An alternative perspective on the Interface Hypothesis: the case of attrition in Brazilian Portuguese

The Interface Hypothesis as suggested by Filiaci, F., I.M., Sorace, A., Heycock, C. (2004), predicts that L1 attrition of purely syntactic features should not take place. This study raises possible questions regarding this prediction with respect to referential null subjects in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Most contemporary analyses of BP referential null subjects agree that main and embedded null subjects are to be analyzed distinctly. The literature is divided on whether BP referential third-person null subjects of embedded finite clauses are to be analyzed as "partial pro" (as in Villa-Garcia 2007), or as the result of movement of the embedded finite clause subject to the main clause subject position (as in Ferreira 2000, 2004; Martins & Nunes 2005, 2010; Rodrigues 2002, 2004). The different predictions that these two lines of analysis make with respect to language attrition of BP under the influence of English are investigated here.

Under the movement analysis, BP is distinct from English in that, due to the properties of BP Tense, it licenses raising out of finite contexts, whereas English Tense does not (Martins & Nunes 2006). Sentence (1) demonstrates this distinction.

(1) Eu disse ao Robertinho que Ø gostava de música ao vivo.
    I said to the Robertinho that pro liked of music live.
    I told Robertinho that I liked live music.

As a result, monolinguals and bilinguals may perceive sentence (1) differently. Bilinguals do not necessarily consider it mandatory to have a null subject occurrence in the environment in question (Castro 2012). Therefore, bilinguals under the influence of L2 English should not judge overt embedded subjects as unacceptable because this construction is mandatory in English.

The movement analysis also predicts that speakers of BP who have attrited grammars under the influence of English in the domain of embedded null subjects should also show attrition in their grammar of inflected infinitivals, since this is due to a difference in BP versus English Tense as well (Martins and Nunes 2010). Inflected infinitivals are illustrated in BP in (2), and are lacking in English:

(2) a. Eu lamento eles não comprarem a casa.
   I regret they not to buy-3PL the house
b. Eu lamento (ec) não comprarem a casa.
   I regret (ec) not to buy-3PL the house
   'I regret that they didn't buy a house.'

I conduct elicited production and grammaticality judgment tasks in these domains in native monolingual BP speakers, and in native BP speakers living in the United States
for over seven years. The parallel behavior of null 3rd person embedded finite subjects and hyper-raising and inflected infinitival constructions in the attrited grammars of BP speakers under the influence of English is predicted by the movement analysis of this construction, which can indicate a pattern that raises significant questions with respect to the Interface Hypothesis.

References

Castro, T. (2012) "Null Subject Behavior in the Attrition of Brazilian Portuguese," *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*: Vol. 18: Iss. 1, Article 5. Available at: [http://repository.upenn.edu/pwpl/vol18/iss1/5](http://repository.upenn.edu/pwpl/vol18/iss1/5)


