Variation in copula choice among Romani-Spanish bilinguals in Mexico

Cristian Padure[1], Stefano De Pascale[2] and Evangelia Adamou[3]

[1]INALCO, [2]KU Leuven, [3]French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)

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Research questions

1. What happens when two languages in contact have different conceptual representations encoded by distinct linguistic means?

2. How does such a partial conceptual equivalence affect the bilingual speaker and eventually lead to language change?

Theoretical background

Conceptual transfer

- When two languages in contact have different conceptual representations encoded by distinct linguistic means, conceptual transfer is likely to occur.

  (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008 for an overview)

1. L1 =>L2
2. Dominant language => heritage/minority language

Spanish copulas *ser* and *estar*

Ahora ella es catolica.
'Now she is Catholic.'

Ahora está enojado.
'Now he is mad.'

Inherent or essential	Accidental or circumstantial
Imperfective	Perfective
Permanent	Temporary
Defining, abstract and independent of immediate experience	Dependant on concrete and/or immediate experience
Not susceptible to change	Susceptible to change
Presented within a class frame of reference	Presented within an individual frame of reference
ser	*estar*

Table 2. Main variables for the distribution of *ser* and *estar*, in Silva-Corvalán (1986: 590) following Falk (1979) and Navas Ruiz (1963)

English and Spanish

- L1 English learners of L2 Spanish generalize *ser* before acquiring *estar*. (e.g., Geeslin 2001)

- Heritage speakers of Spanish in the US generalize *estar* (Silva-Corvalán 1986) following a more general trend among Spanish monolinguals in the Americas. (e.g., Gutiérrez 1994, Ortiz-López 2000)

L1 English   L2 Spanish

concepts   (being)   (being permanent/being) (being temporary)

linguistic
means   [be]   [ser] [estar]

Simplification of the minority language?

- However, using a large sample from the Iberian Peninsula, Geeslin & Guijarro-Fuentes (2008) showed that bilingualism does not always lead to simplification.

- Adamou (2013) demonstrated that bilingualism may lead to complexification of the L1 with data from Mexican Romani (Indic) in contact with Mexican Spanish (Romance).

Background on Mexican Romani

Romani migration to the Americas
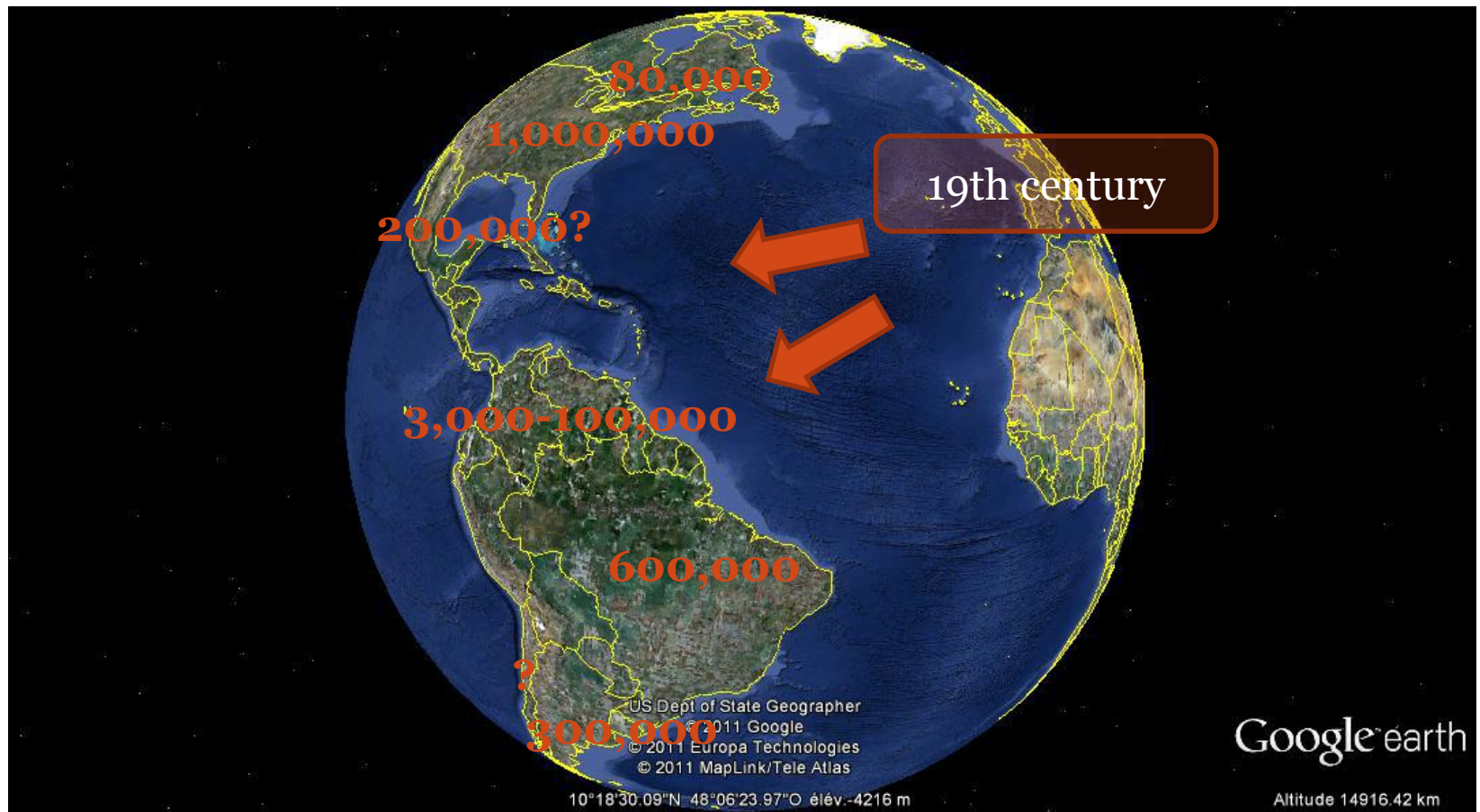
official documents (Pardo-Figueroa 2013, Sutre 2014)
life stories (Acuña 2011, Adamou 2013)

Romani copula choice

(22) sar   amende   bi   voj   **si**   terni
       like 1PL.LOC also 3SG.F.NOM **be.3SG** young
       SPANISH: Como nosotros, ella es bastante joven.
       'Like us, she is young.'

(18) vo   xuljariko   **=lo**
       3SG.M.NOM   angry   **3SG.M**
       SPANISH: (Porque no le llamé antes y ahora) está enojado.
       '(Because I didn't call him and now) he is mad.'

Oaxaca, Mexico

Romani copula
Spanish copula *ser*

Romani clitics
Spanish copula *estar*

Adamou (2013)

Romani clitics

- Subject clitics are obsolescent in Romani from Europe.
- When a form becomes marginal:

  a) it can be lost

  b) it can be kept as marginal garbage

  c) it can be reused for something else, 'exaptation' (Lass 1990).

- Whereas subject clitics were lost (a) or marginalized (b) in many European Romani dialects, in Romani from Latin America contact with Spanish allowed them to be 'recycled' (c).

Goal of this study

1. To explore variation in Romani copula/clitic in Mexico.

2. To explore the equivalence between the Romani uses and the Spanish ones.

3. To test the simplification hypothesis in language contact (for the minority language).

Method

Sample

- 60 Romani-Spanish bilinguals

- Age range 17-90 y.o ($M = 37.08$; $SD = 18.86$)

- 35 Romani-dominant and 25 Spanish-dominant

- All participants had similar low education level and similar socioeconomic status.

- Locality: Rinconada, State of Veracruz, Mexico

Veracruz, Mexico

Copula choice task

- Each participant responded individually to a copula choice task in Spanish (Geeslin & Guijarro-Fuentes 2008) followed by immediate translation of the target clauses in Romani (Adamou 2013).

- 28 target clauses

The University of Indiana
Plymouth University
2002

Name: _____

Region: _____

Instrucciones: Eres un estudiante en una universidad hispanohablante. Leerás descripciones de situaciones que pasaron entre tus amigos, Paula y Raúl. Ellos viven juntos pero no son novios. Lee cada escena y decide qué respuesta prefieres. Por favor, selecciona UNA opción.

1. Paula y Raúl van a un restaurante esta noche. Paula habla desde su habitación mientras se viste y hace los planes con Raúl, quien está en la sala. Cuando sale de la habitación le pregunta a Raúl:
Paula: ¿Quieres que vayamos en mi coche?

A. Raúl: ¡Ay! ¡Qué bonita estás!   __ Prefiero la frase A.
B. Raúl: ¡Ay! ¡Qué bonita eres!   __ Prefiero la frase B.
                                        __ Prefiero A y B.

2. Paula le agradece el cumplido y le pregunta si viene su amigo Alejandro al restaurante. Paula quiere discutir algo sobre la clase de matemáticas. Raúl le dice que Alejandro no vendrá y Paula quiere saber por qué:
Paula: ¿Por qué no viene Alejandro?

A. Raúl: Porque no le llamé antes y ahora está enojado.   __ Prefiero la frase A.
B. Raúl: Porque no le llamé antes y ahora es enojado.   __ Prefiero la frase B.
                                                           __ Prefiero A y B.

Coding and analysis

1. Extra-linguistic variables: age, gender
2. Linguistic variables:

   copula choice for Mexican Romani

   copula choice for Spanish

   clause type

   predicate type

   referent

   experience with referent

   change

   adjective class

- A mixed-effects logistic regression, with "Mexican Romani copula" as response variable and "participant" and "experimental item" as random effects.
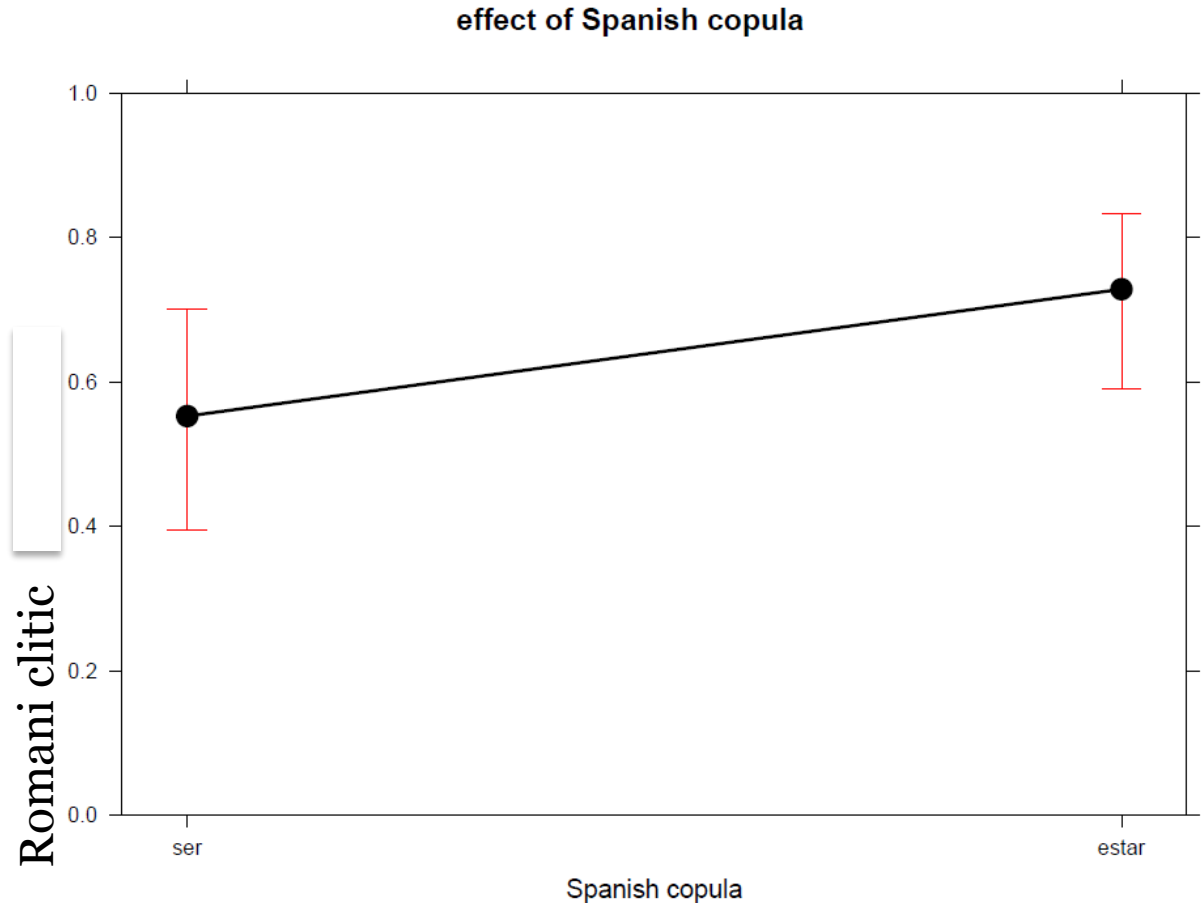
Results

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Spanish copula variant (*ser* or *estar*)

Sentences with *estar* are significantly more frequently translated in Romani using the clitics, but those with *ser* correspond to both the Romani copula and the clitics.
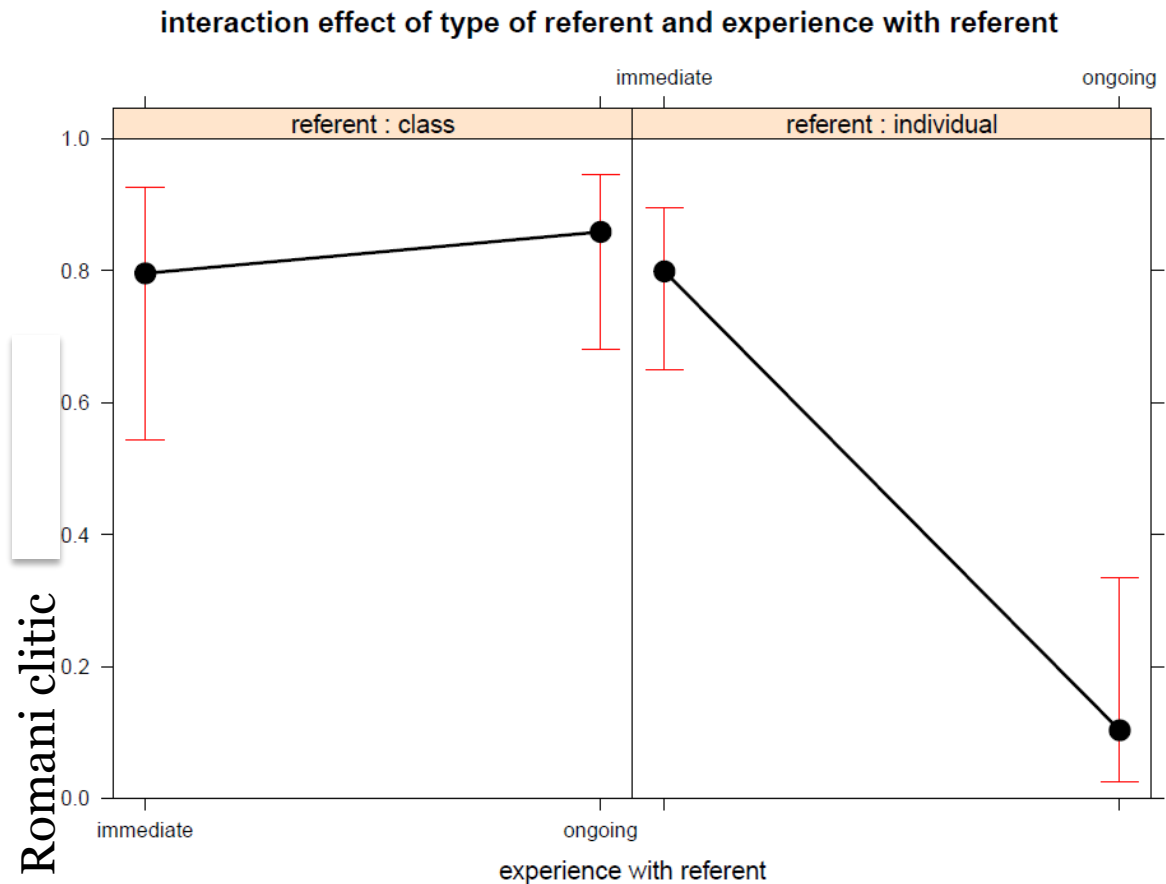

effect of Spanish copula

$\chi^2 = 13.67$; df = 1; p < 0.001

Interaction between generation and referent

The youngest cohort of participants tends to prefer the clitic significantly more frequently than the other two generations, and this preference is even more outspoken for class referents.

interaction effect of type of referent and generation of respondents

$\chi^2 = 6.35$; df = 2; p < 0.05
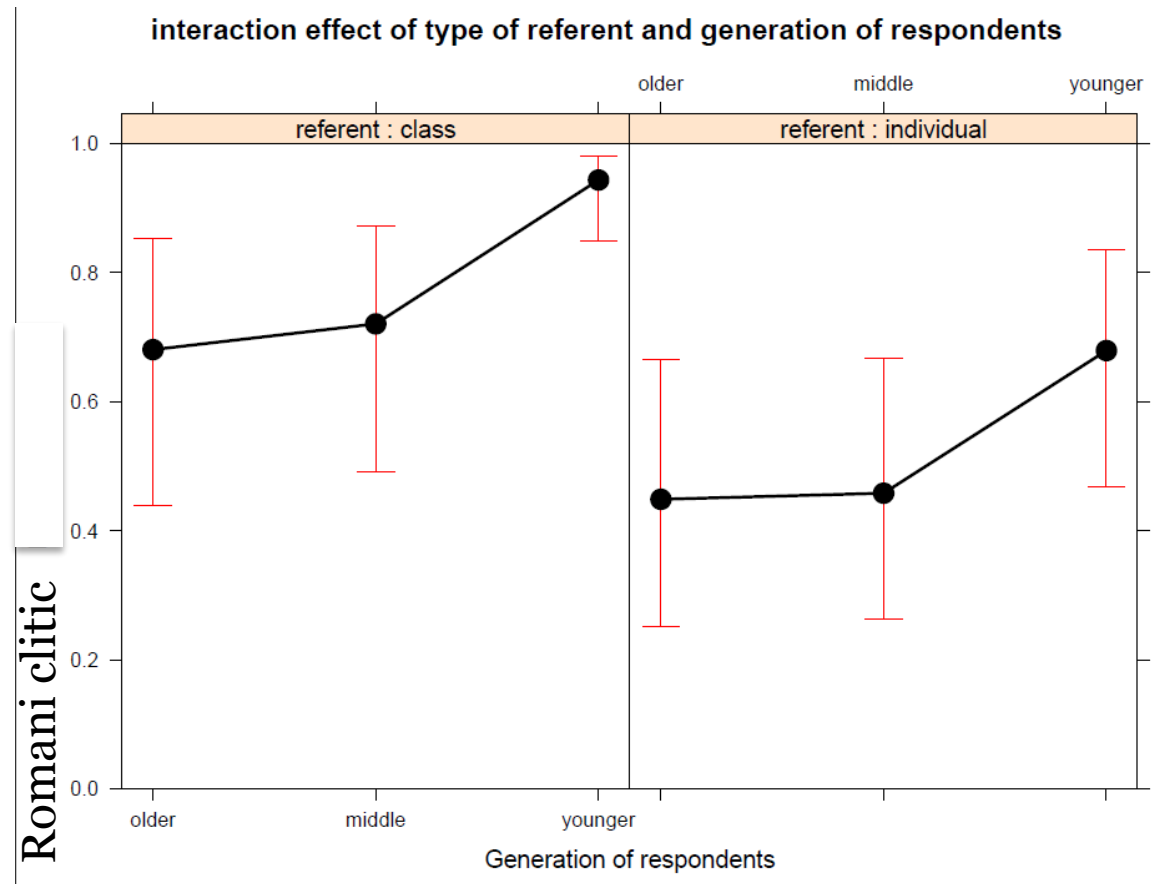
Interaction between referent and experience with the referent

The main linguistic predictor for the use of the Romani clitics is immediate experience with the referent for individual or class, but ongoing experience only for class.

interaction effect of type of referent and experience with referent

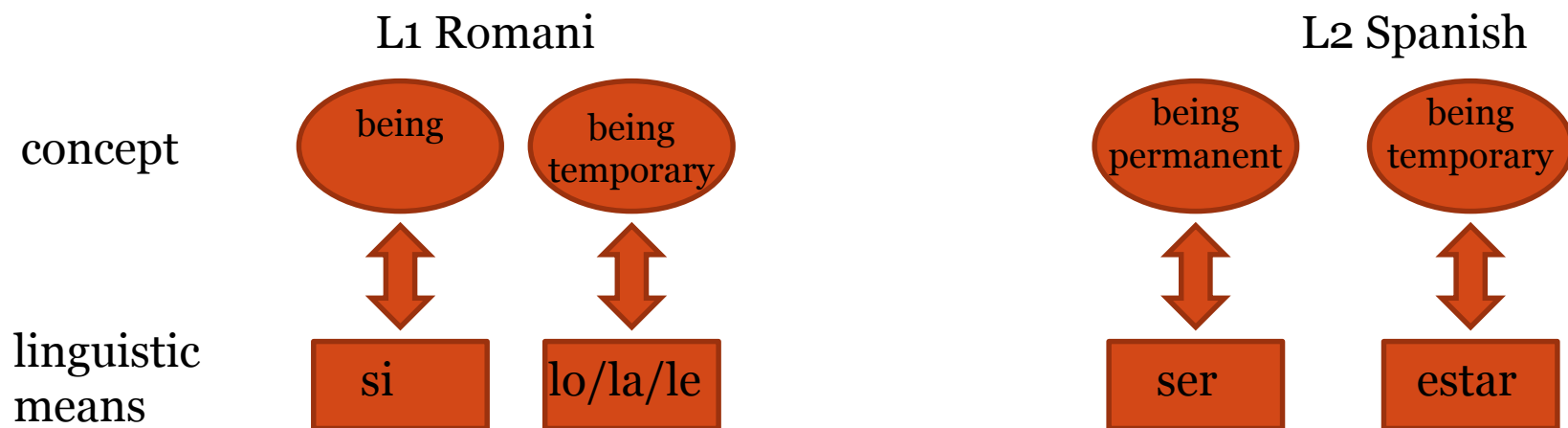$\chi^2 = 12.25$; df = 1; p < 0.001

Discussion

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Stage 1

- The equivalence between the Romani copula *si* and the two Spanish copulas may indicate that at first the Romani speakers used the Romani copula for both Spanish contexts.

L1 Romani   L2 Spanish

concept

being

being permanent   being temporary
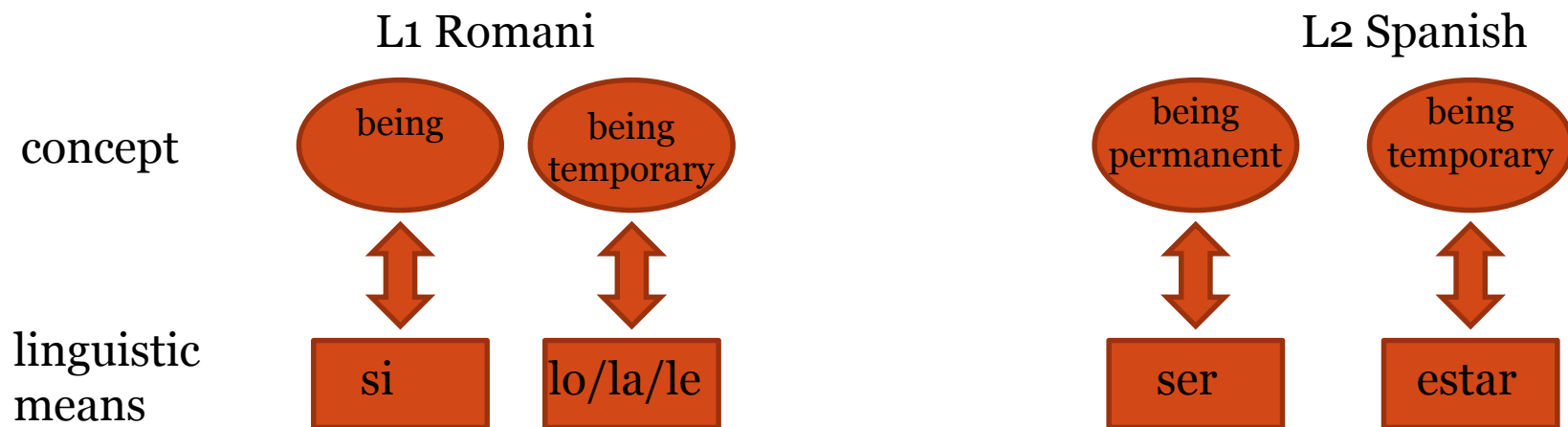
linguistic means

si

ser   estar

Stage 2: complexification

- The equivalence between the Romani clitics and the Spanish *estar* shows that at some second stage they modeled Romani under the influence of Spanish by replicating *estar*.

L1 Romani   L2 Spanish

concept

| being | being temporary | | being permanent | being temporary |

linguistic means

| si | lo/la/le | | ser | estar |

Stage 3: simplification

- Simplification of alternatives is ongoing in Romani from Mexico, in particular among the younger, Spanish-dominant generation, with the expansion of the clitics.

L1 Romani

concept

being

being temporary

linguistic means

si

lo/la/le

L2 Spanish

being permanent

being temporary

ser

estar

Complexification vs. simplification

- This means that both simplification and complexification occur in language contact, in a heritage language.
- Complexification in the heritage language appears to have taken place among balanced bilinguals, whereas simplification is taking place among Spanish-dominant bilinguals.
- Comparison with a Mexican Spanish monolingual control group in progress.

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Henri Rousseau, The Sleeping Gypsy, 1897
MoMA, New York

Thank you!

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