Romance grammars in context and contact: Introduction to the Special Issue

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This Special Issue brings together ten articles authored by the participants and invited speakers of the *Romance Grammars, Context and Contact* (RGCC2021) workshop. RGCC2021 was held at the University of Birmingham from 24 to 26 March, 2021 as an extension of the project 'The Grammars of Judeo-Spanish' funded by a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust grant.[1] Across the three days, the workshop brought together scholars with expertise in Romance morphosyntactic variation, working at different interfaces (generative, sociolinguistics, dialectology,

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[1] British Academy/Leverhulme Trust grant no. SRG1819\191358 awarded to Alice Corr and held at the University of Birmingham (March 2019 to July 2022). https://judeospanish.bham.ac.uk/.

and language contact), as well as stakeholders and the general public who attended an afternoon of open events including a public lecture *La diferensia entre el ladino i el kristilyano* given in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) by rabbi and scholar Eliezer Papo (Ben Gurion University of the Negev). Of 38 abstracts submitted for consideration, 12 were accepted for oral presentation across the workshop's five main sessions, with a further 10 selected for presentation as lightning talks.

In lieu of the traditional plenary format, the organizing committee took advantage of the online scenario to invite prominent exponents associated with the field of Romance linguistics to come together across multiple time zones and locations to participate in a stock-taking dialogue regarding the current state of the field, major past achievements, and future trajectories. Introduced and chaired by Alice Corr (University of Birmingham), the dialogue took the form of a roundtable in which three of the foremost scholars representing different approaches to, and language specializations within, the field—Roberta D'Alessandro (Utrecht University), Shana Poplack (University of Ottawa), and Almeida Jacqueline Toribio (University of Texas at Austin)—shared their experiences, perspectives and insights, followed by discussion and audience Q&A.

Each contributor was invited to speak to their vision and record of 'doing Romance linguistics'—a notion the speakers were encouraged to interpret, or indeed, problematize, as they saw fit in relation to their own work—as part of this dialogue. These reflections are collected in this Special Issue and published as a series of short, individual *Doing Romance Linguistics* articles that chart the personal and professional trajectories of these scholars. This collection includes a further contribution from the workshop's keynote speaker, Silvina Montrul (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign), who concluded the three days of RGCC2021 with the invited lecture 'Spanish, Romanian and Bilingual Language Change'. Together, these articles offer a comparative overview of the scholarly developments and key achievements of different approaches to Romance linguistics in recent decades.

In addition to the invited contributions, all presenters were invited to submit an article on the topic of Romance linguistics for publication, following double-blind peer review, in the present issue. In what follows, we summarize the contributions of each article in the present collection, in alphabetical order.

In 'Double Object Constructions in Afro-Brazilian Portuguese: contact driven L2 learning and Maximize Minimal Means', *Isis Barros* and *Ana Calindro* investigate a specific ditransitive construction found in Afro-Brazilian Portuguese, a contact variety which has its genesis in the L2 acquisition of Portuguese by originally Bantu speakers. This innovative structure exhibits an unmarked Goal dative and a V-Goal-Theme order similar to the Double Object Constructions of English and Bantu languages and, although not attested in European, Brazilian or Classical Portuguese, it largely displays the same properties as corresponding constructions in L2 Portuguese varieties spoken in Africa. In order to account for its peculiar features and, in particular, the emergence of a Ø-Dat, the authors adopt Biberauer's (2018, 2019a,b) notion of Maximize Minimal Means, whereby the first generation of Afro-Brazilian Portuguese exploited the means already available in their L1 (viz. [+animate] feature and a low applicative head) and were able to relate them to the V-Goal-Theme structures in their L2 input. The paper ends with a reference to one of the greatest challenges in contact linguistics, that is, the

possibility (or not) to predict the future evolution of this construction in the two parallel laboratories where it is currently attested, i.e., Brazil and Africa.

Mark Cisneros, Eva Rodríguez-González, Kate Bellamy and *M. Carmen Parafita Couto*'s article ('Gender strategies in the perception and production of mixed nominal constructions by New Mexico Spanish-English bilinguals') focuses on gender assignment strategies in mixed noun phrases among 38 New Mexico Spanish-English bilinguals. Building on previous research based on perception and production tasks administered to (neighbouring) Spanish-English bilingual communities, the authors specifically investigate: (*i*) what strategies New Mexican Spanish-English bilinguals employ to assign gender to NPs that contain a Spanish determiner and an English noun; (*ii*) whether the adopted strategies vary depending on the task (two-alternative forced-choice judgment task *vs.* two director-matcher tasks) and speakers' bilingual profile (Early, Late English, Late Spanish), as well as other factors (e.g. urban setting). Regarding (*i*), the overall results from both judgment and production tasks indicate that most participants show a preference for congruent mixed NPs, i.e. NPs where the grammatical gender of the determiner corresponds to the gender of the noun of the equivalent Spanish translation, although some differences between early and late Spanish bilinguals can be observed in the forced-switch toy task. Regarding (*ii*), a detailed discussion is offered in relation to various differences which emerged in strategy assignment depending on the task type and bilingual profile. Overall, the data presented in this article show that not all Spanish-English bilinguals produce congruent and incongruent mixed NPs similarly, calling for further research in this very promising area of investigation.

In 'When Moldovan meets Russian: intralinguistic variation in clitic climbing', *Ştefania Costea* investigates the internal configuration of aspectual *vs.* modal predicates in Moldovan, with specific reference to the phenomenon of clitic climbing. First, Costea argues that complex predicates containing aspectual verbs such as *a termina* 'finish', which select an infinitival embedded verb and exhibit clitic climbing onto the matrix verb, instantiate a monoclausal structure, continuing a process of 'rephasing' (two phases > one phase) which was incipient in old Moldovan. This contrast with modal verbs like *a putea* 'can', where clitic climbing proves ungrammatical when the embedded verb is an A-infinitive. In order to explain this state of affairs, Costea shows that the modal needs to combine with a phasal complement, but A-infinitives do not instantiate phases. Moving on to complex predicates selecting a subjunctive, the patterns of clitic climbing exhibited by aspectual *vs.* modal matrix verbs are explained again in the light of a different internal composition, i.e. subjunctives tend to form one single phase (CP) with aspectual predicates, but head a separate CP with modals, hence the general ban on clitic climbing to the matrix verb in the latter case. Finally, the role of contact with Russian is assessed: in addition to contributing to the preservation of the infinitive after certain functional predicates, it boosted the frequency of monoclausal configurations with aspectual predicates.

In 'Object Person Marking in two under-represented Spanish dialects of Mexico', *Renato García-González* and *Fernando Chapa-Barrios* examine object marking in Mexican Spanish by means of an invariant 'clitic-like form' *lo*, identifying an understudied strategy absent from Standard Spanish yet shared by two separate varieties of Spanish spoken in different regions of Mexico. Identical

in form to the Standard Spanish masculine singular accusative object clitic, the element *lo* in these varieties—which the authors characterize as *unsupervised* due to their isolation from normative pressures—shows neither the distribution nor the agreement patterns of the Standard (Mexican) Spanish accusative object clitic. From these empirical observations, the authors propose an analysis of *lo* as an object-marking strategy associated with the negative value of a [–Participant] feature in the extended nominal structure of the direct object, which triggers the external merge of *lo* in the edge of *v* as an Object Person Marker (OPM). The absence of number or gender agreement on *lo* with the phi-features of the direct object (e.g. *lo*OPM *está protegiendo* [*la pared*]DO '(s/he) *lo*OPM=is.3SG fixing [the.FSG wall]DO') is explained in terms of the hierarchical configuration of the extended nominal edge, composed of a Person Phrase (PersP) merged above DP, internal to which, in turn, number and gender features are encoded. Specifically, the authors suggest that the dialects under investigation are regulated by a condition that blocks *v* from probing deeper into the nominal structure beyond PersP whenever its value is negative for [Participant], thereby preventing the realization of number/gender agreement on the OPM. Finally, the authors reject a hypothesis of contact-induced change in favour of an internal development within the grammar of Spanish, arguing that it is precisely the *absence* of microcontact (D'Alessandro 2021) with hegemonic varieties of Spanish—and their concomitant standardizing pressures— that has enabled the (ordinarily latent) OPM strategy to emerge in these unsupervised varieties.

Michele Goldin, *Julio César López Otero* and *Esther Hur*'s article ('How frequent are these verbs? An exploration of lexical frequency in bilingual children's acquisition of subject-verb agreement morphology') presents the findings of an experimental study into the role of verb lexical frequency in the acquisition of verbal morphology amongst Spanish-English bilingual children with differing ages of acquisition (AoA) across two demographics: heritage simultaneous bilinguals (2L1) and child L2 acquirers of Spanish. In these demographics, agreement morphology shows variability due to AoA effects; however, the effects of lexical frequency—a factor known to be implicated in L1 and heritage acquisition—on the latter group remain underexplored. To test and compare the extent to which lexical frequency modulates the acquisition of Spanish subject-verb agreement in bilingual children, the authors recruited 88 participants aged 3;0-7;0 (*n*=42 2L1 heritage children; *n*=46 L2 Spanish learners with AoA of 5;0) from a Spanish immersion preschool and dual language elementary school. Since this naturalistic learning environment mimics the L1 acquisition environment, the authors hypothesized that higher-frequency verbs will be acquired earlier than lower-frequency verbs, in line with previous findings for L1 acquisition. Participants completed a fill-in-the-blanks elicited production task involving two regular verbs within the same macroclass, viz. *comer* ('to eat') and *correr* ('to run'), which differ greatly in frequency in a child's input. These verbs were selected because they differ in only one phoneme (*co*/m/*er vs. co*/r/*er*), enabling the authors to disentangle the effect of lexical frequency from other factors (e.g. morphological regularity, thematic vowel group, and number of phonemes). It was found that both groups displayed higher accuracy in their production of the more frequent verb *comer* than of the less frequent *correr*. However, the effect of verb frequency was stronger for heritage children with exposure to Spanish from birth, in both their target-like and non-

target-like productions. Notably, the finding that lexical frequency also has an effect for L2 children learners of Spanish in their early stages of acquisition contrasts with the findings for adult (advanced) L2 learners, but aligns with previous research that found frequency effects for beginner adults only. The authors conclude by considering the pedagogical implications of their findings, highlighting to educators that (*i*) bilingual children may exhibit more accurate verb morphology for items with higher rates of frequency in the input, and that (*ii*) verb conjugations may not be acquired as an evenly-distributed rule but rather in piecemeal fashion.

In their article 'Plural formation in Istro-Romanian numeral quantifier phrases: inflexional calquing from Croatian?', *Oana Uță Bărbulescu* and *Martin Maiden* examine contact-induced change on the inflexional morphology of number marking in the Istro-Romanian nominal domain. Drawing on a corpus comprising late 19th century and mid-20th century texts and audio recordings, supported by 2020 fieldwork data, Uță Bărbulescu and Maiden undertake a fine-grained, wide-ranging survey of number-marking and related nominal phenomena (gender-marking, including the Daco-Romance *genus alternans*; case-marking; numerical quantifier phrases) across Istro-Romanian varieties, the wider Daco-Romance branch, and Croatian (dialectal and literary/standard). Through this comparison, the authors establish that Istro-Romanian has undergone a reorganization of its nominal system, yielding distributional patterns in the morphology of plural marking and numerical quantifier phrases which closely align with those found in Croatian. Challenging widespread perceptions in the descriptive literature, these changes are interpreted as complex and extensive effects resulting from prolonged, centuries-long contact with Croatian. In addition to extensive calquing in which Istro-Romanian morphological material is redistributed according to Croatian models, evidence of direct borrowing of morphological material from Čakavian dialects of Croatian is identified in Istro-Romanian number morphology. Together, these changes are taken as evidence of the (ongoing) emergence in Istro-Romanian of a special 'numerative' category. Theoretically, the authors situate these contact-induced effects under the rubric of 'pattern' versus 'matter' borrowing (Matras & Sakel 2007), arguing that both mechanisms are not only implicated, but are 'intricately intertwined' in the contact situation under investigation. Underscoring the wider implications of their study, the authors emphasize that the innovations found in Istro-Romanian cannot be explained in terms of internal evolution alone, concluding that their findings provide empirical confirmation that the morphological system is not impervious to external influences, including in scenarios where the languages in contact are not genetically close.

Acknowledgments

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