Unlearning L1 Options and Incomplete Acquisition: The Case of CLLD in Italian and Romanian

Liz Smeets

1. Introduction

The current study examines the L2 acquisition of discourse and semantic constraints on the use of Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD) in Italian and Romanian to examine potential learning difficulties in remapping L1 features onto L2 configurations associated with Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD) in these languages. To date, most research on the L2 acquisition of phenomena at the syntax-discourse interface has been conducted in light of the Interface Hypothesis (IH) which argues for developmental differences between grammar-internal (e.g. syntax-semantics) and grammar-external (e.g. syntax-discourse) interfaces. In its recent version (Sorace, 2011), the IH argues that performance differences between native and L2 speakers surface when integration of external discourse information is required, and crucially, that this happens regardless of properties of the L1. The extensive amount of research on the IH from the past decade or two, focusing on various linguistic phenomena and language combinations, has shown not all properties at the syntax-discourse interface to be equally problematic. For example, whereas various studies describe L2 learner's difficulty with the discourse restricted use of overt pronouns in L2 null-subject languages (e.g., Sorace and Filiaci 2006; Belletti, Bennati and Sorace 2007, Margaza and Bel 2006), the acquisition of word order variation driven by the discourse notions topic and focus is shown to be relatively unproblematic (e.g., Slabakova, Kempchinsky and Rothman 2012; Hopp 2009). More recently, a shift has been made to examine the *combination* of factors that may cause unsurmountable difficulty for L2 acquisition.

While there exists ample evidence from other domains of the grammar that systematic errors made by L2 learners are often attributable to L1 transfer, systematic investigation on how L1 – L2 featural differences contribute to L2 non-convergence has been relatively understudied, with the exception of, for example, Hopp (2009) who reports convergence with the target language for speakers whose L1 realizes grammatical features related to discourse driven word order optionality in the same way as the target language and Bohnacker and Rosen (2008), Valenzuela (2005) and Slabakova and García Mayo (2015) who report L1 transfer effects in L2 performance.

* Liz Smeets, York University, lsmeets@yorku.ca.

In Smeets (2022), I take a feature reassembly (Lardiere, 2009) approach to describe the differences between Romanian and Italian in their use of object clitic left dislocation. With this, I extend the feature-reassembly hypothesis to the syntax-discourse interface. By comparing English to Romanian native speakers in their acceptability and use of Italian CLLD, the participants' second language, I show that Romanian learners of Italian do not fully acquire the discourse constraints on Italian CLLD, unlike English learners of Italian for whom L1 transfer does not play a role. In the current paper I report on preliminary findings from Italian and English learners of Romanian in comparison to the earlier findings from Romanian and English learners of Italian. Reversing the L1 and the L2 allows us to tease apart various factors that may contribute to differences between monolingual and L2 end-state grammars. Specifically, we examine the role of construction frequency as well as the L2 feature involved (whether it involves a grammar internal (semantic) or a grammar external (discourse) property) in addition to L1 transfer effects. The results suggest that L1 transfer, and in particular the need for unlearning L1 options, is most pertinent to L2 non-convergence.

2. Object left dislocation

Two types of object left dislocation constructions are relevant for this paper: Topic Fronting/ Topicalization as illustrated in (1) and Focus Fronting/ Focalization as illustrated in (2).

(1)   **Topic Fronting**
Q: What did you do with the couch and the table?
A: [The couch]$_i$ I put t_i in the living room, but the table broke during transportation.

(2)   **Focus Fronting**
Q: You put the table in the living room, right?
A: [THE COUCH]$_i$ I put t_i in the living room, not the table.

Both constructions involve A-bar movement of an object into the left-periphery (following López, 2009) and both constructions are associated with a contrastive interpretation of the dislocate (in both sentences "the couch" is contrasted to "the table" mentioned in the previous sentence). The two constructions are, however, used in different discourses. I follow López in the assumption that the discourse property anaphoricity differentiates between Topic Fronting in (1) and focus fronting in (2). In (1), the dislocated element "the couch" has a discourse antecedent which is mentioned in the immediate discourse. This is not the case for (2), which involves Focus Fronting. A fronted focus is used most commonly to express contrastive focus whereby the object is placed in a position of prominence (the beginning of the sentence) with the goal to provide a correction.

Italian, Romanian and English, the languages relevant to this study, allow both Topicalization and Focus Fronting. Crucially, however, the languages differ as to whether they insert a clitic that stands in an agreement relation to the left dislocated object as well as the exact discourse contexts in which a clitic is used. While English does not use a clitic or a pronoun in either Topicalization or Focus Fronting (Note: *The couch I put (*it) in the living room.*), CLLD is used in both Italian and Romanian. To avoid confusion with some of the existing literature, it should be emphasized that the term CLLD is used for constructions where an object clitic is inserted in preverbal position after the object has moved to the left periphery. To explain the differences in the use of CLLD between Italian and Romanian I use the features [± anaphor], as developed by López (2009), and the feature [± specific], which are illustrated in more detail in Section 3.

3. Interpretative properties of CLLD in Italian and Romanian

Let us illustrate the role of anaphoricity and specificity by manipulating the [± anaphor] and [± specific] status of the object in four different scenarios. In (3a) for Italian and (3b) for Romanian, CLLD is used in a context in which this construction is felicitous in both languages, as *il divano/canapeaua* (*the couch*) is both [+specific] and [+anaphor].

(3) **[+specific, +anaphor]**
Luca and Michaela recently moved into their new house. Luca worked all day while Michaela stayed home to organize the furniture. Luca calls her to ask how it went and says:
Q: What did you do with the couch and the table?

a. [Il divano]$_i$ l$_i$'ho   messo t_i in soggiorno, ma   il
    The couch cl.acc.m.sg'have put t_i in living room but   the
    tavolo   si   è   rotto   durante   il   trasporto.
    table   REFL   is   broken during the transportation
    'The couch I put in the living room, but the table broke during
    transportation.'   **Italian**

b. [Canapeaua]$_i$ am pus-o$_i$ t_i în sufragerie, dar masa
    couch.def   have put-cl.acc.m.sg t_i in living room but table.def
    s-a   rupt   în timpul   transportului.
    REFL-is   broken in time   transportation
    'The couch I put in the living room, but the table broke during
    transportation.'   **Romanian**

If we slightly change the context such that the dislocate is not a discourse anaphor (where the object has no antecedent in the immediate discourse), but instead a Fronted Focus, we see that clitic use is illicit in Italian (see (4a)). In Romanian on the other hand, the clitic is obligatory, as shown in (4b). In other words, discourse anaphoricity is not a constraint on CLLD in Romanian.

(4) **[+specific, -anaphor]**
Q: You put the table in the living room, right?

    a.   Il   DIVANO (*l')   ho   messo in soggiorno, non il
         The couch   cl.m.3sg have.1sg put   in living room not   the
         tavolo. Il tavolo si   è rotto   durante il   trasporto.
         table   the table REFL is broken during   the transportation
         'The couch I put in the living room, not the table. The table broke
         during the transportation.'   **Italian**

    b.   CANAPEAUA am   pus-*(o)   în sufragerie, nu masa.
         couch-the   have.1sg put-cl.f.3sg in living room not table-the
         Masa   s-a   rupt în   timpul   transportului.
         table-the REFL-has broken in   time   transportation
         'The couch I put in the living room, not the table. The table broke during
         the transportation.'   **Romanian**

      In Romanian, but not in Italian, clitics can *only* be used for noun phrases that are interpreted as specific (see also Cornilescu & Dobrovie-Sorin, 2008 and Avram & Coene, 1999). *The couch* in the examples in (3) and (4) was specific, as the speaker had one specific couch in mind. However, if we look at the clitic use in a different scenario, where the dislocate is non-specific, as is the case for *a glass of wine* in the examples in (5) and (6), we see that the clitic would make the sentence ungrammatical in Romanian. Specificity does not affect the use of clitics in Italian; in (5a), where the dislocate is [-specific, +anaphor], a clitic is obligatory.

(5) **[-specific, +anaphor]**
Emma and Elio are at a restaurant with Nicolò and Susanna, Elio's brother and sister. Nicolò and Susanna excuse themselves to go to the bathroom and ask Elio to order for them. When the waiter arrives, Elio isn't sure what Nicolò and Susanna requested and he asks Emma:
Q: `Who wanted a glass of wine and who a beer?'

    a.   Un vino *(lo)   ha ordinato tuo   fratello e   tua sorella
         a wine cl.m.3sg has ordered your brother and your sister
         vorrebbe   una   birra.
         want.cond.3sg a   beer   **Italian**

    b.   Un vin (*l-)a   comandat fratele tău iar   sora   ta
         wine cl.m.3sg-has ordered   brother your and   sister   your
         ar   vrea o bere.
         would want a beer   **Romanian**
         'Your brother ordered a glass of wine and your sister would like a beer.'

      In the context in (6) neither Italian nor Romanian allows the use of a clitic. This holds for Italian because the fronted object is [-anaphor] and for Romanian because it is [-specific].

(6) **[-specific, -anaphor]**
Q: Nicolò ordered a beer, right?

    a. UN   VINO (*lo)   ha   ordinato tuo fratello, non una birra.
        a   wine   cl.m.3sg has ordered your brother not a   beer
        È   tua sorella che vorrebbe   una   birra.
        is   your sister who want.cond.3sg a beer   **Italian**

    b. Un VIN (*l-)a   comandat fratele tău, nu o bere. Sora ta
       a wine cl.m.3sg-has ordered brother your not a beer sister your
       e cea   care ar   vrea o bere.
       is one who would   want a beer   **Romanian**
       "Your brother ordered a glass of wine, not a beer. It's your sister who
       would like a beer."

In sum, Romanian has a specificity requirement on the use of CLLD; left dislocated object DPs are doubled by a clitic when there is a particular entity to which the object is referentially anchored. Italian has an anaphoricity requirement on the use of CLLD, where the dislocate is obligatorily linked to a discourse antecedent.

As shown in Table 1, Italian restricts CLLD to constructions where the fronted object is a *discourse anaphor* (see the first line in Table 1). In Romanian, clitics are used when the fronted object has a *specific referent* (see line 2 in Table 1). Scenario 2 and 3 are most interesting for the purpose of L2 acquisition, as this is where the Romanian and Italian differ in their use of CLLD.

Table 1: Distribution of clitics in Italian and Romanian object left dislocation

	[+ anaphor] (Topic Fronting)		[- anaphor] (Focus Fronting)		Property
	[+specific]	[-specific]	[+specific]	[-specific]	
	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	
Italian	✓	✓	✗	✗	anaphoricity
Romanian	✓	✗	✓	✗	specificity

4. Feature reassembly and L1 transfer

The first language typically constitutes the initial state in the L2 acquisition process (see Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996; Hawkins and Chan, 1997, as well as White (2003) for an overview). Therefore, properties of the first language determine the exact learning task for acquiring the anaphoricity requirement on CLLD in Italian and the semanticity restriction in Romanian. Specifically, English learners of Romanian or Italian have to acquire that CLLD is used in the L2 and then restrict its use to the appropriate contexts (to [+specific] objects in Romanian and to [+anaphoric] objects in Italian). The task is different for Italian learners of Romanian and Romanian learners of Italian, as these learners need to reconfigure the features that are associated with CLLD in the L2.

Specifically, Italian learners of Romanian need to remove the [+anaphor] feature and replace it with the [+specific] feature. This requires unlearning the use of a clitic when the fronted object is [-anaphor, +specific] (Scenario 3 in Table 1) and learn to use a clitic when the fronted object is [+anaphor, -specific] (Scenario 2). Conversely, the Romanian learners of Italian need to remove the [+specific] feature and add the [+anaphor] feature through unlearning to use a clitic when the fronted object is [+anaphor, -specific] (Scenario 2) and using the clitic when the object is [-anaphor, +specific] (Scenario 3).

Following the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (Lardiere 2009), the reconfiguration of features associated with CLLD is predicted to be more challenging than acquiring features associated with a structure from scratch. In other words, English native speakers are predicted to be most successful in acquiring the anaphoricity constraint in Italian and the semanticity constraint in Romanian than learners whose L1 constitutes different constraints on CLLD.

5. Interface and construction frequency effects

The findings on L2 Italian as reported in Smeets (2022) and discussed in more detail in Section 8 show that Romanian near-native speakers of Italian learn the use of clitics with non-specific topics but fail to unlearn the use of clitics with specific foci, a context where the clitic is used in Romanian but not in Italian. Slabakova and Garcia Mayo (2017) made a similar observation for Spanish L2 speakers of English, who accepted resumptive pronouns in English Topicalization constructions as shown in (1), where native speakers of English did not.

(1)   Last week I had the sole. It was delicious. The salmon I haven't tried (*it) yet.

The use of a clitic would be required in the Spanish translation of the sentence in (1) and English L2 speakers of Spanish show no difficulty acquiring the use of clitics in Spanish and restrict its use to the appropriate discourse contexts (see also Slabakova, Kempchinsky and Rothman 2012, for example).

Slabakova and Garcia Mayo (2017) argue that, on the basis of positive evidence alone, unlearning L1 options is harder than learning L2 options not available in the L1. Similarly, in Smeets (2022) I suggest that the absence of negative evidence makes unlearning the use of clitics more difficult. In consequence, Romanian learners of Italian cannot acquire a [+anaphor] feature as they cannot unlearn the use of clitics with fronted specific foci.

There is, however, another factor that could have contributed to the results. Note that the performance of Romanian near-native speakers of Italian diverged from the target language with Focus Fronting, not with Topic Fronting. The difference in frequency of each of these constructions in Italian, and possibly all (Romance) languages could have led to the attested performance differences. Let us elaborate. Slabakova (2015) discusses the frequency differences between Spanish and English in the use of various left dislocation constructions, including Topic and Focus Fronting. I used the references therein to get an idea of the

relative frequency of Topic Fronting and Focus Fronting in various Romance Languages. Brunetti et al. (2011) conducted a comparative analysis on overt marking of Information Structure in the spoken language within the NOCANDO corpus, including Catalan, Italian, Spanish, and German. The researchers annotated for 22 different non-canonical word orders, including Clitic Left Dislocation and Focus Fronting. The following data are relevant for this study. Brunetti et al. (2011) report that 1.35% of all Italian finite clauses were instances of CLLD (the same as in Spanish). This percentage was 1.4% for Catalan and may suggest that the frequency of CLLD in Romance languages is comparable. With respect to Focus Fronting, Brunetti et al. found 63 Focus Fronting constructions in a 45,000 word Italian corpus, while this was 33 instances in a 59,800 word Spanish corpus. To calculate the frequency of Focus Fronting in each of these languages, I took the total of the number of words divided by the total of number of segments reported in Table 1 in Brunetti et al. (2011) to get an average words per segment ratio, which was 6.5. It can then be extrapolated from the data that Italian Focus Fronting occurs in around 0.9% of all constructions (63/(45,000/6.5)=0.009), while this number is 0.69% for Spanish (33/(59,800)). Based on these corpora, Focus fronting is around half as frequent as CLLD in each of these languages. I am unfamiliar with any studies investigating the frequency of object fronting in Romanian. However, based on information from other Romance languages, we may cautiously assume that the proportion of Topic Fronting and Focus Fronting in Romanian is similar to the other two languages. The bidirectional design of the L1 and L2 in the current study allows us to examine potential effects of construction frequency in comparison to L1 transfer effects.

The current study uses a bidirectional design reversing the L1 and the L2 (Romanian-Italian) to test for the role of construction frequency. If Romanian learners of Italian have difficulties learning that clitics in Italian are not allowed with fronted specific foci while learning that clitics are used with fronted non-specific topics because focus constructions are insufficiently frequent in the input, then we expect to see difficulties for Italian learners of Romanian in acquiring that clitics are used with specific focus constructions.

In addition, adding Romanian as the L2 into the design, we can also examine the possible difference in the acquisition of a semantic property (i.e. specificity in L2 Romanian) vs. a discourse property (i.e. anaphoricity in L2 Italian). The reasoning for each of this is as follows: If semantic constraints are more easily acquired than discourse constraints, as predicted by the Interface Hypothesis (e.g. Sorace 2011), then the acquisition of the specificity restriction on Romanian CLLD should be less problematic than the anaphoricity restriction on Italian CLLD, both for learners with English as L1 as for those with either one of the Romance languages as a native language.

6. Predictions

This section discusses the predictions in relation to each of the three factors of interest for the acquisition of constraints on CLLD in L2 Romanian and L2 Italian.

(1)   Unlearning L1 transfer and the need for feature reassembly.

If the need for feature reconfiguration hinders successful L2 acquisition even at the near-native stages, then it is predicted that only the English near-native speakers of Italian or Romanian can acquire the anaphoricity and specificity constraint in each of these languages respectively. Italian learners of Romanian, just like Romanian learners of Italian reported in Smeets (2022), are predicted to show L1 transfer effect, even in their end-state grammars. In particular, while Romanian near-native speakers of Italian experience difficulty unlearning the use of clitics with focus fronting when the object is specific, Italian near-native speakers of Romanian may be unable to unlearn the use of clitics when the fronted object is a non-specific object. In other words, when both the L1 and the L2 allow CLLD, L2 learners are predicted to extend the use of clitics to situations where it is allowed in the L2 but not in the L1. However, they may be unable to unlearn the use of clitics in situations where it is allowed in the L1 and not the L2.

(2)   Construction frequency

If the relative input frequency of a construction plays a role in the acquisition of constraints on the use of clitics, L2 grammars are expected to be more target-like in constructions with Topic Fronting than with Focus Fronting. Referring back to Table 1, this means that acquiring the use or non-use of a clitic is easiest for scenario 1 and 2 than for scenario 3 and 4, as the latter two involve Focus Fronting.

(3)   The L2 property involved (syntax-semantics or syntax-discourse)

If the acquisition of features that are grammar internal (such as the semantic property *specificity*) is less problematic for L2 learners than acquiring features at the syntax-discourse interface, then L2 learners of Romanian are expected to perform more target-like than L2 learners of Italian.

7. Methods
7.1. Participants

In total, 150 participants of various levels of proficiency completed the experiment either in Italian or in Romanian, but we focus here only on the results from the native and near-native speakers (72 total, see participant details and background information in Table 2). Participants in the near-native group scored (near)- perfect on the proficiency task and within the same range as native

speakers on the C-test. None of the native speakers or L2ers spoke another language with CLLD.

Table 2: participant information

	#	Age	Age at Onset	Years of learning	Hours per week
Taking the test in Italian					
Italian nat.	18	33.4 (24-53)			
L1 Romanian	15	30.1 (21-43)	19.4 (16-24)	10.7 (6-19)	50.2 (0-140)
L1 English	13	43.1 (22-68)	22.6 (16-40)	20.3 (4-50)	44.1 (4-130)
Taking the test in Romanian					
Romanian nat.	17	33.4 (24-51)			
L1 Italian	6	33 (18-49)	24.5 (17-39)	8.5 (3-22)	30 (1-90)
L1 English	3	36 (31-43)	24.7 (19-32)	14.3(11-21)	74.7 (70-84)

7.2. Materials and procedure

In this experiment participants judged the acceptability of sentences embedded in *wh*-question contexts identical to the examples illustrated in (3) to (6) on a 6 point rating scale (where 1 indicated highly unacceptable and 6 highly acceptable). Please note that in the experiment the contexts and questions as shown in (3) to (6) were presented in Italian or Romanian, not in English. The target items differed by three factors: *Discourse* and *Clitic*, which are within item factors and *Specificity*, which is a between item factor. The factor *Discourse* had two levels: in the Topic context (as in (3) and (5)) the left dislocated object was a contrastive topic which was discourse anaphoric and in the Focus context (as in (4) and (6)) the fronted object was a contrastive focus which was not discourse anaphoric. The factor *Specificity* also had two levels: the fronted object was either specific (as in (3) and (4)) or non-specific (as in (5) and (6)). The experiment was presented to the participants as follows (both in written and auditory form): the context automatically appeared after which participants clicked "next", followed by the question-and-answer pair. Auditory stimuli were used to ensure that participants processed the sentences with the intended intonation.[1] Two native speakers of Italian (one female and one male) recorded the stimuli for the Italian version and two native speakers of Romanian (one female and one male) those for the Romanian version.

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[1] A difference in discourse meaning is typically associated with a difference in intonation contour. The corrective focus construction considered here carried a high tone (H*) on the fronted constituent, followed by a default low tone (Jackendoff 1972, Pierrehumbert 1980). Contrastive topic configurations were associated with a `rise-fall-rise' intonation, where the fronted contrastive topic was realized as H or L+HL followed by a L−H% boundary sequence.

8. Results

Figure 1 shows the results from Italian and Romanian monolinguals, respectively. As predicted from the theoretical literature, Italian native speakers accepted sentences with clitics and rejected clitic-less sentences when the fronted object was a topic (anaphoric) and the reverse pattern is observed when the fronted object was a focus (non-anaphoric). Romanian native speakers showed the predicted specificity effect: clitic-sentences were accepted when the fronted object was specific, while no-clitic-sentences were accepted when the fronted object was non-specific.
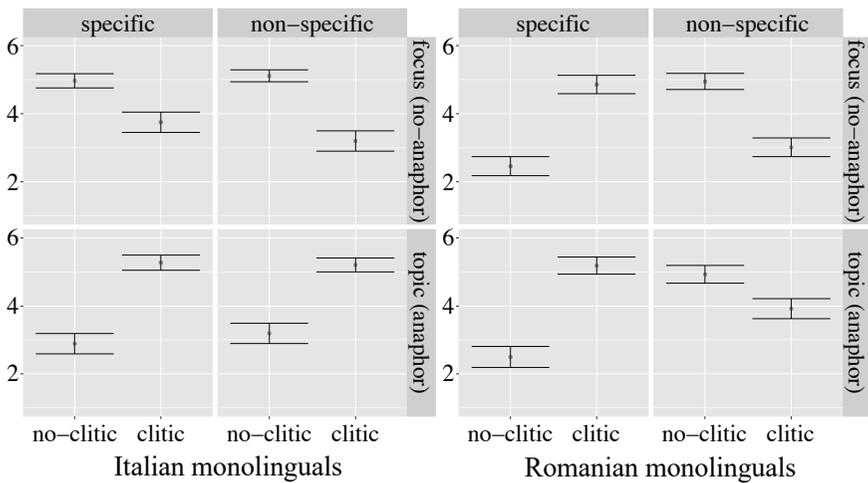
Figure 1: Acceptability judgments from Italian and Romanian monolinguals

Figure 2 shows the results from near-native speakers of Italian, the English native speakers on the left and the Romanian native speakers on the right. Although the difference in rating between clitic and no-clitic sentences is not as categorical as that of the native speakers, participants in the English group correctly rate clitic sentences as more acceptable than no-clitic sentences with fronted topics, regardless of specificity. For target trials where the fronted object is a contrastive focus, near-native speakers show no difference between clitic or no-clitic sentences, accepting both. Participants in the Romanian group show a target-like preference for sentences with clitics when the object is [+anaphoric] but, unlike Italian native speakers, they also prefer clitic sentences when the object is a specific focus. In other words, they rate clitic sentences as more acceptable than no-clitic sentences in situations where clitics are used either in Romanian or in Italian (scenario 1-3 in Table 1).
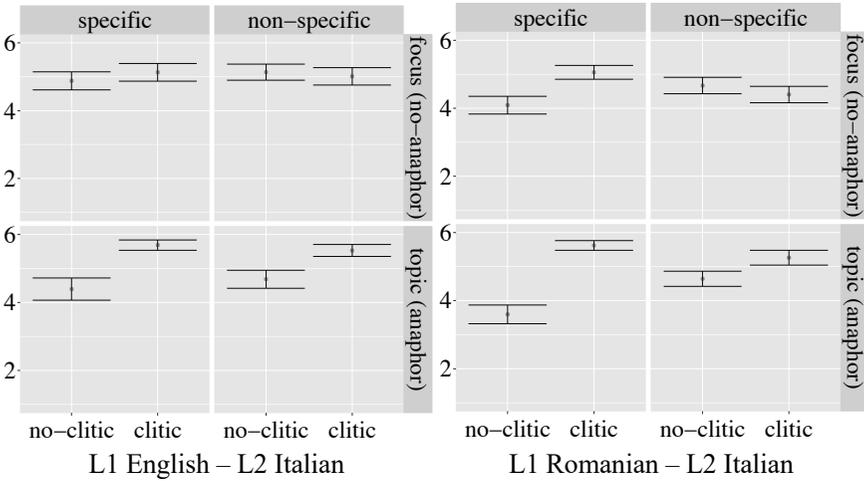
Figure 2: Acceptability judgments from English and Romanian near-native speakers of Italian

Figure 3 shows the results from near-native speakers of Romanian, the English native speakers on the left and the Italian native speakers on the right. The results suggest that participants in the English group acquired the Romanian specificity requirement on CLLD, accepting clitic-sentences and rejecting no-clitic sentences when the fronted object is specific. Like Romanian native speakers, these participants also rejected clitic sentences and accepted no-clitic sentences in constructions with fronted non-specific objects. Italian near-native speakers of Romanian rate clitic sentences as more acceptable than no-clitic sentences when the fronted object is specific, like Romanian native speakers. They do, however, also prefer clitic over no-clitic sentences when the fronted object is a non-specific topic. Like the Romanian near-native speakers of Italian, the Italian near-native speakers of Romanian rate clitic sentences as more acceptable than no-clitic sentences in contexts where a clitic is used either in the L1 or in the L2.
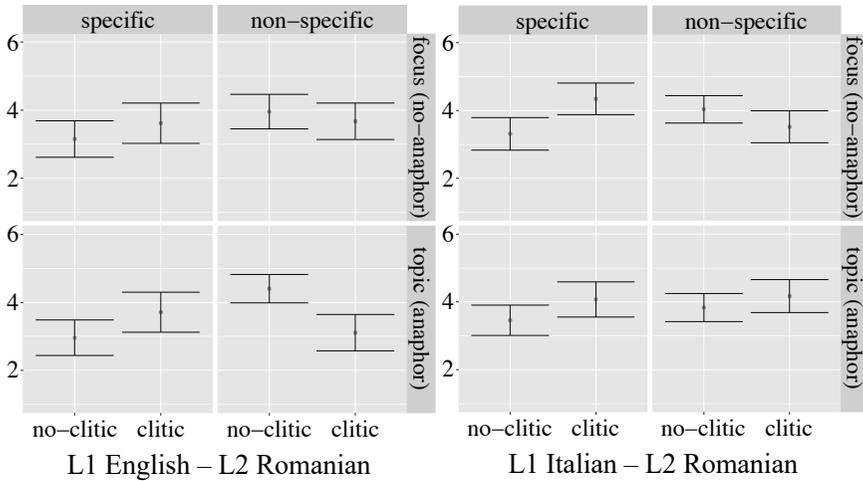
Figure 3: Acceptability judgments from English and Italian near-native speakers of Romanian

9. Discussion

This study examined the L2 acquisition of features associated with Clitic Left Dislocation in Italian and Romanian. Typologically related languages, like Italian and Romanian, differ in the exact discourse contexts in which they allow CLLD. Testing the L2 performance in both languages and with speakers with various native languages, allowed us to examine L1 transfer, construction frequency and the comparison of two features (a semantic and a discourse feature), using the same grammatical construction and the same methodology.

Let us first consider language transfer. The performance differences between native English participants and native Italian/Romanian participants show a clear effect of L1 transfer, both with L2 Italian and L2 Romanian. English near-native speakers of Italian acquired that clitic sentences are acceptable and non-clitic sentences unacceptable with Topic Fronting and English learners of Romanian acquired the specificity requirement in Romanian. Italian-Romanian bilinguals, however, show persistent L1 transfer effects in the acceptability judgments of CLLD in their L2.

The results from Italian near-native speakers of Romanian, combined with the results from Romanian near-native speakers of Italian, suggest that L2 learners with an L1 that uses CLLD in different discourse contexts fail to reassemble the features associated with CLLD in the L2. The fact that we see this effect in both directions (regardless of whether Romanian or Italian is the L1 or the L2), suggests that the lower frequency in the input of Focus Fronting (compared to Topic Fronting) does not influence whether L2 learners can unlearn L1 options. It seems that, L2ers are unable to unlearn the use clitic from the absence of clitics in certain discourse contexts, regardless of input frequency.

Let us now look at whether acquiring the semantic feature [+specific] in L2 Romanian is easier than acquiring the discourse feature [+anaphor] in L2 Italian. English learners of Italian correctly preferred clitic sentences over non-clitic sentences in [+anaphor] contexts, but they also incorrectly accepted CLLD with Focus Fronting. These results are in line with the Interface Hypothesis, which suggests that in performance, divergence from the target language is reflected in higher error rates, optionality, and indeterminate knowledge when it comes to acquiring discourse constraints on syntax. English learners of Romanian show a more categorical difference in acceptance versus rejection of target sentences depending on whether the fronted object is specific or non-specific. In other words, the [+specific] seems to be less problematic than [+anaphor]. However, when L1 transfer of features is involved, as is the case for the Italian-Romanian participants, the L2 feature (semantic or discourse) seems irrelevant.

In sum, theories like the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis, which to date have mainly be applied to examine acquisition and reassembly of morphological and semantic features, can also be applied to the syntax-discourse interface. The results of this study show that transfer of L1 features can explain incomplete L2 acquisition. Specifically, when feature reassembly requires unlearning L1 options, negative evidence may be needed to achieve native-like competence.

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