

How to make do with what you have got

Priming effects in dialectal data, the view from indefinite Partitives

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URPP Language and Space

FNSNF
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Spoiler: this is a methodological talk

We propose a methodology to use as a resource one of the most prominent problems that translation tasks, traditionally used in dialectological field work, display: **priming effects** from the stimulus language (generally the standard).

It is a well-known fact that speakers, who are bilingual, can be influenced by the stimulus sentence and tend to reproduce the same structure as the stimulus if possible in the dialect, but even when it is not.¹

We show that it is possible to measure the priming effect, which can become a new resource for linguistic dialectological analysis.

¹ Hartsuiker & al. 2004, Bernolet & al. 2007, Baroncini & Torregrossa, ms.

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The problem with fieldwork data

Data from fieldwork are often “fuzzy”, they provide **tendencies more than being categorical**.

One of the major confounding factors in this respect is the **influence** of the **other languages** actively mastered by the speakers, especially the one used for the investigation.

This is extremely relevant when investigating **colloquial varieties** (Labov 1972, 1996 on English colloquial varieties spoken in the US) and **minority varieties** in constant **contact with a roof/standard language** generally perceived as more prestigious (Cornips & Poletto 2005)

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Translation questionnaires & priming

Issue with translation questionnaires (Cornips & Poletto 2005):

- Some widely used field work methodologies as **translation questionnaires from the standard language** are extremely likely to trigger the influence of the standard: **priming effect**.

Possible solution:

- Adopt **additional methodologies** and **compare the data** obtained from translation questionnaires with those obtained through other elicitation strategies.

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Alternative methodologies

Each type of task is adequate to a certain stage of the investigation:

1. Free speech

- between native speakers.

2. Guided conversation

- between native speakers.
- prompted by videos, map tasks, etc.

3. Completion tasks

4. Reordering tasks

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Alternative methodologies

5. Different grammaticality judgments:

- Direct grammaticality judgments:
 - Do you judge X grammatical in your variety? Better or worse than Y?
- Indirect grammaticality judgments:
 - Do you encounter the variants X & Y in the local variety?
 - Which variant X or Y do you consider the most or the least local?
 - etc..
- Relative grammaticality judgments:
 - Multiple options for a phenomenon to be rated along a scale from “uncommon” to “common” in the local variety.

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Layered methodology

Any type of task has:

- test-specific problems.
- requires previous round of testing and often translations in order to be adopted.
- are only apt to test different degrees of granularity of the analysis.

Hence → Each type of task is to be used at a certain stage of the investigation.

For instance: **free speech** and **guided conversations** are only to be used in the **initial stages** of the investigation when we do not have a precise hypothesis but need to gather data to see what the patterns are.

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Layered methodology

On the contrary, **grammaticality judgments** require:

- A deep **knowledge of the variables** at play for the phenomenon **in the specific variety**.
- Having **already collected sentences in the exact local variety** we want to investigate which can be used as stimuli in the test

→ Hence, they are only to be used at **later stages** of the investigation.

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Layered methodology

This is why this **methodology** is “**layered**”, it requires different rounds of fieldwork investigations, to be compared one with the other.

Hence, we are back to square one: at some point a translation task is unavoidable.

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A complement to translation tasks

In this presentation, we present a **complementary methodology** for **cleaning “fuzzy” data** collected with **translation questionnaires** from the roof/standard language at the **early stages of the investigation**.

Measure the priming effect of the standard/roof language by treating it as a well-known priming effect in a bilingual context.

Priming effects can be turned from a hindrance into a resource!

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The pattern we investigated

Indefinite nominals are subject to **variation** in **Northern Italy** (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018, Pinzin & Poletto 2022a).

AIS (<https://navigais-web.pd.istc.cnr.it/>) & **ASIt** (<http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>) data:

- **North-eastern varieties** as Veneto and Friulian **prefer Bare Nouns (BNs)** and generally avoid indefinite Partitive Articles (PAs).
- **Emilian**, (some) **Piedmontese** and (some) **Ligurian** varieties **prefer indefinite PAs** and generally avoid BNs.
- Additional patterns are attested:
 - **bare DE** (mainly in Piedmont, Liguria and some spots in the Lombard Alps)
 - **generic definites** (throughout the whole area)

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The pattern we investigated

In the atlases data, the two more **polarized** areas are Friuli and Emilia, with the **Friuli** showing “**almost**” **only BNs**, and **Emilia** showing “**almost**” **only PAs**.

In light of these considerations, we decided to conduct our investigation in these areas and determine what “almost” means.

NB. we conducted a **study on 3 speakers from Liguria too**, which shows a more **mixed pattern**, with **also** the possibility of using **bare DE**. We do not present these data here, as they are not relevant for the point at stake.

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Our study: overview

8 participants from Emilia, 17 from Friuli (2 separate sessions, 7+10).

We used a **translation task**, with the following characteristics:

- 70 orally presented items with explicit contexts.
- Only object position.
- Balanced for input (PA, BN, def, etc.), gender, number, polarity and dislocation (no dislocation, left & right dislocation).
- 29 additional fillers.

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Today's focus: Emilian and Friulian

We exclude:

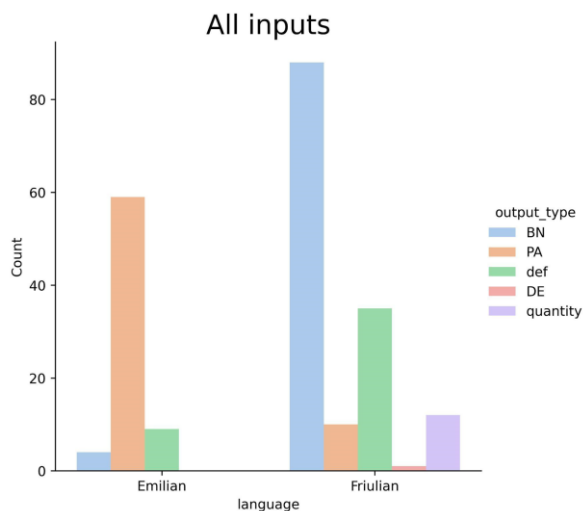
- non-BN/PA inputs, thus selecting only the relevant contexts for assessing the priming effect.
- dislocation, because it can induce the presence of bare DE, an additional factor irrelevant for the present discussion.

For the full results see Pinzin & Poletto (2022b, 2022c)

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Global view, preference and fuzzy data

Data from the whole set of inputs delimited as above:

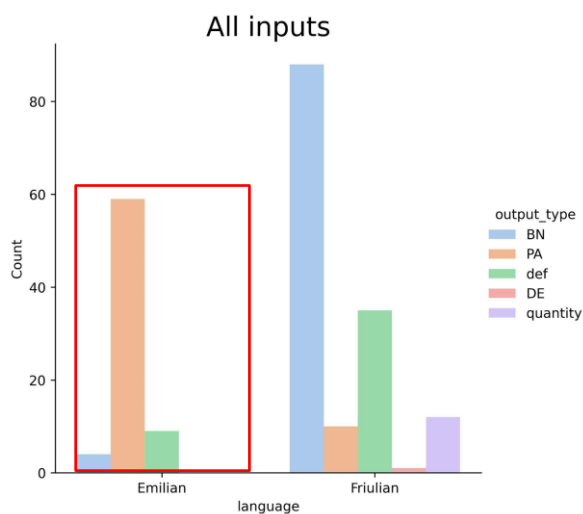


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Global view, preference and fuzzy data

Emilian:

- Predominance of PAs
- Small share of BNs
- Share of definites



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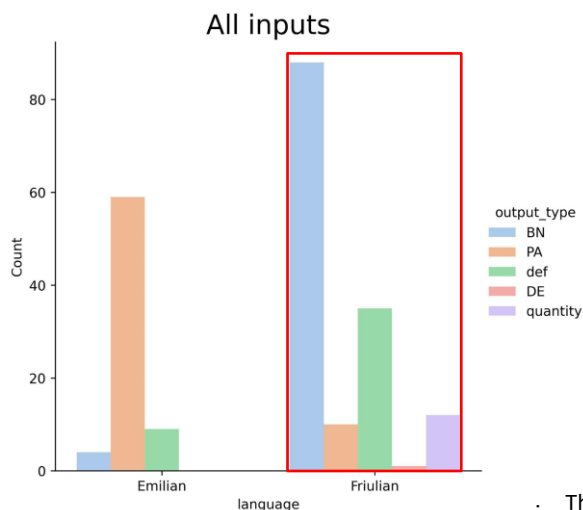
Global view, preference and fuzzy data

Friulian:

- Predominance of BNs
- Small share of PAs
- Share of definites

But:

- Share of other translations, mainly quantities.

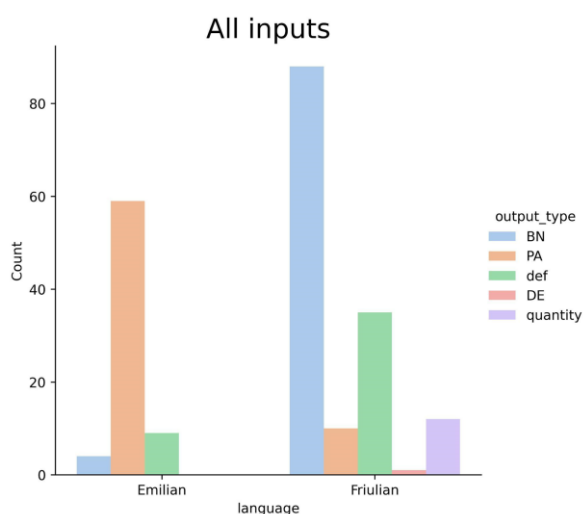


• The single DE is a mispronunciation.

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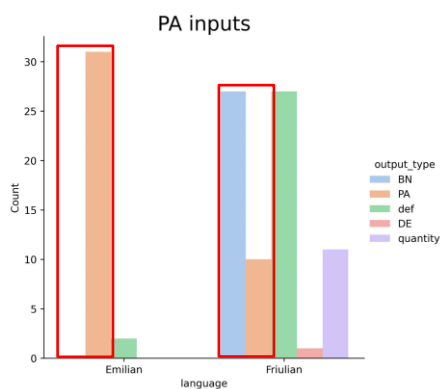
Global view, preference and fuzzy data

- Are we dealing with **optionality** between BNs and PAs **in the two languages?**
- If so, **how come** that we have such a **neat predominance of opposite patterns** in the two dialects?



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Splitting per input: a neat view

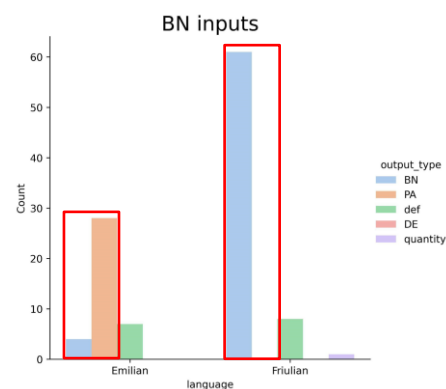


BN inputs:

- Friulian: only BNs (+def), **no PAs**.
- Emilian: PAs (+def) & a **share of BNs**

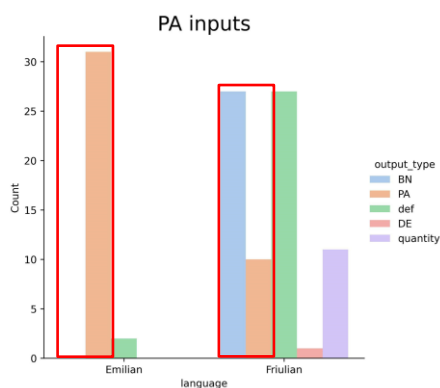
PA inputs:

- Emilian: only PAs (+def), **no BNs**.
- Friulian: BNs (+def & quant) & a **share of PAs**



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Splitting per input: a neat view

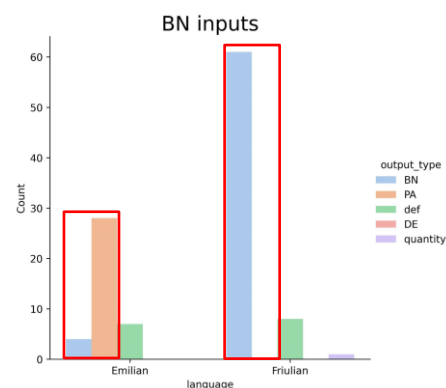


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- Emilian: PAs (+def) & a **share of BNs**

PA inputs:

- Emilian: only PAs (+def), **no BNs**.
- Friulian: BNs (+def & quant) & a **share of PAs**



Let us treat these results as we would treat results from bilingual population. Italian will be called L-a and the other language - Emilian or Friulian - L-b.

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Splitting per input: what it can tell us

- **Italian-Emilian** speakers produce $\cong 100\%$ **PAs in L-b** when previously exposed to a **PA in L-a**.
- **Italian-Friulian** speakers produce $\cong 100\%$ **BNs in L-b** when previously exposed to a **BN in L-a**.

Priming is boosted when the **option presented in L-a overlaps with a grammatical option in L-b**.*

Overlap for BNs in Italian-Friulian speakers → **BNs grammatical in Friul**.
 Overlap for PAs in Italian-Emilian speakers → **PAs grammatical in Emil**.

* Crosslinguistic effects & overlap condition, Hulk & Müller 2000, Müller & Hulk 2001;
 Crosslinguistic priming Hartsuiker & al. 2004, Bernolet & al. 2007

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Splitting per input: what it can tell us

- **Italian-Emilian** speakers produce a **small share of BNs in L-b** when previously exposed to a **BN in L-a**.
- **Italian-Friulian** speakers produce a **small share of PAs in L-b** when previously exposed to a **PA in L-a**.

In bilinguals, **priming of a structure from an L-a in which it is grammatical into an L-b in which it is ungrammatical is attested** (Baroncini & Torregrossa ms.).

Notably, the **ungrammatical structure only appears in small shares in L-b** after a priming containing it in L-a.

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Splitting per input: what it can tell us

BNs in Emilian and PAs in Friulian are the result of a priming effect in a bilingual setting.

Given the small share of occurrences, fully **compatible with a priming effect of a structure which is grammatical in L-a and ungrammatical in L-b**, we could infer that:

**BNs are ungrammatical in Emilian
PAs are ungrammatical in Friulian**

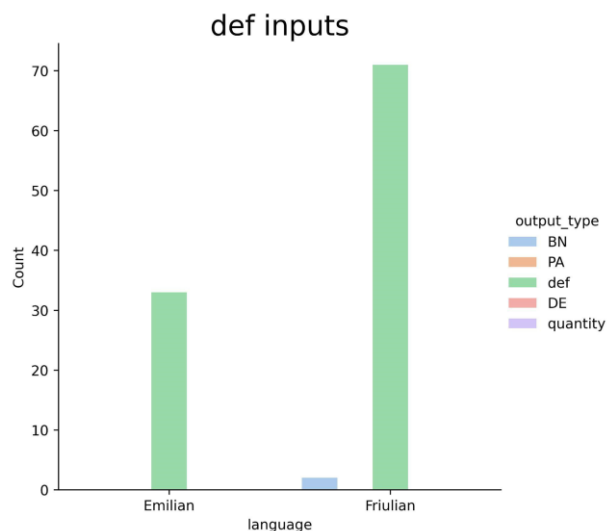
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Definite articles: 100% priming

Inputs with a generic definite object.

Here we have a **repetition** of the input which goes **almost at ceiling for both languages**.

$\cong 100\%$ priming

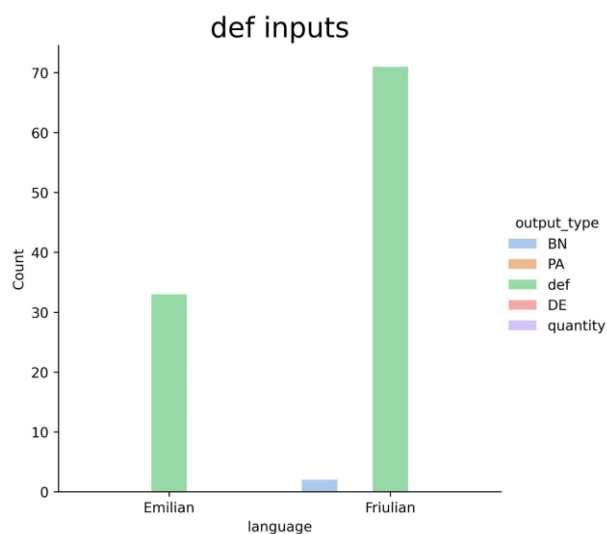


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Definite articles: 100% priming

= PAs in Emilian and BNs in Friulian.

We can conclude that **L-a (Italian) and L-b (Emilian or Friulian) overlap with respect to the interpretation of generic definites in these contexts, boosting the priming effect.**



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Concluding remarks

We have shown that **priming effects** do exist and are **unavoidable** when using a **translation task**.

However, once we measure their distribution, we notice that:

- a. they are clearly **detectable** because they depend on the stimulus in the sense that they always **replicate the structure of the stimulus sentence**.
- b. They are generally **low frequency** phenomena.
- c. You **never see the opposite pattern**: when in Italian you provide bare nouns, Friulian never uses PAs, and the opposite holds of Emilian.
- d. They more frequently occur in speakers that are using the standard a lot. (younger, working outside the community, highly educated)

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General methodological consequences

Hence, far from being a problem, **priming effects** can become a **resource** for the linguist, once they are measured properly.

It is necessary to investigate speakers of different age and sociolinguistic background:

→ controlling for the sociolinguistic variables in the sense that we use only speakers of the same type is not an advantage.

Whether **priming** is one of the **causes of language change**, which is possible, remains **to be established**, at least for PAs.

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Thank you!

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Speaker-type matters

As a further point, we notice that the **most frequent production of BNs in Emilian and of PAs in Friulian** is due to a **specific typology of speakers:**

Young and with many contacts with the roof language (Italian), mainly due to their working environment.

This kind of additional cue strengthens the idea that we are dealing with a crosslinguistic effect.

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Definites everywhere!

- An additional minority option is represented by definites in both languages.

As far as this datum is concerned, we notice that **generic definite** translations are **overwhelmingly attested with specific items:**

- *La mamma non ha messo olio.*
'Our mom didn't put (any) oil.'
- *Il vicino ha fatto polenta per giorni.*
'The neighbor cooked polenta for days.'
- *Il cuoco non ha scaldato dell'acqua.*
'There is some water that the cook did not heat up.'

Item-specific biases which influence the output.

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Quantities in Friulian

Additional pattern in Friulian with input PA: **nominal quantities** (*un alk* 'a bit')

- **Friulian (L-b) “flattens” the BN/PA distinction** observable in Italian (L-a), where we have context-A for BNs and context-B for PAs.
- **Italian-Friulian speakers** still **perceive a difference** between the two contexts (strengthened by the test: both input BNs & input PAs).
- Italian-Friulian speakers try to **reproduce in L-b the overt difference observable in L-a**, but **only in the non overlapping context (input PAs)**.
- In order to do so, they **produce the next overtly different indefinite available on the scale**.

Italian → BNs > PAs > nominal quantities

Friulian → BNs > **BNs** > nominal quantities

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No quantities in Emilian

Why do Emilian speakers not do the same?

- **Emilian (L-b) “flattens” the BN/PA distinction** observable in Italian (L-a), where we have context-A for BNs and context-B for PAs.
- **Italian-Emilian speakers** still **perceive a difference** between the two contexts.
- Italian-Emilian speakers try to **reproduce in L-b the overt difference observable in L-a**, but **only in the non overlapping context (input BNs)**.
- In order to do so, they **try to produce the next overtly different indefinite available on the scale, but there is none!**

Italian → BNs > PAs > (nominal) quantities

Emilian → **PAs** > PAs > (nominal) quantities

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