is alternation in D-drop with numerals after prepositions, as the same HS of Friulian uses both *su li trentatré stradis* 'on the 33rd street' in (12a) and *su- \emptyset_D trentaquattro stradis* 'on the 34th street' in (8a) in §3.1.3. Nonetheless, contact with English cannot always be invoked for the cases above, as the definite article would be required in all cases but those involving the expression of age in these specific contexts. Indeed, a contrast between the presence/absence of the definite article in these contexts would create a minimal pair between *dopo i (miei) 21 anni* 'after my 21st/I turned 21 y.o.', interpreted with a silent [1SG] possessive, vs #*dopo 21 anni* 'after 21 years went by'.

Moving onto quantifiers, in (13) we observe D-omission when the NP is modified by quantificational elements such as *all*, *other*, and *same*:

- (13) *Cilentano*
- a) **tutto \emptyset_D anno** è andato là per visitare \emptyset_D me nonni
 all year is gone there to visit my grandparents
 'I've been going there every year to visit my grandparents'
- b) \emptyset_D **altro problema**
 other problem
 'the other problem'
- c) invece d'aiutà \emptyset_D **altrə italiano**
 instead of=helping other Italians
 'instead of helping the other Italians'
Abruzzese
- d) solo mamma e ppapà, \emptyset_D **altri** erano sicilianə, bbarezə
 only mum and dad others were Sicilian Barese
 'Only mum and dad, the others were Sicilian, Barese'
- f) infatti \emptyset_D **altri italiani** che lavorano qqua mi digono sembre...
 other Italians who work here
 'In fact the other Italians working here always tell me...'
- g) Però, \emptyset_D **stessa mesa**, ottobre, hanno fatto la gosa pe i spagnoli.
 same month
 'But, the same month, October, they did the celebration for the Hispanics'

- h) E invatti adessə che ts'è mmòrta mia mamma, tenavamə tuttə lə cusctumə.
 Mia mamma sabèvə **tuttə Ø_D** **cusctumə** origginalə.
 my mum knew all costumes original
 'In fact, now that my mum is dead, we got all of the (traditional) costumes. My mum new all the original costumes.'

In the examples above, we observe determiner drop within both singular and plural DPs in the presence of quantificational adjectives (in fact, antonyms) such as ‘same’ (13g) and ‘other’ (13b)-(13f), as well as with the universal quantifier ‘all/every’ (13a), (13h). Crucially, all of the cases above involve non-generic referents which would require an overt definite article in English, as well as in Italo-Romance. The linear order of such quantified DPs in both (Italo-)Romance and English is represented in (14), where the omission of the D-head is only allowed in the heritage Italo-Romance varieties under scrutiny:

- (14) a. [QP *tutto*/‘all’ [DP (D) [NP]]] > [DP *tutto*/‘all’ [NP]]
 b. [DP (D) [AP *altro*/‘other’ [NP]]] > [DP *altro*/‘other’ [NP]]
 c. [DP (D) [AP *stesso*/‘same’ [NP]]] > [DP *stesso*/‘same’ [NP]]

Consider that the overt determiner in these structures is (nearly always) semantically void, so the heritage grammar may able to do away with the extra D-element without (major) consequences for the semantic import of the expression. This allegedly involves a structural simplification within the DP, whereby the numeral or quantifier can occupy a (phrasal) position at the DP-edge, i.e. SpecDP (similarly to Demonstrative modifiers), thus fulfilling the role of the omitted D-element. This intuition is not too dissimilar from the parallel discussion on possessive structures in §3.1.4, where we shall observe the replacement of definite articles by possessive determiners.

3.1.4 Possessive structures

Before moving on to consider structures with adnominal possessive adjectives, an important premise is that they already display an enormous variation across Italo-Romance, as shown in Table 3, where kinship terms have a different configuration than common nouns:

<i>Homeland / Baseline</i>	Singular Kinship	Common nouns
Nothern Italo-Romance varieties	[Poss _{CL} -N] (= [D-Poss-N]) <i>me pare</i> (= <i>la me mare</i>)	[D-Poss-N] <i>e me coze</i>
Extreme Southern I-R	[Poss _{CL} -N]/[D-N-Poss] <i>mi patri / u patri mia</i> (emphatic)	[D-Poss-N(-PossP)] <i>li me cosi (/mia; emphatic)</i>
Upper Southern I-R	[N-Poss _{CL}]/[D-N-PossP] <i>patra-ma / lu patra mia</i> (emphatic)	[D-N(-P-D)-PossP] <i>li cosə (d'i) mia</i>
Italian	[Poss _{CL} -N]/[D-Poss-N] <i>mio padre / la mia mamma</i>	[D-Poss-N(-PossP)] <i>le mie cose (/mie; emphatic)</i>

Table 3. The structure of kinship terms in Italo-Romance

Table 3 shows some crucial distinctions in the DP-structure of Italo-Romance varieties between (some) kinship terms and definite common nouns (see Benincà, Parry & Pescarini 2016: §13.3.7; Ledgeway 2016: §14.4.1, §16.4.1; a.o.). On the one hand, singular kinship terms allow pragmatically unmarked configurations with (determiner-like) clitic possessives, which are prenominal in Northern Italo-Romance, Italian, and Sicilian, and postnominal in Upper Southern Italo-Romance.⁷ Note that (some) Northern Italo-Romance varieties do allow overt articles to co-occur with the singular kinship terms modified by the prenominal possessives, e.g. (*la*) *me mare* ‘(the) my mum’. On the other hand, common nouns all show obligatory definite articles co-occurring with prenominal (Northern Italo-Romance, Italian, and Sicilian) or postnominal (Upper Southern Italo-Romance) possessives. Upper Southern Italo-Romance varieties are the only varieties which do not allow prenominal possessives, thus neutralising the pragmatic pre- vs postnominal distinction we find in Italian or Extreme Southern Italo-Romance for unmarked vs contrastive interpretations, respectively.

(15) *Cilentano*

- a) tutto anno è andato là per visitare Ø_D **me_[D] nonni.**
 my grandparents

Mi piace visitare Ø_D **me_[D] nonni**
 my grandparents

‘I’ve been going there every year to visit my grandparents. I like visiting my grandparents’

- d) **mi_[D] zio** era, *a politician*, e portato tutta la famiglia là
my uncle
my uncle was a politician and brought all his family there’

⁷ In Upper southern Italian varieties, such determinerless kinship terms can only be modified by [1SG]/[2SG] (and more rarely [3SG]) enclitic possessives (Renzi 1997: 164ff.; Ledgeway 2009; 2016:§16.4.1; D’Alessandro & Migliori 2017; Andriani 2017:Ch.3,§3.1.2), yielding the pragmatically salient contrast between *fijja-ma/fijja-tə* ‘my/your daughter’ vs *a fijja mè/tò* ‘MY/YOUR (own) daughter’, where only the latter can be used contrastively.

- e) quando ho andato a Italia poi a visitare \emptyset_D **$mi_{[D]}$ famiglia** a Teggiano
 my family
 'when I then went to Italy to visit my family in Teggiano'
Irpino (Eastern Campanian)
- f) \emptyset_D **$mio_{[D]}$ vicino** **di casa**
 my neighbour
 'my neighbour'
Abruzzese
- g) **$mia_{[D]}$ mamma** sabèvə tuttə cusctumə origginalə
 my mum
 'My mum knew all the original (traditional) costumes'
- h) ma lu taglianə... *my partner*, \emptyset_D **$mio_{[D]}$ fidanzato**, e llui sembə tsə metta
 my boyfriend
 la RAI, almenə lə sèndə, lə sèndə.
 'but Italian... my partner, my boyfriend, he'd always have the RAI on TV, at least
 he listens to it'
- i) poi jìə avévə il suo zio, che era più indelligente, più scrivava, più...
 e pure \emptyset_D **$mio_{[D]}$ bisnonno** che ha avuto un *high school diploma* qui, a Chicago
 my great-grandfather
 'Then I had his own uncle (i.e. my uncle's uncle) who was even brighter (than my
 uncle), he wrote too... and so was my great-grandfather, who got a high-school
 diploma in Chicago'

The examples above present fairly clear cases of structural transfer from English, as we find a determiner-like possessive preceding common nouns, e.g. *me nonni* 'my grandparents' (15a), *mi famiglia* 'my family' (15e), *mio vicino* 'my neighbour' (15f), *mio fidanzato* 'my boyfriend' (15h). This order would only be grammatical in Italian/Italo-Romance with an obligatory definite article, e.g. *(i) *miei nonni*, while Upper Southern varieties (and the relative regional Italian) only allow postnominal tonic possessives with an obligatory definite article, e.g. *(i) *nonni (r'i) miə* lit. '(the) grandparents (of the) mine', entirely ruling out a prenominal counterpart. Likewise, examples such as *mia mamma* 'my mum' in (15g) are plausibly calques from English or spoken Italian; indeed, this structure would not be found in the Abruzzese baseline variety, in which the bare noun *mamma* is interpreted with a silent possessive, i.e. 'my mum' (while the [2SG] possessive would only be enclitic, e.g. *màmma-tə* (lit. 'mum+your')). This tendency is also attested in Haller's study (1987: 400) on NYC heritage speaker, as shown in (16), as well as in Reinke's (2014: 162) discussion on Montreal Italian and other heritage contexts involving Italo-Romance and English contact (Bettoni 1991):

- (16) **mi papa** ha venuto agli Stati Uniti all'eta di sedici anni
 'my dad came to the US when he was 16 years old'

In her discussion on similar findings in Montreal Italian, Reinke (2014: 162) finds that determiner-less possessive structures, such as \emptyset_D ***mio paese/libro*** 'my country/book',

are “the most common ‘deviation’ in this context” (Reinke 2014: 161).⁸ In this respect, she also highlights that “uncertainties in the use of the article before possessives” are attested in Italian L2 acquisition data (Chini & Ferraris 2003: 56), as well as one of the characteristic features of modern popular Italian (Berruto 1993: 64), although it is actually attested in Dante (Rohlf 1969: §432), and has been in use until 19th-century literary Italian (Serianni 2006: 178). This seems to suggest that an Italo-Romance grammar alone would not, in principle, ban this option (despite the considerable amount of structural changes the rigid [*(D)-NP-PossP] order in Upper Southern Italo-Romance has to undergo to become [Poss-NP]). Nonetheless, such structural calques from English lead to a certain uniformity of possessive expression with respect to the kinship vs common nouns distinction operated by Italo-Romance, essentially ironing out the differences between these classes in the heritage grammar and leaving [Poss-NP] as the default option.

However, we also note the opposite tendency, namely the presence of articles in structures which would not require it in Italo-Romance/Italian, nor in English. This is the case of determiner-less singular kinship terms, such as ‘brother’ (17a), ‘husband’ (17b), and ‘uncle’ (17c), which may occur with a definite article accompanying a prenominal possessive (a possibility which, again, would be banned in the upper-southern baseline varieties of these speakers):

(17) *Cilentano*

- a) adesso parlamo co nnonna, chø mmamma, chø ppapà, *you know*, più
i mmi frate ... il mio fratello, la famijja, nella casa.
 the my brother the my brother
 ‘Now we speak (dialect) with grandma, mum, dad, you know, also with my brother, the family, at home’
- Abruzzese*
- b) (*In Abruzzo*) Cø sta la famijja purø dø mamm’e ppapà, e anche del mio marito
 of.the my husband
 ‘In Abruzzo there is also mum and dad’s family, as well as my husband’s’
- c) poi jìø avéva il suo zio, che era più indelligente, più scrivava, più...
 the his uncle
 ‘Then I had his own uncle (i.e. my uncle’s uncle) who was even brighter (than my uncle), he wrote too...’

In Haller’s (1987: 399-400) discussion on possessives in the Italo-Romance varieties spoken in New York over 30 years ago, the position of possessive adjectives largely conformed to the ‘archaic dialect’ pattern (cf. Table 3), i.e. consistently postnominal with an overt determiner in the speech of Campanian informants, and consistently prenominal for Sicilian informants. However, he already attests that one

⁸ “When analyzing this category, 18.4% of all required articles before a possessive (N = 412) were found to be missing, with a proportion of 11.7% for the first and 39.7 % for the second generation; the difference being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)” (Reinke 2014: 161).

heritage Sicilian speaker includes an innovative option (18a) to the baseline ones (18b)-(18c):

- | (18) | D-Poss | N | PossP | |
|------|------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| a. | <i>la</i> | <i>mia</i> | <i>mamma</i> | (only Italian, unmarked) |
| | the | my | mother | |
| b. | <i>la</i> | <i>mamma</i> | <i>mia</i> | (Sicilian/Italian, marked/USIDs, (un)marked) |
| c. | <i>mia</i> | <i>mamma</i> | | (Sicilian/English, unmarked) |

Homeland Sicilian only allows the structures in (18b)-(18c), while (18a) would only be allowed in Italian (and some northern varieties)⁹; this means that the change discussed above in (17) had already begun to (optionally) arise in the *koine*-based HS's grammars in New York.

In Table 4, we modify slightly the scheme presented in Table 2 to include the behaviour of possessive structures in the different heritage grammars, boldfacing the innovative structures and proposing the source-language:

<i>Baseline + Heritage</i>	Kinship	Common nouns
Northern I-R	[Poss _{CL} -N] (= [D-Poss-N]) <i>me pare</i> (/ <i>la me mare</i>) (+ [D-Poss-N]) (<i>el me pare</i> (< It.))	[D-Poss-N] <i>e me coze</i> + [Poss _{CL} -N] <i>me cose</i> (< Eng.)
Extreme Southern I-R	[Poss _{CL} -N]/[D-N-Poss] <i>mi patri</i> / <i>u patri mìa</i> (emphatic) + [D-Poss-N] <i>u mi patri</i> (< It.)	[D-Poss-N-(PossP)] <i>li me cosi</i> (/ <i>mìa</i> ; emphatic) + [Poss _{CL} -N] <i>me cose</i> (< Eng.)
Upper Southern I-R	[N-Poss _{CL}]/[D-N-PossP] <i>patrə-mə</i> / <i>lu patrə miə</i> + [Poss-N] = [D-Poss-N] <i>mi patrə</i> (< Eng.) = <i>lu mi patrə</i> (< It.)	[D-N-(P-D-)PossP] <i>li cosə</i> (<i>d'i</i>) <i>mìa</i> + [Poss-N] = [D-Poss-N] <i>me cosə</i> (< Eng.) = <i>li me cosə</i> (< It.)

Table 4. Possessive structures in Italo-Romance

⁹ The form *mamma* 'mum', already attested by Varro in Latin *baby talk* (Rohlfs 1969b: 83, fn.9), proceeds from the (reduplicated) vocative form of *matre(m)* 'mother'; the latter, in turn, developed into (Italo-)Romance *ma(d)re/mat(h)re*. In a given variety, these two forms may coexist (e.g. Italian), or not (e.g. Friulian, Sicilian), yet the two lexemes behave differently in allowing an overt determiner to precede the proclitic possessive: It. (**la*) *mia madre* vs (*la*) *mia mamma*; Friulian (*la*) *me mari* (vs ***la me mama*).

When we consider the internal structure of these possessive expressions, Cardinaletti's (1998) work on possessive types and relative 'strength' comes to mind. We adapt below in (19) her template including three different strengths and positions for possessives, i.e. clitic (Poss_{CL}),¹⁰ weak (WPossP) and strong (SPossP), respectively:

- (19) a. [DP [D Poss_{CL} [NP N]]] → *mio padre* (clitic)
 my father
 a'. [DP [D N- Poss_{CL} [NP \dot{N}_i]]] → *patre-mo* (clitic)
 b. [DP [D [WPossP WPossP] [NP N]]] → *il mio padre* (weak)
 c. [DP [D D [FP N_i [SPossP SPossP] [NP \dot{N}_i]]] → *il padre mio* (strong)

The structures in (19a) and (19b) show instances of prenominal possessives: the clitic possessive in (19a) behaves like a head and can thus occupy the D position without overt article, whereas the weak possessive (19b) has phrasal status, but needs to co-occur with an overt D. In contrast, the only postnominal possessive phrase is the strong one in (19c), which also requires the overt realisation of the D-head; the SPossP will surface postnominally due to movement of the N or the phrase containing it in its own extended projection (Grimshaw 1991, 2005) to a functional projection FP. While in Italian this option is only adopted to express contrastive focus, in Upper Southern Italo-Romance this is the only option available for common nouns (kinship terms have the post-nominal possessive, e.g. (19a?); cf. footnote 9). Cardinaletti argues that the clitic and weak possessives are derived via movement (head or phrasal, respectively) from SPossP, the phrase where it is first merged the strong possessive.

As for the behaviour of our Italo-Romance heritage varieties, we observe the convergence of rich patterns of possessive expression into two main generalised, default strategies, which happen to be the ones found in English (19a) and Italian (19b), i.e. [$\text{Poss}_{\text{CL}}\text{-N}$] and [D- $\text{Poss}\text{-N}$] respectively. Moreover, the distinction between the possessive expressions for common nouns and kinship terms has been ironed out in favour of these two 'default' strategies.¹¹ Both strategies are used interchangeably without any semantic differences, displaying the type of optionality we would find in 'dual-grammar' contexts, i.e. overlapping grammars in change.

As for those heritage Upper Southern varieties which featured the [D-N- PossP] as their sole strategy in the baseline, we must assume that the movement of the strong

¹⁰ Even though Cardinaletti does not specifically address enclitic possessives, (vi.a') has been included here to show the structure of the postnominal clitic possessive in upper-southern Italo-Romance varieties. These clitics form a complex head with a limited class of kinship terms and raise to occupy the D position (à la Longobardi 1994). We remain agnostic as to where the incorporation occurs, since it is beyond the scope of our discussion (and our heritage speakers tend to replace it with the structure in (vi.a) or (vi.b)). See footnote 9 for more details.

¹¹ When considering endogenous change, the development of the English-like option [$\text{Poss}_{\text{CL}}\text{-N}$] is not unknown in the history of Romance varieties: this is what happened in 17th century within the Spanish DP, in which the clitic-possessive type [$\text{Poss}_{\text{CL}}\text{-N}$] was generalised at the expense of the weak-possessive one [D- $\text{Poss}\text{-N}$] (Company Company 2001). In contrast, the opposite path can also occur: we mentioned that, in the history of Italian, [$\text{Poss}_{\text{CL}}\text{-N}$] structures were gradually lost (but in a few contexts) and the [D- $\text{Poss}\text{-N}$] order became the main unmarked option.

possessive from what we labelled S_{PossP} to the derived positions (Poss_{CL} and W_{PossP}), postulated by Cardinaletti, has become (nearly) obligatory. In this respect, we could argue that these varieties (partly) abandoned the strict [D-N-PossP] order because of its ambiguity between pragmatically marked vs unmarked interpretation, thus converging towards the structures offered by the contact varieties, i.e. English and the Italian koine. These facts may be taken as further evidence supporting the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace 2011), according to which interface phenomena are more vulnerable to change. Moreover, we could also invoke a readaptation of the “Avoid Indeterminacy” principle (Polinsky & Scontras 2019), which claims that heritage grammars tend to select only one function for items that have more syntactic functions. Rather than one single element, the heritage grammars of these Upper Southern varieties might have inherited a strategy that did not feature in the original system, so to eliminate the pragmatic ambiguity of the [D-N-PossP] order.

3.1.5 The Nominal domain: Interim conclusions

In the sections above, we have observed a wealth of data from Italo-Romance varieties in contact with NY English whose common denominator was the omission of definite article, as well as its overextension in possessive constructions. These two tendencies can mainly be ascribed to contact with English, for the former, and Italian, for the latter. However, not all cases are explicable due to sole transfer, as it seems that HL speakers operate certain input generalisations which do not comply with the grammar of any of the varieties in question. In particular, we observed in §3.1.1 and §3.1.2 that the possibility of having bare nouns in contexts of sisterhood with lexical heads (V or P) is further extended to other contexts, e.g. subject position, and to other NPs which would obligatorily have a determiner both in English and Italian, e.g. singular count nouns. Moreover, we saw in §3.1.3 that numerals and quantifier expressions may lose the obligatory, yet semantically void, definite article. Finally, §3.1.4 addressed the possessive expressions, for which we identified a(n optional) tendency to generalise two structures with prenominal possessives, either clitic or weak ones, and eliminate the differences between types of NPs ([+common] vs [+kin]). From these facts, it appears that the omission of the definite article is partly dependent on the presence of other elements inside the DP (possessives, numerals, and quantifiers), or immediately outside of it (such as prepositions or the universal quantifier).

Similar tendencies are also attested in contact between Italo-Romance and Australian English, as described by Bettoni (1991: 377-378). In her study of Australian-born children acquiring a ‘continuum’ between Venetan and Venetan regional Italian, Bettoni testifies to a frequent drop of the definite article with possessives (20a), quantifiers (20b), geographical terms (20c), as well as what she labels as ‘other contexts’ (20d); this seem to occur at a much higher rate than in the speech of their parents:

- (20) *Venetan (regional Italian)* (Bettoni 1991: 377-378)
- a. con Ø_D mii amichi
with my friends
‘with my friends’

- b. tuta \emptyset_D vita
all life
'all my life'
- c. le cugine de- \emptyset_D C^hanada
the cousins of Canada
'the (female) cousins from Canada'
- d. su- \emptyset_D radio
on radio
'on the radio'

While Bettoni mainly focuses on the NPs with which definite-article omission is attested, the cases in (14) closely resemble the cases discussed in §3.1 for New York for different reasons. Indeed, the contexts in (14a), (14b), and (14c) are comparable to those discussed in §3.1.2 for NYC, i.e. drop of definite articles after prepositions, irrespective of the type of NP involved. Contact with English (or Italian) cannot be invoked for (14d) 'on the radio' (except for the choice of preposition 'on' vs It. 'at': *alla radio*), nor for (14b) with the universal quantifier 'all' (cf. §3.1.3).

Such comparative evidence reinforces the hypothesis that the creation of novel syntactic options is indeed due to the multilingual contact environment, but does not necessarily happen due to direct transfer. Nonetheless, these HL speakers borrow the structures at their disposal in the contact languages and generalise these to contexts where the contact languages would not use such structures. It could be argued that these new outputs are somehow 'default' syntactic options, relying on and resorting to some cognitive primitives which do not include the overt expression of definiteness (cf. languages which lack definite articles altogether). Importantly, most of the cases examined do not comply with another generalisation put forth in the literature, namely 'avoid silence' (Polinsky 2006; Laleko & Polinsky 2016), according to which overt elements are preferred by HL speakers in order to avoid misunderstandings. At a more general level, our data show that even the most salient, top-most functional heads, i.e. D (vs Demonstratives, cf. Terenghi 2021), are not as resilient to change as it is generally assumed (Polinsky 2018).

To conclude, determiner omission is very frequently attested in the L1-acquisition of languages with overt determiners. In particular, Chierchia, Guasti & Gualmini (1999) point out that Italian-acquiring children stop omitting determiners earlier than children acquiring English (cf. also Guasti, Gavarró, de Lange & Caprin 2008: 90). On this basis, Guasti, Gavarró, de Lange & Caprin (2008: 110) conclude that article-omission in L1 is subject to cross-linguistic variation, yet this does not necessarily depend on changes in the input. If we extend this intuition to our contact situations, we have observed that that the presence/omission of articles may not (always) respond to the impact of the contact language in question, but rather to independent factors of acquisition and generalisation of a certain parametric input.

3.2 The Verbal Domain

Moving on to the verbal domain, we observe again the adoption of what could be considered as ‘default’ strategies, resembling those found in L1 and L2 acquisition, as well as those of pidgins and creoles. In situations of contact, it would be a standard assumption to expect rich verbal-agreement systems, such as that of Romance, to experience morphological impoverishment when compared to the homeland/baseline varieties. Structurally, this may translate in the loss or impoverishment of features (or movement) of the functional head encoding Tense and agreement features (namely, T).

It is a standard assumption that the finite verb in Romance leaves the v-VP to move to the T position (Emonds 1976, Pollock 1989 and many others). We found that some Romance HL speakers tend to have a poorer realisation of the features encoded on T, as well as to leave this functional head empty.

3.2.1 ‘Default’ 3rd-person singular present tense and root infinitives

The most frequent tendency witnessed in our data sample is the (expected) loss of the verbal agreement/inflectional features, which are realised as a ‘default’ [3SG] singular. This occurs both with synthetic, e.g. present indicative (21a), (21c), and analytic, e.g. present perfect (21d), (21e), verb forms, namely the syntactic material lexicalising the T head. In (21) we show but a few of the many cases of such default [3SG] forms, which are very frequently attested for those HL speakers using the Italo-American koine:

(21) *HCilentano*

- a) cose **cambia**
things.F.PL changes.3SG
'things change'
- b) ogni Rianese aiuta quacchè pər zona [...]
vabbè, tuttəquandə è **econosciuto** tuttəquandə
all.people.PL is.3SG known.M.SG all.people.PL
'Every Tegjianese helps the other [...] well, everyone knows everyone'
- c) io **va** a Italia
I.1SG always goes.3SG to Italy
'I always go to Italy'
- d) tutto anno è **andato** là per visitare me nonni
all year is.3SG gone.M.SG there for visit my grandparents
'I've been going there every year to visit my grandparents'
Sicilian
- e) ma iddu era cchiù mericanu,
la pàpa e mmamma è **ccresciutə** qqui
the.F.SGdad.M.SG and mum is.3SG grown here
'but he was more American, his dad and mum grew up here'

Note that, while the morphology of all verbs in (21a), (21e) appears as [3SG], the interpretation of the referents in (21a), (21b) and (21e) is [3PL], whereas that of referents

in (21c) and (21d) is [1SG]. In structural terms, φ -feature impoverishment and the [3SG] default strategy may represent a stage in which T, the syntactic head encoding inflection and agreement feature, is φ -defective. This means that the verb still raises from V to the inflectional layer of the clause as in most Romance varieties (Pollock 1989; Schifano 2018), but the T-probe cannot (always) match the full φ -matrix of the subject. Importantly, the data in (21c) may be particularly telling as for the precise position of the verb in the clause. Note that the word order of (21c) matches that of English ‘I always go to Italy’, where the Adv-V order is typical of English, rather than Romance (i.e. *vado sempre*).

Building on Cinque’s (1999 *et seq.*) adverbial hierarchy, this word order suggests that the verb does not move all the way up to T, but may be sitting in a lower position, rather than remaining inside the VP, for reasons which will become clearer when we discuss cases of root infinitives and bare past participles.

Indeed, these same Italo-American-koine speakers produce verbal forms in which V-to-T movement seems to be lost altogether with simplex verb forms, which surface as root infinitives:

(22) *Cilentano*

- a) gente italiana americana non **capire**
people.F.SG Italian.F.SG American.F.SG NEG understand.INF
'Italo-American people do not understand'
- b) nəssciuno **capire** questa lingua (target: vado/vaco)
nobody.M.SG understand.INF this language
'no-one understands this language'
- c) sempre **andare** a Italia (target: vado sempre in Italia)
always go.INF to Italy go.1SG always in Italy
'I always go to Italy'¹²
- d) persone *como io* **non capire** questa cosa
people.F.PL like I.NOM NEG understand.INF this thing
'people like me don't understand this thing'
(target: le persone come me non capiscono questa cosa)
the.F.PL people.F.PL like me.ACC NEG understand.3PL this thing
- e) mi padre venni di America e t̪rovava mi mamma in Sicily [...]
my father came.PST of America and found.IMPF my mum in Sicily
e ssi **maritare**=’n Italia, Castelbuono di Palermo,
and REFL get.married.INF=in Italia
e poi **sposare** e **smuffare** qui, cinquant’annə fa.
and then get.married.INF and move.INF here
'my dad came from the US and found my mum in Sicily [...] and they got married in Italy, in Castelbuono di Palermo, and after they got married, they moved here, 50 years ago'

¹² Because of wild microvariation in the original dialects, we insert the corresponding/target form only when the sentence is in Italian.

- f) io solo **sentire** la lingue, e mmi fantasia cu
 I only hear.INF the.F.SG language.F.PL and my fantasy with
 stu lingue, e poi con molta attenzione ha insegnato me s... mio stesso.
 this.M.SG language.F.PL
 ‘I’d only listen to this language, and my fantasy with this language, and then,
 with much attention, I taught myself (the language)’
- g) Ogni vvenerdi, sugnu troppə fortunata, perchè **ttrovare** questi (people)
 because find.INF these.M.PL people
 [...] we have the lunch, **giocar**’i ttombola, l’altri carte,
 play.INF
 e ppoi la classe, e poi **pulizziare** qqua prima che mme ne vai.
 clean.ING
 ‘every Friday, I feel very lucky, because I find these people... [...] we have lunch
 (together), play bingo, other card games, and then the class, and then we clean
 here before leaving’

The root-infinitive strategy in (22) appears to be freely alternating with the default [3SG] one presented in (21), and is typical of HL speakers with lower levels of proficiency in the relevant HL (in this case, the Cilentano- and Sicilian-based Italo-American *koine*). This alternation may be understood as if the verb no longer moves outside of the VP when it surfaces as a root infinitive, or, as in (21c) above, it does so without reaching a position as high as T, the expected position for the inflected verb in Romance.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, both default [3SG] present tense and root infinitives are also frequently attested in contexts of L1/L2 acquisition. As for L1 acquisition, the default [3SG] present form is the most common strategy found in Italian (cf. Pizzuto & Caselli 1992; Pinto 2012: 294, 296), while the root-infinitive strategy is attested for Germanic languages as well as French. As far as the latter is concerned, Wexler (1993, 1996, 1998, 2017) discussed at length the concept of *Optional Infinitive Stage* (OIS) in the children’s grammar of different languages (cf. also Rizzi 1993). This temporary stage allows children’s root clauses to have both finite and non-finite options available, i.e. inflected and infinitival forms, because Tense is (still) underspecified, and only agreement triggers movement to T (cf. the three ‘no T’>‘optional T’>‘T’ developmental stages proposed by Baauw, De Roo & Avrutin 2002: §2). Besides discussing a large selection of Germanic cases, Wexler also focuses on the OIS in French,¹³ where the pre- or postverbal position of negation may clearly indicate verb-movement vs lack thereof, respectively.

¹³ Baauw, De Roo & Avrutin (2002: §3) argue that children acquiring Romance varieties do not have a root infinitive stage, as opposed to children acquiring Dutch and English. This claim is discussed in relation to the earlier adult-like production of determiners of Italian children when compared to English ones, which suggests a relation between T and D, as languages where root infinitives are produced (i.e. Germanic) will tend to show D-drops until a later development stage of acquisition. However, the French data discussed in Wexler, among others, seem to defy this generalisation.

Following Wexler's intuition, we can try to define the exact position of the finite V for the cases presented in (21) by considering pre- vs postverbal adverb placement with finite verbs, which characterise Germanic vs Romance. For instance, the root infinitives *sempre andare* 'I always go' (21c) and *io solo sentire* 'I'd only listen to' (21f) show that the adverbs are able to precede the infinitive (mirroring the English order Adv-V), which is not an option in Romance (see Cinque 1999 *et seq.*; Schifano 2018). We represent the structures of the default [3SG] present (23a) and the root-infinitive (23b):

- (23) a. [TP T [AdvP *sempre*] [XP *va* [VP [v *andare*]] and/or
b. [TP T [AdvP *sempre*] [VP [v *andare*]]

There is no evidence for V-movement in either case; it could be the case that the V moves to an intermediate XP. We could assume that 3rd person agreement inflected V moves to an intermediate projection, perhaps Aspect, but we have no evidence for that. Observe that loss or impoverishment of V movement has been found in other heritage varieties (see Westergaard *et al.* 2021 for American Norwegian, Albirini & Benmamoun 2021 for Heritage Arabic).

Similarly to the [3SG] strategy, the root infinitive does not seem to have major interpretative consequences for the relevant phi-features (retrievable from the overt subjects), but it does with respect to Tense(/Aspect). This is evident in the contrast among (21e), (21f), and (21g), where the root infinitive can be employed either as the simple past in (21e),¹⁴ e.g. 'they got married and moved here', the imperfect in (21f), e.g. 'I would only listen to the language', or the present indicative (21g). This means that the root infinitive is able to surface and override temporal(/aspectual) specifications, which is not too surprising if we consider similar cases of long-lasting contact, such as that of creoles, to which we return below.

3.2.2 Bare past participle

Turning to compound forms, in particular the present perfect, we have observed in (21) the tendency of the perfective auxiliary to occur in the default [3SG] form; another rather frequent tendency is the omission of the perfective auxiliary, irrespective of the subject grammatical person (expressed elsewhere, i.e. pronouns/full DPs). Hence, the past participle is left as the only 'cue' for the Tense specification [+PAST]:

- (24) *Cilentano*
a) mi zio era... *a politician*, e Ø_{Aux} **portato** tutta la famiglia là(target: ha portato)
and brought.PPT has brought
'my uncle was a politician and brought all his family there'

¹⁴ In the particular case of (16f), the endings in *-re* produced by this HS of a Sicilian-based *koine* could be argued to match the 'correct' simple past [3PL] ending *-ru* of the Sicilian baseline, e.g. *si maritaru* 'they got married'; however, this does still not explain the extensive use of *-re* with present (15g) and imperfect (15e) functions. We may therefore conclude this is not an instance of simple past, but a *Brooklynese* root infinitive (vs Sicilian infinitive *-ri*).

- b) io \emptyset_{Aux} **conosciuto** tuttə quandə (target: ho conosciuto)
 I met.PPT everyone
 ‘I’ve met everyone’
Abruzzese
- c) Però erə un periodə moldo inderessande perché, (\emptyset_{Aux}) **nadə** qqua,
 born.PPT here
vissudə qqua, però le ggende purə tenèvano questi idei.
 lived here
 ‘but it was a very interesting period because, (even though I was) **born** here,
lived here, people still had these ideas (i.e. prejudices).
- d) Jevə ggià spuséta allu cinguandatre, poi papà \emptyset_{Aux} **pututə** mənì allu cinguandasì
 then dad could.PPT
 ‘he was already married in ’53, then dad, he was able to come in ’56’
- e) pe mməndənē scetu palazzə cə volevə i soldi, e poi abbiamo fatto colla bbanga,
 (\emptyset_{Aux}) **aggiuscta**, (\emptyset_{Aux}) **ffatta**, e abbiamo deciso di ricostruire.
 repaired.PPT done.PPT
 ‘in order to maintain this building, we needed money, so we sorted things out
 with the bank, we’ve fixed, done (stuff), and we decided to rebuild it’
Sicilian
- f) e cci \emptyset_{Aux} **ddetto** che u dàialetto differente de taliano
 and us.DAT said.PPT
 ‘and I told her that the dialect is different than Italian’
Friulian
- g) son vegnut tut four, \emptyset_{Aux} **fatt** un *reunion*
 are.3PL come.PPT all out done.PPT a reunion
 ‘they (i.e. Friulians) all came out, we had a reunion’

In (24), these bare past participles provide a [+PUNCTUAL PAST] interpretation of the tense of the clause, while the omitted auxiliaries – had they been overt – would be referring to subjects in the [1SG] and [1PL]. Moreover, in Romance, the auxiliary in perfective periphrases would also be able to express [+DURATIVE] or [+PUNCTUAL] anterior past or [+IRREALIS] modality, but the auxiliary omission only seems to be occurring in cases of present perfect interpretation, i.e. [+PUNCTUAL PAST].

The auxiliary omission can be schematised as follows:

- (25) [TP [T \emptyset_{AUX}] [_v-VP [V PPT]]]

In (25) the T head where the perfective auxiliary should be merged, is either silent or left empty, while the past participle remains in low in the structure. Nonetheless, we could assume that a mechanism of (covert) agreement between the empty/silent T and V is in place, as V does surface as a past participle, thus, inherently specified for [+PAST]. In both root-infinitive and bare past-participle cases, the T head anchors the content of the lexical domain to its TAM specification, either covertly or overtly, respectively, insofar as these two verbal forms are concerned. This anchoring operation, labelled ‘event-utterance coincidence’ by Hale (1986: 238), is formalised by Ritter & Wiltschko (2009,

2014) as an unvalued [COIN(cidence)] feature on (their re-adaptation of the Principles-and-Parameter idea of) INFL(ection), the functional layer of the clause which is responsible for TAM-encoding. In these cases, we may assume that the T head is still able to value such a [COIN] feature, despite its silent form at PF.

3.2.3 The Verbal Domain: Interim conclusions

In §3.2.1 and §3.2.2 we observed that heritage Italo-Romance speakers (usually the least proficient in their local variety, or resorting to the Italo-American koine) tend to produce ‘default’ verbal forms, such as [3SG] present tense and root infinitives replacing synthetic forms (§3.2.1) and bare past participle instead of analytic present-perfect forms with overt perfective auxiliaries (§3.2.2). The tendency according to which T is not overtly lexicalised has been interpreted as a contact phenomenon which weakens the overt expression of the typical features of T; however, the possibility of still interpreting these features via other means led us to argue that T remains silent, rather than empty, and the ‘event-utterance coincidence’ (Hale 1986: 238; Ritter & Wiltschko 2009, 2014), formalised through Ritter & Wiltschko’s [COIN(cidence)] feature, can still be valued and interpreted thanks to the non-finite verb. We can go further and argue, following Wexler (1998, 2017), that this behaviour instantiates a heritage-language version of his Unique Checking Constraint, so that only the [COIN(cidence)] feature can be valued in the derivation of these forms.

Looking at the broader picture, these types of ‘default’ strategies are also attested in other cases of contact, such as those of pidgin and creoles, and reported in the literature on L2 acquisition (of Italian, see Berretta 1990), as well as L1 acquisition (see Pinto 2012 for Italian; cf. also Wexler 1993 *et seq.*; Blom 2003: 11-12 for underspecification of Tense in Germanic, leading to root infinitives and auxiliary-drop).

As for Italian L2 acquisition, Berretta (1990) discusses the emergence of the early TAM oppositions among infinitive [V-re] (restricted to durative predicates), present [V] and past participle [V-to]. In this respect, Bernini (2003: 171) provides the following continuum of tense-system acquisition in Italian L2 (see Giacalone Ramat 1992 for details):

- (26) present/infinitive > (Aux +) past participle > imperfect > future > conditional.

The scale in (26) for Italian L2 seems to match the usage of verb forms discussed above for our data, as the first two stages represent a common strategy adopted by some of our HL speakers.

Similarly, in the L1-acquisition of heritage Italian by (8-17 y.o.) children living in Sweden (with one Italian parent and one Swedish parent), Wiberg (1996) notes that the ‘past-participle only’ stage is the first step preceding the acquisition of the compound present perfect and, then, the imperfect. With respect to this strategy, another useful comparison can be drawn with other context of contact involving Italian and other

typologically different languages, such as the varieties of ‘East-African’ Italian,¹⁵ in which the only attested tense-related opposition “non-past vs past tense” was expressed by infinitive (27a) vs past participle (27b) forms, respectively (Tosco 2008: 391):

- (27) *East African Italian* (Tosco 2008: 391)

- a. [i̯o ɻew'rare]
I work.INF
'I (will) work/am working/...'
- b. [i̯o ɻew'rato]
I worked.PPT
'I (have) worked/was working/used to work/...'

This binary opposition is also characteristic of interlanguages such as the *foreigner talk* (Ferguson 1971). Ferguson himself (see also Habte-Mariam 1976: 180) uses such a concept to characterise East-African Italian (used for interethnic communication, acting as a *lingua franca*),¹⁶ and this is adopted by Berruto (1991) in his work on the community of foreign workers in Italian-speaking Switzerland, using L2-Italian among them.

In conclusion, we have observed that [3SG] forms, root-infinitives and bare past participles are fairly common strategies across different domains of L1 (or L2) acquisition, including that of HLs. HL speakers (usually with lower levels of competence in their own HLs) adopt these ‘default’ forms to cover a fairly wide range of temporal(aspectual) values, avoiding thus the use of more morphologically complex verbal forms. This could be considered as a way of ‘simplifying’ part of the grammar of languages with rich verbal systems, such as that of Italo-Romance, especially when in contact with a language with a reduced inflectional system, such as that of English. Moreover, we observe that our heritage speakers do produce empty functional elements (T-related, in this case, but also D-related, as discussed in §3.1). Once again, this behaviour seems to go against the generalisation ‘avoid silence’ (Polinsky 2006; Laleko & Polinsky 2016), as our HL speakers do produce empty T-heads (in a way or the other). Hence, T, the highest, most salient functional head within its domain, is indeed affected by change.

3.3 Relative Pronouns and Complementisers

We now turn to the C-layer of the clause as the last context under scrutiny, where we can also observe contact-induced phenomena, albeit to a lesser extent than those in §3.1 and §3.2. In particular, some HL speakers sporadically omit relative pronouns and

¹⁵ Ethiopia: Habte-Mariam (1976: ch.13, §2); Eritrea: Holm (1989: §12.15); Somalia: Banti (1990); see Tosco (2008) for an overview of these varieties.

¹⁶ It does not seem coincidental that this same strategy was historically attested in the Romance-based *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, Sabir (itself an infinitival form meaning ‘to know’), in which the infinitive was found across the board, e.g. [ti mi'rar] ‘you see’, with the exception of the past participle ending V-to as the sole attested bound morpheme in the language, also used in deverbal-adjective formation (Holm 1989: 608; Aslanov 2014: 124).

complementisers, mostly in contexts where English allows such omissions. Below in (28) is a simplified representation of the portion of the clause in question:

- (28) [... **T-V / D-N** [_{CP} [C **Ø_C** [_{TP} V ...]]]]

In (28) the omission of the material lexicalising the syntactic head C may occur whether the embedded CP it heads is selected as a complement of predicates (T-V), hence, a clausal subordinator, or nominals (D-N), i.e. a relative pronoun. The structural result of these omissions is that relativisation or subordination can be(come) asyndetic, i.e. obtained by juxtaposition of the main and the embedded clauses:

(29) *Cilentano*

- a) Non è **na cosa Ø_C tu poi**
NEG is a.F.SG thing.F.SG you can
'it's not something that you can...'
- b) Ogni Rianese aiuta quacche persona, (**Ø_{IF}**) **serve** **quaccosa...**
needs.3SG something
vabbè tuttoquandə è econosciuto tuttəquandə
'Every Teggianese helps other people, if they need anything... well, we all know each other'
- c) Maria ha dittə **Ø_C ha combratə o panə**
Maria has said has bought the bread
'Maria said she bought bread'
- d) Io ho scordato **Ø_C ho visto mi fijja**
I have forgotten have seen my daughter
'I forgot I saw my daughter'
- e) Ieri ho scordato **Ø_C ho visto nu candandə**
yesterday have forgotten have seen a singer
'I forgot I saw a singer yesterday'
- Abruzzese
- g) ma ei visctə lu modə **Ø_C hann'a scità a cumənzà a cagnà lle còsə, l'ei visctə.**
the way have.3PL
'but I've seen the way (in which) things have to begin to change (in the club), I've seen it'
- Siciliano
- h) ricordo **Ø_C u nnonno mi pejjàua, mézə n'e sink e mme... cu the pliers, a pizzə,**
remember.1SG the grandpa
me teraua stu nail... u chiovu, grazzi.
'I remember that grandpa picked me up, put me in the sink and... with pliers, he pulled this nail, thanks'

The younger Cilentano HL speaker of *Brooklynese* in (29a), (29e) shows a much higher rate of C-deletions than those other mid-aged HL speakers who show this same tendency. Indeed, while the former drops relative pronouns (29a), and declarative (29c)-

(29e) and *irrealis* (29b) complementisers, the latter only drop one complementiser (29h) and one relative pronoun (29g) each, without showing further uncertainties on the overt lexicalisation of this functional category.

Silva-Corvalán (1994) attests this same phenomenon in Los Angeles Spanish, and confirms that knowledge of English may lead to *que*-drops (among other phenomena) as a tendency, rather than a generalised strategy of Spanish HS. Indeed, the C-deletions shown above are consistent with the behaviour of English (and a handful of Italo-Romance varieties, e.g. Florentine), but not Italian and the majority of Italo-Romance. In Italo-Romance (bar Florentine), complementisers can be deleted only if they head a subordinate clause containing an *irrealis* verb form, which is argued to move to C – to the Finiteness-head in the CP – to check [mood] features (Cocchi & Poletto 2000; Poletto 2001; Franco 2009; among others). In contrast, Florentine (Cocchi & Poletto 2000) allows C-deletion after declarative verbs that do not select *irrealis* verb forms in the embedded clause, similar to the English facts, e.g. *dice Ø_C lo porta* ‘s/he says s/he’ll bring it’. Nonetheless, C-deletion in Florentine is only licensed if other elements, e.g. clitics, negation and auxiliaries, occur preverbally and are able to check C-related features (Cocchi & Poletto 2000: 4-5).

Moreover, not only does the Cilentano HS drop relative pronouns (29a) and declarative complementisers (29c),(29e), but also the *irrealis* complementiser ‘if’ in (29b), which may obtain in a few contexts in both Romance and Germanic (with V-S inversion), e.g. *dovesse servire qualcosa* ‘should they need anything’.

The omission of relative pronouns/complementisers and definite articles, i.e. C- and D-heads, respectively, would be expected under the assumption that these domains show parallel behaviours at different structural levels, inasmuch as they both contribute to the interpretation of their own extended projections. In this respect, recent claims (Manzini & Roussou 2020 among others) collapse these two functional categories into one (usually also evident from their morphological shape), operating either at clausal or nominal levels. However, our data show that the general frequency of these omissions is rather unbalanced, as D-drops occur much more often than C-drops. In any case, it is true that C-drops occur with those speakers who show the most difficulties with the other functional categories, i.e. D and T, as also remarked in the conclusions of §3.2.

4. Conclusions

In this contribution we have discussed three syntactic domains in which HL speakers show a tendency to drop (or impoverish) the relevant functional heads, namely D, T, and C. While some of these omissions can be ascribed to the contact languages (be that English or Italian), we testify to the generalisation of some of the syntactic options found in the contact languages to a larger number of contexts, yielding some sort of ‘default’ strategy.

This dropping phenomenon was observed in the contexts of definite-article omission, where nouns tend to appear in their bare variant, or accompanied by other DP-internal elements (quantificational elements and possessives). Likewise, three ‘default’ strategies were discussed for the verbal domain, namely [3SG] verbal agreement, root-

infinitives, and bare past participles. In this respect, if we attempt to correlate the weakening of D and T in our heritage Italo-Romance speakers, the literature on L1 acquisition can come in handy. For instance, Van Zonneveld (1994) argues that Dutch learners resort to a *default strategy* of nominative-case assignment whenever no proper (structural) case-assigner, i.e. a finite verb, can do so. Crucially, whenever the *default strategy* is in place, overt determiners are likely to be omitted. The same correlation is noted in Dutch by Hoekstra & Hyams (1998), who argue that the omission of the article occurs more often in non-finite sentences, than in finite ones. In this respect, Baauw, de Roo & Avrutin (2002) argue that only when the usage of T in children's grammar is mastered will the usage of D be mastered too.¹⁷ In our case, however, there does not seem to be a direct correlation between default (non-finite) tense and determiner omission, although we do observe that HL speakers who produce root infinitives or bare past participles more often are those who omit articles at a higher rate than the other speakers. However, this is once again just a tendency which would need further testing.

As for the C domain, the complementiser/relative pronoun omissions were way less frequent and especially observed in less proficient HL speakers, mostly speakers of the Italo-American koine. Importantly, the few cases of C-omission seem to follow the English pattern of C-deletion, hence, instantiating direct transfer from the contact language.

These data seem to contradict the generalization according to which the highest heads in a functional projection are the most resilient to change, as put forward by Polinsky (2018) (see also Terenghi 2021, 2022 for a different explanation of the facts).

A concluding remark on the phenomena described in this paper relates to the issue raised in the literature concerning null/silent elements. While HL speakers are claimed to avoid such silent elements as these are more computationally costly, we have observed that this is not the case across the board, as this tendency to null elements can be appreciated across different core syntactic domains.

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¹⁷ Moreover, the parallel omission of determiners and finite verbs is also a well-known characteristic of speakers with Broca's aphasia. Ruigendijk & Bastiaanse (2002) discuss this situation with respect to German agrammatic speakers, and conclude that both omissions in spontaneous speech occur in series, i.e. the omission of determiners is dependent on the presence of a finite verb and its ability to assign case to nominals. In other words, these speakers resort to the *default strategy* of case-assignment to DPs whenever the non-finite verb cannot assign them the appropriate case, leaving the former determinerless.

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