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Assessment of the linguistic development of Friulian-Italian bilingual children

FEDERICA MAURO* & ALESSANDRA BURELLI*

Summary. The aim of the present study was to assess the linguistic development of Friulian-Italian bilingual children by means of tests which analyse both the comprehension and production abilities in each language. The study concerns 8 subjects attending the first year of Primary School in Friuli Venezia Giulia, an Italian region where Friulian is considered a minority language and Italian the official and majority language. The main purpose of the investigation was to find out the dominant language of each child and the level (phonology, syntax, lexicon) at which the largest number of cross-linguistic influences occur.
The tests were selected from a battery for the assessment of language disorders in children with Italian as first language. The data collected show that only one of the examined subjects can be considered Friulian-dominant. For some subjects the dominance of Friulian was only evident at the comprehension level and, in general, the majority of the children can be considered balanced bilinguals, characterized by a tendency towards mixing and switching. Moreover, the data collected point out that the degree of competence in each language, if compared with the normative values for monolingual subjects, turns out to be on the average.
We noticed that the influence of Italian on Friulian is very strong at the lexical level. On the other hand, Friulian does not show traces of the influence of Italian at the syntactic level and sometimes Friulian influences Italian at the syntactic level.
As it is common for a minority language to be influenced at the lexical level by the majority and more prestigious language, on the basis of the data collected we can assume that the Italianisation of the Friulian lexicon is a widespread phenomenon concerning the language spoken by the whole linguistic community and not only the language of children and young people.

Keywords. Friulian-Italian bilingualism, assessment of linguistic abilities, lexicon, syntax.

* DSFSS, University of Udine, Italy. E-mail alessandra.burelli@dsfss.uniud.it

Introduction. This study aims at assessing the linguistic abilities of a group of children attending the first year of Primary School and who are used to communicating also in Friulian. As far as is known, this is the first time that children with Friulian as first language participate in a study to investigate the development of their L1 and L2. The studies carried out so far on the linguistic development of Friulian-speaking subjects are, indeed, clinical studies of patients with specific language and speech disorders (Fabbro & Frau 2001, and Fabbro & Skrap 2002). Nowadays it is almost impossible to find monolingual Friulian children who use only Friulian after the age of three. All the children who can understand and speak this language, can understand and speak Italian too, which is the official language, used by institutions and taught in schools. This means that a study on the linguistic competence in Friulian necessarily involves bilingual subjects.

One of the main purposes of our research was to discover for each child which of the two languages is the dominant one. Assuming that "balanced bilinguality (...) is a question of state of equilibrium reached by the levels of competence attained in the two languages as compared to monolingual competence" (Hammers & Blanc 1990), we tried to find out in which of the two languages each subject shows higher comprehension and production skills. We then attempted to find out any possible cross-linguistic influence and determine at which levels (phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactical) the two languages were more likely to influence each other. A large empirical evidence suggests that bilingual children are able to differentiate between the two languages early, and some studies have suggested that separation of two grammars also implies autonomous development without interaction (De Houwer 1995). However, current views are more open to the possibility of interaction and cross-linguistic influence between languages (Döpke 2000). The development of separate grammars in bilingual children does not preclude cross-linguistic influence, which is only to be expected whenever two languages are simultaneously in contact during development. What is at issue is the nature of influence and whether it constitutes transfer, i.e. "incorporation of a grammatical property into one language from the other" (Paradis & Genesee 1996). Then, one major question which current research addresses is whether and to what extent interaction between the two languages occurs, and in which subcomponents of grammar.

As far as is known, there is no measuring instrument yet allowing to study the linguistic development of Friulian-Italian bilingual people. We thus decided to use a test originally devised to discover and describe specific language impairments in Italian monolingual children, and to adapt it to our specific purposes.

Materials and methods

1. The subjects. Participants were four girls and four boys aged between 6

and 7. They were selected among all the children that during the 2001/2002 school year attended the 1st grade of Primary School in Cisterna (Municipality of Coseano, Province of Udine, Italy). To identify a number of children who could both understand and speak Friulian, we administered a questionnaire to the parents to obtain information about the language(s) spoken by the father, the mother, the relatives and the child within the family. The teachers were asked about the language(s) spoken by the children at school, during classes and free play activities. Then, we selected the children who, on the basis of the answers given by the parents, are constantly exposed to Friulian and can speak it fluently. Although each of the eight selected subjects has their own linguistic background, they share some important features: they have all been exposed to Friulian since birth; their parents speak only Friulian with each other; Friulian is the most spoken language in their families. The results of the questionnaire are summarized in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1 some parents also speak Italian with their children. This fact seems to support what emerged from a recent study about the socio-linguistic condition of Friulian, i.e. that very often parents speak Friulian with each other and Italian with their children (Picco, 2002).

2. The measuring instrument. The measuring instrument used for the study includes five tests taken from a wider battery put together by Fabbro in 1998 and called *Esame del linguaggio nel bambino dai 4 ai 12 anni* (Battery of language assessment in children from 4 to 12 years – 4-12 years Test).

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire administered to parents.

	First language used with the child			Language currently spoken with the child			Language spoken by the parents				Language spoken by the child within the family				Language spoken by the child with his/her peers	
	by mother	by father	by relatives	by mother	by father	by relatives	with each other	with relatives	with friends	with strangers	with mother	with father	with relaitves	with strangers	at home	at school
S1, MF	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	I	F	F	F	I	F	F/I
S2, FS	F	F	F	F/I	F	F/I	F	F	F	F/I	F/I	F	F/I	I	F	F/I
S3, BN	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	I	F	F	F	I	F	F/I
S4, GM	F	F	F	F/I	F/I	F	F	F	F	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I
S5, BD	F/I	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F/I	F/I	F	F	F	F/I	F	F/I
S6, DL	F/I	F/I	F	F/I	F/I	F	F	F	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I
S7, TM	I	F	F	F/I	F	F	F	F	F	I	F/I	F	F	I	F/I	F/I
S8, ME	F	F	F/I	F/I	F/I	F/I	F	F	F	I	F	F	F	I	F	F/I

The *4-12 years Test* consists of a number of subtests originating from pre-existing batteries (De Agostini et al. 1998; Chilosi & Cipriani 1998; Paradis 1987) and other tests conceived by Fabbro. The test aims at finding out and analysing language disorders in Italian monolingual children, and therefore it is not a specific instrument for the assessment of linguistic skills of normal bilingual children. However, as it had been adapted into Friulian by Fabbro in 1999, we decided to make use of the two versions (the Italian and the Friulian one) to investigate the linguistic abilities of the children in each language.

In our study we did not consider articulation and repetition tests nor production and comprehension tests as we wanted to speed up test administration and prevent the children from getting bored. The tests we used include: a semantic comprehension test, a test of grammatical comprehension, a naming test, a semantic fluency test and finally the *Nest Story Description*. The semantic comprehension test assesses comprehension of words (adjectives, substantives and verbs). The child is shown 32 pages of illustrations one at a time. On each sheet there are four pictures. The examiner pronounces a word corresponding to one of the four pictures and the child is asked to point to the right picture. The test includes both easy and difficult words as age limits range from 4 to 12 years. A point is scored for every correct answer, while no scores are given for wrong or missing answers (*British Picture Vocabulary Scale*, in De Agostini et al. 1998)

The grammar comprehension test considers 8 different grammatical structures in 76 clauses (Chilosi & Cipriani, 1995). In this case too the child is shown an illustrated sheet with 4 pictures, one at a time. Then, the examiner reads a clause and asks the subject to point to the corresponding picture. If the child gives a wrong answer the examiner reads the clause again and records both answers on the "assessment sheet". If the child immediately corrects him/herself without any prompting from the examiner, the wrong answer is not taken into consideration. Unlike the other tests, wrong answers contribute to the score. Correct answers are not scored, the child obtains 0.5 points if he/she misses the answer the first time, 1.5 points if he/she gives the wrong answer after the second reading.

The naming test allows assessment of the child's lexical abilities (De Agostini et al., 1998). The child is shown 36 images one at a time and is asked to say the name of what is represented by those images within 10 seconds. Nevertheless, the examiner can stimulate an answer from the child even after this time, but in this case the answer is not considered valid. A score is attributed for every correct name pronounced by the child. No score is attributed for wrong or missing denominations and for the answers given after the time-out. In our specific case, we considered as mistakes not only wrong denominations, but also the words pronounced in the "wrong" language (in Italian during the test in Friulian or

viceversa) or mixed words, i.e. words made up of elements of both languages.

The semantic fluency test includes two tests (De Agostini et al. 1998). In the first one the child is asked to tell the names of all the animals he knows; in the second one s/he is asked to list the names of things that can be found in a house. Each part lasts 90 seconds. Not all the words pronounced count towards the score, only the ones pronounced during the "best" 60 seconds (i.e. in the most productive 60 seconds). For each of the two tests the number of right words pronounced by the child is considered. Then, the two partial results are summed up to obtain the total score. Proper names, repetition and words in the wrong language are not considered.

The results of the first four tests are interpreted on the basis of normative values used for the French and Italian versions referring to the 4-12 age range. They allow to understand whether the performance of the child can be considered as normal, below the average or above the average. The normative values refer to the Italian version of the test as established by administering the test to children whose L1 was Italian. Therefore, the assessment of the development of Friulian in these children is based principally on the comparison of the results obtained in each language.

During the *'Nest Story Description* the child is shown a sequence of six illustrations making up a short story (Paradis 1987). The child is asked to tell the story with her/his own words on the basis of the illustrations. The examiner should not intervene during the narration. At most, he/she can encourage the child to continue the narration, if they should stop. Even if the children usually produce very short narrations, these can supply a lot of information about lexical and grammatical development. The test has to be recorded, transcribed, and analysed according to the principles suggested by Paradis (1987) and including the mean length of utterances (MLU), the type/token ratio, phonological, lexical and syntactic mistakes, the number of coordinate and subordinate clauses. There are no normative values for this test. On the basis of the information collected, for each subject we compared the narration in Italian with the narration in Friulian. Then, all the stories were compared to verify the presence of common linguistic features shared by all children.

3. Administration. The Friulian and Italian versions of the test were administered by two different examiners. This choice, far from being accidental, is determined by quite precise reasons. In bilingual children language choice is strongly bound to the interlocutor, as children usually "tag" each person with a particular language (Grosjean, 1982). Children are inclined to speak language A with the people "tagged" as "language A speakers", whereas they speak language B with the interlocutors addressing them in language B. When the language-person bond is broken, the child becomes upset, and, generally, s/he is not willing to accept the

language switch. For this reason, we decided to apply the method *one person-one language* during the test administration. There are also other factors that can play a role in language selection such as language choice but we simply attempted to exclude one of the most relevant. As will be seen later, the application of the method one person-one language did not prevent some subjects from making the "wrong" language choice.

The tests were administered between February-March 2002. We started administering the test in its Friulian version to four subjects. Then, the Italian version was administered to the remaining four subjects. After some time we administered the Friulian test to the children who had already been tested in Italian and the Italian test to the ones who had previously been tested in Friulian.

Results and discussion. The results of the first four tests are reported in Table 2. One asterisk (*) indicates that the performance is below one standard deviation (<1SD), whereas two asterisks (**) indicate results below two standard deviations (<2SDs). In the studies on monolingual impaired children, standard deviations are parameters that allow to understand whether the development of a linguistic skill is on the average, below the average (between 1SD and 2SDs), or seriously below the average (<2SDs). As the test has been standardized for monolingual children and only with reference to Italian, results below the average do not indicate, in our analysis, the presence of language disorders.

On the semantic comprehension test all the subjects scored well in both languages. Five children (ME, DL, GM, BN, FS) scored above the average in Italian. Five subjects (TM, BD, FS, BN, MF) seemed to be more skilled in Friulian than in Italian and two of them (MF,BD) obtained a definitely higher score on the Friulian test than on the Italian.

On the syntactic comprehension

Table 2. Scores on comprehension and production tests.

	FRIULIAN				ITALIAN			
	Semantic compr.	Syntactic compr.	Naming	Semantic fluency	Semantic compr.	Syntactic compr.	Naming	Semantic fluency
MF	25/32	4,5/114	30/36	36	17/32	17,5/114**	22/36**	28
FS	24/32	5,5/114	16/36**	27	21/32	6/114	31/36	23
BN	28/32	8,5/114	29/36*	16	24/32	12/114	29/36	21
GM	24/32	7,5/114	28/36**	15	25/32	2/114	33/36	14*
BD	26/32	4,5/114	8/36**	18	17/32	7/114	32/36	24
DL	21/32	16/114**	32/36	24	23/32	9,5/114*	34/36	34
TM	23/32	13,5/114**	6/36**	0**	19/32	11,5/114*	31/36	19
ME	17/32	5,5/114	28/36	20	21/32	2,5/114	27/36**	25

test in Italian two subjects (ME, GM) scored above the average, three (FS, BD, BN) on the average, and three below the average (MF, TM, DL). Four children (BD, BN, FS, MF) showed a better syntactic comprehension in Friulian than in Italian. On the same test in Friulian two subjects (MF, BD) performed above the average, four (GM, ME, FS, BN) on the average, and two (TL, DM) below the average.

On the naming test in Italian two subjects (GM, DL) scored above the average, three (TM, BD, FS) on the average, and three below the average (BN, ME, MF). On the same test in Friulian only two subjects (MF, DL) obtained scores falling within the average values, whereas all the other children scored below the average. It is worth pointing out that three subjects (TM, BD, FS) obtained much higher scores in Italian: In fact, throughout the whole test in Friulian or just part of it, these children had been speaking the "wrong" language.

On the whole, these children show good semantic fluency: in Italian six subjects (MF, ME, BN, BD, FS, DL) scored above the average, one subject (TM) on the average and one (GM) slightly below the average. Four subjects (MF, ME, DL, FS) obtained very good results both in Italian and in Friulian: these are the only four subjects with scores above the average in Friulian. Of the remaining four subjects, three (BN, BD, GM) scored on the average and one (TM) definitely below. Three children (MF, FS, GM) obtained higher scores in Friulian than in Italian.

The errors. We will now consider the most recurring errors and try to explain which factors could have determined them.

On the semantic comprehension test the most frequent mistakes occurred with words which could actually be difficult to understand for 7-years-old. For example, in the Italian version many subjects cannot figure out the meaning of the word *deambulazione*-'deambulation', and in the Friulian version *imprestut*-'tool' turns out to be the most problematic item. According to the results, in some cases, the Friulian translation and the corresponding Italian word do not have the same degree of difficulty for the children: the Friulian *i conte*-'he confides in her', for example, seems to be by far more common than the Italian *si confida*-'he confides in her'. The same can be said for *deambulazione~talpinâ,* both meaning 'deambulation': while the first word is very problematic for many children, only three subjects did not understand the corresponding Friulian word.

On the syntactic comprehension test, the mistakes made by the children were independent of any particular structure and varied from child to child.

On the other hand, the naming test results are very interesting as they reveal the presence of cross-linguistic influences or interferences (Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1956). Many of these mistakes are indeed bound to the language, and can be classified as cases of code-switching or borrowing (Grosjean 1982). They are to be

found especially on the Friulian test and consist mostly of borrowings from Italian, which are used without any morphological or phonological adaptation: that gives cause to assume that Italian has a great influence on the Friulian lexicon. The most common mistake (made by all the children) concerns the denomination of "pink": all the subjects pronounce the Italian *rosa*-'pink' instead of the Friulian *colôr di rose*-'pink'. This fact seems to be relevant as it may be indicative of a gradual change within the Friulian lexicon. It may be that the word *rosa* is nowadays much more widespread and used than in the past also among adult Friulian speakers, whereas *colôr di rose* may be about to disappear. This hypothesis still needs to be verified but at this time no lexical frequency index for oral Friulian is available.

"Language errors" are present on the Italian test too, even if they are not so frequent as in the Friulian version (15 errors in the Italian test vs. 75 errors in the Friulian test). A common error is the word *tazza*-'cup' used instead of *bicchiere*-'glass' with reference to the picture of a glass. In this case the mistake is due to the presence – in the two languages – of two "false friends", that is of two words *tazza* and *tace* which, though having a very similar phonological form, have two different meanings. In fact, the Italian word *tazza* means *cup*, whereas the Friulian *tace* means *glass*.

Wrong denominations are mostly cases of hyperonimy (Italian: *mobile*-'piece of furniture' instead of *tavolo*-'table', *dito*-'finger' instead of *pollice*-'thumb'; Friulian: *dêt*-'finger' instead of *poleâr*-'thumb'), hyponimy (*blue jeans/jeans* instead of Friul.: *bregons* and It.: *pantaloni* -'trousers', *tonno*-'tuna' instead of *pesce*-'fish'), or substitution with other words belonging to the same semantic field (It: *aereo*-'airplane' instead of *elicottero*-'elicopter', *furgone*-'van' instead of *camion*-'truck', *nave*-'ship' instead of *barca*-'boat'; Friul.: *banc*-'desk' or *taule*-'table' instead of *scrivanie*-'bureau', *taulin*-'small table' instead of *taule*-'table'). In the cases of hyponimy exemplified above and in some cases of substitution with words with a similar meaning (It.: *ciotola*-'bowl' instead of *scodella*-'mug', *lepre*-'hare' instead of *coniglio*-'rabbit'; Friul.: *cite*-'bowl' instead of *scudiele*-'mug', *sedon*-'spoon' instead of *gucjarin*-'teaspoon') the answers were considered valid as the words pronounced matched with the represented pictures. *Blue-jeans* was accepted also in Friulian because this loanword is now part of the Friulian lexicon. The fact that on the Friulian test some subjects obtained results below the average is consistent with the results of the other production tests that reveal how Italian exerts a big influence on the Friulian lexicon.

The semantic fluency test shows the children's tendency to switch from one linguistic code to the other, although this linguistic behavior is more evident in some subjects than in others. On this test two children (MF, FS) often alternated the two languages and a child (BD) spoke exclusively in Italian in the first part of the test (*Bestiis* 'Animals') and only

switched to Friulian in the second part (*Robis* 'Objects'). On the Friulian test some mixed words were recorded, made up of an Italian lexeme and a Friulian morpheme (e.g. **bambules* 'dolls', **forchetes* 'forks', **armadis* 'wardrobes', **mondisies* 'rubbish', **oches* 'geese'). Petersen (1988) maintains that the insertion of morphemes belonging to language B into lexemes belonging to language A is a sign of the dominance of language B. Our findings cannot confirm this assumption for two reasons: because of the limited evidence and because in our case the mixed words seem rather to be a consequence of a lexical gap in language B. The presence of bound morphemes in a language cannot alone determine the dominance of that language. There are indeed many other linguistic and sociolinguistic factors which should be taken into account in order to establish which language is the weak one and which is the strong one (Romaine 1989).

Code-switching is a widespread linguistic behaviour among bilingual people. Code-switching may be caused by a momentary or permanent lexical gap or by the fact that the subject is more familiar with a word in one language than with the same word in the other language. Practically, the bilingual subject chooses the more accessible or more 'available' word (Mackey 1970, p. 203). Very often bilinguals develop a specific vocabulary related to a particular topic only in one of the two languages. This happens because each language is automatically associated with particular experiences and precise contexts. Of course, it may also be possible that in some speech domains bilinguals can master both languages equally well. For example, the children involved in our study know the names of different referents both in Italian and in Friulian. As for the words pronounced in the wrong language we assume that some of the words bound to familiar contexts and everyday life may be known by the children only in Friulian, whereas the words pronounced by the subjects only in Italian have been probably learned at school or from the media. For example, words like *puiese-*'bug', *gjaline-* 'hen', *cunin-*'rabbit', *purcit-*'pig', *vacje-*'cow', *carotes-*'carrots', *pomodoros-* 'tomatoes', *pevarons-*'peppers', *civoles-*'onios', *ai-*'garlic', *civolin-*'chive', *butilie-*'bottle', *roses-*'flowers', *stue-* 'stove', that were pronounced during the Italian test, are likely to be actually known and used by some children only in Friulian, as they are part of the everyday lexicon. It is also plausible that some subjects hear and utter words like *leopardo-*'leopard', *bue-*'ox', *gufi-*'owls', *scoiattolo-*'squirrel', *scimmia-* 'monkey', *aquila-*'eagle', pronounced during the Friulian test, mostly in Italian. However, as can be seen from Table 1, most of the subjects live at home in a bilingual environment. Therefore, even very ordinary words could seem to them more familiar and more available in Italian (for example, words like *topo* 'mouse', *topi-* 'mice', *coniglio* 'rabbit', *finestre* 'windows' were pronounced by some children in Italian also during the test in Friulian).

The *'Nest Story' Description* is

probably the test that provides the most information about the way these children speak. The "Friulian" test of TM was not taken into consideration as during the testing the child only spoke in Italian. From a syntactical point of view, the very first thing to be noted is that in the narrations produced there are more coordinate than subordinate clauses. This inclination toward the coordination is stronger when the children speak in Friulian. In the narrations in Friulian the children produced 9 subordinates out of 26 secondary clauses, whereas only produced 12 subordinates in Italian. The most frequent kind of subordinate is the final clause (11 cases: 6 in Friulian, 5 in Italian), followed by relative clauses (2 in Friulian, 4 in Italian), object clauses (1 in Friulian, 2 in Italian) and an indirect interrogative clause. On average, it takes the children longer to tell the story in Italian but this does not mean that they are more precise or more informative in that language. In some cases, in fact, the narrations last longer simply because of many pauses, breaks and repetitions in the sentences.

Table 3. Rates and syntactical features in the narrative production.

		MF	FS	BN	GM	BD	DL	TM	ME
FRIULIAN	Words pronounced	64	45	58	32	70	25	**The subject uses the 'wrong' language**	68
	Words without repetitions	57	42	57	32	65	25		65
	Duration of the narration (in seconds)	27	26	37	20	33	16		48
	Words per minute*	126,7	93,9	92,4	96	118,2	93,8		81,3
	Utterances	6	7	4	5	6	6		6
	MLU (Mean Length of Utterance)	9,5	6	14,3	6,4	10,8	4,2		10,8
	Subordinate clauses	1	2	2	1	1	0		2
	Coordinate clauses	2	3	4	1	2	1		3
ITALIAN	Words pronounced	43	89	53	36	65	38	52	58
	Words without repetitions	40	80	52	36	53	35	49	55
	Duration of the narration (in seconds)	23	69	45	25	67	29	31	35
	Words per minute*	104,3	69,6	69,3	86,4	47,5	72,4	94,8	94,3
	Utterances	7	12	5	5	8	5	5	6
	MLU (Mean Length of Utterance)	5,7	6,7	10,4	7,2	6,6	7	9,8	9,2
	Subordinate clauses	0	4	2	1	1	1	1	2
	Coordinate clauses	2	1	3	1	1	2	1	3

*repetitions were not considered.

Table 3 summarizes the most relevant results emerged from the analysis of the narrations. To determine in which language the children produce the most complex sentences we calculated the mean length of the utterance (MLU). On the basis of this measure we can state that MF, BD and BN produced much longer utterances in Friulian, whereas ME's utterances in Friulian were only slightly longer than the ones in Italian. GM and FS, on the other hand, produced slightly longer utterances in Italian. Finally, the utterances produced by DL in Italian are much longer than those in Friulian.

Also, the data obtained by this test point out that there is a mutual influence between the two languages. Moreover, the influence of Friulian is more evident at the phonological and syntactic levels, whereas the influence of Italian concerns principally the lexicon (consistently with what emerged from the other two production tests).

In the short narrations in Italian the most common error is the substitution of the article *gli* (definite article, m., pl.) in the syntagm *gli uccellini* with the morpheme *i*, that is the masculine plural definite article in Friulian, which can be used both with words beginning with a consonant and words beginning with a vowel. In Italian, on the contrary, the article *gli* is used instead of *I* with words beginning with a vowel or with the cluster *s*+C . In this case, it is worth observing that the use of the article *i* instead of *gli* is indeed a quite widespread habit also among Italian monolingual children and this can be ascribed to the fact that the morpheme *gli* is phonologically more difficult. Moreover, *i* is regularly accepted and used as equivalent of *gli* in the colloquial regional variety of Italian spoken in Friuli-Venezia Giulia as well as in many other Italian regional varieties. A further syntactic error caused by the interference of Friulian is to be found in the sentence **si è rott**a** ***una gamba*** 'he broke his leg', pronounced by the subject ME. As the sentence refers to a masculine subject (*il bambino* 'the child') that has been mentioned in a previous utterance, the correct form should be *si è rott**o** una gamba* 'he broke his leg'. In Friulian the reflexive construction does exist and requires, as in Italian, the agreement between the subject and the past participle of the verb (*si è rot une gjambe*). Moreover, the meaning of a reflexive clause can be rendered through a non-reflexive form which, in this case, would be *al a rot une gjambe* or, alternatively, *al a rote une gjambe* as in Friulian the past participle can optionally agree with the direct object. It is clear that the last mentioned form is the one which has structurally influenced the Italian sentence. Also, the syntactic error given by the pronominal repetition of the indirect object in the sentence **una femina gli ha detto a un uomo* 'a woman told him a man' (subject FS) may have been determined by the interference of Friulian, as in this language the pronominal reiteration of the indirect object is possible and, in some cases, even compulsory. The influence of Friulian can also be per-

ceived in sentences like **lo portano* ***nell'****ospedale* 'they take him in the hospital' (MF) and **lo hanno portato* ***nell'****ospedale* they took him in the hospital (FS), where the use of the preposition *all'* 'to the' instead of *nell'* 'in the' would be more correct. In this case it is more appropriate to speak of microinterferences as the exchanged prepositions have indeed very similar meanings.

An utterance in Italian showing very clearly the influence of Friulian is the following: **lì è l'uomo co la femina* 'here is the man with the woman'. A first error is the omission of the clitic *ci* 'there' before the verb, which is compulsory in Italian but does not exist in Friulian (in Friulian the sentence would be: *lì al è l'om...*). A second error concerns the preposition **co* instead of *con-*'with' which in Italian does not blend with the article (the forms *col* and *colla* are quite unusual), and preserves the final consonant. In Friulian, on the contrary, when the preposition *cun* 'with' is followed by a definite article the final *n* is usually omitted. Further, a rule characterizing Friulian has been applied also to Italian. In the same utterance there is also an error caused by the lexical interference of Friulian, that is the use of the word **femina* to indicate the meaning conveyed by the Italian *donna* 'woman'. This is a morphologically adapted lexical borrowing (the adaptation consist in the substitution of the Friulian inflectional morpheme *-e*, which characterizes the feminine singular, with the corresponding Italian morpheme *-a*). However, it is worth pointing out that the borrowing takes place between two "half-friends" (according to the definition given by Faggin 1997), that is between two words (*femine* 'woman' and *femmina* 'female' in our case) which in the two languages have a similar phonological aspect, have one or more meanings in common, but one of them also has other meanings which are not shared by the other. *Femmina* has indeed a more restricted meaning than *femine*. The child has overextended the meaning of the Italian word in imitation of Friulian. The same error is present in the narration of another subject (FS) with a slight phonological variation. FS pronounces indeed "*femmina*", so that the influence does not concern the phonological level. In other words, the borrowing has not been phonologically modified.

In the narrations in Friulian the interference of Italian takes place mostly at the lexical level. A most widespread error is the pronounciation of the word *arbul* 'tree' as **albur*. On the one hand, the children may have more problems with the pronounciation of the cluster /rb/ than with the pronounciation of the cluster /lb/. On the other hand, the error may be caused by the influence of the Italian *albero* 'tree'. It is even possible that both factors – difficulty in the pronounciation and influence of Italian – contribute to the mistake. One child, FS, pronounces directly the Italian word *albero*. Moreover, in this case *albero* is a trigger word for code-switching. In fact, the child produces the next utterance in Italian and then switches back to Friulian to end the

narration (...***il baston dal*** *albero, /si cade, /cade e si fa male,/ va al pronto-soccorso e va nel letto,...****a curâsi*** '...**the stick of the** tree,/he falls himself,/ he falls and hurts, /he goes to the first aid and he goes to bed,... to be cured'). A further problem concerning the lexicon is the difficulty shown by two subjects (FS, ME) in retrieving the Friulian word *ramaç*-'branch'. As these two subjects cannot find the right word, they use a circumlocution (FS: *il baston dal albero* 'the stick of the tree'; ME: *il spali dal albur* 'the string of the tree'). These two children are not the only ones to have problems with this word. In fact, we noticed that in four cases *ramo* 'branch' is present in the narration in Italian, whereas *ramaç* was mentioned in the narration in Friulian. This may be indicative of a difficulty determined by a lexical gap or by the momentary non-availability of the word. The syntactic interference of Friulian is limited to two cases of microinterference concerning two prepositions: *a si fâs mal* ***a une*** *gjambe* 'he hurts his leg' (in Friulian *a si fâs mal* ***intune*** *gjambe* would be more correct), and *al va a finî* ***al*** *jet* 'he ends up in bed' (the form "*al va a finî* ***tal*** *jet*" is to be preferred in Friulian).

The analysis of the narrations in Friulian provides another point for discussion, which has nothing to do with the phenomena of cross-linguistic influence, but which could be interesting for those researchers concerned with Friulian grammar.

The following sentences raise some considerations: *a lu puartin al pronto-socorso* 'they take him to the first aid' and *a lu an metût sul jet*-'they put him on the bed'. Vanelli asserts that, in Friulian, when a clitic cluster consisting of a subject clitic and an object clitic occurs before a verb, all subject clitics, except the 2nd singular and, optionally, 3rd singular masculine, must be omitted (Vanelli 1997, p. 126). We do not agree with this as it seems to us that the presence of the subject clitic is accepted, in some Friulian variety, also when another object or reflexive pronoun preceeds the verb. The sentences reported above help to demonstrate that the rule described by Vanelli cannot be considered valid at least as far as the 3rd plural is concerned. The sentences pronounced by the children are in perfect Friulian: if these children actually mistook grammatical rules, they were to be considered pathological subjects, which is definitely not the case.

Conclusions. As the study examines a limited number of subjects, its results cannot be generalized and considered valid for all bilingual Friulian-Italian children. However, we have identified some characteristics of the linguistic behaviour of these bilingual children, which could either be corroborated or belied by further studies on the development of language in bilingual Friulian-Italian children.

With regard to the linguistic dominance of our subjects, only one case showed a strong dominance, and precisely of Friulian. MF is the only one who obtained much better results on all the administered tests. Although his speech was not devoid of reciprocal interferences between the two

codes, the influence of Friulian on Italian is much more evident. On the basis of our results we identified another subject (TM) who is dominant in Italian. Indeed, we could not collect all the linguistic data that would have allowed us to study the productive abilities of this girl in Friulian as she refused to speak this language during all the production tests. In this case, we could assert the dominance of Italian only with reference to the elicited data that show that TM has no productive competence in Friulian. However, this is not true because the child also speaks Friulian at home, as stated in the answers to the questionnaire. This girl speaks sometimes Italian only with her mother and Italian is the first language the mother spoke to the child (and this may be a relevant factor). With strangers, as can be seen from Table 1, TM usually speaks exclusively Italian. This could help explain the language choice made by the child during the administration of the test. TM may have identified the person who administered the test in Friulian as belonging to the category "strangers" and this may have determined her language choice. However, as the language choice of a 6/7-year-old subject does not merely depend on the interlocutor, we assume that also the context where the child-examiner interaction took place may have been of some relevance. In fact, our children speak almost exclusively Italian at school during their interactions with adults (and above all with their teachers). TM may have decided to comply with this "rule", which the interlocutor seemed to ignore. The fact that the other children did not react in the same way is not in contradiction with this; it just demonstrates that sensitivity to the factors determining the linguistic behavior can vary from subject to subject.

The presence of cross-linguistic influences is the most prominent feature emerging from our study. It is not easy at all to find the real causes of this linguistic behavior, also because the reasons may be various and differentiated. In some cases the tendency to code-mixing and code-switching may be determined by the language input situation a child finds him/herself in. For instance, there are Friulian-speaking parents who address their offspring also in Italian. Although the information provided by parents was not indicative of the extent to which the two languages are kept separate, we can guess that a Friulian native speaker may have some difficulty in speaking Italian without any Friulian influence. However, the results point out that the fact that some parents address their children both in Italian and in Friulian does not necessarily lead the children to speak a language rich in interferences (GM and DL, for example, who hear both languages from both parents showed a tendency to keep them apart during the test administration). This may suggest that in some cases parents probably manage to operate a functional separation of the languages, for example by basing their language choice on the context or on the situation (e.g.: some topics are dealt with only in a language, some others only in the other one).

Moreover, we noticed that the girls are far more consistent with their initial language choice, above all from the point of view of the lexicon. For example, during the *Nest Story* description ME (girl) did not make use – in the presence of lexical gaps – of words in the other language but resorted to a neologism once (*fa* ***schiccare*** *il ramo*-'he causes the branch to break' – in the narration in Italian) and then to a circumlocution (*a si romp* ***il spali dal albur*** 'the string of the tree breaks' – in the narration in Friulian). Even TM, who spoke the "wrong" language throughout the testing in Friulian, was consistent with her language choice up to the end.

We may argue that, whatever the causes which determine their onset, the presence of cross-linguistic interferences demonstrates that code-switching and code-mixing are accepted by the whole linguistic community. It would be interesting to administer the test also to adult speakers to verify whether mixing and switching characterize only the language produced by the children or whether they are common among all the speakers.

Generally speaking, the data collected show the great penetration of the Italian lexicon into Friulian, which may indicate a widespread phenomenon of Italianisation of the local language. On the other hand, the fact that the Friulian morphology and syntax "hold out" and in some cases influence Italian gives us cause to think that Friulian still preserves its own identity also among the children, that is to say also among the new generations. However, what we described as syntactic influences of Friulian on Italian could indeed be indirect influences. In fact, the regional variety of Italian seems to borrow many syntactic elements from Friulian (Cortelazzo 1996). We could thus state that the language of the examined children is influenced from the local Italian variety rather than from the Friulian dialect as such. Let us consider, for example, the utterance **lì è l'uomo con la femmina*, where we attributed the absence of the clitic pronoun *ci* to the influence of Friulian. Actually, this utterance reflects a structure which is very common in the regional Italian variety, and even if the influence of Friulian cannot be excluded, it is more appropriate to speak of indirect influence.

As far as the lexicon is concerned, the borrowing of words from languages considered more prestigious and more advanced in the field of science and technology is a normal habit which has always existed. As the core of the Friulian language, that is to say its phonology and its syntax, is still living and productive, we can assume that the diffusion of Friulian to new contexts and circles which is taking place in these years will allow to maintain the original lexical heritage and create new lexical forms starting from its own linguistic resources.

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