Introduction to RLLT25: Selected papers from LSRL 54, Brigham Young University

Adam F. McBride
Brigham Young University
a_mcbride@byu.edu

James Law
Brigham Young University
jimlaw@byu.edu

Willis C. Fails
Brigham Young University
willis_fails@byu.edu

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1. LSRL 54 at Brigham Young University

The 54th Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages (LSRL 54) was hosted by Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, May 9-11, 2024. Organized by BYU's Department of French and Italian, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and Department of Linguistics, LSRL 54 brought together scholars from throughout North and South America and Europe to discuss the current state of the art in Romance linguistics.

After three years of virtual conferences in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic (organized by the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison) and the first-ever LSRL outside of the Americas in Paris, France (organized jointly by INALCO,

Université Paris Cité, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, and Université Paris Saclay), LSRL 54 represented a return to this annual gathering's standard procedure with an in-person conference in North America. As has become typical, the conference included the full range of academic experience from graduate students to prominent and seasoned scholars, and featured four excellent plenary speakers (discussed below).

LSRL has traditionally had no permanent organizing committee, instead being carried on year to year by volunteer hosts who coordinate with the previous organizers. While this has been a successful pattern for over fifty years, discussions at recent conferences have turned to the advantages of a more formal organization to facilitate the work of each year's hosts. These discussions culminated at LSRL 54 and, in its immediate aftermath, with the election of the first LSRL Executive Committee: Dr. Christina Tortora (Chair, The City University of New York), Dr. Margaret Renwick (Johns Hopkins University), Dr. Miquel Simonet (The University of Arizona), and Dr. Bryan Donaldson (University of California, Santa Cruz). The establishment of this committee will help to ensure the continued success of LSRL in the coming years.

With roots in generative grammar, a more recent empirical turn, and regular contributions from all corners of applied and theoretical linguistics, LSRL has always been varied in its topics and approaches. This is apparent in the four plenary speakers from LSRL 54. Hélène Blondeau (Professor, Université de Montréal) spoke about grammatical variation in spoken and SMS corpora in a talk entitled "Montreal French on the move: Speaking and Texting." Scott Schwenter (Professor, The Ohio State University) addressed the use of second-person pronouns in "Why (not) 2PL? Thoughts on a class of snubbed address forms across Romance." Esther Brown (Professor, University of Colorado Boulder) discussed how pronunciation is affected not just by the immediate context but also by the accumulated memory of previously encountered contexts in "What sticks in memory? Exploring articulatory biases in Spanish /d-/." Finally, Mark Amengual (Professor, University of California, Santa Cruz) spoke on "Language dominance and co-activation in bilingual speech." We are thankful to these presenters for their contributions to the conference.

2. Contributions

The talks from regular conference attendees were even more varied than those from the plenary speakers, and this diversity of approaches is represented in the papers selected for publication in this special issue. Papers were subject to a double-blind peer-review process and review by the guest editors to qualify for inclusion. We will present the 10 selected papers in three subsections, each corresponding to one of the following approaches represented in the authors' work: formal morphosyntactic analyses, experimental studies, and corpus studies.

2.1. Formal morphosyntactic analyses

In "V-Movement, Subject Clitics, and Inversion," Rubin introduces new Bolognese data to a fundamental question in Gallo-Italic syntax. There is significant micro-variation in the realization and form of subject proclitics and (in interrogative and other inversion contexts) enclitics in Gallo-Italic varieties. This has led to several proposed syntactic accounts, including some that include functional heads specific to subject

clitics or variable height of head-movement. These proposals do not always account for all Gallo-Italic dialects or for grammar-internal variation, such as differences in subject clitic realization across different verb tenses. Rubin notes that a more generally applicable account that relies only on independently motivated mechanisms is possible. His proposal depends on standard T-to-C head-movement in interrogatives and standard Agree, and borrows from Roberts (2010) a formalization of agreement doubling, in which agreement appears on the verbal suffix and the subject clitic, which both manifest φ. Rubin explains how the aforementioned micro-variation is better handled by the morphophonological component of the grammar. While his analysis focuses on Bolognese and he recognizes some important gaps in the available data for other varieties, Rubin's proposal provides an account of Gallo-Italic subject clitic syntax that is simple and generally applicable.

In "Features of French clausal ellipsis," Authier discusses contexts in which the clitic *le* ('he/it/so'), which can act as a proform substituted for a proposition, instead takes on a different role related to clausal ellipsis. Because this "special *le*" alternates with a silent category and can be used in sentences involving *wh*-extraction, it is assumed not to be pronominal. Special *le* appears with two types of clausal ellipsis: first, with ellipsis of the phasal complement of certain modal verbs, and second, with ellipsis in comparatives, ACD constructions, and long-distance sluicing. Authier presents the facts of both of these types of clausal ellipsis, including various restrictions on the licensing of special *le*. He shows how these restrictions support his analysis of special *le*, namely that it is an overt realization of the typically covert E-feature proposed by Merchant (2001) and used widely in subsequent work on ellipsis. By separating special *le* from pronominal *le*, despite their surface similarities, this analysis explains the distribution of the former including its alternation with a silent category (dependent on register) and its lack of alternation with the strong pronoun *ça*. By identifying an overt realization of an E-feature, this paper provides a new perspective on these features and their role in ellipsis.

Previous descriptions of complementizer deletion (CD) in Italo-Romance observed a bipartite model, with two different implementations of the phenomenon found in standard Italian and in Florentine. In "Complementizer Deletion and the Split Hypothesis," Isolani complicates this model, providing data supporting a tripartite split, with CD1 in standard Italian, CD2 in Florentine, and CD3 in Pisano. CD2 is the least restrictive, allowing CD with any type of main and embedded verb. CD3 is somewhat more restrictive, disallowing CD when a non-bridge verb in the main clause is combined with a realis embedded verb in the subordinate clause. CD1 is the most restrictive, only allowing CD with a bridge verb in the main clause and an irrealis embedded verb. She proposes the "split hypothesis" to account for these three types, in which CD is the result of verb movement towards distinct left-peripheral projections. In the most restrictive case (CD1), this movement is constrained to the lowest projection, whereas in the least restrictive case (CD2), the verb moves to the highest of the available projections. This naturally licenses CD in the other contexts as well, as movement to the highest projection requires passing through the intermediate positions. Using the Parametric Comparison Method, Isolani draws on this model to present an implicational hierarchy that situates these three varieties within Italo-Romance, with consequences for synchronic and diachronic phylogeny.

Latin demonstratives seem to associate person and spatial deixis, with a correspondence between 1ˢᵗ person and proximal deixis, 2ⁿᵈ person and medial deixis,

and 3rd person and distal deixis. In "The Role of Person in Ibero- and Gallo-Romance Demonstratives," Bernstein, Ordóñez, and Roca build on this observation to propose a morphological composition of Romance demonstratives that includes a Deictic head (associated with spatial deixis) and a D head (associated with person). In their proposal, these heads are linked by an Agreement relation. After explaining the Latin demonstrative system under this model, they illustrate how this structure plays out across Romance demonstratives, with special attention to Ibero- and Gallo-Romance varieties. In different varieties, the tripartite deictic system of Latin (proximal, medial, and distal) is either preserved, reduced to a bipartite system (proximal, distal), or, in the case of some Gallo-Romance varieties, collapsed altogether. In the latter case, the D head is devoid of person specification, with the person/deixis feature provided by a semi-obligatory reinforcer element. The analysis reveals a cyclic grammaticalization pattern, in which person/deixis features are alternately lost and revived on different elements of the morphological structure.

2.2. Experimental studies

In "Predicative possession choice in Argentinian Spanish: An experimental study," Fuchs, Dickinson, and Schwenter step away from more formal frameworks as they examine the alternation between two common possessive constructions: *tener* ('have') + NP and *estar con* ('be with') + NP. In doing so, they consider both semantic and pragmatic aspects of the two expressions. In this experimental study, 59 informants from Argentina were asked to choose which of the two target construction types was more likely to follow each of 24 contextual vignettes, which varied in temporal duration and adverbial modification. A series of nested mixed-effects logistic regression models revealed the *tener* + NP construction to be much more frequent than the *estar con* variant. However, due to the considerable overlap among informants with respect to their choice of possessive construction, the authors show that the distribution is not necessarily complementary, but reflective of a more nuanced relationship with implications for studies in other Romance languages.

In another experimental study, "Comparing two experimental designs for the study of subject island in Spanish," Stigliano, Verdecchia, and Murujosa investigate how best to experimentally test the well-known syntactic phenomenon of subject islands in Spanish by evaluating two different models: the subject/object design (Sprouse et al. 2012, Sprouse et al. 2016) and the simple/complex subject design (Sprouse et al. 2012, Kush et al. 2018). As the authors point out, there seem only to have been two studies done previously relating to subject islands in Spanish, each having taken a different methodological approach. Results from the authors' acceptability judgement task, completed by 99 informants between the ages of 18 and 65 from the Rioplatense region of Argentina, indicate that both designs show a drop in acceptability when elements were extracted from subjects, and neither design can adequately identify which specific factors (e.g., sentence complexity or the type of extraction) contribute most to the degradation. This challenges the idea that subject islands can be fully captured by looking for super-additive effects, a common benchmark in experimental syntax. Instead, the authors argue that subject islands may not stem from a single grammatical rule but from a combination of interacting factors, such as definiteness, thematic roles, D-linking, etc. Their findings suggest that while

both experimental designs are useful, neither fully captures the complexity of subject islands.

2.3. Corpus studies

In "Reconsidering the Mid Vowel System of Parisian French," Griffiths and Renwick investigate both phonetic and phonological factors that influence the vowel height of the mid-vowel pairs /e, ɛ/, /o, ɔ/, and /ø, œ/ in tokens extracted from the Brunoy, Paris Centre ville, Puteaux-Courbevoie subsections of the *Phonologie du français contemporain* (PFC) corpus (Durand, Laks & Lyche 2002; Durand, Laks & Lyche 2005). Acoustic analyses of 2849 vowels produced by 26 different speakers indicate the strongest predictors of actual mid-vowel height to be lexical height, syllable stress (including an interaction between syllable stress and syllable structure), and duration of the vowel. Griffiths and Renwick elect to frame their formal analysis—informed by the aforementioned acoustic analyses—in Maximum Entropy Grammar (Goldwater & Johnson 2003) with constraint scaling (Coetzee & Kawahara 2013), which uses machine learning to rank constraints gradiently. These analyses reveal faithfulness constraints to most greatly affect the surface realization of these mid vowels. The authors' application of new methods and tools (i.e., Maximum Entropy Grammar) broaden our understanding of both the complex nature of the mid vowel system in Parisian French as well as of marginal contrasts and the interaction between phonetics and phonology in vowel systems.

In "Adjective positioning in French," Roadman assembled two corpora to carry out both a diachronic study of the pre- and post-nominal positioning of French adjectives in 45 texts from the 14th-21st centuries as well as a synchronic study of the possible influence that contact with English might have on this same distribution in posts from 10 present-day blogs written in French, with five covering topics related to American (pop) culture and five covering topics related to French literature, art, and culture. The empirical data in the diachronic study confirm previous suggestions (Rickard 1995, Langford & O'Connor 2005) that the shift from a general preference for pre-nominal positioning to post-nominal positioning does seem to have occurred in the 17th century. Results from the synchronic study indicate a marked preference in blogs about American (pop) culture for pre-nominal adjectival positioning, which might be due to a contact effect with English and its clear preference for the pre-nominal position. In both studies, Roadman's use of corpora provides a deeper view on both historical and modern tendencies of usage for these frequent constructions.

In "Variation of the Inflected Infinitive in Portuguese," McLendon, Revheim, and Ezro-Christy offer an empirical contribution to the study of Portuguese syntax by examining the variation of the uncommon inflected infinitive verbal form in both European and Brazilian Portuguese. Using the ptTenTen20 corpus (Kilgarriff et al. 2014), the authors analyzed 12,450 observations to investigate how this form varies across dialects (European or Brazilian Portuguese), registers (formal or informal), and syntactic structures (clitic or non-clitic pronouns). Their findings challenge prior claims that this verbal form has disappeared from colloquial Brazilian Portuguese, showing that it remains in use, even in informal contexts. This study also reveals that European Portuguese and formal registers favor the inflected infinitive, while clitic constructions tend to disfavor it, though variation still occurs. Through corpus data and statistical modeling, the authors provide robust, data-driven insights into a long-

debated syntactic phenomenon. This contribution not only refines theoretical understandings of Portuguese grammar but also demonstrates the value of large-scale corpus studies in capturing nuanced patterns of language use, offering a model for future research in variationist and Romance linguistics.

In "VERB-INDIRECT OBJECT-DIRECT OBJECT and VERB-DIRECT OBJECT-INDIRECT OBJECT: A variationist analysis of oral Spanish," Rivas presents a synchronic study on the position and order of objects in ditransitive constructions in the Spanish spoken in Madrid, a variety in which both the Verb-Direct Object-Indirect Object (V-DO-IO) and the Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object (V-IO-DO) constructions can occur. Using data from both the PRESEEA (2014-) and COREC (Marcos Marín 1994) corpora, Rivas is able to describe the frequency and usage of the less common V-IO-DO variant and to determine which factors condition its use over the more common and more traditional V-DO-IO order. Although still the less common variant, findings reveal the V-IO-DO to represent approximately one third of all viable tokens. Furthermore, the study identifies the following as three primary factors conditioning the use of V-IO-DO over V-DO-IO: when a first- or second-person IO is used, in a V-DO construction where the verb and DO seem to form a lexical chunk (cf. Bybee 2010), and with certain verb types. While this study's focus is synchronic in nature, its findings may be indicative of an ongoing change toward greater acceptance of the V-IO-DO variant and a broadening of contexts in which it may appear.

Acknowledgments

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