

The 'greek' Null Subject Parameter in the germanic languages.

Its acquisition by Greeks acquiring German as a L3

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1. Introduction

- This poster is an overview of the *Null Subject Parameter* (NSP) in Greek, English and German from a psycholinguistic perspective.
- In the study are presented research data from Greeks (L1), who acquired English as their *first foreign language* (L2), and are currently acquiring German as a *second foreign language* or *third language* (L3).
- The three languages involved seem to have different values in NSP (Chomsky 1981, Rizzi 1982, 1990).

2. The Null Subject Parameter

In Greek, a typical *Null Subject Language*, a pronoun does not necessarily have to be realized in subject position, overt grammatical subjects may be omitted; *both* (1) *and* (2) are correct:

(1) ego pezo

(2) ∅ pezo

(Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998, Anagnostopoulou 2013, Philippaki-Warbuton 1985, Tsimpli 1990)

On the contrary, in English, a *Non Null Subject Language* (NNSL), the pronominal subject must always be explicitly implemented in order to constitute a grammatically correct sentence:

(3) I play *but not:*

(4) *∅ play

German is classified by many researchers as a NNSL, since in most cases it does not allow the omission of the overt grammatical subject:

(5) ich spiele *but not:*

(6) *∅ spiele

Nevertheless, in the passive voice of specific verb classes the omission of the overt grammatical subject is permitted:

(7) Sonntags wird nicht gearbeitet.

(Holmberg & Platzack 1995)

Consequently, current theoretical approaches classify German among *Expletive Null Subject Languages*.

(D' Alessandro 2014, Roberts & Holmberg 2010)

- Furthermore, unlike Greek, both English and German allow *pleonastic subjects*:

(8) *There* fell down some stones.

(9) *Es* wurde dem General nicht gern gehorcht.

(Cardinaletti 1997)

3. Research Hypothesis

A. The preference of the *Non-native speakers* (NNSs) for a sentence with no subject of the finite verb (i.e. in the passive voice) (experimental condition: [-lex. sub./ -es]) denotes a considerable influence from the L1 (Greek) on their interlanguage.

B. Conversely, the predilection of the NNSs for the experimental condition in which German (L3) has the same syntactic properties with English (L2), [+lex. sub./ +es], (i.e. expletive subjects), implies a *notable influence* on their interlanguage from the L2 when acquiring the L3.

4. The experimental procedure

The *psycholinguistic experiment* that has been conducted in Greece consisted of two tasks:

- a *Grammaticality Judgement Task* (GJT) and
- a *Preference Task* (PT)

A total of 73 participants were recruited for this study, namely:

- two groups of Greeks (NNSs) with different proficiency levels in German (B1 and C1), but with the same proficiency level in English (C1) and
- one group of Germans who served as a *control group* evaluated the grammaticality of 288 *experimental utterances* (in German) by choosing a mark from a 5-point Likert scale.

5. Results

Figure 1: Results of the GJT

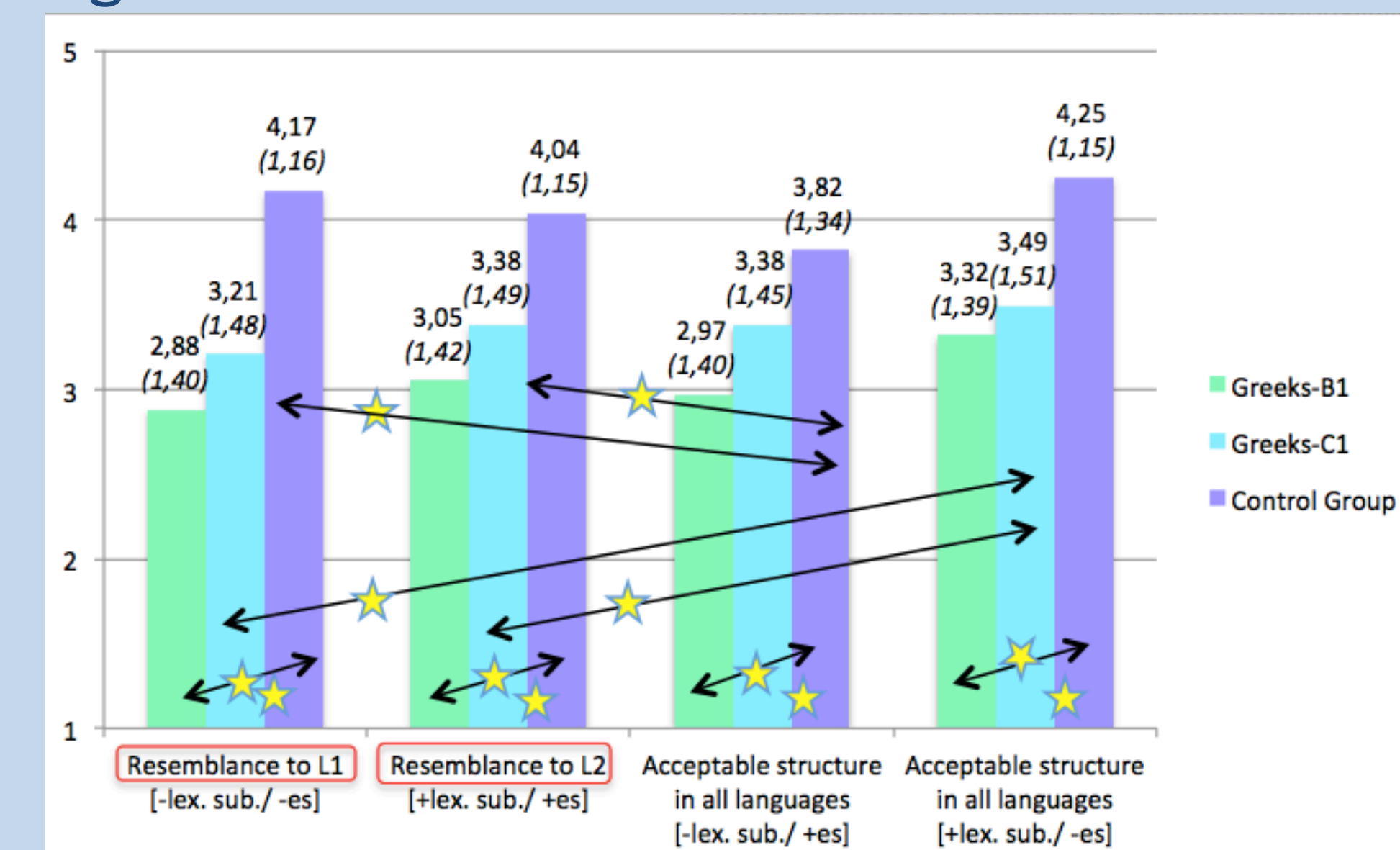
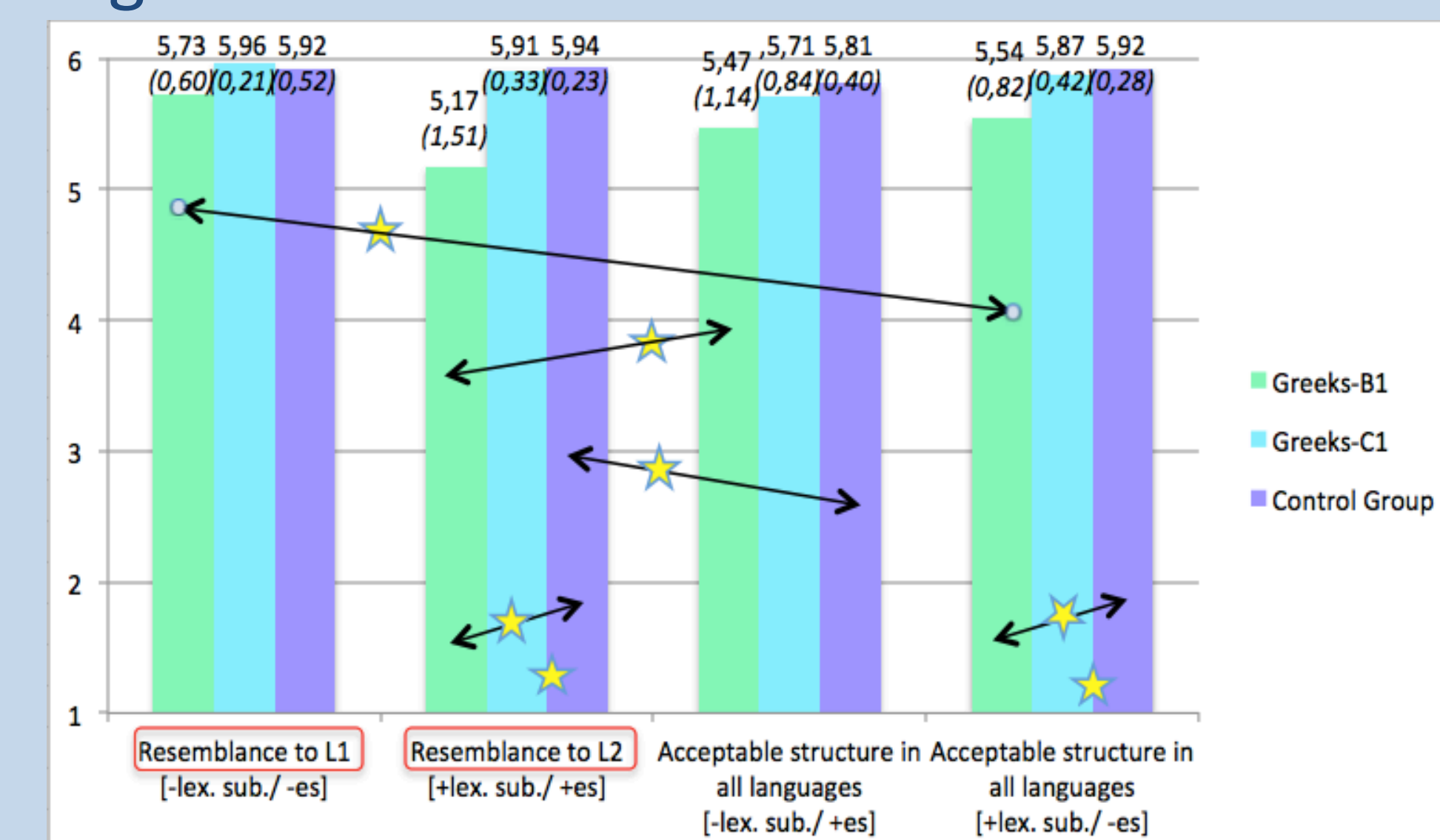


Figure 2: Results of the PT



6. Conclusion

The study results show that *both languages* already acquired play an *equally important role* in L3 acquisition. Therefore, the theoretical model that best describes their interlanguage is that of Flynn, Foley and Vinnitskaya (2004), namely, the ‘*Cumulative-Enhancement Model for Language Acquisition*’.

According to this model, every previous acquired language can contribute to the development of the syntactic structure of each subsequent language only in a manner, that is either positive or neutral, which means there is only ‘*positive language transfer*’ or ‘*no linguistic transfer at all*’ to the target language.

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