L2 proficiency modulates the distinction between personal and demonstrative pronouns in Russian–German bilinguals

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SFB 1252 PROMINENCE IN LANGUAGE

CONTEXT: OUR PROJECT

- Comparing interpretation of **personal** (PPro) and **demonstrative** (DPro) pronouns in German and Russian
- Looking at the impact of implicit causality (IC) on demonstratives
- Adult L1 speakers – **adult bilinguals** - children

Personal and demonstrative pronouns

- In both German and Russian, both PPros and DPros can refer to animate referents (see example [1] in the materials table below)
- The DPro often picks up the non-subject, non-agent or less prominent referent (1); interpretation preferences are stricter for DPros than PPros
- Descriptively, the Russian DPro *tot* is strictly reserved for non-subject referents; interpretation preferences may be stricter than in German (2)

Pronoun interpretation in bilinguals

- Pronoun interpretation preferences are hard for bilinguals to acquire:
- Bilinguals often display optionality in overt pronoun resolution (3, 4)
  - Adult L2 learners (5)
  - Heritage speakers and L1 attriters (4)
- L1–L2 **differences in pronoun systems** are often assumed to be the main underlying cause of these difficulties (6) → **cross-linguistic influence (CLI)**
- → When both L1 and L2 pronoun systems are the same, there should be CLI, whereby the L1 interpretation pattern is transferred to the L2 (6)
- Bilingual preferences for **DPros** vs. **PPros** have been less well studied (5)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do bilingual adults (L1 Russian–L2 German) distinguish their interpretations of PPros and DPros in the same way as monolingual speakers of each respective language?
- Does L2 proficiency play a role, even when CLI is in play?

Materials

[1] neutral	Der Clown sah den Zauberer, weil **er/dieser** an der Bühne stand. Kloun uvidel fokusnika, potomu chto **on/tot** stojal u sceny. *"The clown saw the magician because **he/he-DEM** stood by the stage."*
[2] obj-biased	Der Designer verachtete den Regisseur, weil **er/dieser** sehr gerissen war. Dizajner preziral rezhissera, tak kak **on/tot** byl ochen' xitryj *'The designer despised the director because **he/he-DEM** was very crafty.'*
[3] subj-biased	Der Richter bewunderte den Anwalt, weil **er/dieser** sehr einfühlsam war. Sud'ja vosxischal advokata, potomu chto **on/tot** byl chuvstvitelen. *'The judge delighted the lawyer because **he/he-DEM** was very sensitive.'*

- Referent selection task, in Russian and German
- Manipulated pronoun (PPro/DPro) and verb type (neutral; object-biased; subject-biased)
- 38 L1 Russian–L2 German bilinguals (mean age 30, 25 female, 13 male, all resident in Germany)
  - Born either in Germany (n=6) or in countries where Russian is spoken (Russia n=21; Ukraine n=8; Kazakhstan n=3)
  - Range of AoA for German 0-37
  - Self-rated proficiency range in Russian 10-20; in German 7-20
    - (max. 20; 1-5 each for comprehension/speaking/reading/writing)
- 79 monolingual German speakers (control group)
- 76 monolingual Russian speakers (control group)

Effect of proficiency on DPro (German bilinguals):
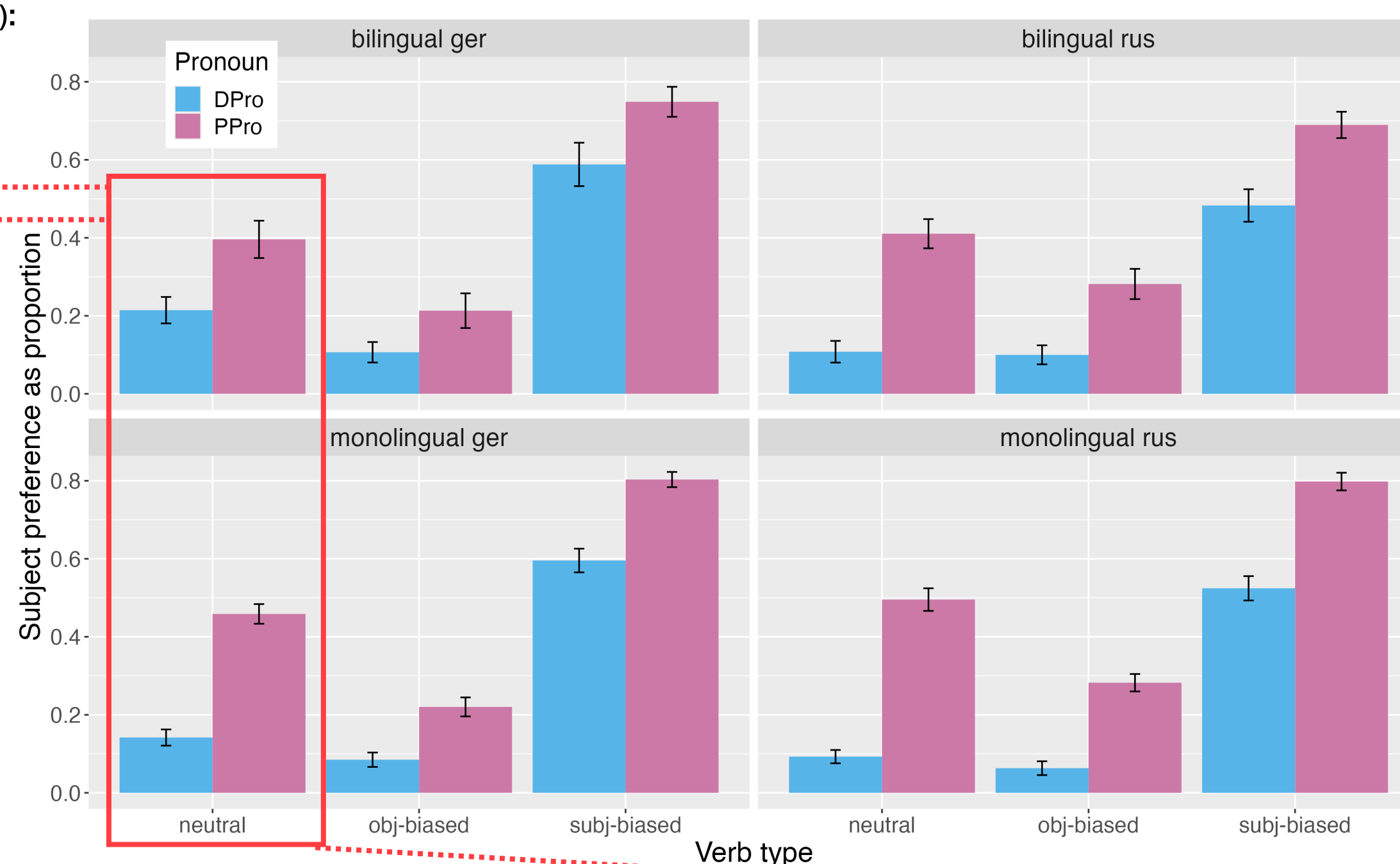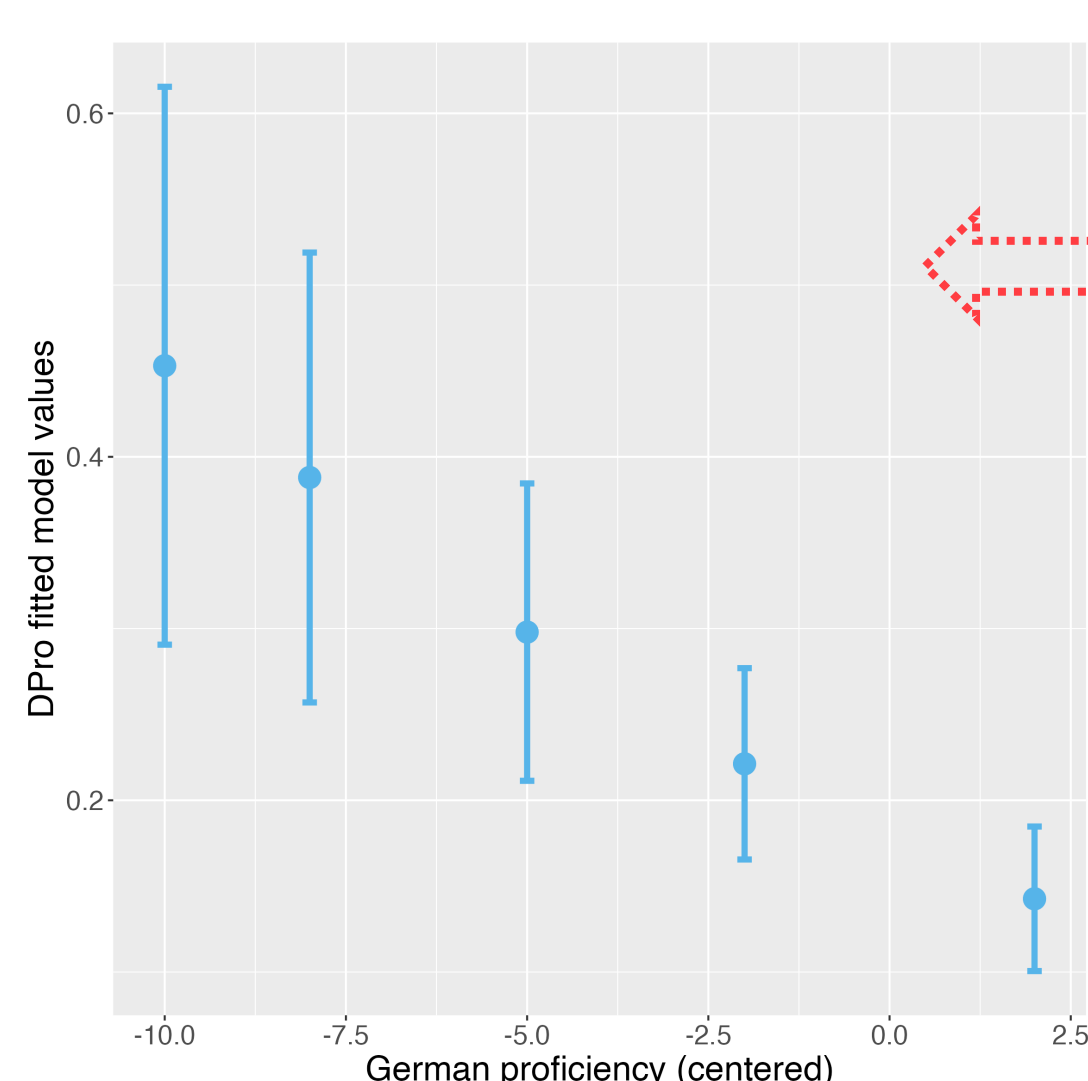
RUSSIAN
- ME pronoun (p< .001) → higher subj preference for PPro than DPro
- Simple effect of verb type (p< .001) → higher subj preference for subj-biased than neutral verbs
- pronoun x verb type (ps < .05) → ME pronoun varies over verb types
- pronoun x group (p = .003) → ME pronoun varies over group (lower PPro subject preference in bilinguals)
- No effect of proficiency

GERMAN
- ME pronoun (p< .001) → higher subj preference for PPro than DPro
- Simple effects of verb type (ps < .01) → subj preference is higher for subj-biased verbs, lower for obj-biased verbs, compared to neutral verbs
- pronoun x group (p = .005)
- group effect for DPro (p = .03) → bilinguals have higher DPro subj preference than monolinguals (neutral verbs)
- Effect of proficiency on DPro (p = .03) → higher proficiency = lower subject-preference

- Bilingual adults (L1 Russian–L2 German) distinguish their interpretations of PPros and DPros in both Russian and German, but there is a difference between the bilinguals and monolinguals for German; <u>bilinguals have a higher subject-preference for DPros</u>
- **PPro–DPro distinction is not simply transferred from the L1**
- Further, L2 proficiency moderates this difference, moving towards the monolingual pattern with increasing proficiency → role for proficiency even when CLI can take place (fine-tuning)
- L2s may need to re-learn interpretation patterns even when they are highly similar in the L1 and L2, particularly for subtle phenomena like pronoun interpretation

References: [1] Schumacher PB, Backhaus J, Dangl M. Backward- and forward-looking potential of anaphors. *Front. Psychol.* 2015;6:1746. **[2]** Kibrik AA. Mexanizmy ustranenija referencial'nogo konflikta. [Mechanisms of resolving the referential conflict.] In: Kibrik AE, Narin'jani AS (eds.) *Modlerovanie Jazykovoj Dejatel'nosti v Intellektual'nyx Sistemax. [Modeling Linguistic Performance in AI Systems.]* Moscow, Russia: Nauka; 1987. p. 128-145. **[3]** Sorace A. Pinning down the concept of 'interface' in bilingualism. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* 2011;1:1-33. **[4]** Kaltsa M, Tsimpli IM, Rothman J. Exploring the source of differences and similarities in L1 attrition and heritage speaker competence: evidence from pronominal resolution. *Lingua* 2015;164: 266-288. **[5]** Wilson F. *Processing at the syntax–discourse interface in second language acquisition.* PhD thesis. University of Edinburgh; 2009. **[6]** Tsimpli I, Sorace A. Differentiating Interfaces: L2 performance in syntax–semantics and syntax–discourse phenomena. In: Bamman D, Magnitskaia T, Zaller C (eds.) *Proceedings of the 30th Annual Boston University Conference on Language and Development.* Sommerville, MA: Cascadilla Press; 2006: 653-664.