

## Relative clauses in heritage Romanian in a French-dominant context

Elena Soare<sup>1</sup>, Alexandru Mardale<sup>2</sup>, Larisa Avram<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Paris 8 & CNRS

<sup>2</sup>INALCO Paris

<sup>3</sup>University of Bucharest

elena.soare@univ-paris8.fr, alexandru.mardale@inalco.fr, larisa.avram@lls.unibuc.ro

According to Montrul's (2016) Incomplete Language Acquisition Hypothesis (ILAH), structures acquired late by monolinguals are even more vulnerable in heritage languages (HL); their acquisition will be incomplete. Crosslinguistic research identified an asymmetry between subject and direct object relatives (SR/DOR) in L1. DORs emerge later than SRs, are more difficult to produce and comprehend. However, Polinsky (2008), Marinis, Özge (2020) report findings which challenge ILAH. Heritage speakers (HS) of Russian and of Turkish with English as the majority language comprehend relative clauses (RC) early in spite of the differences between RCs in the HL and in the ML.

This study investigates the use of RCs in heritage Romanian with French ML, an understudied context (Soare 2020). We analyse RC production in order to test the predictions of ILAH: (i) RCs in the HL should emerge later than in monolingual development; (ii) performance should deteriorate as an effect of increased exposure to the majority language.

We used an elicited preference task (a replica of Novogrodsky, Friedmann 2006), designed within COST A33, previously used for Romanian in Sevcenco et al. (2013), with 20 test items (10 SR and 10 DR).

18 HSs of Romanian<sup>1</sup> dominant in French (mean age 8;11), born in France, in Romanian families, took part in the study. The results were compared to a group of monolinguals and to data previously reported for Romanian adults.

SRs and DORs are indeed acquired later by the HSs, with a more significant delay for DORs. Before age 8, even SRs are problematic. The younger HSs (7 children, mean age 6;6) produced 62.8% SRs (n = 44), whereas the monolinguals (7 children, mean age 6;6) produced a SR 95.7% (n=67). DORs are more delayed. HSs produced DORs 14.3% (n=10) whereas the monolinguals produced DOR 50% (n=35) of the time. Contrary to the predictions of ILAH, no deterioration of RC production was found with age. The older group of HSs (11 children, mean age 12;7) produced 95.5 % SRs and 31.8% DORs. Though the rate of DORs is low, it is in line with the results of the monolingual group, who produced an even lower rate of DORs (similar to what was reported for Romanian adults, Sevcenco et al. 2013). The analysis of errors revealed the same pattern with both groups. The DOR avoidance strategies are the same: SRs are used instead of DORs. But the HSs also produced SRs which "copied" the *se-faire* causative RCs in French.

In line with previous studies, our findings show that complex syntactic structures can be acquired in spite of the impoverished input which HSs receive, though at a lower pace and are prone to crosslinguistic interference effects.

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<sup>1</sup> Data are still being collected and analysed.

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