

# Genericity in the grammars of Romanian, French, and English trilinguals

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## Previous research

- Research carried out with bilingual adults/children has shown cross-linguistic influence from English to the Romance languages.
  - For example, Serratrice et al. (2009) show acceptance of ungrammatical bare plural noun phrases in generic contexts in Italian in bilinguals Italian-English children.
- English-Spanish adult heritage speakers of Spanish also show acceptance of ungrammatical bare plural NPs and preference for the specific interpretation of definite plurals (Montrul and Ionin, 2012).
- These results point to unidirectional cross-linguistic influence from English to the Romance language.

# Our study + Research Questions

- Our study examines trilinguals with two romance languages (Romanian, heritage language, and French, third language) and English as the majority language.
- We examine the interpretation of genericity in French, English, and Romanian to address the following research questions:
  - 1) Do Romanian heritage speakers know the restrictions on bare plurals in their three languages?
  - 2) is there evidence of cross-linguistic interaction in the use of bare plurals?

# Some facts about NPs in subject position in Romanian, English, and French

- The interpretation of NPs in English, French, and Romanian, involves both morphosyntax (bare, definite, or indefinite determiner) and a semantic interpretation (specific or generic). Under Chiercha's Nominal Mapping Parameter (NMP), languages are classified based on whether bare nouns can appear as arguments.
- ENGLISH:
  - genericity in canonical argument positions such as subject is expressed by bare plurals while specificity is expressed by definite plurals.
- FRENCH and ROMANIAN:
  - bare plurals are ungrammatical in subject position. Plural indefinites can be generic or specific (depending on context).
  - Singular definites can also be used in generic or specific contexts. Differently from French and English, Romanian definites are enclitic on the noun.

# Some facts about NPs in subject position in Romanian, English, and French

		generic	specific
ENG	Bears eat fish	✓	✗
	The bears eat fish.	✗	✓
ROM	*Ursi mănâncă peste.	-	-
	Ursii mănâncă peste.	✓	✓
FRE	*Ours mangent du poisson.	-	-
	<u>Les</u> ours mangent du poisson.	✓	✓

# Methodology

## PARTICIPANTS

- trilingual children between 8-11 years-old (Romanian, heritage language/English, majority language/French, L3, immersion) born and raised in Toronto, Canada.
- 11 children tested

## TASKS

- Children were tested in all three languages (Romanian, English, and French)
- Picture Task looking at **generic** and **specific** interpretation of NPs in subject position

# Table 1. Picture Task sample

## Generic condition

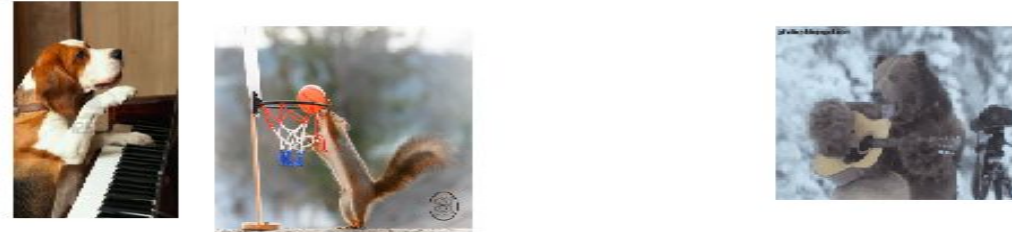


### Stimuli question samples:

In general, what animals drink milk?

In general, what animals live in the jungle?

## Specific condition



### Stimuli question samples:

What animal is riding a bicycle?

What animal is eating ice cream?

Table 2 Results (in percentages) of target forms in the Generic and Specific conditions

# Preliminary results

Language	Target form in generic condition	% correct in generic condition	Target Form in Specific Condition	% correct in Specific Condition
Trilinguals				
Romanian	Definite PL/Definite SG	42.3	Definite Singular	61.9
English	Bare PL	86.6	Definite Singular	57.1
French	Definite PL/Definite SG	85.2	Definite Singular	95.4
Monolingual Romanian		77	Definite singular	81



# Preliminary results

- RQ 1: Are children capable of using the target forms in each language? >> if yes, we expect bare plurals in English, and definite plurals (and some definite singulars) in French and Romanian.
  - It looks like children are almost target in English and French, using mostly bare plurals in English and definites in French. In Romanian however, children use target forms only almost half of the times, while more than half the times they use non-target bare nouns.
- RQ 2: Given that English uses bare plurals, while Romanian and French use mainly definite plurals (plus definite singulars), would we see interference from Romanian/French into English? >> if yes, we predict definite plurals in English.
  - There were no definite plural answers in English
- RQ 3: Are children capable of differentiating the type of DP between generic and specific contexts?
  - English: it seems that the distribution of nominals between two contexts indicates differentiation:
  - It is clear that the generic context elicits a majority of target forms. However, in the specific context, 25% of answers were given with a bare singular (and the rest with the indefinite determiner). There were no definite plurals (no definite at all actually) used in the generic context. We know from Pérez-Leroux et al. that anglophone children age 4-6 still interpret some definites as generic (“definite generic errors”).

# Preliminary conclusions

- BARE NOMINALS
- Bare nominals in plural are grammatical in the subject position only in English, in the generic context. We see that bare forms are used in a non-target way in the generic context in Romanian too. >> **WHY? Possible influence from English bare nominals in subject position in generic condition.**
- However, for Romanian and English, children also use bare nominals in the specific condition (singular bare nominals). It is interesting to note that the singular bare nominals are expressed as a pro-form in English, and as an enclitic form in Romanian. The position of this determiner does not seem to matter, as both languages show a similar proportion of bare nominals in the specific condition. **WHY??**

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