

Information through Constructions: ‘Rough’ and ‘Fine’ Grammar

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1. Theoretical framework

This analysis has been carried out within the Constructionism approach. By ‘Constructionism’ we intend the totality of theories directly inspired by Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor’s article published in 1988 and all other functionalist paradigms theoretically close to Construction Grammar. Among the former, Goldberg’s *Cognitive Construction Grammar* (CCxG) (Goldberg, 1995), Langacker’s *Cognitive Grammar* (CG) (Langacker, 1987, 1991) and Croft’s *Radical Construction Grammar* (RCxG) (Croft, 2001) should be taken into consideration; of the functionalist approaches, the *discourse grammar studies* (Hopper & Thompson, 1980, 1984) and the *usage-based* approaches (Kemmer & Barlow, 2000) deserve particular mention.

The literature offers a limited number of second language acquisition (SLA) studies directly linked to Constructionism (Ellis, 2003; Robinson & Ellis, 2008), but the choice to insert this study within the Constructionism framework is motivated by two factors: several studies on L1 acquisition have already been carried out within this approach (Diessel, 2004; Tomasello, 2003)¹ and SLA and Constructionism share several key-concepts:

1. The idea of construction, that is any linguistic structure with a form and a function, is very similar to that of *chunk*. Since a language is considered to be made up of many constructions, L2 acquisition can be seen as the process of acquiring constructions.
2. In Constructionism, language is intended as a network of constructions, so that acquisition can be considered the process of creating, and restructuring links between constructions.
3. Construction Grammar studies support the idea of a Lexis-Grammar *continuum*, as proposed for SLA by Lewis (1993); acquisition takes place through the generalization, abstraction and categorization processes of the input, moving from chunks to more complex constructions.
4. Both approaches can be considered usage-based; in particular, SLA is usage-based in two directions:
 - a. horizontally usage-based, if we consider the process of fixation of constructions; their strengthening can be seen as a process of ‘constructionalization’²;
 - b. vertically usage-based, given the exposure to the input and the role it plays in facilitating the emergence and constructionalization of a construction (cf. Gass, 1997).

A distinctive feature of Constructionism, particularly regarding L1 acquisition studies carried out within this framework, is the formulation of a network of constructions through which language development is envisioned. Usually Construction Grammar networks entail several constructions, all semantically and functionally related (cf. Goldberg, 1995), and all sharing a base meaning. This core meaning is usually expressed by a “basic” construction, that is, the construction which expresses the meaning feature shared by all the others. Construction Grammar networks are also more complex since

¹ Even though the publication of L1 acquisition studies within the Constructionist approach is evidence in favour of a wider application of this framework to all acquisition research, L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition should still be considered two different phenomena which entail different cognitive processes and knowledge.

² Supporting the idea according to which lexicon and grammar are not two separate entities, but rather two poles of the same *continuum*, the constructionalization process should be intended as the fixation process of a construction, regardless of its lexical or grammatical content (Masini, 2007).

they differentiate various kinds of links and relationships between constructions (polysemic links, subpart links, instance links and metaphorical extension links – see Goldberg, 1995 for further details).

Applying this concept to SLA means trying to draw up a network that envisages the development pattern of a particular construction in the interlanguage. The underlying idea is that if constructions are functionally related in the target language (TL), it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the development of one construction would exploit these functional links. Moreover, one would expect that certain links are exploited before others according to the complexity of the construction involved.

This kind of representation is scarcely used (or totally ignored) in SLA studies, where linear representations (such as acquisition sequences) are usually preferred. Nevertheless, a network-like representation has some advantages: first of all, it does not select only one dimension of representation (usually the time-line) but can be organized along two axes, representing the degree of proficiency and interlanguage development; moreover, in displaying constructions within a network, the formal and functional links between them can be traced in order to envisage formal and functional proximity between structures exploited by learners while attempting to build the TL construction. Finally, a network-like representation is also a valid instrument for envisioning the passage of morpho-syntactic information between constructions.

The complexity of acquisition of morpho-syntactic information transmission has been formulated within the Processability Theory (PT) (Pienemann, 1999), according to which the passage from one interlanguage stage to another is determined by the non-native speaker's ability to mark morpho-syntactic information within phrases and sentences, and also across them (Feature Unification Process). According to PT, interlinguistic development can be described as a scale made up of five stages: lemma, category, phrase, sentence and subordination, differentiated according to the syntactic level at which the information is transferred. Very briefly, the category stage - which follows the lemma stage where the learner is not able to handle information transmission - the information is simply marked on the head of the phrase. Later, the morpho-syntactic information is spread first to all the phrases (phrase stage), and then to the entire sentence (sentence stage). Finally, at the subordination stage the information can also reach subordinated clauses³.

This central aspect of PT can also be interpreted in Constructionistic terms, by claiming that the development of interlanguage can be seen as the passage from one stage to another according to the complexity of expression of morpho-syntactic information between constructions. Therefore, the more structured and complex the transmission of information between construction is, the higher the L2 proficiency level involved. Morpho-syntactic information transmission within and across phrases and sentences is therefore acquired gradually in several phases: consciousness and emergence of the phenomenon; first attempts at use; consolidation (that is, constructionalization) and regular production⁴. These phases can be schematized in two macro-phases: 'rough' grammar and 'fine' grammar. In particular, the 'rough' grammar indicates the learner's emerging control of a certain phenomenon, and 'fine' grammar indicates the learner's mastery of the phenomenon. In other words 'fine' grammar more accurately elaborates previously 'roughly' manifested constructions. The two macro-phases can be placed at the extreme poles of a *continuum*, which we shall call the 'rough-fine grammar' *continuum*, which evidences the evolution of the learner's accuracy and mastery of a particular construction.

³ Although this study deals with the Feature Unification Process, as a general process of information processing, it is important to mention the recent PT extension to include the developmental patterns of marked structures (Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005). Based on Levelt's assumption regarding the use of pragmatic structures (such as topicalization, passive, cleft-sentence, dislocation etc.) in order to direct a listener's attention toward a particular sentence portion, the extension provides an integration between standard PT and language pragmatic functions: learners' choices are constrained by processability. In particular, two hypotheses are proposed by PT: the Lexical Mapping Hypothesis and the Topic Hypothesis to explain how the development from linearity to non-linearity takes place (cf. Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005).

⁴ These phases mostly correspond to Gass' input elaboration model, according to which acquisition is a dynamic model articulated in five stages: apperception, comprehension, intake, integration and output (Gass, 1997).

2. Italian left-dislocation

The Italian construction analyzed in this research is left-dislocation, a choice motivated by its pragmatic and morpho-syntactic interlinked features. Indeed, regarding its function, left-dislocation is a marked structure used to topicalize an element which would not be topicalized in unmarked contexts. This means that there is no obligatory context in which it should be used, its use being an issue of pragmatics.

As for its form, it is possible to identify two kinds of agreement:

1. the agreement between the dislocated subject and the verb;
2. the agreement between the dislocated object and the clitic.

The first kind of agreement takes place when the subject is dislocated, as in example (1).

- (1) *Le mele, mi piacciono molto.*
 ART apple.PL CL-1SG like.3PL very much
 Apples, I like them very much

In the example, the subject ‘*le mele*’ has been dislocated to left-position; the only agreement required is the agreement with the verb⁵. Obviously the subject-verb agreement would also have been required in a context without left-dislocation (unmarked context), which would be considered an easy agreement. However, since dislocation takes place and the unmarked order is altered, the learner may not be aware that the agreement is required.

The second kind of agreement takes place when one of the objects is dislocated. When the direct-object is dislocated, the agreement (of number and gender) must be marked on the pre-verbal clitic and on the past participle in case of compound verbs, as example (2) shows:

- (2) *I fiori, li ho comprati ieri.*
 ART flower.PL CL.3PLi AUX-1SG buy-P.P..M.PL yesterday
 Flowers, I bought them yesterday

Indeed, in the example above the clitic ‘*li*’ agrees in number and gender with ‘*i fiori*’, just as the past participle ‘*comprati*’ does. Agreement is compulsory in direct object left-dislocation. On the contrary, when the indirect object is dislocated, agreement on the clitic can be optionally marked, as example (3) illustrates:

- (3) *Agli studenti, (gli) ho comprato un libro.*
 PREP student-PLi, CL-3PLi AUX-1SG buy-P.P. ART book
 For the students, I have bought (them) a book

The parentheses indicate that the clitic is optional. The version with the clitic marked for number and gender is considered less standard than the version without the clitic; however, the former would no longer be recognized as an error, as it is now becoming commonplace among native speakers of Italian.

Finally, when a circumstantial is dislocated, the clitic agreement is not required (ex. (4)):

- (4) *In giardino, gioco con il cane.*
 PREP garden, play-PRES-1SG PREP ART dog
 In the garden, I play with the dog

⁵ As for the dislocation of the subject, the definition of ‘unmarked order’ is not an easy task. Usually Italian is considered a SVO language, but this is simply a tendential classification since unaccusative verbs, which require a postverbal subject, are very frequent. For this reason the identification of subject left-dislocation can be based on two criteria: on intonational cues, since a dislocated phrase belongs to a different intonational unit (Crespi, 2000), and on syntactic cues, since sometimes the post-verbal subject can be anticipated. Both kind of cues apply in the case of unaccusative verbs, where, as in case of the SVO unmarked order, only the former cues apply. Therefore, in example (1), since ‘*piacere*’ is an unaccusative verb, the unmarked order is ‘*Mi piacciono le mele*’.

In Italian, it is also possible to topicalize more than one phrase in a sentence. In the case of multiple left-dislocation the rules for agreement do not change: this means that it is possible to dislocate a direct object, an indirect object and a circumstantial at the same time and mark the agreement between the clitic and the direct object (i. e. the compulsory agreement) and the indirect object⁶. Obviously the resulting construction is very complicated and also rare in native Italian spontaneous speech. Indeed, no occurrence of this was found in the data of the current study.

The acquisition of Italian left dislocation is a relatively uninvestigated research area. Recently, Nuzzo & Bettoni (in press) carried out pre-test post-test design research to explore the effects of form-focused instruction on object-topicalization; the results show that the majority of speakers at pre-test time are already able to produce object topicalizations and that at post-test time (immediately after the treatment) and at delayed post-test time speakers are more accurate in marking morpho-syntactic features.

The difficult linguistic form of Italian left-dislocation leads us to formulate the following research question:

Research question: Is direct object left-dislocation, that is, dislocation that requires obligatory agreement between the dislocated phrase, the clitic and the past participle, the last dislocation to appear in the interlanguage? In other words, is it possible to outline a sequence of acquisition that starts from circumstantial and indirect object left-dislocations and ends with direct object left-dislocations, via subject left-dislocations?

Hypothesis: Even though the information processing cognitive load of this particular type of dislocation leads us to hypothesize that it would appear later in the interlanguage, pragmatic needs seem to prevail over morpho-syntactic complexity: learners prefer to use this construction when they believe the context requires it, despite its complexity and even though it may likely be produced incorrectly.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants were 64 L2 Italian speakers of two different levels of proficiency: 32 of a certified B1 level and 32 of a certified C2 level (Council of Europe, 2002). Some of them had spent some time in Italy, others were learning Italian as a foreign language outside Italy. Twenty one participants were male, 43 were female. They were from 17 to 59 years old and they were native speakers of eight different first languages (L1): Russian, Spanish, English, German, Polish, Romanian, Chinese and Portuguese. Participants were selected bearing in mind their L1 in order to avoid an over-representation of the Romance languages and, as far as possible, to limit the number of inflecting languages: an over-representation of Romance L1s and of inflecting L1s would have been influential factors in the frequency and accuracy of left-dislocation production. The resulting sample was organized as *Table 1* shows:

L1	Participants	
	B1 level	C2 level
Russian	4	4
Spanish	4	4
English	4	4
German	4	4
Polish	4	4
Romanian	4	4
Chinese	4	4
Portuguese	4	4
TOT		64

Table 1- Participant distribution

⁶ The result would be a combined pronoun. Combined pronouns are very difficult to learn and to use and learners frequently prefer to avoid them, opting for alternative structures. Some studies have shown the same difficulties also regarding oral data of native speakers (Berretta, 1986).

Some limitations should be mentioned. First of all it was impossible to represent the typological variety of world languages. This would have shed more light on the acquisition of the Italian agreement system and complex pronominal system. Moreover, it was not possible to collect fully accurate information about the participants' time spent in Italy: this information would have helped to clarify the influence of input exposure on the use of this particular pragmatic construction.

3.2. *Materials*

Data were taken from the recording of the oral part of the Roma Tre L2 Italian Certification Exams for B1 and C2 levels, administered between 2005 and 2009. The communicative tasks the examinees were given were differentiated according to proficiency level and were designed according to the guidelines of the CEF (Common European Framework, cf. Council of Europe, 2002). In particular, B1 examinees had to complete two tasks: the first dealt with answering some personal questions aimed at making them feel at ease with the examination situation; the second part dealt with a discussion, starting from visual input relating to everyday life. Indeed the examinees were shown some pictures regarding specific semantic domains, listed in the CEF for the B1 level. On the contrary, C2 participants were involved in three tasks: the first one dealt with general and personal questions; in the second part examinees had to comment on an Italian proverb, idiom or famous quotation and in the third part they were asked to comment on some comic strips. Thus, the textual genres involved in the interaction were descriptive, narrative, regulative and argumentative. It is important to underline that all the data were taken from successfully passed exams which the candidates had taken spontaneously; the interviews from which they are extracted were all formal and structured; the interviewers (i.e. the exam committee) just formulated personal questions for the first task and then proposed the topic of the interview, eliciting expression of personal opinions or the advantages or disadvantages of a particular fact or state. The data can therefore be considered spontaneous or semi-spontaneous. The choice for spontaneous data, rather than elicited data, is motivated by the idea that authenticity can reveal more about learners' strategies (communicative strategies, pragmatic strategies or avoidance strategies) and is more likely when a communicative task is involved.

3.3. *Procedure of transcription*

There was a total amount of 11h36'23'' of spoken data (4h01'23'' for L2 Italian B1 speakers and 5h54'34'' for L2 Italian C2 speakers); all data were transcribed according to CHAT format (MacWhinney, 2000). The choice of this format was based on a previously conducted analysis of all the systems of transcription and annotation used for L2 learner corpora, with particular attention on L2 Italian corpora (Luzi, 2010). As for the corpora transcription, the most frequently used formats are: the Conversational Analysis system (Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Psathas & Anderson, 1990; Sacks.), Gumperz's model (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993), the LIP (*Lessico di frequenza dell'Italiano Parlato*) (De Mauro, Mancini, Vedovelli & Voghera, 1993) and the CHAT format. The choice was based on several criteria:

- Comprehensiveness, meaning the capacity of the transcription system to take into account all the interaction phenomena;
- Reliability, meaning the degree of interference of the transcribers: the less the interference, the more reliable the system is;
- Readability, in terms of the use of particular symbols (like IPA);
- Consistency, meaning the internal coherence of the transcription and the degree of subcategorization of the phenomena transcribed;
- Flexibility, the chance to update according to latest research findings.

All things considered, the CHAT format was taken as best in providing an articulated system of symbols to report all the phenomena that occur in interactions. At the same time it also assures great consistency, leaving the transcriber/researcher free to select the phenomena to include in the transcription. Indeed, beside a bulk of obligatory symbols and information to report, the transcriber can select, from a vast set of symbols, those most useful for his/her research aims.

3.4. Methodology

First of all, it should be noted that the present study is purely descriptive: despite the fact that participant selection was carefully planned (cf. section 3.1), no experimental manipulation was sought in the data selection procedures: the aim was to observe when left-dislocation construction starts to appear in Italian L2 interlanguage and how it is realized.

The analysis consisted of identifying, counting and classifying from both the recording and the transcription all occurrences of left-dislocation, paying particular attention to the TL-like left-dislocations, the ‘proto left-dislocations’ and their distribution according to the kind of dislocated phrase. ‘Proto’ left-dislocation refers to any left-dislocation with morpho-syntactic incorrect uses, as in the case of a missing clitic, missing agreement, wrong agreement etc. An example, taken directly from the data, is given in (5):

- (5) *B108PAC06PLFD⁷: *l' italiano studio da tre anni*
 ART Italian study-PRES-1SG since three year-PL
 Italian, I have been studying for three years

In (5) the clitic is missing; it is a direct object left-dislocation that requires a clitic in preverbal position agreeing in gender and number with the dislocated phrase (*italiano*). So the TL form would be:

- (6) *l' italiano lo studio da tre anni*
 ART Italian CLI study-PRES-1SG since three year-PL
 Italian, I have been studying it for three years

It is useful to point out that the analysis of this kind of construction was conducted taking into account both the transcription and the audio data from which the transcription originated. Considering the flexible syntactic order in Italian, it would have been impossible, and often misleading, to select left-dislocations based solely on the transcription. As a matter of fact, sometimes the left-dislocation does not seem to alter the superficial order of an unmarked sentence. For this reason, recording was very useful to disambiguate ambiguous cases. Indeed, one important mark of dislocation derives from the suprasegmental level: simple unmarked sentences are produced within the same intonation contour, whereas in left-dislocations, the dislocated phrase and the rest of sentence belong to two different intonation contours. Thus, integrating the transcription and the recording was assessed as the best way to obtain reliable data. This is the case, for example, in circumstantial left-dislocation (see example (7)).

- (7) *COMM1: *ho capito hmm e in cina che cosa faceva?*
 AUX-1SG see-PERF.1SG hmm and in China what do-IMPERF.-3SG
 I see hmm and in China what did you do?
 *C206R3C03CIFX: *hmm in cina faceva: hmm facevo: [//] hmm prima hmm*
 hmm in China do-3SG hmm do-1SG hmm before hmm
studiavo e poi dopo un pò già lavoro
 study-IMPERF-1SG and then after a bit already work-PRES-1SG
 hmm in China at the beginning I was studying and later I got a job

In (7) an example of circumstantial left-dislocation is given. In the transcription it is not clear that the phrase “*in cina*” is dislocated, since in Italian the sentence “*In Cina prima studiavo*” (here given without hesitation and false starts), taken out of the context, can also be considered an unmarked sentence. Actually listening to the audio version it was possible to notice that the dislocated phrase and the rest of the sentence belonged to two different intonation contours.

⁷ Every participant production is identifiable by a code in which the year and the place where the exam took place, student number in that session, the L1, the sex, and the age range appear.

Another cue exploited for this study was the context in which the topic of the conversation was established. In (7) for example the topic (“*in Cina*”) was established by the examinee. This linguistic choice pragmatically induced the examinee to produce a left-dislocation.

4. Results and discussion

In this section the results for TL-like left-dislocations and ‘proto’ left-dislocations are presented. As **Table 2** shows, participants were able to produce left-dislocations for all the phrases. However, B1 participants did not use any indirect object dislocation. This fact cannot be generalized, since this study dealt with spontaneous production: if B1 participants did not produce any indirect object dislocations in the data considered for this study, it does not mean that they were not able to do so or that, at a general level, intermediate speakers cannot use them.

TL-like left-dislocations		
	B1 <i>n</i> (%)	C2 <i>n</i> (%)
Subject	7 (43.75)	3 (14.29)
Object	6 (37.50)	11 (52.38)
Indirect object	/	2 (9.52)
Circumstantials	3 (18.75)	5 (23.81)
Tot.	16	21

Table 2- Distribution of TL-like left-dislocations

From **Table 2** a slight preference for subject left-dislocation emerges in the B1 data. Indeed, it requires simple agreement (subject-verb agreement), which is obligatory in all Italian unmarked sentences. In other words, learners are not asked to do something different from what they usually do in constructing an unmarked sentence in Italian. An interesting statistic in **Table 2** regards to B1 object dislocations: even though the participants predominantly topicalize the subject, the data show a high figure also for the topicalization of the object. This is even more significant if we consider the percentage of circumstantial left-dislocations: according to the sequence hypothesized above based on a complexity gradient, circumstantial and indirect object dislocations should have been more frequent.

Therefore, the acquisition sequence (indirect object/circumstantial > subject > direct object) does not seem to be respected in this study, as the construction complexity does not appear to condition participants’ production. Pragmatic needs, more than morpho-syntactic complexity, seem to drive production. This is even more evident looking at the data presented in **Table 3**.

‘Proto’ left-dislocations’ vs. TL-like left-dislocations				
	B1		C2	
	‘proto’ <i>n</i> (%)	TL-like <i>n</i> (%)	‘proto’ <i>n</i> (%)	TL-like <i>n</i> (%)
Subject Agreement 1	1 (12.5)	7 (87.5)	/	3 (100)
Direct object Agreement2	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	1 (8.3)	11 (91.7)

Table 3- Comparison between ‘proto’ and TL-like left-dislocations

Several aspects emerge from **Table 3**; first of all, taking into consideration the data for the B1 level, and in particular those relating to the direct object, it is interesting to notice that 45.5% of all left-dislocations are ‘proto’ left-dislocations. This seems to confirm what was hypothesized above, that is, that morpho-syntactic complexity does not prevent learners from producing complex constructions in that the participants seem to be led according to the pragmatic needs of the conversation flow. Indeed, they seem to prefer to use left-dislocations rather than avoiding them, even though in half of the cases they produce a ‘proto’ left-dislocation.

However, although an acquisition sequence may not be confirmed, a decrease from B1 level to C2 level in ‘proto’ left-dislocations is undeniable (from 12.5% to 0% for subject left-dislocations, and from

45.5% to 8.3% for direct object left-dislocations). It seems that, rather than an acquisition sequence, a development from a less to a more accurate phase is revealed. Although the data do not give evidence of a strict acquisition sequence, they seem to support a progression from ‘rough’ to ‘fine’ grammar and this is more marked when looking the decrease seen in direct object left-dislocations.

Now it is possible to formulate a tentative answer to the research question given above.

Research Question: Is it possible to trace an acquisition sequence regarding Italian left-dislocation that starts from circumstantial and indirect object left-dislocations and ends with direct object left-dislocations, via subject left-dislocations (indirect object/circumstantial > subject > direct object)?

It seems that there is no a rigid sequence of acquisition for the left-dislocation construction. Indeed, B1 and C2 participants were able to construct even direct object dislocation productively, which from a morpho-syntactic point of view can be considered the most difficult one. This appears to be due to the pragmatics requirements of the conversation in which the participants were involved. However, as is predictable, B1 participants produce more ‘proto’ left-dislocations, principally concentrated around those left-dislocations requiring Agreement 2. This seems to favor the hypothesis that there is a gradual progression in the development of this construction. The initial hypothesis proposed a *continuum* progression, going from ‘rough’ to ‘fine’ grammar and including several phases: first attempts at use; constructionalization and regular production. Having considered the data, it appears that B1 participants are located at the constructionalization phase, whereas C2 participants tend more towards regular production.

5. Network proposal

According to the theoretical framework within which we carried out this research, a tentative network regarding Italian left-dislocation can be proposed.

The concept behind this network is the idea that left-dislocations without agreement (circumstantial and indirect object left-dislocations) and ‘proto’ left-dislocations lead to the production of target-like left-dislocations with agreement (subject and direct object left dislocations). Since they are all functionally related, that is, with the similar function of topicalizing a phrase, one leads the other. In this way the linear idea of sequence can be replaced by a multidimensional model that takes into account the proficiency level and the improvement in accuracy. The network proposal is presented in *Figure 1*.

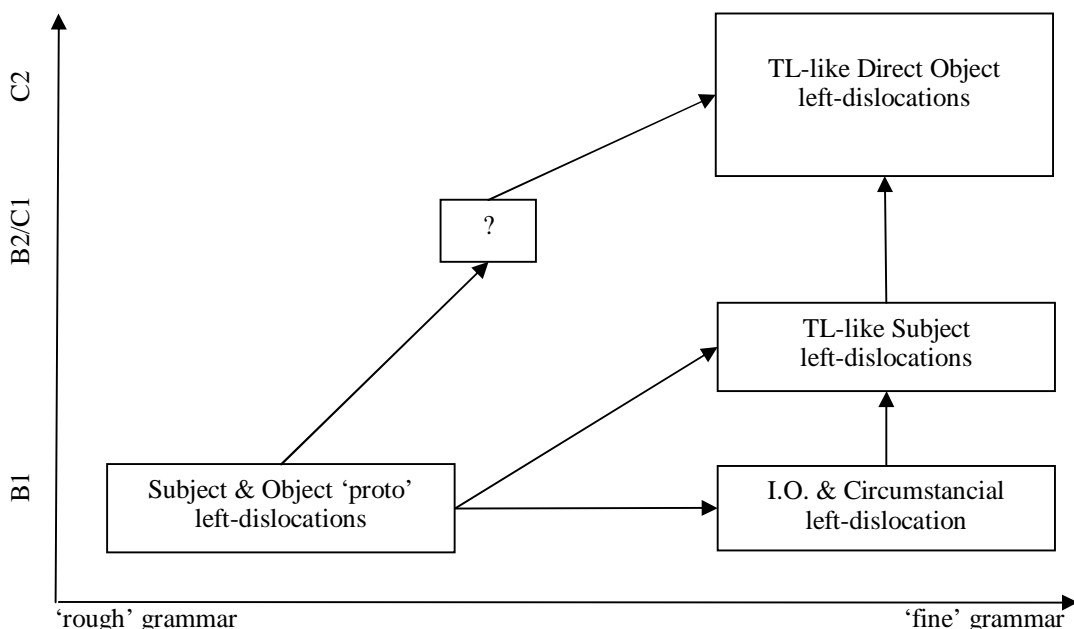


Figure 1 – Proposed network for left-dislocation acquisition

In *Figure 1*, the network is organized along two axes: the horizontal axis represents the ‘rough-fine grammar’ *continuum*, and the vertical axis represents the L2 proficiency level. At B1 level all constructions are already produced: indirect object and circumstantials are already dislocated in a TL-like manner, whereas subjects and direct objects are predominantly dislocated using the ‘proto’ structure. Indirect object and circumstantial left-dislocations are thus produced at the ‘fine’ grammar level and the subject and direct object ‘proto’ dislocations at the ‘rough’ grammar level. All contribute to the development of TL-like subject left-dislocation, as they share the topicalizing function and, partially, the form.

At C2 level and at the ‘fine’ grammar level TL-like direct object left-dislocation is produced thanks to the intermediation of the other developed constructions. The arrows traced between constructions are not implicational and are not to be intended as necessary for the acquisition of the linked constructions. They simply underline how constructions contribute to the acquisition of each other. Learners exploit such links to learn constructions.

The analysis did not involve B2 and C1 participants. What one might expect at these levels, however, is an intermediary step in which ‘proto’ left-dislocations decrease. The collection of more data for these two levels would allow for a study that analyzes the kind of errors which characterize ‘proto’ left-dislocations. Indeed it would be interesting to investigate the kind of disagreement which takes place and how it evolves from low to high levels of proficiency.

6. Conclusions

The present study deals with the acquisition of left-dislocations in Italian as an L2. In particular, the analysis of this construction reveals a progressive *continuum*, here called a ‘rough-fine grammar’ *continuum*, along which several phases can be placed, from noting first attempts at use to regular production, or constructionalization. Moreover, even though a progression in accuracy is noted along this *continuum*, data show that a detailed acquisition sequence cannot be traced. Indeed in place of a linear and discrete sequence, a proposal for a network has been suggested in which accuracy and proficiency are integrated. This leads to the hypothesis that the acquisition of any construction might not follow a linear and discrete order, but involves a multidimensional progression which includes how functional and semantic links between constructions are exploited while acquiring Italian L2.

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