

The development of verbal strategies in L2 Italian of low/non-literate adult learners

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Workshop on «L2 language and literacy learning
in adulthood with no/low educational background»



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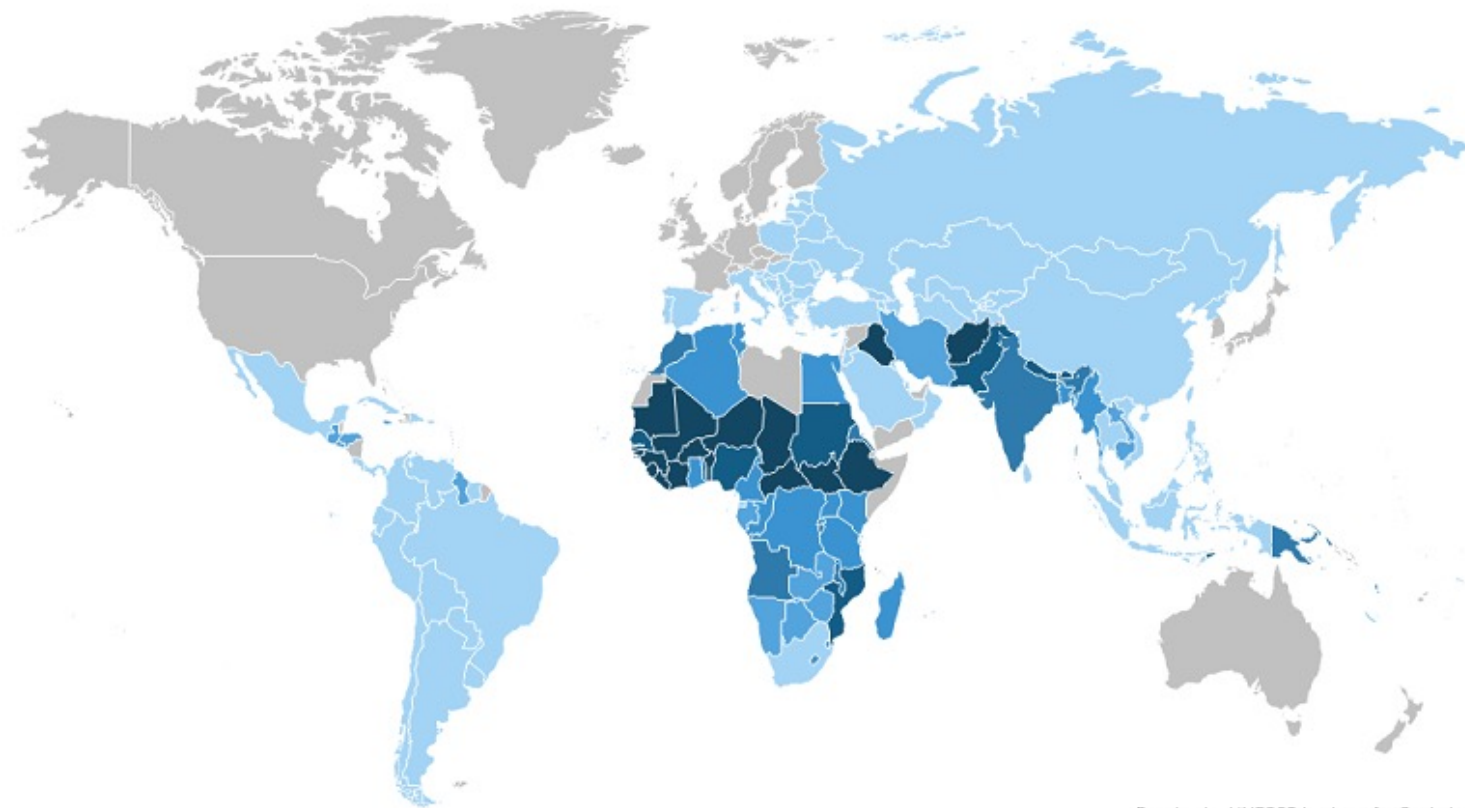
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*"The dynamics of language, communication
and culture in a changing world"*



Places

Adult literacy rate (2017)



Data by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

90%-100% 80%-89% 70%-79% 60%-69% 50%-59% Less than 50% No data

Places

- Reception system (hubs, hosting centres)
 - Segregation
 - Plurilingual speakers, multilingual contexts, multi/polylinguistic interaction
 - Low/no interaction with the local population
 - Low/no exposure to the local language(s) (varieties of Italian, Sicilian)

➔ Acquisition without contact?



Studies

❑ Peripherality of research on L2 acquisition in migration contexts

- Biased samples and non-representativeness (Andringa & Godfroid 2020; Henrich et al. 2010; Tarone & Bigelow 2005)

❑ Previous large-scale studies on (im)migrants' L2 acquisition

- Low exposure, low-schooling, *no attention* to literacy (Becker et al. 1977; Clahsen et al. 1983; Klein & Perdue 1992; Perdue 1993; Clahsen et al. 1991)
- Naturalistic acquisition, *no attention* to schooling and literacy (Giacalone Ramat 2003)

❑ Existing studies on the role of literacy and/or schooling (inter alia)

- Bigelow & Tarone (2004); Tarone (2010); Tarone & Bigelow (2005, 2007); Tarone et al. (2006, 2009)
- Vainikka & Young-Scholten (2007); Vainikka et al. (2017); Young-Scholten & Strom (2006)
- (L2s different from English) Julien et al. (2016); Oldenkamp (2013); Sanders et al. (2014); Van de Craats (2011); Tammelin-Laine (2014, 2015); Tammelin-Laine & Martin (2016); Janko (2020); Janko et al. (2019)

Questions (and methodological choices)

1 What influence (if any) does literacy and other sociolinguistic variables have on the development of the second language, with particular reference to L2 Italian?

➡ Keeping variables distinct (literacy vs. schooling vs. exposure)

2 Do the existing descriptions of L2 Italian morphosyntax (in particular the functionalist approach adopted by the Pavia group, cf. Giacalone Ramat 2003) also allow us to describe the route, the rate and the endstate of the acquisition process followed by low/non-literate learners?

➡ Adopting a longitudinal perspective

➡ Focus on verbal morphosyntax

Data collection

- 20 newcomers recruited during the literacy tests at *ItaStra*, Palermo (2017)
 - 3 levels of literacy
 - early or late
 - any language or writing system

Group 1 (4)	No literacy	The participants is not able to perform any reading and writing task
Group 2 (6)	Limited literacy	(a) recognises individual letters/characters; (b) spells words into syllables; (c) links two or more syllables and/or more complex syllables; (d) deciphers individual words; (e) writes his own name; (f) writes individual letters/characters; (g) writes incomplete words; (h)writes individual words
Group 3 (10)	Literacy	is partially to fully fluent in (a) reading simple to complex sentences and texts; (b) writing simple to complex sentences or texts.

Table 1. Levels of literacy (ItaStra test)
(cf. Amoruso & Lo Maglio 2018; D'Agostino 2018; D'Agostino & Mocchiari 2021, forthcoming)

Data collection

LEARNER	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	L1 /OTHER LANGUAGES	SCHOOLING	EARLY LITERACY (L1 / SCHOOL LS)	RESIDENCE	COURSES IN ITALY	L2 ITALIAN	LATE LITERACY IN ROMAN ALPHABET
AC	20	Nigeria	Ika; English, Pidgin Eng.	12 years	Group 3 English	18 months	6 months	pre-basic	-
AL	27	Nigeria	Urhobo; Bini, English, Pidgin	10 years	Group 3 English	18 months	5 months	basic	-
AO	24	Nigeria	Esan; English, Pidgin Eng.	12 years	Group 3 English	12 months	2 months	basic	-
BD	18	Guinea	Pulaar; Wolof, French	2 years (Q)	Group 1	11 months	5 months	post-basic	Group 2
CO	26	Nigeria	Ika; Igbo, English, Pidgin E.	12 years	Group 3 English	12 months	10 months	post-basic	-
GO	27	Nigeria	Esan; Yoruba; English, Pidgin Eng.	16 years	Group 3 English	16 months	9 months	post-basic	-
HL	25	Nigeria	Esan; English, Pidgin Eng.	-	Group 1	11 months	3 months	none	Group 1
ID	25	Ivory Coast	French, Kojaka; Bambara Malinki	12 years	Group 3 French	11 months	8 months	post-basic	-
LO	25	Nigeria	Igbo; English, Pidgin Eng.	-	Group 1	11 months	none	pre-basic	Group 1
MC	18	Gambia	Mandinka; Krio	3 years	Group 1	21 months	10 months	basic	Group 2
MD	30	Senegal	Mandinka; French, English	10 years (Q)	Group 2 Arabic	11 months	10 months	post-basic	Group 2 French
MF	28	Mali	Bambara; French	-	Group 1	12 months	7 months	basic	Group 2
MJ	24	Nigeria	Igbo; English, Pidgin Eng.	11 years	Group 3 English	11 months	11 months	post-basic	-
MLG	25	Burkina Faso	Bissa; Mòoré, French	5 years (Q)	Group 1	11 months	6 months	post-basic	Group 2
MT	23	Mali	Bambara; French	-	Group 1	11 months	6 months	post-basic	Group 2
MTR	25	Ivory Coast	Bambara; Senufo, Wolof, French	2 years (Q)	Group 1	11 months	9 months	post-basic	Group 2
OT	23	Gambia	Mandinka; Wolof, English	12 years	Group 3 English	16 months	4 months	basic	-
RC	18	Bangladesh	Bengali	8 years	Group 3 Bengali/English	13 months	9 months	post-basic	-
SM	27	Bangladesh	Bengali; English	12 years	Group 3 Bengali/English	12 months	none	basic	-
YS	30	Senegal	Pulaar; Wolof, French	2 years (Q)	Group 1	10 months	5 months	post-basic	Group 1

Table 2. The participants in the sample

*Q=Qur'anic school

Data collection

SESSION	ACTIVITIES	DATA ELICITED	TIME	SUPPORT
1	Preliminary interview	Bio-data and sociolinguistic background	After 7 to 13 months from arrival	Paper template
2	Narrative tasks	Nouns and verbs Inflection (tense, aspect, person)	After one day	Audio recording
3	Guided conversation (literacy test)	Inflection (tense, aspect, person)	After a further 6 months	Audio recording
4	Interview Narrative task (literacy test)	Inflection (tense, aspect, person)	After a further 4 months	Audio recording
5	Interview Narrative tasks (literacy test)	Inflection (tense, aspect, person)	After a further 4 months	Audio recording

Table 3. Synopsis of data collection sessions

Analytical tools

□ The **Basic variety theory** (Klein & Perdue 1997, based on ESF project):

	Variety		
	<i>Pre-basic</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Post-basic</i>
LEXICAL CATEGORIES	None	Verb/Noun	Verb/Noun
MORPHOLOGY	None	Basic forms (uninflected)	Inflected nouns and verbs
ORGANIZATION OF THE UTTERANCE	Pragmatic (information structure)	Semantic-syntactic (argument structure)	Syntactic
DEPENDENCY ON THE CONTEXT	High	←-----→	Low

Table 4. Initial interlanguages (Banfi & Bernini 2003: 84, adapted)

Analytical tools

phase	PRESENT	PERFECTIVE PAST	IMPERFECTIVE PAST	FUTURE	NON- FACTUAL
1	Present/ Infinitive	Present/ Infinitive	Present/ Infinitive	Present/ Infinitive	Present/ Infinitive
2	Present	Past participle	Present	Present	Present
3	Present	(Aux.) Past part.	Imperfect	Present	Present
4	Present	(Aux.) Past part.	Imperfect	Future	Future

□ Sequence of acquisition of the Italian verb (Banfi & Bernini 2003: 90)

present (infinitive) → past participle (w/wo auxiliary) → imperfect → future → conditional → subjunctive

Table 5. The complexification of the verb in L2 Italian (Banfi & Bernini 2003: 93)

The continuum of morphosyntax

GROUPS 1-2	PRESENT/INFINITIVE	PP	COPULA/AUX	PROGRESSIVE	IMPERFECT	FUTURE	CONDITIONAL	SUBJUNCTIVE
BD	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
HL	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MC	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
MD	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
MF	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
MLG	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MT	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MTR	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
YS	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
GROUP 3								
AC	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AL	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AO	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
CO	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
GO	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
ID	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MJ	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
OT	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
RC	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
SM	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 6. Path of acquisition of the L2 Italian verb in the sample

Basic variety

- V is an autonomous lexical category (argument structure), but lacks finiteness and is morphologically unanalysable (**basic form**)

(1)

[AL_2_b]

35 AL	notte	io	va	a	lavoro
	night	I	go:PRS.3SG	to	work

‘At night I go to work.’

(2)

[AL_4_b]

024 AL	lui	guardə /:	guardare	a	ragaza
	he	look-Ø	look:INF	to	girl

‘He looks at the girl.’

Basic variety

- Temporal, aspectual and person information can be **lexicalised** (*notte, io, lui*)

(1)

[AL_2_b]

35 AL notte io **va** a lavoro
 night I go:PRS.3SG to work

‘At night I go to work.’

(2)

[AL_4_b]

024 AL lui guardə /: **guardare** a ragazza
 he look-Ø look:INF to girl

‘He looks at the girl.’

Basic variety

□ Specific lexical strategies to express temporal-aspectual information

(3) [MF_2_a]
07 MF lavare dente **finito** /:
clean:INF tooth finish:PST.PTCP
08 MF andare cucina
go:INF kitchen
‘They brushed their teeth and went to the kitchen.’

(4) [AL_4_a]
io **tutti** va a lavori
I all go:PRS.3SG to [work-]
‘We always went to work.’

Postbasic continuum

□ Emergence of **past participle** to express **perfective aspect**

(5) [AO_5_c]

17 AO	quando	lui	visto	ovo
	when	he	see:PST.PTCP	egg
18 AO	[...]	voi	prende	
		want:PRS.2SG	take:PRS.3SG	

'When he sees the eggs, he wants to take them.'

(6) [BD_3]

065 BD	noi	sempre	venire
	we	always	come:INF
		ASP	
	per	legere	
	for	read:INF	

'We always went there to read.'



Postbasic continuum

- Analytical stage → grammaticalisation of auxiliaries
 - Scalar character and intermediate stages from non-finite to finite utterances
 - *Analytical stage (stade analytique)*. Tense and aspect are expressed analytically, either by auxiliaries or specialised lexical markers; the lexical verb conveys essentially its lexical value
 - *Merging stage (stade du fusionnement)*. Tense/aspect merge with the lexical content of the verb (more opaque expression of tense and aspect) (Benazzo & Starren 2007: 151)

The postbasic continuum

□ *essere* 'be' constructions (Bernini 1989, 2003; "protoauxiliary", cf. Starren 2001)

- Grammatical meaning and lexical meaning are encoded separately
- Temporary strategies before morphology emerges

(7)

[YS_4_a]
034 YS ora **sono** **fermare**
 now be:PRS.1SG stop:INF
 FIN STOP

'Now I stopped.'

(8)

[MLG_5_c]
10 MLG allora lui **era** **dormo**
 thus he be:PST.IPFV.3SG sleep:PRS.1SG
 FIN SLEEP

'Thus, he was sleeping.'

The postbasic continuum

□ *fare* 'do' constructions

- Very transition from the basic to the postbasic variety (before *essere*-constructions)
- Light V construction (\approx *fare ricerca*) \rightarrow ACT(ion/activity) (and aspect?) + lexical predicate

(9)

[BD2_b]

11 BD

ieri /::
yesterday

io mmh:
I

poi /::
then

fatto
do:PST.PTCP
ACT

lavare /:
wash:INF
WASH

'Yesterday I washed and went to school.'

(10)

[MF_2_b]

8 MF

alle
at.the

fare /:
do:INF
ACT

cinque [...]
five

lavare
clean:INF
WASH

dentis
teeth

'At five, I brushed my teeth.'

The continuum of morphosyntax

GROUPS 1-2	PRESENT/INFINITIVE	PP	COPULA/AUX	PROGRESSIVE	IMPERFECT	FUTURE	CONDITIONAL	SUBJUNCTIVE
BD	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
HL	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MC	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
MD	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
MF	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
MLG	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MT	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MTR	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
YS	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
GROUP 3								
AC	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AL	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AO	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
CO	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
GO	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
ID	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
MJ	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
OT	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
RC	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
SM	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 6. Path of acquisition of the L2 Italian verb in the sample

Literacy and non-target constructions

SESSION	GROUPS 1/2			GROUP 3		
	PRE-BASIC STAGE	BASIC STAGE	POST-BASIC STAGE	PRE-BASIC STAGE	BASIC STAGE	POST-BASIC STAGE
1-2	-	<i>fare</i> (2)	<i>fare</i> (7) <i>essere</i> (2)	-	<i>fare</i> (1)	<i>essere</i> (2)
3	-	-	<i>fare</i> (2) <i>essere</i> (6)	-	-	-
4	-	-	<i>fare</i> (9) <i>essere</i> (4)	-	<i>fare</i> (1)	<i>fare</i> (1)
5	-	<i>avere</i> (3)	<i>fare</i> (9) <i>essere</i> (6)	-	-	<i>essere</i> (1) <i>avere</i> (1)

Table 7. Diachrony of the non-target analytical constructions in the sample

Some possible conclusions

- Learners with limited literacy lack visual exposure provided by the written language
 - «greater reliance on **auditory memory** than visual memory» (Vainikka et al. 2017: 248; see Cintrón-Valentín & Ellis 2016; Tarone et al. 2009)
 - inflectional morphemes are less accessible, as they are **low salient**
 - at the **phonological level** (less than a foot, cf. Vainikka et al. 2017: 248)
 - at the **physical level** (frequent phenomena of reduction in the actual speech, cf. Savy 1999)
 - at the **contextual level** («redundancy», e.g. *yesterday I walked*; cf. Cintrón-Valentín & Ellis 2016; DeKeyser 2005: 8; Goldschneider & DeKeyser 2001: 52)

Some possible conclusions

- Learners with limited literacy lack visual exposure provided by the written language. This circumstance:
 - ➔ Favours the selection and persistence over time of “heavier” forms, more easily perceived in the input (functional words)
 - ➔ Prompts the emergence of non-target but interlanguage specific morphosyntactic patterns, resulting from overgeneralisation of such functional words (cf. Vainikka et al. 2017)
 - ➔ Does not affect the route and the rate of acquisition: it is the type and amount of exposure that affects the rate (but not the route) of acquisition

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