

## Variation in copula choice among Romani-Spanish speakers bilinguals in Mexico

Based on evidence from heritage speakers of Spanish in the US who generalize *estar* Silva-Corvalán (1986, 1994) argued that bilinguals tend to simplify alternatives. However, using a large sample from the Iberian Peninsula, Geeslin & Guijarro-Fuentes (2008) showed that bilingualism does not always lead to simplification. Adamou (2013) further demonstrated that bilingualism may lead to complexification. It was shown that heritage speakers of Romani in Mexico developed under the influence of Spanish copulas a distinction between attributive predications using the copula *si*, in (1a), and the third person subject clitic pronouns, in (1b), whereas Romani speakers from Europe only use the copula (Matras 2002).

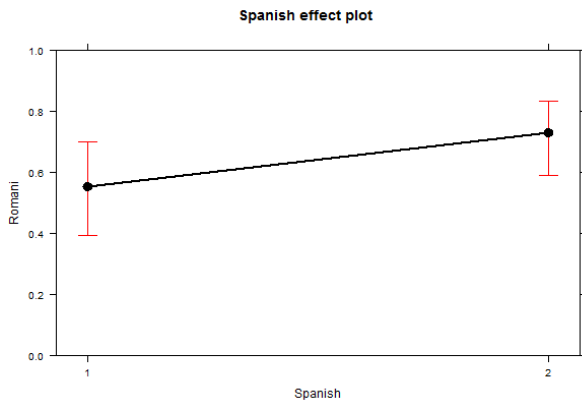
- (1) a. le        ʃave        muʁa        bibiake    si        barbale  
         DEF.PL children   POSS.1SG aunt.DAT be.3PL rich  
         ‘My aunt’s children are rich.’ (Adamou 2013:1085)
- b. o        raklo=**lo**        felis  
         DEF.M boy=3SG.M happy  
         ‘The boy is happy.’ (Adamou 2013:1075)

In the present study, 60 Romani-Spanish bilinguals from Veracruz, Mexico, responded to a copula choice task in Spanish (Geeslin & Guijarro-Fuentes 2008) followed by immediate translation of the target clauses in Romani (Adamou 2013).

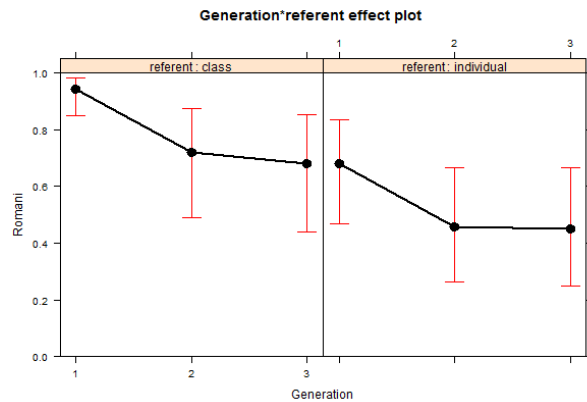
A mixed-effects logistic regression, with “Romani copula” as response variable and “participant” and “experimental item” as random effects, reveals a significant effect of “Spanish copula” variant, i.e., *ser* or *estar* ( $\chi^2 = 13.67$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), “generation”, i.e., young (ages 17-22), middle (ages 23-45), old (ages 48-90) ( $\chi^2 = 20.35$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and interaction between linguistic predictors “referent” and “experience with referent” ( $\chi^2 = 12.25$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Analysis shows that 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; see Figure 1. The youngest cohort of participants prefers the clitics significantly more frequently than the other two generations, including for class referents; see Figure 2. The best linguistic predictors are immediate experience with the referent, and class for ongoing experience; see Figure 3.

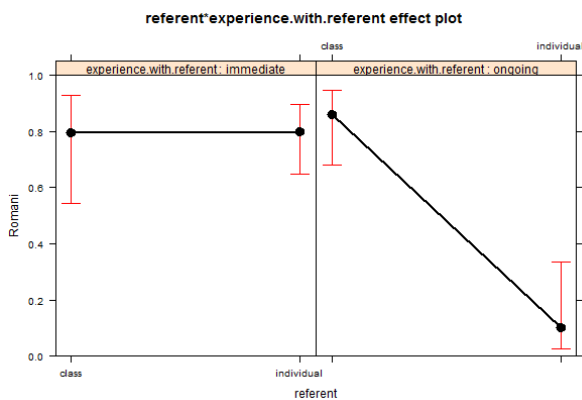
Our study illustrates that after the complexification of the heritage language, simplification is ongoing in Romani, in particular among the younger, Spanish-dominant generation.



**Figure 1.** Innovative clitic choice in Mexican Romani with respect to Spanish copula choice (1: *ser*; 2: *estar*)



**Figure 2.** Innovative clitic choice in Mexican Romani with respect to generation (1: young; 2: middle; 3: old) and referent (class or individual)



**Figure 3.** Innovative clitic choice in Mexican Romani with respect to referent (class or individual) and experience with referent (immediate or ongoing)

## References

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