

Research Statement

My research contributions lie in the areas of bilingualism and language contact, with a focus on (i) cross-linguistic influence and (ii) code-switching (CS) in Spanish. In both research areas I address aspects of the formal generative tradition while applying data-driven approaches to my analyses, specifically those used in the variationist literature. My particular contribution within this field is the comparison of linguistic situations that involve two different language pairings: Spanish-English bilingualism in the U.S. and Spanish-Catalan bilingualism in Minorca, Spain. Both are linguistic situations of prolonged, extended, and intense contact, while only in Minorca both languages enjoy official status. Crucially, Spanish and Catalan share more linguistic characteristics than English and Spanish, a contrast which allows me to discriminate between possible sources of differences between monolingual and bilingual Spanish.

The contrast between Spanish in contact with English and in contact with Catalan has been particularly productive in my research on subject expression. Subjects can be lexical (*Nimbus es inteligente* 'Nimbus is intelligent'), pronominal (*Él es inteligente* 'He is intelligent') or null (\emptyset *Es inteligente* '* \emptyset is intelligent') in Spanish and Catalan and only overt in English. These differences make subject expression an ideal phenomenon to test hypotheses about the possible sources of cross-linguistic influence. For instance, some authors have proposed that in language contact situations differences between monolingual and bilingual speech can be traced back to the contact language (*Cross-linguistic influence hypothesis*). The *Simplification hypothesis*, on the other hand, states that bilingual speakers may optimize their resources by resorting to less cognitively costly forms, in this case overt subjects. While both hypotheses predict more overt subjects in Spanish in contact with English than in monolingual Spanish, differences emerge with respect to the predictions for Spanish in contact with Catalan. The *Cross-linguistic influence hypothesis* predicts no increase in overt pronominal subjects in this case while the *Simplification hypothesis* still predicts an increase in overt pronominal subjects to compensate for the cognitive load of inhibiting the language not currently in use. Several studies have reported an increased use of overt pronominal subjects in Spanish-English bilinguals, in line with the predictions of both hypotheses. My research using variationist methodology to examine the Spanish of Spanish-Catalan bilinguals in contrast with Spanish monolinguals is uniquely poised to tease these hypotheses apart. I found that Catalan-Spanish bilinguals did not use more overt subjects than Spanish monolinguals, thus, lending support to the *Cross-linguistic influence hypothesis* and contra the predictions of the *Simplification hypothesis*.

Thus, the overarching question in my research on bilingualism examines the factors that appear to restrict bilingual speech. Although my first research project under Dr. Toribio's supervision largely lent further support to the Interface Hypothesis¹ (Sorace and colleagues), as I delved into more data-driven analyses and expanded the language pairing to include two null subject languages in contact, I put forth a new hypothesis of my own, the Vulnerability Hypothesis (VH). In particular, I propose that, on the categorical-variable continuum, the more variable a linguistic phenomenon, the more vulnerable it will be to cross-linguistic influence. I have found support for this hypothesis in several structures (subject expression, subject position, clitic climbing,

¹ The Interface Hypothesis proposes that the core or narrow syntax is impermeable to cross-linguistic influence, while the interfaces with other linguistic modules (syntax-semantics, syntax-pragmatics) are the locus of cross-linguistic influence. This hypothesis further distinguishes between external interfaces (e.g. with pragmatics) and internal interfaces (with semantics), the former being more vulnerable to cross-linguistic interference.

subject-verb disagreement, subject-to-subject raising, and reverse psychological predicates), both in Spanish in contact with English in the U.S. and in Spanish in contact with Catalan in Minorca.

With a similar approach to data analysis and the aim of understanding the source of linguistic differences between monolingual and bilingual speakers, I have developed a second line of research during my time at UF. Even though this line of research explores one of the most researched topics in bilingualism, code switching (CS), I take an innovative approach by (i) applying a variationist methodology and (ii) analyzing CS as an independent variable to determine what effect it has on variable linguistic phenomena. I have examined the effect of CS on subject expression, clitic climbing, copula selection, mood selection, and vowel quality and quantity in Spanish-English CS. Comparing data from the same participants in two separate sessions, one speaking only Spanish and the other using Spanish-English CS, revealed differences between the sessions which suggest bilinguals use of less costly options. These results seemed to indicate that when it comes to CS simplification may occur even in cases where the language pairing does not differ with respect to the linguistic structure under study. I found further support in my Catalan-Spanish CS data, where participants used significantly more overt subjects in CS than in the Spanish monolingual session. Thus, comparing both lines of research there is evidence consistent with influence from the contact language being the main source of differences between bilingual and monolingual speakers when bilinguals are speaking in one of their languages. When they are engaging in CS, however, differences can be attributed to a process of simplification. This is consistent with the idea that the simultaneous activation of both languages, as in CS, is more cognitively costly. Thus, my CS data allowed me to assess different prominent theories in the field from an empirical approach that incorporates the solid and accepted tenets of various linguistic traditions.

In summary, my research is innovative in using different data elicitation and analysis methods and comparing two different language pairings in order to address the long-noted differences between bilingual and monolingual speakers. With these data I have been able to propose a new hypothesis for cross-linguistic influence, the VH, which researchers in other U.S. and European institutions are testing. This has been an exciting and productive hypothesis that I continue to expand on and that requires further specification. Currently, I am collaborating with Inma Gómez Soler (U. of Memphis) on a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews carried out (mostly) in Florida to refine this hypothesis. As new data is starting to emerge and others are starting to test the hypothesis the need arises for me to specify the role of external factors (e.g. proficiency level, order of acquisition of languages, generation, region of origin, etc.). Thus, this is the direction I am planning to follow in the next few years. Additionally, my CS data, where comparisons are drawn within the same speaker across language modes (monolingual vs. CS) has allowed me to isolate the effect that CS has on bilingual speakers' production. Being such a recent approach to the study of CS, however, it needs to be further tested against different linguistic phenomena. I have used a new task (an oral elicitation task that resembles a reading task) as well as tasks broadly used in the field (e.g. acceptability judgment tasks). I have collected pilot data from the same participants using tasks that differ in the level of naturalness. Thus, comparing tasks is a methodological contribution I am planning to do in the near future. Lastly, to the best of my knowledge there is no other researcher working on Catalan-Spanish CS. Thus, documenting where switches are possible is a line of research I am interested in pursuing in the next following years.