Null Objects in Heritage Portuguese
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1. **Goals** This study investigates object omissions in the spontaneous production of European Portuguese by second generation Portuguese-German bilingual speakers and compares them to first generation migrants, and two age-matched groups of monolingual speakers. It investigates i) whether the production of null objects in the speech of these bilingual migrants differs quantitatively and/or qualitatively from the production of the three other groups; and if so ii) how possible divergence can best be accounted for.

2. **Background** Null objects are a frequent phenomenon in Portuguese, in European Portuguese (EP) as well as in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). In Portuguese, definite and anaphoric null objects have to be distinguished from other types of object omissions, e.g. VP-ellipsis and incorporated arguments (e.g. so-called unspecified arguments). Syntactically, null objects in EP have originally been analysed as variables which form a chain with an empty operator and are associated to a sentence external discourse topic (Raposo 1986). More recently, Kato and Raposo (2005) propose a unified analysis of the null objects for EP and BP in terms of an empty determiner. Concerning semantic constraints on null objects, Schwenter (2014) uses a quantitative multivariate analysis of comparable samples in BP and EP to show that inanimate direct object referents are significantly more likely to be null while definite human anaphoric direct object referents are more likely to be pronouns. The overall grammatical marking strategy in both varieties is to employ more marking on non-prototypical (human and specific/definite) DOs, and less marking on prototypical (inanimate and non-specific/indefinite) DOs, with null realization being the "less"option in both BP and EP for anaphoric DOs. Moreover, it has been shown (Cyrino et al. 2000) that the null object in BP has extended its distribution along a referential hierarchy, the most referential arguments (+human, +spec, 1st/2nd person) being the most resistant to be realized as null elements. This diachronic evolution of the null object construction in BP may illustrate a potential diachronic change that reflects a universal pathway along a referential hierarchy. The main idea of this study is that such a universal pathway may be visible also in the speech of bilingual populations as, in our case, Heritage Speakers (HS) of EP. Taking into account the syntactic and semantic features that constrain the occurrence of object omissions, the present analysis focuses on the following aspects: (i) the type of object omissions (e.g. VP-ellipsis, unspecified objects, genuine null objects) (ii) the syntactic constructions in which the null objects occur, specifically their distribution in syntactic islands or in sentence-initial position, resembling German topic drop and iii) the semantic-pragmatic factors governing the distribution of null objects, particularly the feature [+/- animate].

3. **Speakers and methodology**

This study is based on oral interviews of four different groups of speakers of European Portuguese: 1) a group of eight first generation migrants, who migrated to Hamburg/Germany as adults in the 1960s/1970s (mean age = 59.88; SD = 6.94); 2) eight second generation Lusophone immigrants, who were born and raised in Hamburg/Germany (mean age = 27.38; SD = 4.03); and two groups of Portuguese monolingual speakers without migration background who match the migrants' profile in age and education: 3) 8 older and low-educated speakers in the age span of 54 to 74 years (mean age = 64.25; SD = 5.92) and 4) 8 younger speakers with high school or university degree who are between 18 and 32 years old (mean age = 25.25; SD = 5.39). All speakers were interviewed individually for approximately one hour, on topics related with the interviewee's life experience. The oral interviews were transcribed and all transitive contexts (a

total of 10.880 tokens) were coded for the type of object realization. The mean distribution of coded tokens is similar in the four groups revealing comparable datasets.

4. Results 348 tokens of the whole corpus (out of 662 omissions) are null objects. The other tokens correspond to unspecified objects (16.1%) and to VP ellipsis (31.3%). Since only null objects compete syntactically and discursively with overt clitic pronouns, we further excluded the occurrences of VP ellipsis and unspecified objects and looked at the distribution of (accusative and dative) clitic pronouns, demonstratives and 'real' null objects per group in contexts with specific antecedents. The results demonstrate that the HSs produce less clitic pronouns than the other groups and compensate this lower rate with a higher rate of demonstratives and null objects.

Focusing, now, specifically on the distribution of null objects, we analyzed their occurrence taking into account the syntactic contexts in which they are produced (island and sentence-initial omissions) and the semantic features and [+/- animate]. The data show the use of missing objects within islands in VP ellipsis as well as in null object contexts. This occurrence is attested not only in the bilingual but also in the monolingual corpora to the same extent. An extension of the German topic drop construction into Portuguese would be seen in sentences with VS order and a missing object. The results with respect to this construction are very clear. Neither the 1st nor the 2nd generation corpora contain ØVS-sentences that may resemble the German topic drop structure. Regarding the factor 'animacy', results show that, proportionally, the heritage bilinguals omit considerably more animate objects than the other groups. Chi-squared tests show that the HSs omit the object significantly more with animate objects than the other speaker groups. However, even in the monolingual groups we find animate null objects, showing that this is not an ungrammatical construction in EP.

5. Discussion and conclusion Our results show that the HSs do not differ from the other groups with respect to the type of object omissions employed. They produce all three types of omission structures (null objects, unspecified objects and VP ellipsis), with a higher proportion of null objects. This is in line with the distribution found in the monolingual corpora. Only the first generation migrants produce less null objects. This difference between the first and the second generation bilingual corpora shows that no characteristic of the speech of the second generation bilinguals can be traced back to ongoing changes already present in the speech of the first generation. These data reveal that the bilingual speakers have successfully acquired missing object constructions in EP, which includes the null object, showing no incomplete knowledge of object realization / omission structures. Thus, no general acquisition deficit is visible.

Having discarded the hypothesis of an overall failure in acquiring null objects, we now consider the hypothesis of transfer (ii). A scenario of crosslinguistic influence would be visible if heritage bilinguals preferrably displayed null objects in verb-initial sentences with post-verbal subjects (as in Germanic topic drop). Our results, however, do not show traces of cross-linguistic influence from German.

The most revealing results are related with a significantly higher proportion of animate null objects in the speech of the bilingual group, even though also the other speaker groups omit animate 3rd person pronouns. We interpret these results as indicating that the HSs have further developed and extended the null object construction in a way comparable to the diachronic evolution of null objects in BP. Our hypothesis is that this change reflects a universal pathway along a referential hierarchy, so it is internally motivated rather than due to acquisition deficits or cross-linguistic influence.