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Null arguments in transitional trilingual grammars: Field observations from Misionero German

Abstract: In this field note we discuss findings from pilot research on a variety of heritage German spoken in the Northeastern Province of Misiones of Argentina. Based on sociolinguistic field interviews with 25 consultants possessing varying degrees of proficiency in the language, we show that this variant of heritage German does in fact occasionally display instances of both null subjects (e.g. *pro*-drop) and null objects. These preliminary findings are consistent with other recent studies in the contact linguistics literature (cf. Camacho et al. 1997; Sánchez 1997, 1999a, 1999b; Cuza et al. 2013). In conclusion, we introduce suggestions for future research.

1 Introduction

The role of null arguments (i.e., subject drop and object drop) in multilingual language contact situations has developed into an interesting field of study. In particular, recent work by scholars such as Camacho et al. (1997), Sánchez (1997, 1999a, 1999b), and Cuza et al. (2013) have revealed that often languages that do not license null arguments in their monolingual grammar can display null arguments in their grammar over time if they come into steady contact with a *pro* or object-drop grammar.[1]

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1 As pointed out to us by an anonymous reviewer, it is a misnomer to refer to instances of object drop in German as "topic drop" (as in (2)) due to the fact that instances of topic drop in German are restricted to the pre-field (see e.g. Fries 1988).

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In this field note, we introduce data from heritage German spoken in the Northeast Province of Misiones, Argentina, which we call Misionero German (MG). Misionero German is a cover term for the varieties of regional dialects of German of Volga German heritage that are spoken in Misiones Province, which on the surface seem to provide further evidence of the introduction of null arguments into the grammar of a language (namely, German) that does not license null arguments. Pilot data interviews with 25 speakers (consisting of over 11 hours of natural narrative production) of this dialect exhibiting varying degrees of proficiency and fluency, reveal that Misionero German licenses instances of null subjects and null objects, such as the examples in (1) and (2) below:

(1) null subject (*pro*-drop)
In Brazilen <u>haben</u> [Ø] Propaganda <u>gemacht</u>, sie sollen die die deutschen Leut sollen nach
in Brazil have *pro* propaganda made, they should the the German people should to
Brasilien kommen fer Arbeit.
Brazil   come   for   work
'(They) made propaganda in Brazil, (that) they, the German people, should come to Brazil for work.'

(2) null object
Sie haben immer [Ø] verschlachten, wenn sie haben Deutsch gesprochen in Brazilien.
they have always *pro* slaughtered, when they have German spoken in Brazil.
'They have always slaughtered (cattle), when they spoke German in Brazil.'

Misionero German is largely a moribund German-language enclave dialect cluster that can be classified as a heritage grammar (i.e., it was acquired as the first language (L1) of these speakers where Brazilian Portuguese became the dominant L2). In addition to sustained contact with vernacular rural Brazilian Portuguese, most Misionero German speakers have acquired Spanish as an L3 later in life. As a result, arriving at a better understanding of the null argument properties of L1 Misionero German requires us to come to grips with the influence that both the L2 (e.g. Brazilian Portuguese) and L3 (e.g. Spanish) can (simultaneously) have on the L1 Misionero German grammar. In this field note, we discuss how the instances of structures containing null arguments in the natural speech of Misionero German-speaking informants is unique when

compared with other varieties of contact German throughout the world (especially those variants in contact with other Romance languages). Bearing this in mind, we discuss future research opportunities to further explore null arguments in a full range of structural contexts.

2 Trilingual (German-Portuguese-Spanish) speakers in Misiones province, Argentina

Before introducing the data, we provide a brief historical and sociolinguistic overview of the Misiones province of Northeastern Argentina. The province of Misiones, in the extreme northeast of Argentina, is a narrow peninsula bordered by Paraguay to the west and Brazil to the east. Originally part of neighboring Corrientes province but also claimed by Paraguay until the war of the Triple Alliance (1876), Misiones officially became a territory of Argentina in 1881, but did not gain provincial status until 1953, becoming the most recently formed province of Argentina. Between 1883 and 1927 Argentina recruited European settlers to this sparsely populated region, mostly from the Ukraine and Poland. After World War I many German settlers also arrived in Misiones, attracted by German-owned business in South America. Most of these German immigrants settled along the western edge of the province along the Paraná River, in such communities as El Dorado, Puerto Rico, and Wanda (Capaccio 2001). German speakers are still to be found in these communities (Huber 2010), although the predominant language throughout the region is Spanish, with occasional use of Guaraní by Paraguayans from across the Paraná River. Even more German immigrants—many arriving without authorization—came from neighboring Brazil, which is separated from most of Misiones by the narrow Uruguay River and in a few places only by small creeks; in one area there is a land border with no natural demarcation. Many Brazilian settlers in Misiones are descendants of German immigrants to the neighboring Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, and Paraná, who during the time period 1937–1945 were forced out of Brazil by the ultra-nationalist government of Getúlio Vargas, who prohibited the teaching or public use of the German language and who was alarmed by rumors that German settlers in Brazil intended to form a separatist state (Campos 2006, Zubaran 1994).

Most Brazilians and their descendants in Misiones work in agriculture, on small farms producing tea, yerba mate, tobacco, and aromatic plants such as

citronella and mint, from which the essential oils are extracted in distilleries, with the town of El Soberbio at the center of this activity. Other "German Brazilians" own small businesses such as saw mills, small shops, and bakeries. To this day more Portuguese than Spanish is spoken in the rural *colonias* surrounding the cities and towns in eastern Misiones, and remnants of German are also found in most of the same communities. In a few towns along the Uruguay River (most notably El Soberbio and Santa Rita) Portuguese (or Portuguese-Spanish hybrids) predominate even in urban areas. Although trilingual German-Portuguese-Spanish speakers can be found along the entire eastern corridor of Misiones province, the highest concentration is found along the upper Uruguay River region (Alto Uruguay), stretching from El Soberbio in the north to Panambí in the south. It is from this zone that the data for the present study were obtained.

2.1 Data collection

Data for the present study were collected in Misiones province in 2012, from the following communities: El Soberbio, Santa Rita, San Francisco, and Alba Posse. All are located on or near the Uruguay River, in the central portion of Misiones' eastern border with Brazil. All potential participants had previously been interviewed in Portuguese and Spanish by one of the authors (Lipski), who had determined that they were also fluent enough in German to provide data for the study. A total of 25 individuals participated in sociolinguistic interviews conducted primarily in German by one of the authors (Putnam). Their ages ranged from the mid-50s to the mid-80s. All were interviewed in their homes or workplaces (which included a bakery, a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, a boarding house, a restaurant, and several farms).[2] None of the trilingual participants had ever studied German or Portuguese, and most had little or no schooling in Spanish. All were born and raised near or in the communities where they were interviewed and all had been raised in households where German was the principal language. Portuguese was acquired either at home or in the immediately surrounding agricultural communities, while Spanish was

a much later accretion for most speakers. Although no ready proficiency measures exist for this speech community, by asking numerous questions about domains of language usage (following the general approach of Marian et al. 2007) as well as by observing actual linguistic production, it is clear that most of the participants are effectively Portuguese-dominant, despite being born and raised in Argentina.

A combination of participants' own knowledge of their ancestors' places of origin and observation of German dialectal traits revealed evidence of at least the following German regional dialects: Western Palatinate and, as evidenced by some very isolated features, some variants of Middle and Low German dialects.[3] These preliminary findings must be interpreted with caution, since the speakers represent speech variants transplanted from Germany (including areas not currently within the borders of Germany) nearly a century ago, and some dialect mixing and koinéization has apparently taken place in Misiones. Unlike most of the German-speaking communities in the neighboring Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, where a single regional variety of German predominates in most communities (most frequently Hunsrückisch), the trilingual Misiones German speakers represent numerous migratory trajectories spanning much of western Germany but also the German-Polish border region and even the Volga German communities who emigrated to South America from Russia. This linguistic heterogeneity, when combined with the sociolinguistically unconstrained and highly vernacular Portuguese and minimally normative Spanish spoken in these communities, constitutes a rich but challenging environment for the study of language contact phenomena.

The German dialects spoken in the neighboring Brazilian states have been studied (e.g. Altenhofen 1996; Pereira Fritzen 2007; Rosenberg to appear, 2005, 2003, 1998; Schaumloeffel 2003), including code-switching and contact with Portuguese, but to date there are no reliable data on German-Portuguese-Spanish contacts in Misiones, Argentina (Gallero 2009 and Huber 2010 briefly mentions German-Spanish contacts in western Misiones). The observations contained in the present study are therefore to be regarded as preliminary and subject to eventual expansion and refinement as more information on this linguistically complex environment becomes available.

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3 Although it was anecdotally reported by a small minority of informants that their parents and others in the area spoke a Pomeranian dialect, there appears to be no attested dialectal forms in the speech of the remaining speakers of Misionero German.

3 Null argument parameters in the respective grammars

In this section we highlight the key attributes of *pro-* and *object*-dropping in the three source grammars; namely, Spanish (3.1.1), Brazilian Portuguese (3.1.2), and German (3.1.3).

3.1 *Pro*-drop in Spanish and Portuguese: fundamental observations

Before examining the data on Misionero German, it is useful to consider the *pro*-drop properties of Spanish and Portuguese. Spanish *pro*-drop has been well documented and only a brief summary is required here. Brazilian Portuguese *pro*-drop exhibits some differences with respect to European Portuguese, and vernacular Brazilian varieties such as those spoken in Misiones show even more noteworthy departures from canonical Spanish and European Portuguese patterns.

The *pro*-drop feature of Spanish and (European) Portuguese is usually tied to the rich verbal morphology, which identifies the grammatical subject with a high degree of accuracy, rendering overt subject pronouns usually redundant. Native speakers of Spanish, representing a broad spectrum of regional variants and dialects, are not always in agreement as to the desirability or even acceptability of null versus overt subject pronouns when presented with test utterances in which *pro*-drop could apply, and observation of unmonitored speech reveals an equally great variation in actual production. There is much anecdotal commentary as to the relatively higher frequency of overt subject pronouns in certain dialects (generally those in which phonological erosion of verbal inflection makes positive identification of null subjects less transparent), but a solid classification of Spanish and Portuguese dialects in terms of overt subject pronoun usage has yet to be demonstrated.

3.1.1 Spanish

Turning first to Spanish, for every instance where a non-conjoined overt subject pronoun can occur, in principle a completely grammatical utterance results from suppression of the overt pronoun (allowing for possible ambiguous reference if verb morphology and discourse referents are not sufficient to identify the subject). There are instances in Spanish in which only null pronouns may occur, i.e. where

replacement of a null pronoun by an overt pronoun results in ungrammaticality. Overt subject pronouns can only have animate—usually human—referents.[4] Other obligatorily null subject pronouns occur with the existential verb *haber* 'to be', weather predicates, extraposed sentences, etc.:

(3) a. *[Ø] Hay   muchas montañas   en México.*
         pro EXIST many   mountains in Mexico
         `There are many mountains in Mexico.'

     b. *[Ø] Llueve frecuentemente   en abril.*
         pro rain   frequently   in April
         `It rains frequently in April.'

     c. *[Ø] Es difícil   hablar español.*
         pro be difficult speak Spanish
         'It is difficult to speak Spanish'

Normally in Spanish overt subject pronouns are construed as focused, i.e. occupying the left periphery rather than the canonical VP-internal subject position. It has been claimed (e.g. Montalbetti 1984, 1986) that overt pronouns which alternate with null pronouns cannot be bound by an operator (in this instance, the quantifier or WH-word).

(4) a. Todos los *estudiantes*$_i$ piensan que Ø$_i$/*ellos*$_i$ son inteligentes
         `All students$_i$ think that Ø$_i$/*they$_i$ are intelligent'

     b. *¿Quién*$_i$ piensa que Ø$_i$/*él*$_i$ es inteligente?
         `Who$_i$ thinks that Ø$_i$/*he$_i$ is intelligent?'

Luján (1985) has claimed that in *pro*-drop languages like Spanish, strong (e.g. lexical) pronouns cannot precede their antecedents. This was later amended (Luján 1986) to the Stressed Pronoun Constraint: an antecedent may bind a stressed pronoun if and only if this pronoun does not alternate with an unstressed pronoun (e.g. the object of a preposition). It is rare to find, among monolingual speakers, acceptable cases where a null pronoun precedes an overt pronominal antecedent but many heritage speakers

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4 Despite these general strictures, there are Spanish dialects which depart from the use of obligatory null subjects. The vernacular Spanish of the Dominican Republic routinely places non-referential *ello* in the subject position of expletive clauses; many of these same Dominican sociolects also employ overt subject pronouns with inanimate subjects.

of Spanish produce pronominal anomalies including backwards pronominalization (Lipski 1993) and some regional dialects, especially in the Caribbean, freely allow overt pronouns in combinations such as (4) (Lipski 1996).

The regional Spanish dialects of Misiones, Argentina, are not noted for any exceptional departures from the usual Spanish *pro*-drop manifestations, and even the Portuguese-dominant trilingual speakers who provided the data for the present study did not appear to employ null and overt subject pronouns in fashions that differ from monolingual Spanish speakers from the same zone.

3.1.2 Brazilian Portuguese

Although Portuguese is a *pro*-drop language and while (European) Portuguese null and overt subject pronoun usage patterns with Spanish, vernacular Brazilian Portuguese prefers overt referential subject pronouns in most instances (Kato 2000), possibly due to the partial reduction in verbal morphology in which 1st-person and 3rd-person plural forms are replaced by the third-person singular, effectively reducing a six-member verbal paradigm to only two members (first-person singular and the default third-person singular; Duarte 1989, 1995). Unlike Spanish (except for the aforementioned Dominican dialects) Brazilian Portuguese also employs overt subject pronouns with inanimate referents. Brazilian children often produce null subjects at a greater rate than adults (Lopes 2003), and in fact have a higher rate of null subjects than null objects. There is one instance in which null referential subject pronouns are categorically used in Brazil (and frequently in European Portuguese as well). When responding to an absolute (yes-no) interrogative, speakers do not reply with "yes" or "no" but rather with the bare first-person singular verb form:

(5)   a. *Você fala   português?*
          you   speak Portuguese
          `Do you speak Portuguese?'

    b. *[Ø] falo*
          pro speak-1s
          `[I] do'

None of the trilingual speakers who provided data for the present study departed from the typically observed subject pronoun usage for vernacular Brazilian Portuguese.

3.1.3 German(ic): licensing requirements and limitations

In the generative literature, it has been proposed that in verb-second (V2) languages (such as standard German) the syntactic pre-requisite for licensing non-referential *pro* is not fulfilled (e.g. Jaeggli and Safir 1989; Rohrbacher 1999). Consider the examples in (6):

(6)   a. *Es   wurde   gestern   getanzt.*
         it   became yesterday danced
         'Yesterday dancing took place.'

      b. *Gestern   wurde   (*es) getanzt.*
         yesterday became (*it)   danced
         'Yesterday dancing took place.'

The impersonal passive examples in (6) demonstrate that the deletion of non-referential pronominals is possible whenever they do not appear in the left periphery/C(omplementizer)P(hrase)-layer of the clause. In example (6a), the non-referential pronoun *es* 'it' appears in the CP-layer and V2-ordering is maintained. Contrast this example with (6b), where the temporal adverbial *gestern* 'yesterday' occupies the initial position in the CP-layer, which forces *pro* to be realized below the inflected verb in second position. These examples demonstrate that *pro*-drop is possible in standard German whenever the pronominal element is non-referential under certain structural constraints.

   Although in its historical development standard German displayed more instances of *pro*-drop than it does in its contemporary form (Weiß 2005; Axel and Weiß 2010, 2011; Volodina and Weiß 2012), *pro*-drop exists now in very limited contexts in contemporary non-standard varieties. Axel and Weiß (2011) explicate that *pro*-drop is indeed possible in particular environments, especially those that show c(omplementizer)-agreement in embedded clauses (especially e.g. in dialect regions that exhibit both strong and weak (clitic) pronouns, such as those found in the Alemannic and Bavarian dialect regions; see also Cooper 1995; Nübling 1992). Due to Misionero German's Palatinate heritage,[5] the

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5 Axel & Weiß (2011: 34) point out that, "in the southern part of the Upper Palatinate (which is in Northern Bavaria) [...] there is evidence that the subject clitic is being reanalyzed as an inflectional suffix, since it can be doubled by the full form in main clauses (cf. Bachmann and Scheuerer 1995, Rowley 1994), though not yet in embedded clauses" (example (i) from Axel & Weiß 2011: 34, (18)):

presence of null arguments in our pilot data cannot be attributed to a vestigial structure from the origin dialect.

The uniqueness of the instances of null arguments in Misionero German also appears to be distinct from other instances of null arguments attested in global varieties of German in contact with other Romance languages (e.g., Italian). To provide an example, consider instances of *pro*-drop in in Pomattertitsch, an Alemannic (Walser) German dialect spoken in Formazza in the Italian Alps (Dal Negro 2004) and in Mòcheno (Cognola 2009, 2013). Similar to our comparison with contemporary continental German dialects, we show that the licensing domains for *pro*-drop in Pomattertitsch and Mòcheno compared with our findings in Misionero German are once again not identical. This is due in large part to the fact that the source/parent dialects for both Pomattertisch and Mòcheno are Upper German dialects (e.g., Alemannic and Bavarian), which display a dual pronominal system with both strong and weak pronouns.[6] Comparing our findings in Misionero German with both modern continental German dialects as well as heritage varieties of contact German (in contact with another Romance language that licenses *pro*-drop), we see the need to analyze our data as the result of language contact.[7]

(i)   a.   *mia lingma*
             we lie-we/lie-1.PL
        b.   **wa'ma mia Hunt hand*
             because-we we dogs are

Axel and Weiß acknowledge that the next step, i.e., where *–ma* has become an inflectional element that can no longer stand on its own, thus necessitating c-agreement, which is present in Central and Southern Bavarian (cf. Kolmer 2005, Wiesinger 1989), is not yet attested in Upper Palatinate (i.e., Northern Bavaria) dialects. In our recordings of Misionero German, we have observed no instances of c-agreement, which shows that the mechanisms responsible for licensing null-subjects (and null-objects) in Misionero German are 'something else.' Two primary differences emerge: (1) German dialects show a strong tendency to allow *pro*-drop only in connection with 2nd person singular forms, and (2) this phenomenon related to (pronominal) Agr-in-C (cf. Weiß 2005; Axel and Weiß 2010, 2011). As discussed here, both of these core properties are absent in our MG *pro*-drop data.

6 Dal Negro (2004: 167) even goes so far to claim that the reduction of weak/clitic pronouns in the Pomattertitsch dialect is leading to "an entirely new system of verb morphology" in the dialect.

7 In addition to the unique domains where (subject) *pro*-drop occur in Misionero German in comparison with both contemporary continental German dialects and the two heritage contact varieties that we discuss in this paper, none of the sources mention the possibility of *object/ topic*-drop in either of these dialect communities. As we discuss in the next section (i.e. Section 4), we take this as further proof that the null-subject (and null-object) parameter in Misionero German is the likely result of contact-induced interference.

Much like the cycle of pronominal elements becoming inflectional endings necessitating the birth of c-agreement (and, subsequently, the proper environment to license null-subjects) in modern continental German dialects, Dal Negro (2004) maintains that a similar process is taking place in Pomattertitsch. Similar to other Alemannic dialects (cf. Nübling 1992; Section 2.2.1), Pomattertitsch possesses a very rich pronominal system of both strong and weak (clitic) units. Dal Negro (2004: 166) notes that 2nd person singular pronouns "can be more easily omitted", which, according to her is a fact that can be "explained historically, since traces of the form *du* are included in the verb ending *–st/-scht* as a result of the misinterpretation of word borders and of a strengthening of the ending itself (Admoni 1990: 28)." In her analysis of the unstressed subject pronouns > clitic cycle that takes place the Pomattertitsch dialect, Dal Negro (2004: 167) maintains that "the grammaticality of zero subject sentences provides the necessary background that allows the interpretation of verb-subject clitic sequences as units of verbs followed by its ending in which no explicit subject is present and the information on personal agreement is carried out by the new agglutinative endings." Once again, we do not observe this trend in Misionero German, mainly due to the fact that neither Alemannic nor Bavarian dialects serve as one of the primary source tongues for the dialect.[8] Although Dal Negro (2004: 167) claims to be witnessing the development of "an entirely new system of verb morphology" in the Pomattertitsch dialect, there is no evidence of this currently taking place in Misionero German.

Lastly, we consider recent research on Mòcheno, a heritage dialect spoken in Northern Tirol with Central Bavarian heritage. Cognola (2009, 2013) classifies Mòcheno as an "asymmetric *pro*-drop" language, due to the fact that null-subjects are only manifest in the Mòcheno dialect in matrix clauses. As Cognola (2013: 169) explains for the structural conditions responsible for licensing null-subjects in the dialect:

> "... the syntax of embedded clauses is crucially important for the understanding of the V2 phenomenon. The presence of a complementizer in CP is expected to interfere with either the syntactic position of the finite verb or the distribution of root phenomena. In German, for instance, main and embedded clauses are characterized by an asymmetry in the position of the finite verb (den Besten 1983; Tomaselli 1990, 2004; Haider 2010 a.o.); in Old Romance languages, on the other hand, the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses manifests in the distribution of pro drop. As discussed by Benincà (1984), in Old Romance pro is only

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8 At least in the 2nd person singular form associated with pro-drop is not restricted to these two dialects, but occurs in all major dialect groups (cf. Weiß 2005). We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this distinction.

> licensed in Spec,AgrSP if the finite verb is in CP, i.e. in the main declarative clause, not when
> it is in an embedded clause, where it is assumed to remain in $AgrS^O$. In the later case the
> subject is obligatory and is assumed to appear in Spec,AgrSP. Benincà calls this distribution
> of pro drop, "asymmetric pro drop""

According to this analysis, *pro*-drop cannot be licensed in embedded clauses in
Mòcheno due to the fact that in embedded clauses the finite verb does not move to
the left periphery of the clause, thus preventing the licensing of *pro*. Interestingly,
the conditions and restrictions for licensing *pro*-drop in Mòcheno appear to be the
exact opposite to those observed in Pomattertitsch and in the contemporary
continental German dialects, and is just cause for a more detailed investigation
of a more extensive cross-dialect comparison of heritage varieties of German and
their pro-drop parameters. For our immediate purposes, however, once again the
situation in Mòcheno appears to have little influence on our analysis of null-
subjects (and null objects) in Misionero German, due to the fact that *pro*-drop can
appear in both matrix and embedded clauses. In conclusion, what our findings
from the Misionero German data may perhaps share with those noted by Cognola
(2009, 2013) in the Mòcheno dialect, is that the shift in licensing *pro*-drop, albeit
an "asymmetric" version of the parameter, is the result of two conflicting gram-
mars in the development and contemporary processing (on the part of individual
heritage speakers) affecting the heritage grammar.

4 Null arguments in L1 Misionero German

Although it is not possible to ascertain with any degree of certainty how
pervasive the null subject and null object parameter is in the grammar of
Misionero German based on the sociolinguistic format of our elicitation tasks,
the number of tokens exhibiting either null subjects (n = 21) or null objects
(n = 5) by the majority of our speakers (n = 13) suggests this phenomenon is
most likely not a common feature of this grammar and represents some sort of
parsing strategy that multiple speakers of this language community frequently
employ as an L2 (and L3) transfer effect. Even though at this point in our
research on this topic we are not in a position to hypothesize whether the
presence of null arguments is on the rise in Misionero German, the very fact
that speakers freely produce these forms is noteworthy to document and study
further. For example, consider the environments in which null subjects can
appear in Misionero German. As mentioned in the previous section, these

examples differ considerably from what is attested in other non-standard vari-
eties of German. First, compare examples (7) – (10) below:

(7)   *Pro*-drop (subject initial position)[9]
      [Ø] hat uns jelernt, Deutsch [zu] schreiben...und die Konfirmation <u>haben</u> wir
      <u>gekriegt</u>
      pro has us taught, German [to] write and the confirmation have we
      received
      von Deutsch, nicht?
      from German, not
      '[He] taught us, (how) (to) to write in German...and we received the/our
      confirmation in German, correct?'

(8)   *Pro*-drop (subject in second position)
      Denn <u>wollt</u> er mich in die Schul <u>tun</u>, hier war ich schon 9 Jahr, und frieher
      then wanted he me in the school do/send, here was I already 9 year(s)
      (old), and earlier
      <u>war</u> das so gewesen, wenn sie mal iwwer Zeit par Jahr <u>waren</u> 12-13 Jahre
      <u>musste</u> [Ø]
      was that so been, when they then again time a.few year(s) were 12-13 years
      must *pro*
      in de Ross <u>arbeiten</u>.
      on the farm work

'They he wanted to send me to school, (and) here I was already 9 years old, and
back then it was so/customary, that when they reached the age of 12-13, [they]
needed to work on the farm.'[10]

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9 Schmitz et al. (2011: 212) note that "in German, subject drop interacts only with the left
periphery [of a matrix clause]" and functions as a source of topic-drop. As pointed out by an
anonymous reviewer, this statement only holds when subject drop is associated with some form
of discourse topic interpretation (cf. Fries 1988) due to the fact that in German dialects as well as
in older stages of German, *pro*-drop is only possible post-verbally in matrix clauses (cf. Axel and
Weiß 2010, 2011). As evidenced by the other data samples from Misionero German (cf. (7) – (10)),
null subjects can appear in other positions and are not limited by this restriction.
10 The observant reader will notice that the dropped subject (= 3rd person plural) does not
agree with the modal verb with respect to person, which is inflected for 3rd person SINGULAR
agreement. This may be related to the vernacular Brazilian Portuguese reduction substitution of
all finite verb forms except 1st-person singular with the 3rd-person singular, which serves as a
default form. It is this paradigmatic contraction which has been implicated in the high rate of
overt subject pronoun expression in Brazilian Portuguese as compared with European varieties.

(9)   *Pro*-drop (subject in third position)
    In Brazilen <u>haben</u> [Ø] Propaganda <u>gemacht</u>, sie sollen die die deutschen Leut
    sollen nach
    in Brazil have *pro* propaganda made, they should the the German people
    should to
    Brazilen   kommen fer Arbeit.
    Brazil   come   for   work
    '(They) made propaganda in Brazil, (that) they, the German people, should
    come to Brazil for work.'

(10) Pro-drop (subject in a subordinate clause)
    Als [Ø] in die Schul <u>ging</u>, <u>haben</u> sie <u>aufjehert</u>....<u>haben</u> sie das <u>vergessen</u>.
    as *pro* in the school went, have they stopped have they that forgotten
    'When [they] went to school, they stopped...they forgot that.'

Examples (7) – (10) illustrate that referential *pro*-drop is attested in matrix clauses, which, although possible in earlier historical forms of German (e.g. Old High German (OHG)), is possible in contemporary German dialects that require the presence of an inflected complementizer or the presence of pronominal agreement in the complementizer position (i.e., Agr-in-C obtained by raising inflected verb to the initial clausal position) for *pro*-drop to take place. Furthermore, subjects can appear in a variety of different positions in the matrix clauses, occupying initial position (ex. 7), second position (ex. 8), and third position (ex. 9) respectively.[11] Unlike the Mòcheno dialect, which only exhibits "asymmetric *pro*-drop" where null subjects only appear in matrix clauses, example (10) shows that null subjects can also appear in subordinate clauses; notably without the presence of any inflected complementizer (because Misionero German does not appear to license c-agreement). In summary, Misionero German licenses a version of *pro*-drop unique from that attested in other varieties of dialectal and contact German.

    Finally, in addition to the myriad of environments that *pro*-drop applies to in Misionero German, object-drop can also take place – a cross-linguistic trait that, to the best of our knowledge, is unattested in non-standard varieties of German:

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11 According to an anonymous reviewer, structurally, at least second and third position are identical; namely, they are in the so-called Wackernagel position - which is the position immediately following the finite verb in matrix clauses and the complementizer in subordinate clauses. Therefore, in is perhaps possible to analyse the sentence initial cases of *pro*-drop in the same way, if one assumes V-first sentences in these cases adhering to the following structure in (8) (i.e. "hat *pro* uns jelernt ..."/V *pro* pronoun part).

(11) object-drop

Aber man <u>will</u> sie nicht mit [Ø] zwing[en], weil sie <u>sein</u> jetzt in die Schule.
but one wants them not with *pro* force, because they are now in the school
'But one doesn't want them to force them with it (=language), because they are now current in school.'

The possibility of licensing null objects as well as the wide array of environments in which *pro*-drop can occur in Misionero German requires an explanation separate from what has been proposed in the literature for contemporary continental dialects of non-standard German and instances of other (moribund) German-speech enclaves in extreme contact situations. An anonymous reviewer raises the interesting point that this assertion is only partially correct, because *pro*-drop is in most cases restricted to the post-verbal position in matrix clauses - as in other German varieties. MG clearly differs from these other Germanic dialects in that MG *pro*-drop seems not to be related to 'pronominal' agreement (in the sense of Weiß 2005), thus resembling more Old High German than the modern dialects.

5 Multiple activation, conjoined grammars and future research

The instances of null arguments documented in our Misionero German recordings seem to suggest that all three source grammars (e.g. L1 heritage German, Brazilian Portuguese, and Spanish) are active (to some extent) in the speech of these multilingual speakers. This hypothesis is in line with current psycholinguistic research concerning the activation and integration of multiple aspects of competing grammar systems in on-line production tasks (see e.g. Kootstra et al. 2009, 2010; Kroll et al. 2006). For example, cross-linguistic syntactic priming studies comparing two languages which share at least some word order traits have shown that the most successful priming typically occurs when word order is shared between both languages (e.g. Bernolet et al. 2007; Hartsuiker et al. 2004; Lobell and Bock 2003).

We suggest that the most likely culprit of the inclusion of some null arguments in Misionero German is due to the prolonged activation of the dominant language/L2 (i.e. Brazilian Portuguese) and L3 (i.e. Spanish) and the permanent effect of this continued activation of these grammars often in place of the heritage L1 Misionero German grammar system over the course of the last half

century (if not longer). According to this line of thought, the simultaneous activation of these multiple grammar systems coupled with the recessive status of the L1 heritage grammar functions as the conduit for introducing null arguments into Misionero German.

This "search for common information" has been at the heart of research on multilingual speech for the last half century. Research on multilingual speech from a variety of different theoretical perspectives (especially those focusing on code-mixing; e.g. Lipski 1978, 1985, 2009; Pfaff 1979; Poplack 1980; Poplack et al. 1989; Myers-Scotton 1993/1997, 2002; Deuchar 2005) has observed the strong tendency to avoid (in production tasks) and the paucity of (in corpora analyses) instances of 'language clashes' (in the words of Kootstra et al. 2010), where two (or more) source languages exhibit typologically-contrastive preferences for a particular grammatical parameter such as canonical word order, or, for the sake of our current investigation, the ability to license null (referential) subject and object pronouns. If all aspects of competing grammatical information are hypothetically active and available for multilinguals "this disruption of the co-activation" of conflicting information "can hamper the full resonance within and between speakers that enables alignment to occur" (Kootstra et al. 2010: 230).

Although the existence of null arguments in our pilot data from Misiones German speakers indicates that these structures occasionally occur, their relatively low frequency in our production data seem to suggest that the presence of null arguments is not (yet) a permanent fixture in the Misiones German grammar. Controlled experimental evidence will be necessary in the future to determine the degree to which constructions with null arguments are acceptable to these speakers. Additional factors beyond the structural distribution of null arguments such as morphological case marking and semantic/pragmatic readings will explicate what additional linguistic factors play a potential role. These caveats notwithstanding, the examples here from the natural speech of Misionero German-speakers highlight linguistic behavior that is consistent in other varieties of language contact that warrant additional future investigation.

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