

How to make do with what you have got: Priming effects in dialectal data, the view from indefinite Partitives

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When collecting dialectal data, one must factor out the influence of the standard/roof language used as stimulus. Since the standard is generally perceived as more prestigious, it represents a pervasive confounding factor external to the language the scholar intends to investigate (Labov 1972, 1996 on colloquial English in the US, Cornips & Poletto 2005 on dialectal data). One solution to this problem is to minimize its impact by adopting different kinds of tests and comparing their results (Cornips & Poletto 2005). Translation questionnaires from the standard variety are an established methodology for dialectal data collection (the ASIIt database on Italian dialects is based on such a methodology, <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>) especially at early stages of the investigation, when the variety-specific possible realizations for a given phenomenon are still unknown. Such a methodology is however extremely likely to trigger influence of the standard, which is provided as an input in the test itself. Other kinds of tests, in contrast, are less likely to bring about this issue. One possibility, for example, is to present the speakers with sentences in the local variety and ask them to assess if they (i) have heard them, (ii) would use them in a conversation mimicking a grammaticality judgment task. This methodology clearly requires that scholars have identified all the variables at play with respect to the phenomenon under investigation and collected a set of sentences in the local variety to be used in the test. It follows that such a methodology can only be used at advanced stages of the investigation. In this talk, we present a different approach to minimize the effect of the standard variety while using a translation task, as customary at the earlier stages of an investigation. In a nutshell, we propose that far from being a hindrance, this effect can be measured, and treated as a well-known priming effect in a bilingual context.

We support our methodology by presenting a case study on the realization of indefinite objects in Northern Italian Dialects which has been developed within the DiFuPaRo project (DFG ID: PO 1642/8-1, SNSF ID:100012L_172751). Indefinite objects are subject to a high degree of variation in the languages of Northern Italy. The competitors we focus on in this talk are a) Bare Nouns (BNs; the nominal is not introduced by any pre-nominal marker), b) Partitive Articles (PAs; the nominal is introduced by a form corresponding to the conflation of the preposition DE ‘of’ and the definite article) and c) definites (the nominal is introduced by the definite article). As shown by Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018) based on data from the AIS and Pinzin & Poletto (2022a) based on both the AIS and the ASIT, Emilian varieties show a prevalence of Partitive Articles, while Friulian varieties of Bare Nouns. After having identified which dialects can be configured as prototypical for one type of distributional pattern, we prepared a translation questionnaire from Italian and presented it orally to speakers in Emilia (8), Friuli (17), collecting their translations in the local variety. The input in the questionnaire is balanced for polarity, gender, number, left and right dislocation and PA/definite/BN nominal expressions. The global results for PA/BN inputs illustrated in Fig. 1 do display some

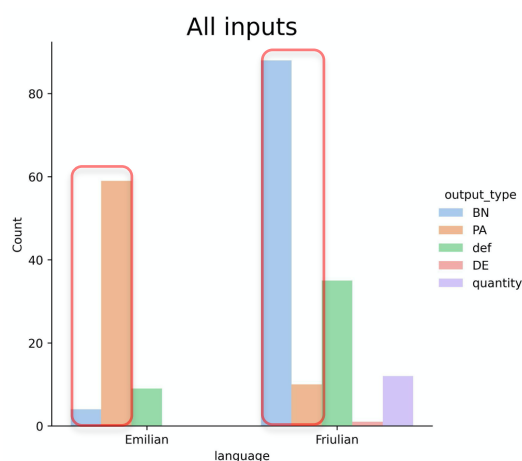


Figure 1

we split the data sorting them by input (fig. 2-3), a neat picture emerges, showing a clear priming effect of the standard Italian stimulus: Emilian only has BNs when a BN is present in the input and Friulian, in parallel, only has PAs when a PA is present in the input. Considering this, it becomes clear that BNs in Emilian and PAs in Friulian are an effect of the Italian input and are to be analyzed as a crosslinguistic priming effect in a bilingual context (Pickering & Branigan 1998, Hartsuiker & al. 2004, Bernolet & al 2007). In the discussion, we also focus on the other translations attested when the input is the ungrammatical option (BNs for Emilian and PAs for Friulian). In our data we observe two different behaviors, while Emilian speakers tend to use PAs (and a few definites), Friulian speakers produce more options, not only BNs but also a relevant number of definites and quantity markers. In conclusion, this methodology allows us to clean out noisy data, guiding theoretical analyses on firmer ground. In this specific case, we have been able to assess that Friulian and Emilian have one grammatical option,

tendencies but do not show any clear distribution (see Pinzin & Poletto 2022b, 2022c). Definite articles are attested in comparable numbers in the two languages (green bar). As for PAs and BNs, we can see that (i) Emilian shows mostly PAs (orange bar), but BNs are still attested (blue bar), (b) Friulian shows mostly BNs (blue bar), but PAs are still attested (orange bar). This could be taken as suggesting that both BNs and PAs are an option in these two languages, with a preference towards one of the two in Friulian and Emilian. However, as

soon as

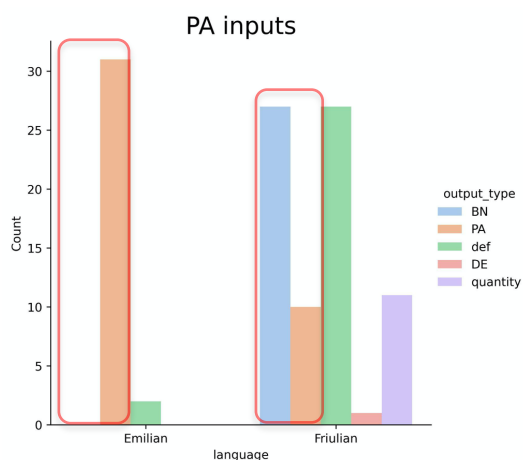


Figure 2

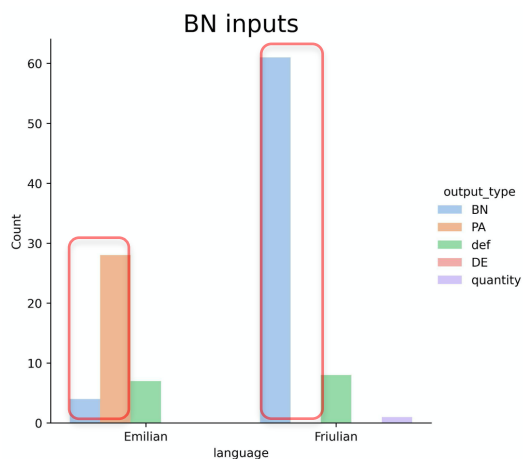


Figure 3

respectively BNs and PAs, while the second option is a crosslinguistic effect of the input. We also point out that such a methodology can be easily carried over to the analysis of “noisy” data from databases based on translation questionnaires (e.g., ASIt).

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