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# Contrasted and maintained information in a narrative task

## Analysis of texts in English and Italian as L1s and L2s

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This paper proposes an analysis of 100 narrative texts concerned with English and Italian as L1s and L2s. We will compare the way both native speakers and learners build textual cohesion when faced with a narrative task involving several referential restrictions: contrasts of entity and polarity, maintenance of the same predication, temporal shifts etc. The stimulus used to collect the data is the film retelling *The Finite Story* by Dimroth (2006). Our results will add to the debate about the learners' tendency to establish anaphoric linkage according to the specific grammaticised (readily encodable) concepts of their mother tongue. In particular, we will show that even at very advanced and almost native levels learners tend to exploit formal and conceptual means resembling those of their mother tongue, demonstrating by that that they have not completely abandoned the L1 specific "perspective taking".

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the way English and Italian speaking informants build textual cohesion in a narrative task involving a non prototypical information flow in (Southern) Italian and English both as L1s and L2s. The reason why we have chosen these two languages lies in their different genetic origins, Romance vs. Germanic, that, at least theoretically, should involve two diverse ways of building textual cohesion and the necessity for a (German/Romance) learner to switch from one to the other perspective when acquiring a language of the opposite type (cf., among other works, Carroll & von Stutterheim 2003; Carroll & Lambert 2005, 2006).

As a matter of fact, Dimroth et al. (2010) identified several differences between Dutch and German vs. French and (Northern) Italian, for the way native speakers of these two groups of languages build cohesion with respect to the stimulus proposed (namely, *The Finite Story* by Dimroth 2006), which pushed the authors to hypothesize “a Germanic way” and “a Romance way” of establishing anaphoric linkage. Andorno and Benazzo (2010) and Andorno et al. (2010) further explored this topic by an acquisitional perspective, considering data in Italian L2 by French and German speakers, in French L2 by Italian, German and Dutch subjects, in German L2 by French and Italian learners, in Dutch L2 by French and Italian learners. So none of these studies considered English – either as an L1 or L2 – a language that some authors consider “less Germanic” than others with respect to cohesive mechanisms (cf. Carroll et al. 2000; Giuliano & Di Maio 2008): hence this study comparing English L1/L2 data to Italian L1/L2 data.

Our data was collected using the same video clip as that employed by the studies quoted above, *The Finite Story*, and is divided into five groups: English L1; Italian L1; English L2 of Italian advanced and intermediate learners; Italian L2 of advanced English speaking learners.

We shall analyze the information flow of the narrative texts produced by our informants, focusing, on referential maintenance or contrast<sup>1</sup> with respect to entities, events, time spans and sentence polarity (terminology, which will be explained below). We will concentrate both on the semantic domains and the linguistic means speakers (natives or learners) select in order to highlight such referential flow. Once the natives’ patterns of textual cohesion are established thanks to the analysis of the L1 data, it will be possible to state whether and how much the learners’ narrations are deviant with respect to the native retellings.

## The stimulus

The video clip *The Finite Story* (Dimroth 2006) is about three men, Mr Blue, Mr Green and Mr Red, living in three different flats of the same building, which one night catches fire. It is subdivided into several segments – the content of which is illustrated in Table 1 (adapted from Dimroth et al. 2010) – and involves several referential restrictions: contrasts of entity and polarity, maintenance of the same predication, temporal shifts etc., which force the narrator to employ a great variety of anaphoric means.

We will focus on three information structures (IS: I, II and III), each of which is repeated two or three times during the story (they are shaded in Table 1).

The first information structure (cf. segments 4, 5 and 8) is the prototypical configuration for setting up a contrast in the domain of Topic Entities (TE),<sup>2</sup> since

Table 1.\* The *Finite Story*: Information configuration in segments selected for analysis

Nr	Film segment	IS wrt antecedent segment	Example utterances with corresponding IS marking
1/2	Introduction protagonists / flats		
03	Mr Blue going to bed, sleeping		
04	Mr Green going to bed, sleeping	I: Different TT, different TE, same POLARITY, same PREDICATE (wrt 03)	<i>Mr Green also goes to bed; anche il Sign. Verde va a letto</i>
05	Mr Red going to bed, sleeping	I: Different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED (wrt 03/04)	<i>MR RED** goes to bed; IL SIGN. ROSSO va a letto</i>
06	Fire on the roof		
07	Mr Green sleeping		
08	Mr Red sleeping	I: different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED (wrt 07)	<i>so does Mr Red; il Sign. Rosso fa la stessa cosa</i>
09	Mr Blue not sleeping	II: Different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 07/08)	<i>Only Mr Blue does not sleep; solo il Sign. Blu non dorme</i>
11	Mr Blue calling fire brigade		
12	Fireman in bathroom, not answering		
18	Fireman answering the phone	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 12)	<i>this time the fireman DOES ANSWER/ANSWERS the phone; questa volta il pompiere RISPONDE al telefono</i>
22	Arrival of fire engine		
24	Rescue net: Mr Green not jumping		
25	Mr Red not jumping		
26	Mr Blue jumping	II: different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24/25)	<i>Mr Blue on the other hand DOES JUMP/JUMPS; il Signor Blu invece SALta</i>
27	Mr Green jumping	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24)	<i>Mr Green eventually DOES JUMP/JUMPS; il Signor Verde finalmente SALta</i>
28	Mr Red not jumping		
29	Mr Red jumping	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 28)	<i>finally Mr Red DOES JUMP/JUMPS; alla fine il Signor Rosso SALta</i>
31	The happy end		

\* This table illustrates just the segments our analysis is concerned with.

\*\* Capital letters mark prosodic prominence.

it involves a shift in the Topic Entity<sup>3</sup> domain but maintenance of the levels of polarity and predicate; so we expect informants to use additive particles (Engl. *also, too, as well*; It. *anche, pure*):

- (1) a. Engl.: Mr Blue goes to bed
- b. Engl.: Mr Green *also* goes to bed
- c. It.: Il Signor Blu va a letto
- d. It.: *Anche* il Signor Verde va a letto

or to exploit a prosodic prominence on the entity:

- (2) a. Engl.: Mr Blu goes to bed
- b. Engl.: *MR GREEN* goes to bed
- c. It.: Il Signor Blu va a letto
- d. It.: *Il SiGNOR VERde* va a letto

It is also possible to employ anaphoric verbal periphrases (Engl. *to do the same thing*; It. *fare la stessa cosa*):<sup>4</sup>

- (3) a. Engl.: Mr Blu goes to bed
- b. Engl.: Mr Green *does the same*
- c. It.: Il Signor Blu va a letto
- d. It.: Il Signor Verde *fa lo stesso*

For Configuration II (cf. segments 9 and 26 in Table 1), speakers have to convey that a situation applying for the first two characters (Mr Green and Mr Red) does not apply for the third one (Mr Blue), since we have a change in the TE domain, an opposite polarity but the maintenance of the predicate. For this configuration speakers can either mark the contrast on the Topic Entity or highlight the change of polarity. If speakers opt for the Topic Entity contrast, they can apply means such as lexical modifiers (Engl. *on the other hand, instead, differently from Mr X*; It. *invece, in compenso, diversamente da Mr X* etc.) or restrictive particles (Engl. *only, just: only Mr Blue...*; It. *solo, solamente, soltanto*):

- (4) a. Engl.: Mr Green keeps on sleeping
- b. Engl.: Mr Red keeps on sleeping as well
- c. Engl.: *Only* Mr Blue *does not* sleep / Mr Blue *instead* does not sleep
- d. It.: Il Signor Verde continua a dormire
- e. It.: *Anche* il Signor Rosso continua a dormire
- f. It.: *Solo* il Signor Blu non dorme / Il Signor Blu *invece*<sup>5</sup> non dorme

Polarity can be seen as *the strength of assertion* (cf. Klein 2006), and for English and Italian it is supported by negation, auxiliaries and/or prosody. For the change from negative to positive assertion, in English it can be marked by an auxiliary



highlighting the finite component of the verb (*Mr Blue does jump*) or by a pitch accent on the lexical verb (*Mr Blue JUMPS*); a combination of prosody with the finiteness marking is also possible (cf. (5c) below); in Italian, theoretically, just the pitch accent on the lexical verb is allowed (see (5f) and below for more details about differences between English and Italian).

- (5) a. Engl.: Mr Green does not want to jump  
 b. Engl.: Mr Red does not want to jump either  
 c. Engl.: Mr Blue *DOES* jump  
 d. It.: Il Signor Verde non vuole saltare  
 e. It.: Neanche il Signor Rosso vuole saltare  
 f. It.: Il Signor Blu *SALta*

In the third configuration, speakers can either mark the change of polarity or the shift in the Topic Time (TT) or both.

- (6) a. Engl.: Mr Red does not want to jump  
 b. Engl.: *Finally* Mr Red *does* jump  
 c. It.: Il Signor Rosso non vuole saltare  
 d. It.: *Finalmente* il Signor Rosso *SALta*

As a matter of fact, Topic Time shift linking markings (*this time, eventually* etc.) are crucial for the third information configuration since, ideally, they are the only alternative to the polarity change devices that speakers can use to mark the contrast.

### Previous studies and framework

The three configurations commented above have been studied by Dimroth et al. (2010) with respect to native speakers of four languages: Dutch, German, French and the Northern Italian variety of Turin.<sup>6</sup> By virtue of their results, the authors state that: when a polarity contrast from negative to positive assertion is involved in an information structure, Dutch and German native speakers mark the contrast on the assertion level, either by a contrastive stress on the finite lexical verb or auxiliary or by what they call “assertion related particles”, namely *doch/schon* (for German) and *toch/wel* (for Dutch). For these particles Dimroth et al. (2010) observe that “their stressed variants mark that the utterance in which they appear is in contrast to an earlier, otherwise comparable utterance with opposite polarity” (p. 3330).

In what follows, we give an example of Ger. *doch* (cf. Dimroth et al. 2010: 3337); the passage refers to segment 26 of our Table 1:

- (7) der hat sich dann entschieden, *doch* zu springen, obwohl  
 he has himself then decided, “doch” to jump.INF, even-though  
 er eins höher wohnt  
 he one higher lives  
 ‘he has decided to jump, even though he lives in a higher one [flat]’

The particles *wel/toch* and *doch/schon* strengthen the validity of the positive assertion or polarity – they are “assertion operators” – and cannot always be translated into other languages (for instance, English and Italian) because their corresponding equivalents are often missing. Their availability in German and Dutch together with the exploitation of the pitch accent on the finite verb makes these two languages, according to Dimroth et al. (2010), “assertion oriented languages”.

For a change from negative to positive assertion, Romance language native speakers mark the contrast by anaphoric devices acting on the topic component, at the levels of entity or time, rather than on the assertion level (cf. *invece* in (4f) and *finalmente* in (6d) above).

On the basis of Dimroth et al.’s results, Andorno and Benazzo (2010) and Andorno et al. (2010) have enlarged the debate to the second language acquisition perspective. Nevertheless, none of these studies has considered English as L1 or L2, a language interesting to investigate since it does not have assertion-related particles, although it does not lack alternative assertion related means (such as emphasis on the finite component of the verb with the *do* auxiliary or pitch accent on the finite lexical verb). The French, Italian, German and Dutch L2 data of the authors above show in particular that:

- a. L2 learners approach the target distributional preferences in contrast-marking, but the L1 influence factor, even though largely overtaken by a general L2 tendency, still appears;
- b. learners tend to mark a generic “global” contrast instead of a specific one, namely they do not select specific information units for contrast marking (this is the case when selecting means such as It. *ma, comunque* and Fr. *mais*):

- (8) M. Rouge ne veut pas sauter  
 Mr Red does not want to jump  
*Mais* M. Bleu a sauté  
*But* Mr Blue jumped

- c. the use of lexical means precedes the use of morpho-syntactic means in learning target language discourse perspectives, which matches a learner-specific tendency, independent from source languages.

The precedence of lexical means over morpho-syntactic ones has already been remarked in other domains (for example, adverbial markers always precede verb

inflection for the expression of temporal relations),<sup>7</sup> but normally for beginner learners, whereas the authors above claim this implicational tendency also for advanced subjects.

Now, our objective is to compare the results of the three studies we have just commented on to what emerges from our English and Italian speaking natives' and learners' data. Concerning natives, it will be possible to say whether English speaking subjects conform themselves to a "Germanic way" of building textual cohesion or not; with respect to learners, the discussion about our findings will contribute to the debate on "perspective-taking" when producing a text in a second language.

In the last decade, several studies have shown that advanced second language learners master the grammar of the target language *at utterance level but not at discourse level*, since their way of establishing anaphoric linkage, and consequently textual cohesion, still reflects *their mother tongue perspective-taking*. In other words, in selecting and organizing information within a text, learners tend to exploit the language specific effects the L1 employs because of the grammaticised concepts it offers to encode and link information units (cf. Slobin 1987, 2003; Carroll et al. 2000; Carroll & von Stutterheim 2003; Carroll & Lambert 2005, 2006; Giuliano & Di Maio 2008; Slobin 2003; von Stutterheim et al. 2002; von Stutterheim & Carroll 2006).

All the studies quoted in this paragraph will be our reference point during our research, along with the *Quaestio* model of textual analysis by Klein and von Stutterheim (1989, 1991).

According to the *Quaestio* theory, a text is shaped and informationally organized according to an unconscious question individuals learn to formulate since early childhood. The prototypical question, or *Quaestio*, concerned with a narrative text is *what happened to the protagonist in time X?*, where the event is the information segment to specify, or focus, and the protagonist and the time span the segments in topic. But the *Quaestio* is influenced by the formal and conceptual patterns a certain language has available, which explains the possibility for individuals of different native languages to conceive, for the same type of text, relatively different *Quaestiones* (for instance, *What happened to the protagonist and why?*, *What happened to the protagonist after time X?* etc.).

In the opinion of Klein and von Stutterheim, the *Quaestio* guides the speaker's formal and content choices while building the information structure of a text (introduction, maintenance and reintroduction of referents),<sup>8</sup> or *referential movement*. Giuliano and Di Maio (2008) show that different pragmatic ways of conceiving interaction across cultures also influence the selection of linguistic and conceptual preferences (for example that of deictics). On the whole, this internal question dictates the discourse principles coherence and cohesion are based on.

The way of structuring a text in answer to a *Quaestio* may be internalized through the acquisition of the mother tongue and it seems difficult, if not impossible, to restructure when acquiring a second language, which would explain the many formal and conceptual splits between natives' and learners textual productions.

## The informants

The data we have analyzed are concerned with English and Neapolitan Italian variety, both as L1s and L2s.

The informants are divided into five groups: English L1 and Italian L1 subjects, Italian intermediate and advanced learners of English, and English advanced learners of Italian. Each group consists of 20 informants. As Table 2 shows, the intermediate learners of English all have a degree in English language and literature (4 year degree), which required passing tests certifying a level of at least B2.

The two groups of advanced learners are not fairly comparable, since most English learners have been living in Italy for several years, whereas Italian learners live in Italy despite their high level in English (17 out of 20 are University

Table 2.\* The informants

Category informants	N° subjects	Age	Education	Duration of stay in TC / level in L2	From
English L1	20	From 20 to 50	UD: 14; HS: 6	14: no contact with Italy; 6: several years in Italy (daily use of Engl for job)	USA: 14; UK: 5; Ireland: 1
Italian L1	20	From 22 to 35	UD: 18; HS: 2	–	Naples
English L2 Intermediate	20	From 22 to 35	UD Engl Lan and Lit: 20	No visit or short trips to TC (B2 level) <sup>9</sup>	Naples
English L2 Advanced	20	From 29 to 67	PhD Engl Lit or Ling: 13; UD Engl Lan and Lit: 1; MA Engl topic: 2	From 1 to several years + frequent trips to TC; use of Engl for job (C2 level)	NA: 17; CE: 2; RO: 1
Italian L2 Advanced	20	From 37 to 75	PhD in Engl Lit or Lin: 4; MA: 4; UD: 10; HS: 2	From 4 to several years in TC; for 15: use of Engl. for job; beyond C2 level	USA: 8; UK: 10; NZ: 1; AUS: 1

\* For the abbreviations in this table, cf. *Symbols and abbreviations* at the end of the work.

professors of English language and literature or linguistics). We could not propose any English test to the latter because of their professional status, but their PhD in English Linguistics or Literature and their more or less long stays and frequent journeys abroad seemed to us to guarantee their level, which was further confirmed by the interviews.

The reason why we decided to compare two different levels for English L2, intermediate and very advanced, lies in the more target like deviation that the former could show, at least theoretically, with respect to a delicate domain such as that of textual cohesion. Unfortunately, the scarcity of English native speakers in Naples with an intermediate level in Italian L2 during the data collection prevented us from having an intermediate group for the latter.

## The data

The two languages we will consider, Italian and English, as we have seen, share many anaphoric linking markings (scope particles, adverbials, intonational markings, verbal periphrases).

Table 3 offers an overview of some Germanic and Romance languages (it partly coincides with the one proposed by Dimroth et al. 2010 for the languages they focus on).

**Table 3.** Information structure related typological differences among Dutch, German, English, French and Italian

Language	Word order	Pro-drop?	Pronouns	Ass Part	Intonation
Dutch	V2	No	2 series of personal pronouns (strong and weak)	Yes	Pitch accents for ( <i>verum</i> ) focus marking
German	V2	No	2 series of personal pronouns (strong and weak)	Yes	Pitch accents for ( <i>verum</i> ) focus marking
English	SVO (+ cleft)	No	1 series of subject pronouns	No	Pitch accents for ( <i>verum</i> ) focus marking
French	SVO (+ dislocations, cleft)	No	2 series of personal pronouns (strong and weak)	No	no comparable marking
Italian	Mainly SVO (+ dislocations, cleft)	Yes	1 series of subject pronouns	No	no comparable marking

In some ways English seems to be closer to Romance languages than to Germanic ones, since it has no V2 movement and no positive assertive particle; furthermore, similarly to Italian, it has no double series of pronouns.

But despite these similarities, English and Italian also show differences with respect to the range of means their speakers can exploit when narrating content such as the one proposed by *The finite story* stimulus. As to additive particles (configuration I of the stimulus), English has a larger variety of means (Engl. *also, too, as well* vs It. *anche, pure*) and a different syntax according to each of them; syntax of additive particles is conversely the same for *anche/pure*. The different positioning, in each language, is of course influenced by the diversity of scope that particles can have in a specific discourse context.

- (9) a. John (also/too/as well)<sup>10</sup> eats (as well/too)
- b. John (too/as well) has (also) eaten (as well/too)
- (10) a. (Anche/pure) Giorgio (anche/pure) mangia (anche/pure)
- b. (anche/pure) Giorgio ha (anche/pure) mangiato (anche/pure)

Still with respect to the additive configuration of the task, in both languages it is theoretically possible to use verbal periphrases (Engl. *to do the same thing*; It. *fare la stessa cosa*).

For the second configuration, the employment of restrictive particles (Engl. *only/just* and It. *Solo/solamente/soltanto*) is probable because of the characteristics of this information structure. For restrictive particles, speakers of both languages are supposed to place it immediately before the entity it has scope over (cf. example (4)).

As to temporal adverbs, supposedly crucial for the third configuration of the stimulus, English and Italian offer means whose content and syntax are extremely similar (Engl. *eventually/finally/at last*; It. *finalmente, alla fine*; cf. example (6)).

Both for the first and second configurations, Italian has a specific syntactic strategy according to which the added subject is placed after the verb, in order to highlight its newness status:

- (11) il Signor Rosso non vuole saltare  
       ‘Mr Red does not want to jump’  
       Salta il Signor Blu  
       Jumps Mr Blu  
       ‘Mr Blue jumps’

The main differences between English and Italian lie in the just commented syntactic device and in the use of prosodic contrastive stress. Theoretically, this latter can be exploited to mark information structure both in Romance and Germanic

languages, but intonational prominence plays a greater role in Germanic languages (cf. Féry 2001). With respect to German and Dutch, Dimroth et al. (2010) point out that contrastive stress on the finite lexical verb or the finite auxiliary/modal/copula can be used for the expression of *verum focus* (cf. Höhle 1992).

the latter corresponding to the assertion component of the finite verb independently of its lexical content. Contrastive stress on the finite element can have a function that is very much related to the function of the assertion-related particles, in that an affirmative assertion is contrasted with an earlier negative one. (Dimroth et al. 2010: 3328–2330)

Now, the *verum focus* seems possible for English too, which allows prosodically stressing the finite component of a verb phrase using *do/does/did* and other auxiliaries, the copula, a modal, or also prosodically highlighting the finite lexical verb (cf. examples (5) and (6)).

Theoretically, in Italian, the change of polarity can be marked by a prosodic stress on the finite lexical verb, but this is not a common strategy (cf. *ibid.*); a contrast on a light verb (auxiliary, copula, modal), seems even more uncommon.<sup>11</sup>

Still theoretically, both in English and Italian, the change of polarity could be highlighted by relatively appropriate lexical means, that is, Eng. *actually* and It. *proprio*, *effettivamente*, as in the following *ad hoc* examples:

- (12) a. Il Signor Rosso non si lancia // il Signor Verde neppure si lancia // il Signor Blu *effettivamente* si lancia  
 b. Mr Red does not jump // Mr Green does not jump either // Mr Blue *actually* does jump

But these lexical means are not to be considered as “asserted related means”, since they do not entail a real contrast of polarity and so have no real implication for the assertion.

## Research hypotheses

By comparing L1 and L2 data, we shall try to answer the following research questions:

1. Do learners select the same content units (i.e., Topic Time, Topic Entity, Polarity, Predicate) that native speakers choose for anaphoric linkage (in particular contrasts) in the configurations under analysis?
2. Which prosodic and linguistic anaphoric means (lexical, morphological and syntactic) do native speakers and learners use in the information configurations in question?

3. Does L1 specific effects play any role in the learners' narrations with respect to points (1) and (2)?
4. Do learners exploit particular interlanguage strategies, independent from L1s and L2s?

Our research aims at enriching the debate concerning the L2 learner's perspective-taking when building textual cohesion in a narrative text. Since the two languages we will focus on are English and Italian, this could also add some relevant considerations about anaphoric linkage mechanisms in Romance and Germanic languages.

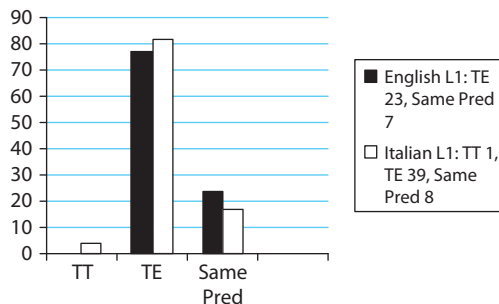
**Information configuration I: Different Topic Entity, same Polarity, same Predicate**

The natives' data

Graphics 1 and 2 illustrate the results we obtained for native English and Italian speaking subjects with respect to configuration 1; the legends report the number of markings for each conceptual domain or type of means.

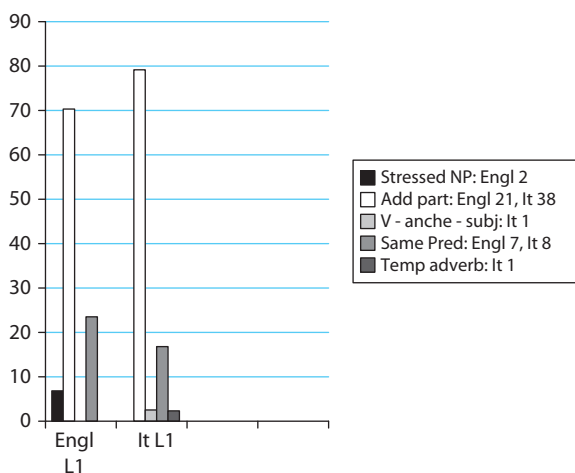
As emerges from Graphic 1, speakers of both groups mark the contrast of entity in a preponderant way but much less the identity of situation (cf. the acronym *Same Pred* in Graphic 1), and they do that by lexical means such as additive particles for the contrast of entity, and anaphoric VPs for the identity of situation (cf. Graphic 2). So, on the whole, the differences between the two groups are not extraordinary with respect to both the semantic domains and the formal means they select to establish anaphoric linkage.

Concerning syntax, the analysis shows that Italian speakers only rarely exploit the Verb-Subject order to emphasize the focus status of an "added" subject,



**Graphic 1.** Conceptual domains: Configuration I, English and Italian as L1s





Graphic 2. Linguistic means: Configuration I, English and Italian as L1s

generally in cases where the subject, and not the predicate, contains newer, less accessible information (cf. example (11)).

With respect to prosodic aspects, we paid attention to stressed elements, in particular when the configuration was *implicitly additive*, in other words when there was no formal additive marking such as an additive particle or the repetition of the same predicate; we made the hypothesis that in this case the speaker could signal addition just by prosody. As to L1 English data, in two passages, the prosodic prominence is taken on by the noun phrase involved in the Topic Entity contrast:

(13) Mr Green did not wake up // *MR RED* did not wake up (Lauren, English L1)

(14) Mr Green slept while the fire became stronger and stronger // *MR RED* slept while the fire became stronger and stronger (Ailish, English L1)

In both of these examples above the additive configuration has no explicit additive formal marking and the flat prosodic contour of VP as opposed to the prominence of the entity *Mr Red* could suggest that the latter is in focus, and that the informant is not answering a prototypical *Quaestio* for a narration,<sup>12</sup> but rather a *local Quaestio* such as *who else does not wake up?*<sup>13</sup> However our Italian L1 speakers never signal NPs prosodically when the additive configuration does not contain an explicit additive marking.

For the latter, we also observed what seems to be a peculiarity of Southern Italian speakers (cf. also the results in English L2, below): they sometimes exploit

temporal contrast devices in order to mark the first information structure (no group of Dimroth et al. 2010 exploits it):

- (15) Anche il Signor Rosso dorme // il Signor Blu *finalmente* si accorge della fiamma sopra al tetto (Antonella, Italian L1)  
 ‘Mr Red also sleeps // Mr Blue *finally* sees the flame on the roof’

The meaning of (15) is “*at the beginning* everybody sleeps on, *finally* Mr Blue realizes that there’s a fire”.

In conclusion, for the first configuration, both Italian and English native speakers preferentially select the entity domain to mark contrasts and they do it by similar linguistic means, especially additive particles.

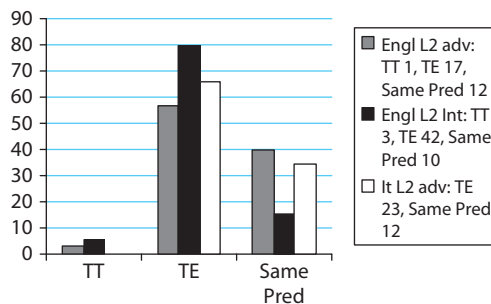
### The data in English and Italian as L2s

As to Italian L2 learners of English, the advanced ones mark both the Topic Entity level and the same predication level in a more balanced way with respect to the intermediate group, who definitively prefer to highlight the contrast of entity. The results for the English speaking learners of Italian also confirm the tendency to focus on the TE level.

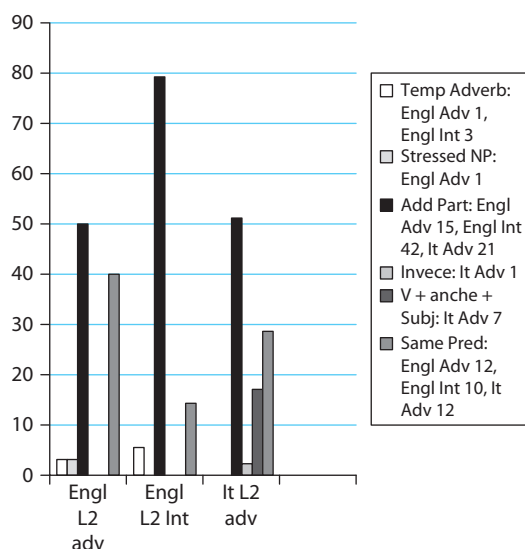
As to the lexical means that learners of English exploit for the change of entity and the identity of situation (namely, *also, as well, too; to do the same thing* etc.), they essentially coincide with the ones selected by the English native group, although the percentages for each item can vary.

Both advanced and intermediate subjects also use the adverbials *finally, it’s the time of, in the end* etc. for the first configuration, as in the following passage:

- (16) after Mr Blue also Mr Green goes to sleep // and then *it’s the time* of Mr Red who goes to his bed (Luisa, English L2, Intermediate)



Graphic 3. Conceptual domains: Configuration I, English and Italian as L2s



Graphic 4. Linguistic means: Configuration I, English and Italian as L2s

The contrast of time spans for the configuration in question seems typical of our Southern Italian subjects in Italian L1 too, whereas it is never marked by English native speakers either in L1 or Italian L2.

If the lexical repertoire does not seem to cause enormous problems to Italian learners of English, the same is not true for the syntax of additive particles. The intermediate group, in particular, when using *also* does a syntactic operation which is clearly influenced by transfer from Italian: as a matter of fact this particle is probably perceived by the intermediate learner as an item able to be closer to the protagonist entity it has scope over, and as a result all intermediate informants tend to place it before the subject in its scope instead of after it, as native English speaking subjects do.

- (17) *Also Mr X*<sup>14</sup> VP<sup>15</sup>  
*Also Mr Green* e: is laying on his bed (Luana, English L2, Intermediate)

This syntactic pattern is almost completely lacking in the narrations of advanced learners of English (1 occurrence).

As far as the learners of Italian are concerned, they use the same lexical means as the native Italians, except the temporal adverbials, otherwise infrequent in Italian L1 too. With reference to syntax, the analysis shows that the Verb-Subject order, by which Italian native speakers can emphasize the focus status of an “added” subject, has clearly been acquired by learners, and this pattern is exploited along

with a pronoun (5 occ.s) or a full NP (2 occ.s),<sup>16</sup> namely more often than by native Italians.

With respect to prosodic aspects, once again we paid attention to stressed elements when the information configuration was implicitly additive. For English L2 learners, we found a prosodically stressed NP in one of the advanced learners' narrations:

- (18) Music is really::: gloomy and Mr Green is still sleeping # unaware of the danger // Music is still very loud and *MR RED* is still sleeping unaware of the danger (Mara, English L2, Advanced)

No prosodic prominence was instead detected for intermediate learners of English and learners of Italian.

In conclusion, for the first configuration both Italian learners of English and English speaking learners of Italian preferentially select the entity domain to mark contrasts; the marking of the identity of situation is less represented. In both cases, all groups of learners exploit very similar linguistic (lexical or syntactic) means. Temporal contrasts appear just in English L2 data and are not conspicuous; these same contrasts were detected in Italian L1 narrations.

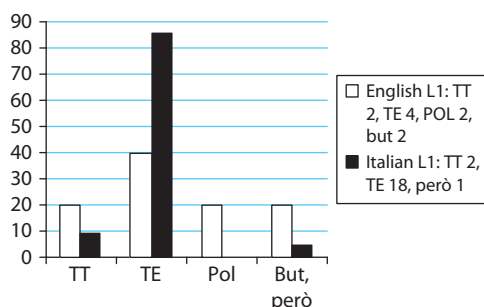
Despite the two different acquisitional levels we have available for English L2, we found no relevant difference between the two groups. The only relative differences are concerned with: (a) the (otherwise very limited) occasional exploitation of the prosodic stress on NP to create contrasts (1 occ.) in the advanced retellings, which intermediate learners never use; (b) the more extensive selection of the identity of situation means (cf. the expressions *does the same thing* and *it's the same*) by the advanced learners, a result vaguely closer to the English L1 results.

### **Information configuration II: Different Topic Entity, opposite Polarity, same Predicate**

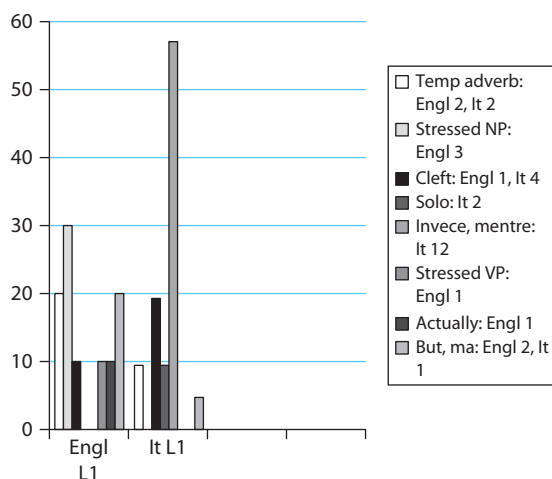
#### The natives' data

Graphics 5 and 6 show the results for the second configuration with respect to our native groups.

Both groups of native speakers exploit the Topic Entity contrast and, although to a lesser extent, the Topic Time contrast. Just English speaking informants also exploit the Polarity contrast, even if not in a preponderant way.<sup>17</sup> There are also some instances of not specific contrast, that the informants mark by generic conjunctions (Engl. *but*, *however* and It. *però*), for which it is impossible to say which



**Graphic 5.** Conceptual domains: Configuration II, English and Italian as L1s



**Graphic 6.** Linguistic means: Configuration II, English and Italian as L1s

component of the utterance is involved in the contrast, unless a prosodically marked element makes it clear.

The most relevant difference between the two groups lies in: (a) the highlighting of assertive polarity exclusively by English speaking informants; (b) the greater exploitation of Topic Entity contrast by native Italians; (c) the different use of the primacy and uniqueness markings, that Italian speakers employ more extensively to contrast entities;<sup>18</sup> (d) the contrast of entities by prosodic stress, used just by native English speakers.

Point (b) could be explained by the greater focus of Italians on the contrast of entities rather than alternative types of contrasts such as that of assertion. As to point (c), the primacy and uniqueness markings consist of cleft constructions along with adjectives/adverbial expressions such as *unico/primo/per primo* (unique, first, as first):

- (19) Il sig. Blu invece è l'unico che: accetta di lanciarsi (Antonella, Italian L1)  
 'Mr Blue instead is the only one who accepts to jump'

and of the restrictive particle *solo*:

- (20) Solo il sig. Blu comincia ad accorgersi di qualcosa di strano (Francesco, Italian L1)  
 'Only Mr Blue starts realizing [that there is] something strange'

Now, although these means give place to a contrast in the entity domain (similarly to *invece*, *mentre* and the prosodic stress on NP), Andorno and Benazzo (2010) suggest that they differ in the semantic perspective taken, since they single out an entity by adding an additional notion of *restriction* or of *chronological order* which seems to be typical of Italian native speakers.

As to point (a) above, we investigated any possible stress on the finite component of the verb, whether other polarity contrasting means were present or lacking. We identified a context with a prosodic stress on the finite lexical verb:

- (21) Mr Green slept while the fire became stronger and stronger // MR RED slept while the fire became stronger and stronger // Mr Blue WOKE up and he SAW the fire (Ailish, English L1)

Still for the polarity contrast, we also found a passage with *actually*:

- (22) Mr Green is scared and backs up from the window // the same happens with Mr Red // Mr Blue *actually* jumps (Ann, English L1)

As already mentioned, the adverb *actually* does not entail a real contrast of polarity with respect to an antecedent, namely it does not scope over the assertion but just signals the actual realisation of an event as opposed to a hypothetical event which has only been expected, desired etc. The function of *actually* is comparable to that of Fr. *bien*, namely to the function of a Romance device.<sup>19</sup>

As to point (d), we focused on possible stressed NPs where the contrast between Mr Blue who wakes up or jumps and the others who do not is marked only by prosody, that is without any contrasting lexical means (Engl. *on the other hand*, *conversely* etc.). We found two stressed NPs in additive configurations, in one case with a generic contrastive means (*though*):

- (23) Mr Green... doesn't want to jump //... even he [= Mr Red] doesn't want to jump out onto the blanket // MR BLUE *though*... jumps straight away (Lynne, English L1)

The prosodic stress lets us deduce *which element is concerned with the contrast*.

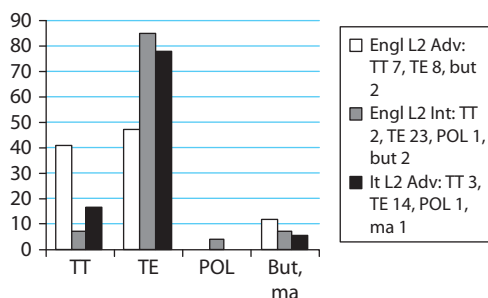
To sum up, for the second configuration our native informants preferentially mark contrasts in the entity domain, even though with partly different means: prosodic stress seems relatively infrequent in native English narrations (just 2 occurrences), whereas Italian tales preferentially show primacy and uniqueness (lexical and syntactic) devices. As to polarity markings, the few cases of contrasts we identified are concerned with English L1.

### The data in English and Italian as L2s

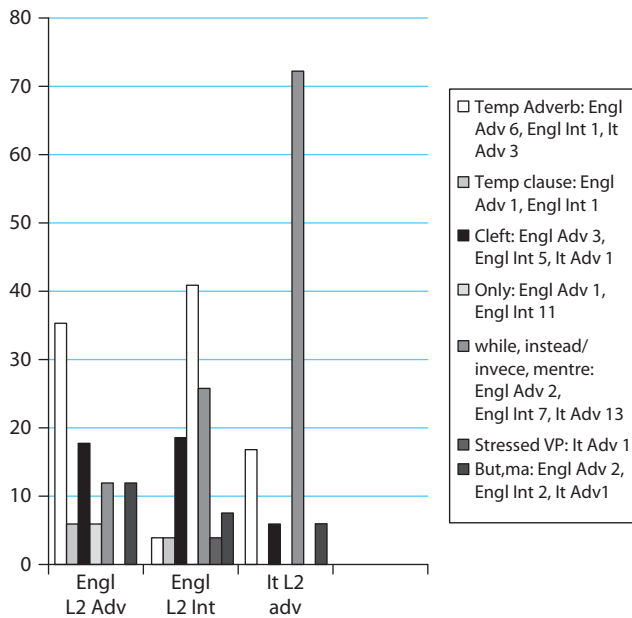
Graphics 7 and 8 show the results obtained for the second configuration with respect to learners' narrations.

The groups of learners exploit the same types of contrast: the entity contrast (examples (24), (25), (26), (28)), the topic time contrast (example (27), containing an entity contrast as well) and, to a much lesser extent, the generic contrast (example (29)).

- (24) *The Blue man is the brave man is the one who has jumped out of the window* (Michele, English L2, Advanced)
- (25) While the other: two men continue to sleep *only* Mr Blue eh realizes that the fire is: is burning in their palace (Luisa, English L2, Intermediate)
- (26) Mister Green too continues to sleep while someone else makes noise // Miste:r Blue e: *instead* wants to see what's going on so... he goes to the window (Wanda, English L2, Advanced)
- (27) Anche il Signor Rossi non ha: sentito niente: e quindi sta... lui anche ancora a dormire // *ADEsso* il signor: BLU si è svegliato (Elisabeth, Italian L2, Advanced)



Graphic 7. Conceptual domains: Configuration II, English and Italian as L2s



Graphic 8. Linguistic means: Configuration II, English and Italian as L2s

- (28) Anche il signor rosso non si sveglia... // *mentre* il signor BLU *invece* si affaccia dalla finestra (Tricia, Italian L2, Advanced)  
 ‘Mr Red does not wake up either... // *whereas* Mr BLU *instead* leans out of the window’

The global or general contrast does not turn out to be specific of learners’ productions, as it occurs only in a few contexts:

- (29) the green man doesn’t seem to to realize that this thing is happening // and the red man as well # ok // *but* the blue man understands what’s going on (Eleonora, English L2, Advanced)

As to the polarity contrast, we found one occurrence in the narration of an intermediate learner of English, where the contrast is conveyed by a prosodic stress on the finite lexical verb:

- (30) But Mr Red reFUSES to jump // Mr Blue JUMPs (Annarita, English L2, Intermediate)

Despite the similarity of semantic domains that all groups of learners select, we identified some relevant differences in the means they exploit with respect to the entity contrast. Italian learners of English exploit primacy and uniqueness devices



extensively, as otherwise they do in their L1, which explains the frequency of cleft structures containing adjectives/adverbs such as *the brave one*, *the only one* and of the restrictive particle *only*. Graphic 8 also shows that the uniqueness/primacy markings are *more frequent in the intermediate group* than in the advanced one, probably as a result of a stronger transfer from Italian L1. English L1 learners of Italian, conversely, never use this same particle and just in one passage exploit a primacy device.

Italian learners frequently employ adverbs such as *while*, *instead*, that native speakers of English never exploit in their narrations (cf. Graphic 6). This sounds like a transfer, namely a translation of It. *mentre*, *invece* into English: as a matter of fact, from a functional viewpoint, *while* is comparable to It. *mentre* and *instead* to It. *invece*.

As for English native learners of Italian, while they fail to demonstrate some formal means typical of Italian narrations (primacy and uniqueness means), they show to manage some others, namely the adverbs *invece e mentre* (cf. example (28) above).

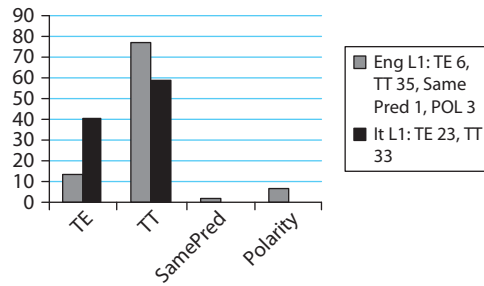
To sum up, for the second configuration all our informants preferentially mark contrasts in the entity and time conceptual domains, even though with partly different means, the use of some of which seems dictated by transfer from L1, especially for learners of English. These means are essentially lexical (adverbs: *invece*, *instead*, *while*, *mentre* etc.; additive and restrictive particles; adjectives: *the brave one*, *il primo* etc.) and only minimally syntactic (cleft constructions). Still with respect to English L2, transfer from Italian appears more extensively in the intermediate group's narrations; as to the advanced group, even though their retellings show a less invasive presence of the L1 transfer, they exploit temporal adverbials very often, which does not correspond to an English L1 strategy (cf. Graphics 5 and 6) but rather to a learner strategy.

Prosodic contrasts, finally, do not play a special role for none of the groups of learners.

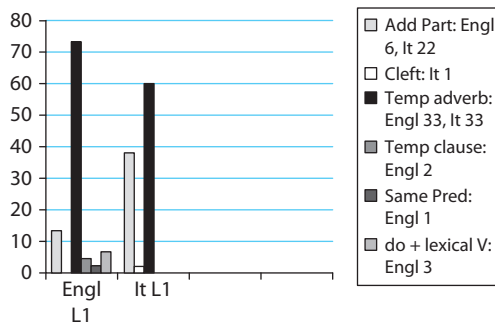
### **Information configuration III: Same Topic, opposite Polarity, same Predicate**

#### The natives' data

Graphics 9 and 10 below illustrate the results for the third configuration relative to native English and Italian speakers' narrations.



Graphic 9. Conceptual domains: Configuration III, English and Italian as L1s



Graphic 10. Linguistic means: Configuration III, English and Italian as L1s

As Graphic 9 shows, the most exploited relation by natives for information configuration III is concerned with the Topic Time contrast, for which speakers employ several adverbs and adverbial expressions or clauses:

- (31) *This time* the fire-fighter answers the phone (Lynne, English L1)
- (32) Il signor rosso eh: *dopo gli inviti ripetuti* dei vigili del fuoco di lanciarsi *alla fine* si lancia (Salvatore, Italian L1)  
 ‘Mr Red eh: after *the repeated invitations* of firemen to jump *at the end* he jumps’

Nevertheless, Italian speakers extensively mark the Topic Entity Contrast as well; English native speakers exploit this same contrast less frequently.

- (33) And so because the flames have got to his bedroom he [= Mr Green] decides the best thing to do is to jump *as well* (Lynne, English L1)

The highlighting of the Topic Entity contrast, for the third configuration, is normally marked by additive particles and is the major difference with respect to Northern Italian informants of Dimroth et al. (2010), who never mark it.

As to the change of polarity, our Italian native speakers never exploit this type of contrast;<sup>20</sup> English native speakers mark the change of polarity in three contexts, by an emphasizing auxiliary together with a temporal contrasting means:

(34) But *finally* Mr Red *did* jump out of the window (Ailish, English L1)

In the contexts in question, the auxiliary *do* never takes on a pitch accent, which shows a limited exploitation of prosodic strategies.

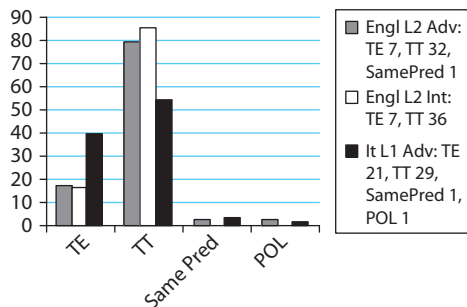
As to prosody in general for the third configuration, we focused on possible *veri foci*<sup>21</sup> in utterances whether other contrastive means (*on the other hand, invece* etc.) were lacking or not; we also focused on possible non specific temporal adverbs (*then, poi, now, ora* etc.) prosodically stressed in order to mark a temporal contrast. Now, the only informants who exploit prosodic devices of the type just quoted are the English speaking ones, with just one occurrence of *NOW*.

In conclusion, for the third configuration English and Italian native speakers show only relative differences as to the type of conceptual categories they select to build anaphoric linkage: both groups preferentially mark contrasts with respect to the entity and the time domains, by similar means even though with a different extension. The real diversity between the two groups lies in the exploitation of the polarity contrast by the English native speakers, who nevertheless do not mark it in a preponderant way and always along with temporal adverbial expressions.

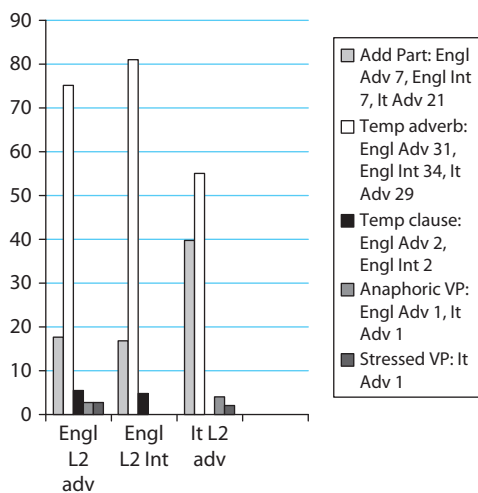
### Data in English and Italian as L2s

Graphics 11 and 12 are concerned with the conceptual and linguistic markings that learners of English and Italian exploit for the third configuration.

As we can see, similarly to natives of their SLs (cf. Graphics 9 and 10), learners exploit the Topic Time contrast extensively. But whereas learners of Italian



**Graphic 11.** Conceptual domains: Configuration III, English and Italian as L2s



Graphic 12. Linguistic means: Configuration III, English and Italian as L2s

mark the Entity Contrast as well, learners of English exploit the latter much less frequently.

By comparing these results with what emerged from natives’ narrations, we can make the observation that the choices of both groups of learners are quite close to those of natives in their SLs.

As to the change of polarity, Italian intermediate learners of English never mark it. For advanced learners of English and Italian, they exploit it just in the following passages by a prosodic stress on the lexical finite verb (*SALta* and *SAVed*):

- (35) Poi vanno sotto la finestra del signore blu... e: ci sono già fiamme nelle stanze e lui non PUO’ dire di no... allora *SALta* (Margaret, Italian L2, Advanced)  
 ‘then they go under the window of Mr Blue e:... there are already some flames in the rooms and he CANnot say no... so he *JUMps*’
- (36) he *finally* jumps and he is *SAVed* (Mara, English L2, Advanced)

As to prosody in general, intermediate learners of English seem to be too concentrated on lexicon and clause grammar to pay attention to prosody and so their intonation is generally flat (with respect to the whole narration). Conversely, the advanced learners are more able to prosodically mark contrasts together with other means (cf. *finally* and *SAVed* in (36) above).

The first passage below has both Entity and Time Contrasts, the second one has just a Time Contrast. Both learners use a pitch accent on the adverbs *POI* (along with the additive particle *anche*, example (37)) and *Finally* (38):

- (37) Il personaggio rosso continua a non voler saltare # anche col fuoco in camera  
// *MA POI* salta anche lui e: ed è salvo (Molly, Italian, L2 Advanced)  
'the red character keeps on wanting to jump # even with the fire in his room  
// *BUT THEN* he jumps as well and and: is saved'
- (38) *Finally* he's able to talk to them because I can see the fireman answering the  
phone (Silvia, English L2, Advanced)

In conclusion, for the third configuration, the narrations of the three groups of learners do not show extraordinary differences as to the type of conceptual categories they select to mark contrasts, namely the entities and the time domains, and they use very similar means in comparable percentages. The most relevant diversity is concerned with the absence in the retellings of both intermediate and advanced learners of English of any polarity enlightenment by the auxiliary *do*.

For learners of Italian, we can wonder whether their sporadic relying on prosodic stress is due to their mother tongue influence (Graphic 6, more than other graphics, seems to confirm this suggestion).

As to the English L2 intermediate group, it rests apart from the advanced group just for the absence of specific intonational contours in the creation of contrasts.

## Discussion of the results

In this section we shall go back to the research questions.

1. Do learners select the same content units (i.e., Topic Time, Topic Entity, Polarity, Same Predication) that native speakers of SL and TL choose for anaphoric linkage in the configurations under analysis?

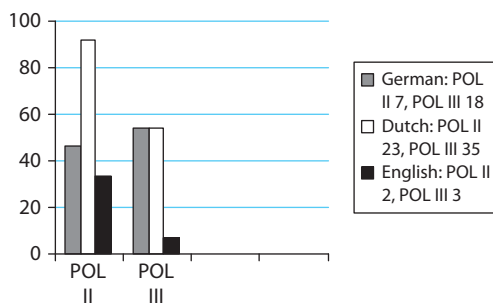
The predominant information structures our five groups of informants select to set up contrasts are concerned with *the Topic Entity domain and the Topic Time domain*; the identity of situation and the polarity contrasts are much less marked.

The topic entity contrast is predominant for the first configuration both in the learners' narrations and in the natives', which is expectable, given the characteristics of this information structure (cf. examples (1) and (2)). For English L2, in particular, we identified a difference between the advanced and the intermediate group, since the latter exploits the entity contrast much more than the identity of situation; this result is an agreement with the precocious appearance of entity contrasting means such as additive particles already remarked in previous studies (cf. Benazzo 2000).

As for the time contrast, our Italian speakers are *particularly sensitive to it*: they exploit this type of anaphoric linkage both in L1 and L2 for all three configurations, although to a different extent. The Italian Southern dialect substratum could explain (for reasons to investigate) this focus on temporal contrasts with respect to the different result for Northern informants obtained by Dimroth et al. (2010). English native speakers, conversely, exploit the temporal anaphoric linkage, in L1 and L2, just for the second and third configurations.

For the second information structure, in particular, we identified a difference between the intermediate learners of English and the other groups of learners in the fact that the former use temporal contrasts at a lesser extent but overexploit the primacy/uniqueness strategies (cf. comment to point 4 *infra*).

The contrast of Polarity is not marked at all in Italian L1, and only infrequently marked in English L1; it is even less crucial in Italian and English L2s. Italian learners of English, in particular, even when advanced, seem not to be really sensitive to assertion contrasts, which otherwise are not frequent in native English either. Now, if this result is relatively significant in acquisitional terms, it is much more from a typological viewpoint, since it sets English apart from other investigated Germanic languages. For example, we furnish a graphic combining Dimroth et al.’s results, for Dutch L1 and German L1, with our results for English native speakers, with respect to the second and third configurations (marked by POL II and POL III):



**Graphic 13.** Polarity domain, configurations II and III: German, Dutch and English as L1s

As the graphic shows, in English the contrast of polarity is rare, in particular with respect to Dutch, which leads us to suggest that English, despite its Germanic origins, is a much less “assertion oriented language”, since its native speakers, at least in the task considered here, take on a cohesive perspective *much closer to the Romance pattern of textual coherence* than to the German one. Historical facts but also typological modifications of internal (structural) and external (pragmatic) nature could be the cause of the present state of affair in English.

2. Which prosodic and linguistic anaphoric means (lexical, morphological and syntactic) do native speakers and learners use in the information configurations in question?

The comparison between the two native groups shows some differences with respect to which we can wonder what learners have or have not acquired at advanced and (just for Italian) intermediate levels.

As to the entity contrast, the results for the first configuration show no relevant difference between natives of SL and TL and learners, as conversely happens for the second configuration. In the latter case, learners of English often exploit the primacy/uniqueness strategies involving both lexical (especially *only/solo*) and syntactical (especially clefts) means, and the contrasting adverbs *while/instead* (cf. It. *mentre/invece*) as they do in L1. The primacy/uniqueness strategies are almost completely absent in English L1 and in Italian L2, since speakers never use *only/solo* and very rarely clefts (1 occurrence per each group, cf. Graphic 8). As a result, narrations of all groups of learners are partly deviant from natives' of SL and TL because of transfer from L1.

If learners of Italian do not perceive the frequency with which Italian native speakers exploit the primacy/uniqueness strategies, learners of English, both advanced and intermediate, never exploit the prosodic stress on NP for the second configuration and just once for the first one. Conversely, English native speakers use this latter strategy in L1, even though not particularly often, for both the first and the second information structures (cf. Graphics 2 and 6).

As far as temporal contrasts are concerned, for this conceptual domain all five groups extensively exploit adverbs. As to intonational strategies, we found very few occurrences (*NOW* in English L1; *ADEsso*, *POI* in Italian L2; *Finally* in advanced English L2).

As to the polarity contrast, as we said above, Italian learners are not very sensitive to this domain (1 occurrence for the advanced group and 1 for the intermediate one), and when they mark it they never do it by the auxiliary *do* but by a prosodic pitch accent (cf. examples (30) and (36)), whereas English native speakers exploit both means in L1 and, of course, just the intonational strategy in Italian L2 (cf. examples (21), (34) and (35)).

3. Do L1 specific effects play any role in the learners' narrations, especially with respect to points (1) and (2)?

As to the first configuration, we can detect a transfer from L1 just in the English L2 data (advanced and intermediate), because of the exploitation of temporal relations, that English native speakers never mark for this information structure, either in L1 or L2. The learners' selection of formal means for the entity domain

and the identity of situation does not show any particular influence of their L1s on the lexical level (additive particles and anaphoric predicates) but rather on the syntactic level, at least for intermediate learners of English, who overexploit the structure *also NP VP*.

For the second configuration, transfer from L1 shows up in different ways according to the group of learners.

For learners of English L2, transfer has to do with the type of lexical and syntactic means they select for the entity contrast. As a matter of fact, learners of English: (a) overexploit the contrasting adverbs *while/instead*; (b) emphasize the primacy/uniqueness strategy by specific adjectives/adverbs (*the brave/first one, the only one*), the restrictive particle *only* and the cleft constructions (cf. Graphic 8). This same strategy is in a way oriented to a *subspecific semantic field* within the entity conceptual domain: that of restriction or chronological order. Even though used by both groups of English L2 learners (advanced and intermediate), strategies (a) and (b) are exploited more extensively in the intermediate group's narrations. The influence of Italian L1 is also seen in the almost complete absence of prosodic stress for NPs involved in entity contrasts.

As to Italian L2 of English native speakers, despite their extremely long stays in Italy, transfer from L1 is detectable in the extremely rare use (1 occ.) of the primacy/uniqueness strategy (cf. *ibid.*).<sup>22</sup>

For the third configuration transfer from L1 shows up in the absence of any polarity highlighting by the auxiliary *do*, in both English L2 intermediate and advanced retellings. The intermediate group, however, rests apart from the advanced one for the absence of any specific intonational contour in the creation of contrasts. For learners of Italian, it is more difficult to detect transfer from L1, but we can wonder whether their reliance on prosodic stress in highlighting contrasts, although sporadic, is due to the mother tongue influence (Graphic 6, more than other graphics, seems to confirm this suggestion).

#### 4. Do learners exploit particular interlanguage strategies, independent from L1s and L2s?

We did not identify many strategies of this type. A specific interlinguistic phenomenon could be the overexploitation of additive particles by intermediate learners of English for configuration 1 (cf. Graphic 4). In contrast with our expectations, the generic means of contrast (*but, however* etc.; *ma, comunque* etc.) do not play any specific role in learners' narrations of any level, differently from the results of Andorno and Benazzo (2010).

Some of the observations furnished during this section clearly show that our learners of Italian and English master *lexical* cohesive means quite well, but that



they neglect some *syntactic* structures. Italian learners of English (both intermediate and advanced) never exploit the highlighting of assertion by the morpho-syntactic structure *finite auxiliary (do) + lexical non finite verb* (cf. example (5c)); the intermediate group, especially, prefer additive particle to verbal expressions such as *to do the same thing*. As to learners of Italian, even though they master the structure *VP – Subject*, they definitively prefer contrasting adverbs such as *invece* to the uniqueness and primacy, (both lexical and) syntactic strategies. Such results are coherent with the following acquisitional pattern that many authors have often pointed out for second language acquisition (cf., for example, Benazzo 2000; Giuliano 2004; Andorno & Benazzo 2010):

lexical means > syntactic means

Nevertheless, for the two advanced groups, this cannot be the only explanation, in our opinion. These groups evidently have a firm grasp of the L2 sentence grammar since their retellings are very sophisticated from any viewpoint; despite that they do not seem to perceive the *frequency* by which some L2 structures and semantic domains recur in the input. Astonishingly, the advanced Italian L2 group is made of people having been living in Italy for many years and their competence in Italian is “near native”.

In conclusion, with respect to textual cohesion, Italian and English texts show many similarities from a typological viewpoint. However, this does not prevent learners from having some problems when selecting the conceptual and formal means emerging from the native input and outweighing their frequency. In agreement with Andorno and Benazzo (2010: 115), our results show that

structural similarities prevent learners from noticing more systematic differences... When available, similar structures help learners’ production, but also prevent them from a further analysis of the input.

As to intermediate learners, they clearly have not reached a mastering of some formal and semantic structures yet. For advanced learners, the cohesive means adopted do not formally deviate from the target language lexicon and sentence grammar; nevertheless, they still do not clearly distinguish between this first cognitive operation (target language specifics at *sentence level*) and the *discourse level* cognitive procedures. As a result, the frequency with which learners use the formal means and conceptual domains they select throughout a text can be quite deviant from what emerges for natives’ narrations. The learners’ task is particularly difficult in this respect, given the optionality of such markings and semantic choices in the target language; in other words, no clear-cut positive or negative evidence but only *frequency* can be used as an evidence of native speakers’ discourse preferences, on both formal and conceptual levels.

## Symbols and abbreviations

//	marks the border between the comments concerned with the different segments of the video clip
#	marks a short pause
:	marks the lengthening of a phoneme
...	refers to the elimination of a passage
[..]	contains the analyst's observations or additions
IS	information structure
TE	Topic Entity
TT	Topic Time
POL	Polarity
PRED	Predicate
Add Part	Additive Particle
Ass Part	Assertive Particle
INF	Infinitive
Temp	Temporal
Subj	Subject
Int	Intermediate
Adv	Advanced
Du.	Dutch
Fr.	French
It.	Italian
Engl.	English
Ger.	German
UD	University Degree
HS	High School
Lan and Lit	Language and Literature
Ling	Linguistics
TC	target Country
NA	Naples
CE	Caserta (town in the region of Naples)
RO	Rome
NZ	New Zealand
AUS	Australia
Engl L2 Int	Intermediate learners of English L2
Engl L2 Adv	Advanced learners of English L2
It L2 Adv	Advanced learners of Italian L2
SL	source language
TL	target language

## Notes

1. I will adopt the notion of contrast proposed by Umbach (2004), which is based on comparability presupposing both similarity and dissimilarity.
2. Cf. symbols and abbreviations at the end of the work.
3. For the notions of *topic* and *focus*, as used in our work, cf. the comment on the *Quaestio* theory in the section Previous Studies and Framework.
4. In graphics we shall refer to such verbal periphrases by the acronym *Same Pred* (same predication). Furthermore, we shall define the semantic level they belong to as *identity of situation*.
5. The Italian adverb *invece* normally has scope on entities.
6. Italian regional varieties can show very different characteristics from each other, partly because of the influence of the extremely different (essentially neolatin) dialects still spoken in most of the regions.
7. Lexical items are considered perceptually more salient and have a greater flexibility with respect to morphosyntactic means; cf., among other works, Benazzo (2003).
8. The *Quaestio* shaping a whole text is said to be *global* by contrast to an incidental or *local Quaestio* a speaker can answer during his textual production, that he will abandon immediately afterwards. So, with respect to our stimulus, a narrator could focus on a protagonist instead of the event, answering by that a *local Quaestio* such as *Who else jumps?*
9. Our learners' levels have been established according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; for advanced English speaking informants, in particular, they are beyond the C2 level because of their long residence in Italy.
10. The structure *Subject as well/too VP* is typical of colloquial English. Similarly, the particle *also* can be placed immediately after the item it has scope over, but in this case it takes on the main accent (*John also has seen it; I saw his elder brother also*).
11. Although it is known that Romance languages mark both narrow and contrastive focus with a pitch accent (cf., for example, Avesani & Vaira 2003), there is no systematic study dealing with the prosodic marking on the assertion component of a finite verb in this type of languages.
12. For the *Quaestio* Theory, cf. the section Previous Studies and Framework.
13. For the notion of "local *Quaestio*", cf. the section Previous Studies and Framework, Note 8.
14. The underline marks the element/s the particle scopes over.
15. Cf. It. *anche/pure il Signor X - VP*.
16. Conversely, Andorno and Benazzo (2010) never find the *V-S* pattern with a full NP in their Italian L2 narrations by German and French learners.

17. For the polarity contrast in Northern Italian data, Dimroth et al. (2010) found just one instance, given by a prosodically stressed finite (lexical) verb (*sveGLIAto*: woken).
18. For the primacy and uniqueness means in Northern Italian variety, cf. Andorno and Benazzo (2010).
19. Cf. the comment on Fr. *bien* in Dimroth et al. (2010).
20. For the polarity contrast, Dimroth et al. (2010) found just one occurrence of *effettivamente* in their Northern Italian data; for a discussion of the functioning of this adverb, cf. our Data Section.
21. We remind the reader that according to Höhle (1992) (cf. Data Section), the *verum* focus refers to the prosodically stressed component of a finite verb.
22. Overuse and underuse of structures have often been observed as typical effects of crosslinguistic influence.

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