

Comparing Late L1 Attrition and Near-native L2 Acquisition:

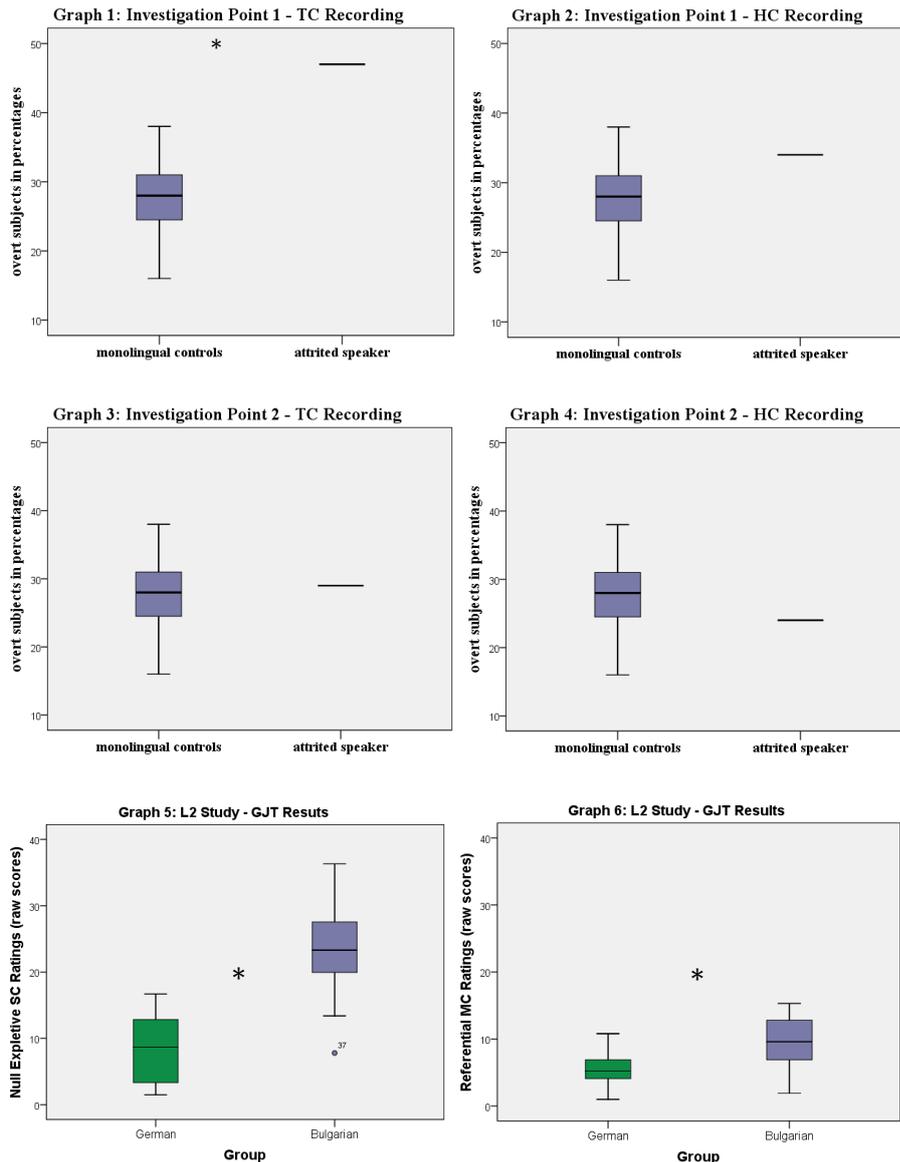
Pronominal Use in Pro-drop L1 Bulgarian Non-pro-drop L2 German

This paper reports on two studies – a) one of late L1-attrition in an L1-Bulgarian/near-native (late/adult) L2-German speaker (long-term German resident) and b) an L2 study of 20 adult L1-Bulgarian/near-native (late) L2-German speakers. Both studies focus on the syntax-discourse interface by studying the use of pronominal subjects in a pro-drop (L1)/non-pro-drop (L2) constellation. Interface syntax has been claimed problematic in similar cases, namely for attrited L1-Italian/L2-English and L1-English/near-native L2-Italian speakers (Sorace&Filiaci 2006). Both groups overused overt pronominal subjects (OS) in topic-continuity contexts compared to non-attrited Italians. However, recent studies indicate this attrition to be temporary since L1 knowledge can be reactivated after short re-exposure to L1 (Chamorro et al. 2015, Genevska-Hanke 2017a).

We analyzed four recordings of spontaneous speech (125 utterances each, graphs 1-4). Only the recording in the target country (TC) at investigation-point 1 showed an OS rate (47%) significantly higher than those of non-attrited controls presumably because L1 exposure in the TC is limited ($p = .004$, Crawford&Garthwaite 2002). After a three-week re-exposure to L1 in the home country (HC) attrition effects disappeared and the rate (34%) fell within the normally-distributed monolingual range. These results at investigation point 1 after ten years abroad were compared to results obtained five years later at investigation point 2 (after 12 months of more intensive L1 use due to a change in home situation). Both rates, TC (29%) and HC (24%), were monolingual-like. The temporariness of the phenomenon can possibly be attributed to changes in L1 access/use under pervasive L2 influence. Thus language mode is a major factor in late L1-attrition (Paradis 2007, Grosjean 2013). These results already indicate that the Interface Hypothesis (IH, Sorace 2005) cannot explain the whole range of phenomena found in L1-attrition.

The IH for near-native L2 is also called in doubt when investigating a pro-drop L1 and a non-pro-drop L2 such as L1-Bulgarian/L2-German (see Prentza&Tsimpli 2013 on L1-Greek/L2-English). 20 L1-Bulgarian/near-native L2-German speakers (mean TC-residence 8 years) were investigated with a GJT revealing significantly different L2 performance from that of 20 German controls (Genevska-Hanke, 2017b). Differences were found for both referential subjects in topic continuity/shift contexts as well as for expletive subjects (for both interface and narrow syntax). Expletives are insensitive to discourse and thus claimed acquirable by IH prediction. Differences were attested even for structures with null expletives, for which both the L1 and the L2 make a similar prediction (graph 5, see graph 6 for referential subjects, $p < .001$ each). Importantly, the analysis revealed that L2 speakers failed to differentiate between distinct types of German subjects since null referential and expletive subjects were replaced by any kind of overt subject (referential, expletive, arbitrary), contrary to the performance of the Germans. This indicates that not only discourse but also grammatical properties of the L2 are not fully acquired.

In contrast, the findings of the longitudinal investigation on late L1-attrition support stability of fully-developed L1s (Schmid&Köpke 2007). Taken together, the results indicated that the IH needs modifications in order to explain effects of L1 attrition and L2 acquisition.



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