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Cross-linguistic Influence in the Production of Multiple wh-Questions

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Introduction

Research on bilingual language development has shown effects of cross-linguistics interference of the first language (L1) on the second language (L2) (Hulk & Müller, 2000; Yip & Matthews, 2000; Serratrice, 2013, Unsworth, 2013, a.o.)

Aim: understand how the similarities/differences between the majority and minority (heritage) language systems affect the development of the two languages in bilingual children and, specifically, the development of the heritage language (Rothman 2009; Kupisch 2013; Kupisch & Rothman 2018)

Test case: *Multiple wh-questions (MWHs)*

In L1 Romanian – L2 English children

• The minority/heritage language is **Romanian**:

1. **a. Cine[1] pe cine[2]** îmbrățișează?
   who   PE who   hugs
   'Who is hugging whom?'

   b. Care bunic[1]   pe care băiat[j2] îl[j]   îmbrățișează?
   which grandfather PE which boy[j] him[j] hugs
   'Which grandfather is hugging which boy?'

• The majority/dominant language is **English**:

2. **a. Who[1]** hugs **whom[2]**?
   b. Which grandfather[1] is hugging **which boy[2]**?

In **Romanian** (but not in English):

• multiple wh-fronting is obligatory

• all wh-objects are preceded by a differential object marker PE

• *which*-objects are doubled by a clitic (1b)

Research Questions

Do L1 Romanian – L2 English children exhibit *similar patterns in the production* of MWHs as compared to Romanian and English monolinguals?

Do effects of *cross-linguistic influence* arise and is there *a direction of transfer* (from L1 ➝ L2 or L2 ➝ L1)?

Participants

• 20 monolingual English chidren
   • 6;4 - 9;11 (mean age 7;11, SD = 13 months)

• 32 monolingual Romanian children
   • 6;11 - 9;8 (mean age 8;3, SD = 11 months)

• 18 heritage Romanian children (L2 English)
   • 6;0 – 9;2 (mean age 8;0, SD = 12 months)

Language history collected using PABIQ (Tuller 2015)

Method and Design

Elicited production (guessing game with Paddington the Bear)

• **24 questions** with two extracted *wh*-phrases :

3. **Cine   pe cine** a mângâiat?   **Who-SO**
   who   PE who has patted
   Who patted whom?

4. **Care fată pe care pisică[j]** a   mângâiat-o[j]?   **Which-SO**
   which girl PE which cat[j] has patted-her[j]
   Which girl patted which cat?

5. **Pe care pisică[j] care fată** a mângâiat-o[j]?   **Which-OS**
   PE which cat[j]   which girl has patted-her[j]
   Which cat did which girl pat?

6. **Pe care pisică[j] cine**   a   mângâiat-o[j]?   **WhichO-WhoS**
   PE which cat[j]   who   has patted-her[j]
   Who patted which cat?

• **Example scenario**

A.   Here are two girls, a boy, two cats and a monkey.
B.   Look! This girl is patting the black cat and this girl is patting the white cat. The boy is taking a picture of the monkey.
C.   Paddington, we can tell you that the boy didn't pat anyone, but each girl patted a different cat.
      CHILD, ask Paddington about this:
         Care fată   pe care pisică a mângâiat-o?   Romanian
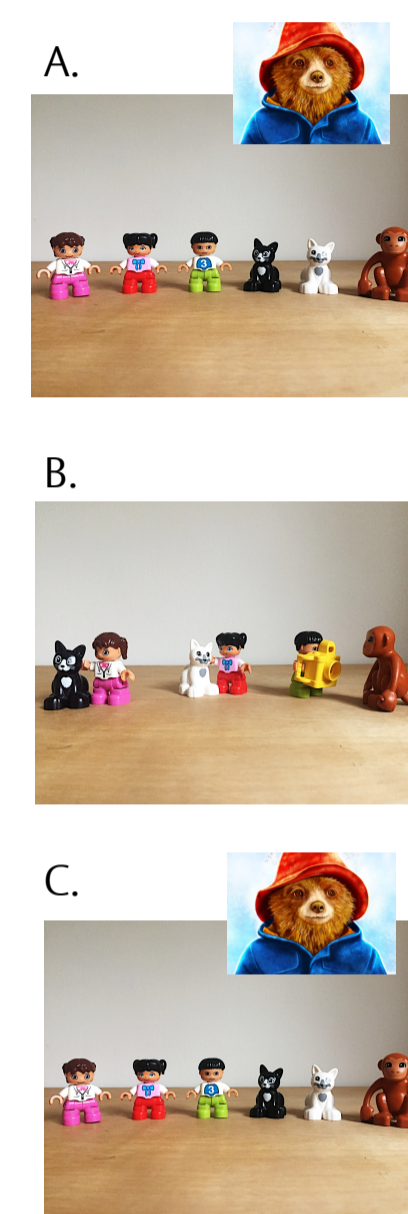   **Which girl** patted **which cat**?   English

Figure 1. Example of image associated with the different conditions in (3-6). Characters (and their position) varied across conditions and images.

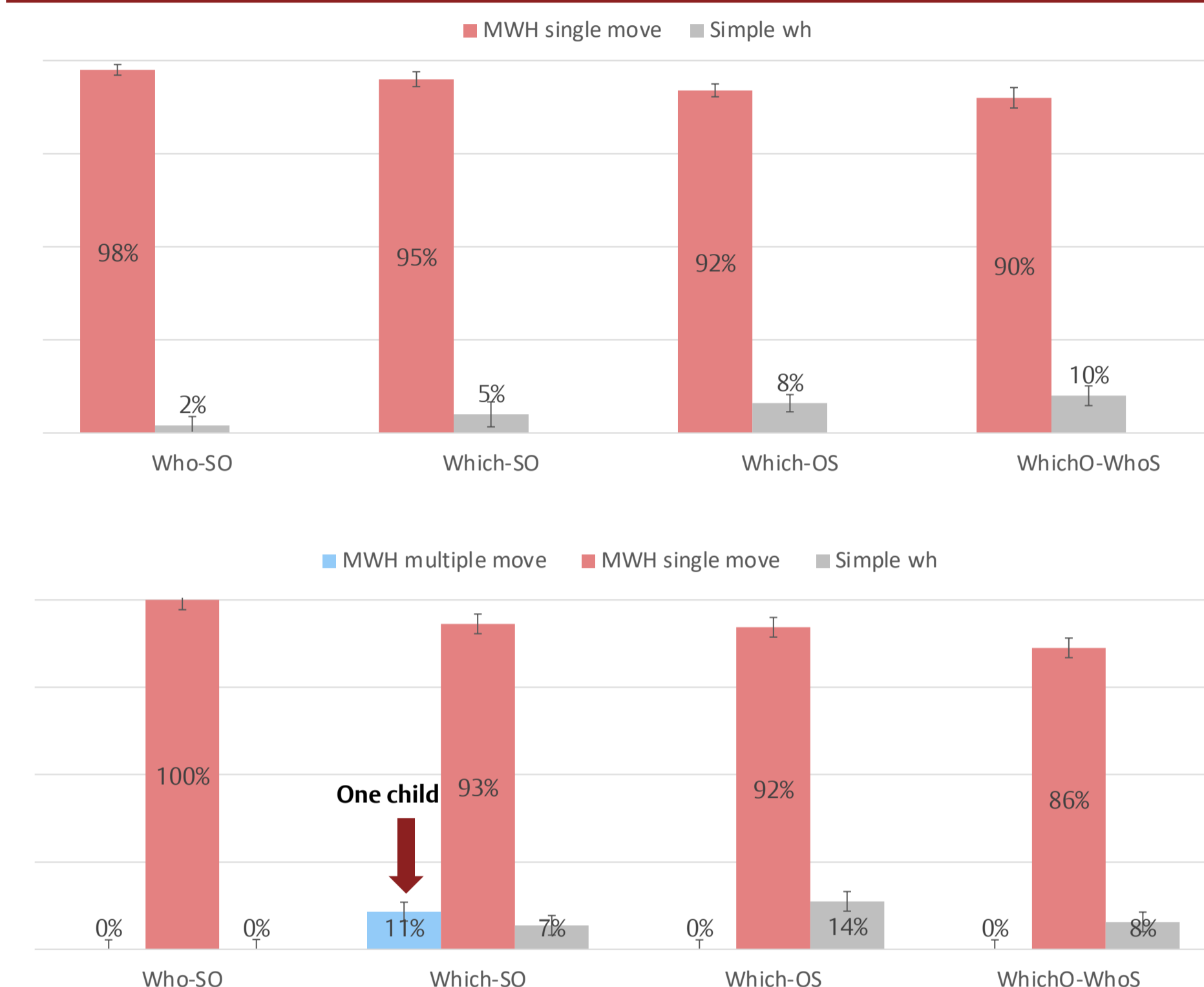## Results: *English Monolinguals versus L1 Romanian – L2 English*

Figure 2. Distribution of responses for each type of elicited question in **English monolingual** children

Figure 3. Distribution of responses for each type of elicited question in **L2 English** (L1 Romanian) children

Results: *Romanian Monolinguals versus L1 Romanian – L2 English*

Figure 5. Overall distribution of responses for MWHs in **Romanian monolingual and heritage** children
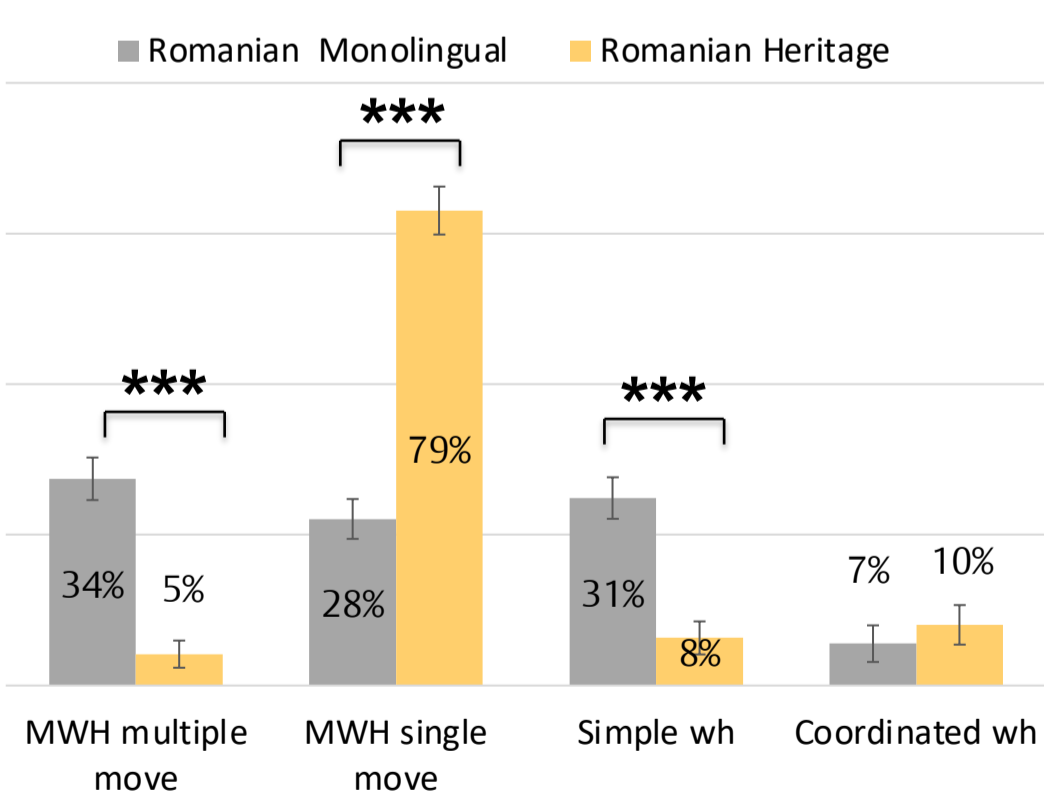

Figure 6. Distribution of responses for each type of elicited question in **Romanian monolingual** children

Figure 7. Overall omission of PE and omission of clitics in obligatory contexts in **Romanian monolingual and heritage** children
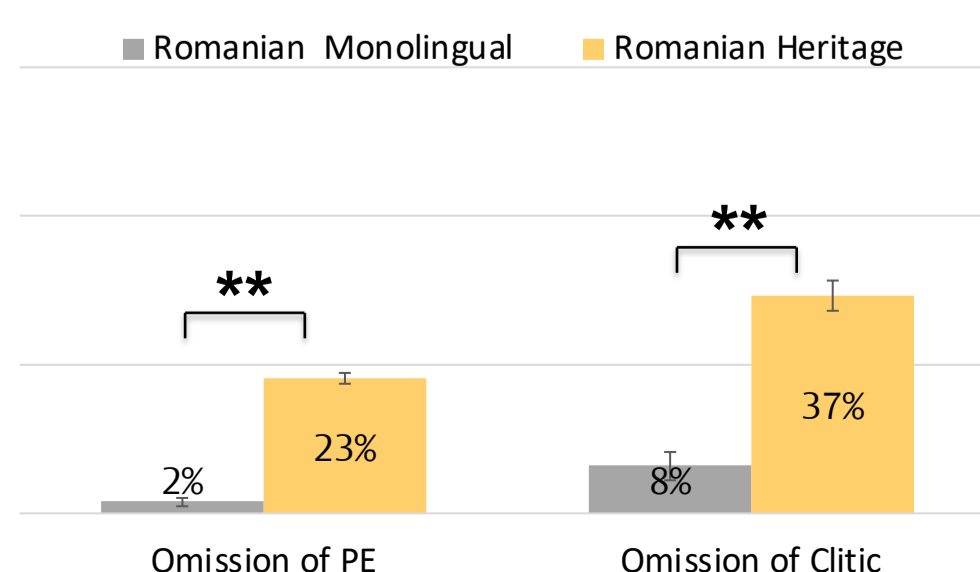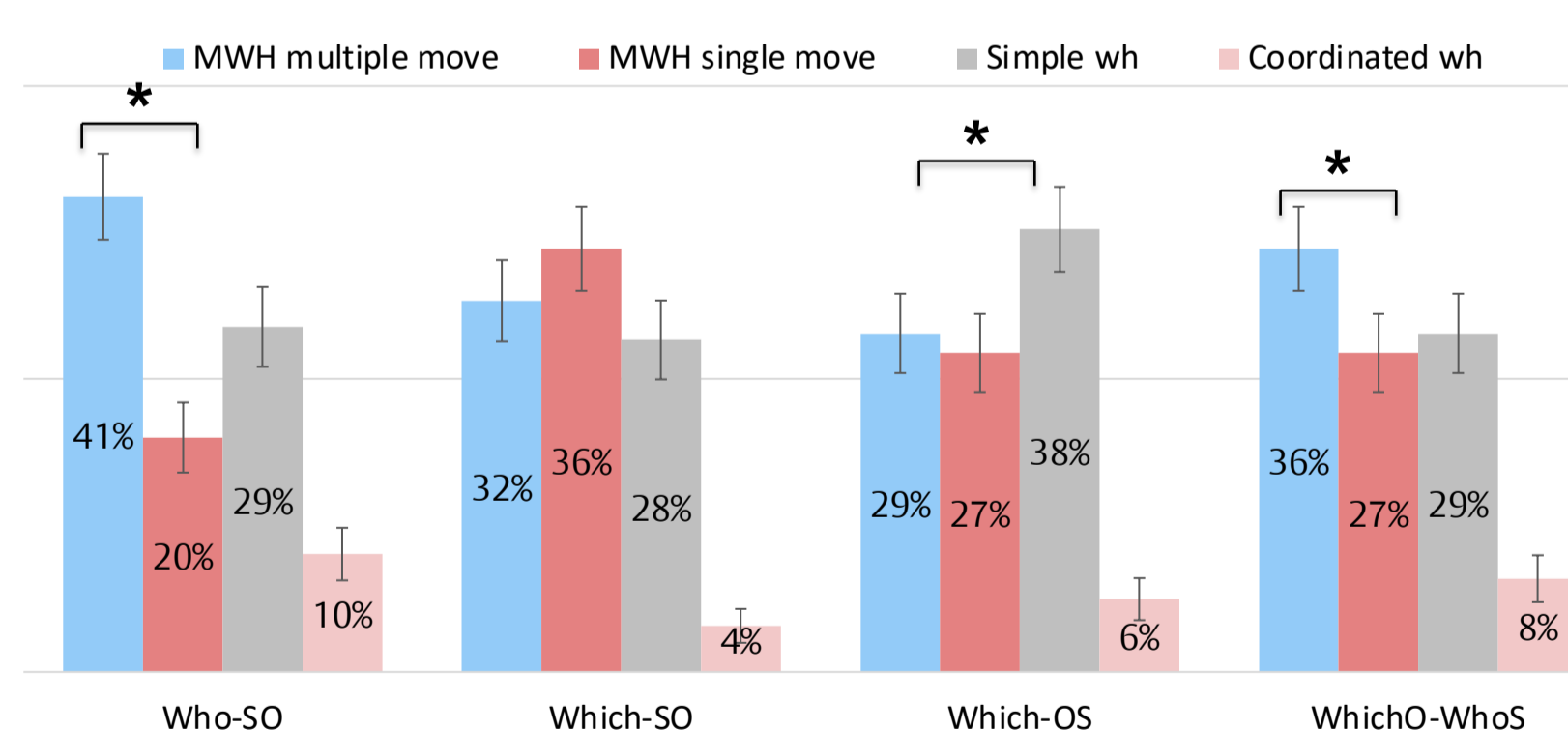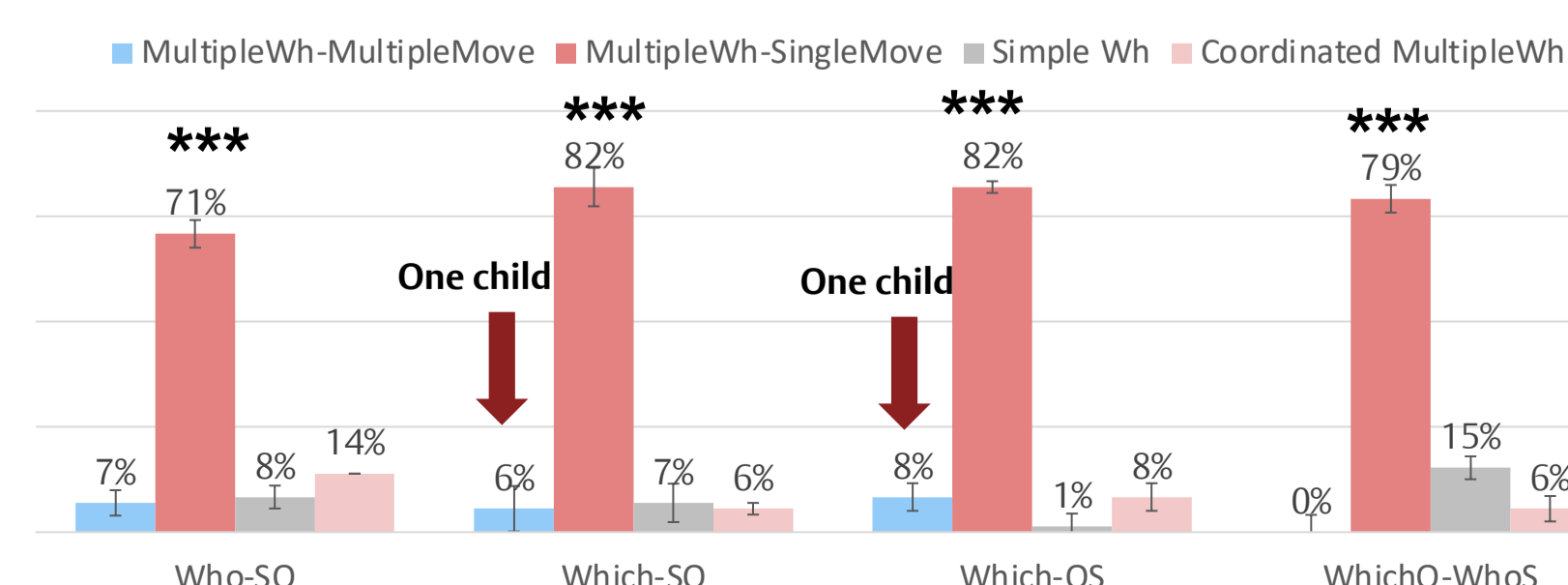

Figure 8. Distribution of responses for each type of elicited question in **Romanian heritage** children

Discussion and Conclusions

• **English monolinguals** produce MWHs with one fronted wh and one in-situ

• **Romanian monolinguals** produce MWHs, mainly *who*-SO (3), but also MWHs with one element in-situ, as well as single wh-questions;

• **Bilingual children** show differences compared to monolinguals only in their L1 (Romanian), which exhibits a more complex structure involving multiple wh-fronting:
   • in the *majority language (English)*, they show a similar production pattern to monolinguals
   • in their *minority/heritage language (Romanian)*
       • they are significantly more likely to produce MWHs with fronted wh-phrase and one in-situ;
       • they omit the differential object marker PE and the clitic significantly more than monolinguals

Language production in the L1 of Romanian heritage children may be affected by L2 properties, under cross-linguistic influence (Müller&Hulk 2001; Serratrice 2013)

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