PRONOUNS DROP, BUT SOON ARE ON THEIR FEET AGAIN: COMPLICATING THE SYNTAX–DISCOURSE INTERFACE IN L2 ITALIAN.

Stefano Rastelli
(stefano.rastelli@unipv.it)

Arianna Zuanazzi
(arianna.zuanazzi01@ateneopv.it)

University of Pavia
Italy

A) THE INTERFACE HYPOTHESYS

The *Interface Hypothesis* (IH) predicts residual instability and optionality in adult SLA for those language phenomena placed at the interface between syntax and pragmatics.

B) RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **Do NN learners experience difficulties also with verb-subject inversion?**

2. **Do interface problems vary across different stages of acquisition?**

3. **Does reducing processing complexity help NN learners choose between null or overt pronouns?**

4. **What happens when the sentence Topic does not shift and L2ers must map [NULL] or [OVERT] syntactic options onto [±Topic Adjacency/Continuity]?**

C) SUBJECT AND INDIPENDENT VARIABLES

	Consistent pro-drop	Partial pro-drop	Expletive pro-drop	Discourse pro-drop	Non pro-drop	NN	N
	Arabic, Greek, Chichewa, Turkish, Spanish, Basque, Catalan, Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Polish	Russian, Ukrainian, Finnish	German, Dutch	Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese	Danish, English, Flemish, French, Latvian, Norwegian, Swedish		
total	157	11	20	117	33	338	90

Proficiency	Absolute beginner	False beginner	Low intermediate	High intermediate	Low advanced	High advanced
n.	29	130	107	59	4	9
Immersion	1.2	2.5	2.3	2.5	6.7	19.1
Instruction	0.6	5.1	7.9	21.9	15.3	23

D) DESIGN AND METHOD
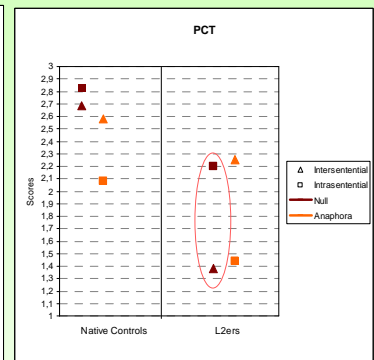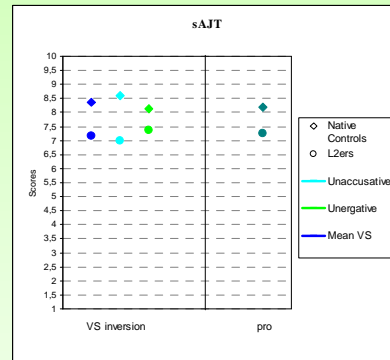
SPEEDED ACCEPTABILITY JUDGMENT TEST (sAJT)

• 18 experimental sentences and 32 fillers.
• 12 experimental sentences have subject-verb (SV) order (and comprise atmospheric verbs such as *piovere* 'rain') and 6 have verb-subject (VS) order (3 unergative and 3 unaccusative verbs).

PRAGMATIC CLOZE TEST

• The PCT aims at testing the learners performance in [±Topic Shift] and [±Topic Adjacency/Continuity] sequences.
• Selective cloze task containing 15 three-option multiple-choice gaps preceded by a six-scene picture story illustrating the written narrative.
• Participants choose one of the three cues: the null anaphora, the 3rd person singular tonic pronominal anaphora (*lui*) and a distractor.
• 6 compulsory occurrences of null anaphora (resolvable by looking at the antecedent available in the previous adjacent clause) and 6 pronominal completions (made compulsory by pragmatic constraints, semantic properties and referential ambiguity), 3 intrasentential and 3 intersentential each.

(...)L'autobus arriva, (8) (__ / lui / perché) sale e (9) (__ / lui / oppure) cerca il biglietto nello zaino. Ma lo zaino è ancora nel negozio! Giulio corre immediatamente (10) (__ / lui / verso) l'uscita dell'autobus, ma l'autista chiude le porte e (11) (__ / lui / da) non può scendere. Quindi (12) (__ / lui / un) chiede all'autista di fermarsi, ma l'autobus riparte e (13) (__ / lui / con) non può prendere lo zaino. (...)

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E) RESULTS

We run ANOVAs and pairwise Tukey post-hoc for beginner, intermediate and advanced students separately.

In **Speeded Acceptability Judgment test**, beginner and intermediate behave similarly (they rate VS sentences with unaccusative verbs 1.20 average point lesser than N controls (p***)). Advanced students and N controls pattern alike (p = 0.62): unlike beginners and intermediates, they rate better VS sentences with unaccusatives than with unergatives.

In **Pragmatic Cloze test**, the differences between N controls on one side and beginner and intermediate students on the other side are significant across all conditions. Advanced L2ers and N controls pattern alike in anaphorical pronouns (p =0.78), but score differently in null pronouns contexts (p = 0.053). Proficiency and knowledge of verb morphology are strongly significant factors (p***) for L2ers performance all across conditions.

Stimuli in our study are only simple, monoclausal sentences and paratactic biclausal sentences which share the same antecedent across/within sentences or which contain a gap that is contrasted with a topic-subject. Our data show that reducing processing complexity doesn't influence the null vs. anaphora choice.

When the antecedent is in another sentence, differences between beginners and N controls are significant throughout. Intermediate and advanced participants pattern alike N controls in choosing anaphorical pronouns (p=0.64) but lay far back in dropping unnecessary pronouns (p***).
When the antecedent is in the same sentence, intermediate students perform similarly to N controls in null pronoun contexts and advanced L2ers perform like N controls in both conditions.

F) DISCUSSION

Some interface problems in both production and comprehension still remain when topics do not shift and processing difficulties are removed. Interface problems in these simplified contexts are of two kinds: developmental and residual.
Developmental problems: The acceptance of *pro* in both SV and VS sentences and the ability to drop or express overtly pronouns in intrasentential context are a developmentally moderated problem: the more L2ers become proficient, the more they rate sentences similarly to N controls.
Residual problems: Residual problems differ from developmental problems in two respects: they show up in a non-linear fashion (i.e., they emerge starting from intermediate learners) and they are principled, as a non-target-like rule drives the computation. The rule is: *"always rely on OVERT pronouns whenever you can't find the antecedent in the sentence"*. Interface problems found in the pragmatic cloze test are residual because our advanced L2ers still comply with this rule.

Indipendent factors: Proficiency, knowledge of verb morphology and amount of instruction hours in a formal setting – but not immersion – are strong factors for both acceptance and production data.

The case of NN Chinese speakers: Chinese speakers overtly express pronoun even when sentence and discourse topics coincide and are easily available. This is unexpected because in Chinese both subject topic and discourse topic are always dropped in [-Topic Shift] condition.