Referential and topic movement in Chinese Learners of Italian: a longitudianl account

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0. Introduction

This paper looks into the development of textual competence by adult Chinese learners of Italian. Attention is drawn on syntactic anaphoric means used in the management of topic entities in oral monologic narratives.

The small set of data investigated is composed of retellings of a picture story (*The Frog Story*, Meyer 1969) by three tutored Chinese learners of Italian. The L2 narratives were collected in three sessions at five-month intervals, beginning two months after the students' arrival in Italy[1]. The present study also examines similar data in Italian L1[2] and compares the main trends in the learner data with studies on referential and topic movement in other interlan-

[1] The learners are prospective university students attending a six-month intensive language course at the University of Pavia within the Chinese-Italian exchange 'Marco Polo' program. The course is designed to bring the students from an A1-A2 CEF level to a B1-B2 stage before taking the entry test for the faculty they choose. At the time of the first recording (May 2008) the students had attended the language course for two months (equal to 200 hours of classroom instruction), the second collection (October 2008) took place after two weeks from the start of their undergraduate courses and the third group of retellings was collected at the beginning of the second semester of the first university year (March 2009).

[2] Italian native speakers' retellings belong to the Chini corpus of Italian L1 and L2 narratives by Spanish and German natives (*The Frog Story*, *Modern Times* and *The Lost Wallet*), available at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Pavia. The data included in the present analysis are the Frog Stories by the Italian natives ROB, ALB and PAT.

guages, with specific attention to Chinese learner data (Hendriks 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2003) and Italian L2 comparable studies (Chini 1998, 2005, 2008 and 2009 and Chini & Lenart 2008). In fact, one of its aims is to identify interlanguage trends, namely tendencies common to other learner varieties, and/or source-target language-specific feaures. A further objective consists in pointing out significant developmental paths in the learners' textual competence in the time span considered.

The research theoretical and methodological framework largely relies on a wider and long-running European project on the topic component in learner varieties[3], to which it contributes by enlarging the set of language pairs examined. In short, the present work moves from the empirical evidence that "while (adult) acquisition of means for referents introduction is not too problematic and almost native-like from the beginning, the acquisition of reference maintaining devices seems to be more difficult and gradual"(Chini 2005: 93). Several studies on the construction of anaphoric linkage in learner varieties (e.g. Chini 2009 for Germans and Spanish learning Italian, Hendriks 2002 and 2003 for Chinese natives learning German, English and French, Jin 1994 for English learners of Chinese and Muñoz 2000 for Spanish learning English, quoted in Chini 2005) have demonstrated that intermediate and advanced L2 speakers are more explicit in reference maintenance than natives of the target language, irrespective of source and target language pair, even in cases where both languages share the +pro-drop parameter (e.g. Spanish and Italian). In other words, learners rely less on discourse organization when reporting in a second language. Furthermore, Hendriks's studies on Chinese learner data (2002 and 2003) found that the importance of overexplicitation of anaphoric linkake varies according to language pairs. For example, in coreferential contexts Chinese natives are more explicit when learning German than in English and French as L2. Among the factors that may play a role in the level of overexplicitation she particularly acknowledges the way in which the narrative is constracted (e.g. perspective-taking and cohesiveness) and the difficulty of specific linguistic means necessary for reference maintenance and disambiguation (for instance, the pronominal system in German) (Hendriks 2003: 64).

As a result of these findings, this paper mainly addresses the following issues on the basis of the longitudinal data collected for the express purpose of

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[3] The analysis followed the procedural steps and labelling principles for the identification of sentence topics (Lambrecht 1994) described in Chini (2008 and 2009). See also Hendriks (2005) and the website *www.learner-varieties.eu/Topic Component* for an overvirew of the Learner Varieties European project.

the present investigation: how is referential newness marked in the three groups of narratives? Do the longitudinal data show a development from purely lexical to mainly target-like grammatical anaphoric linkage during the first year of the learners' stay in Italy and a six-month intensive language course? How does perspectivisation change over time? Finally, how does it correlate with the expression of topic continuity?

After briefly recalling some typological features of the source and target languages, relevant for the investigation of syntactic anaphoric means in the management of referential and topic movement (par. 1), the analysis will be restrained to the establishment of animate referents in the narrative (par. 2) and to anaphoric linkage in contexts of topic continuity (par. 3).

1. Some features of the source and target languages

From a typological point of view the present language pair combines a topic-prominent source language with a subject-prominent target one, making it possible to consider the relevance of this parameter in learner data. Following Li & Thompson (1981) in Chinese "a topic, (…), is typically a noun phrase (or a verb phrase) that names what the sentence is about, is definite or generic, occurs in sentence-initial position, and may be followed by a pause or a pause particle" (87)[4]. The basic sentence structure in Mandarin "can be more insightfully described in terms of the topic-comment relation rather than in terms of the subject-predicate relation" (19). In fact, it is mainly semantic factors rather than grammatical ones which determine the order of major constituents with respect to the verb. The subject is not marked by position, by agreement (as it is in Italian) or by any case marker, and may be omitted if it can be inferred from the context (as in Italian). So, Chinese may have sentences with both subject and topic (Ex. 1), with no subject or topic (Ex. 2 and 3) or where the subject and the topic coincide, as in the three learners' retellings, where all sentence topics are codified by the subject (Ex. 4).

(1) Li & Thompson (1981: 88)[5]
    Nèi zhī gǒu <u>wǒ</u> yǐjing kàn guo le

[4] For a deeper discussion of the semantic notion of topic-prominency in a typological perspective see Maslova & Bernini (2000). See also Zhang (2009) for an updated overview of the literature on topic-prominence in Chinese.
[5] The subject is underlined and the topic is written in bold.

That dog I have already seen

(2) Li & Thompson (1981: 88)
     Nèi běn shū chūban le
     That book, (someone) has published it

(3) Li & Thompson (1981: 90)
     Jìn lái le yi ge rén
     A person came in

(4)   DAV, CH L1
     OK. zhe ge gushi de zhurengong jiao # Giòvani.
     Ok. The main character's name is Giovani

     ta cong shichang shang mai le yi zhi qingwa.
     He buys a frog at the market

     ba zhe zhi qingwa fang zai yi ge- pingzi limian.
     (He) puts the frog in a bottle

In the last excerpt *ta* (Ex. 4, line 2) satisfies all the conditions for being both the subject and the sentence topic: it is in a 'doing' relationship with the verb, it is definite, it is in sentence-initial position, it is what the sentence is about and it may be followed by a pause[6]. In line 3 the subject-topic is omitted since it can easily be inferred from the previous textual context[7]. Given the different sentence organizing principlesof subject- and topic-prominent languages, one may expect to find signs of the L1 topic-oriented sentence structure in the learners' data, with sentences having both subjects and topics and topicalization constructs (such as dislocations and marked word order as topic promoters), which are possible but strongly marked in the target language and usually tend to appear in very advanced learners. Yet, topicalization formats are not empirically tested in the L1 narratives, since in Chinese natives' retellings (as

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[6] The absence of topic markers (pauses or particles) in the data is not surprising since they are not commonly used in spoken discourse and their acceptability varies according to the Chinese variety (Li & Thompson 1981: 87).
[7] This fragment also includes one of the 5 occurences of the *ba construction* in the data (*ba zhe zhi qingwa*, line 3), where the *ba* particle marks the object in preverbal position. For a discussion of this construction with reference to its discursive uses and the notion of secondary topic see Feng-Hsi (www.u.arizona.edu/~fliu/papers/) and Tsao (1987).

in Italian L1) subjects seem to be the unmarked topic expression[8]. As a consequence, topic-prominence in the learners' native language may not necessarily affect the way they organize sentences.[9]

Other typological parameters may be relevant for the choice of linguistic means to introduce referents and maintain topics (Tab. 1).

Table 1- Chinese vs Italian

	CHINESE	ITALIAN
Pro-drop	Yes	Yes
Word order	Free	Free
Unmarked word order	SVO/OV	SVO
Article system	No	Yes
Verb inflection	No	Yes
Relative pronouns	No	Yes
Clitic pronouns	No	Yes

Italian has a number of anaphoric devices such as relative and clitic pronouns, which may be used in contexts of topic continuity. Moreover, in Italian articles mark (in)definiteness while in Chinese this distinction may be indicated by the type of classifier phrase[10] or simply rely on contextual information. For example, if a classifier phrase includes a demonstrative (as in Ex. 4, line 3 *zhe zhi qingwa*), then it is necessarily definite; if it includes a numeral (as in Ex. 4, line 2 *yi zhi qingwa*) it is usually indefinite. As an example of a NP whose (in)definiteness is strictly a matter of context, consider the following excerpt where the NP *xiao laoshu* (line 2) is definite since the referent (*little*

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[8] Similarly, Hendriks (2000)'s analysis on the acquisition of topic marking in Chinese L1 found out that constructions with topic markers are quite infrequent at all ages and that most topics are subjects, highly active in discourse, and therefore marked with the zero pronoun (384).

[9] In fact, as for learners' data, Hendriks (2000)' s study shows that Chinese learners of French tend not to use those constructions typical of a topic-prominent language, namely sentences organized around a topic rather than around a subject, which is not surprising given the fact that these patterns were not found in L1 Chinese either (386-387).

[10] A *classifier phrase* is "the combination of demonstrative and/or number or quantifier plus the classifier" (Li & Thompson 1981: 105).

mouse/mole) has already been activated in the previous sentence (line 1 *yi zhi xiao laoshu*)[11]:

(5) LUN, CH L1

> ranhou mh # huida ta de jiu bu shi xiao qingwa, shi *yi zhi xiao laoshu.*
> *then mh # it's not the little frog who answers, but a little mouse.*

> eh # **xiao laoshu** gaosu ta # shuo # eh # wo mei you jianguo ni de qingwa, ni qu bie chu zhao ba!
> *eh # the little mouse says to him # eh # I haven't seen your frog, go and look for her somewhere else!*

Besides the above-mentioned differences, both languages are +pro-drop, allowing null subjects and, thus, empty pronominal anaphoric chains, but the omission of the subject is matched with verb inflection in Italian and lack of it in Chinese. This is coherent with Jaeggle and Sapir (1989)'s "morphological uniformity principle", according to which null subjects are licensed only in languages with morphological uniformity (where either all verbs are systematically inflected or they are not inflected at all).

In sum, in the management of sentence topics a Chinese learner of Italian faces two main tasks: learning both form and functions of new functional categories (e.g., articles and relative and clitic pronouns) and learning how to use L1-L2 common features (e.g., null subjects) according to the textual organizing principles of the target language. Furthermore, he has to learn to treat morphosyntactic means (e.g., verb inflection) as an anaphoric resource, matching them appropriately with contextual information. The analysis of how Chinese learners of Italian makes new referents accessible in the narratives (par. 2) tackles the first task (with reference to the use of articles), and the study of anaphoric linkage in topic continuity addresses the second issue, namely the role of the +pro-drop feature in the learners' productions (par. 3).

2. Referent introduction

[11] However, in the present analysis instances of bare nouns are kept apart from definite NPs (DEF) and labelled as N because their definiteness is context-dependent and not linguistically marked. The tag DEF (definite NPs) refers to those NPs defined by the presence of the definite article.

The previous paragraph underlines that Italian and Chinese partially differ in the way they mark (in)definiteness. Table 2a shows that most animate brand-new unanchored referents (Lambrecht 1994 and Givón 1983) in both L1 retellings are introduced by indefinite linguistic means (65% in Chinese and 69% in Italian)[12].

Table 2a. Referent introduction (RI) – Chinese and Italian L1

R I	CH	%	IT	%
N	3	15	2	7
IND	10	**50**	18	**62**
DEF	-	-	8	29
NPRO	-	-	-	-
POSS	4	20	1	3
DEM	3	15	-	-
TOT	20		29	

In the Chinese retellings the first mention of the three main animate referents (the boy, the dog and the frog) is preceded by the numeral *yi* (whose function is similar to the indefinite article) and may occur within a presentational sentence (Ex. 6, *you yi ge xiao – xiao nanhai*) or as the subject in a SVO sentence (Ex. 7).

(6) LUN, CH L1
ok. ## mh – you yi ge xiao nanhai # eh # you- **you yi ge xiao – xiao nanhai**.
ok. # mh – there's a little boy # eh # there's a little – a little boy

ta- ta zhuale **yi zhi - qingwa**, # ranhou ta feichang xihuan zhege qingwa.
he has found a – frog, # and he likes very much this frog

(7) ORL, CH L1
mh, # yi tian wanshang, eh **# yi ge xiao nanhai he ta de gou**, # eh zhuazhu le **yi ge qingwa**.
mh, # one night, eh # a little boy and his dog, # eh catch a frog.

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[12] The percentages include bare nouns (N) and indefinite NPs, i.e. nouns preceded by the indefinite article (IND).

In the Italian L1 data investigated the retelling always begins with a presentational sequence which introduces the boy (and in some cases, the frog and the dog) in the narrative, as in examples 8 and 9.[13]

(8) PAT, IT L1

allora la storia -, la storia inizia con appunto **un bambino** <u>che</u> la sera prima di andare
well the story -, the story begins precisely with a boy who in the evening before going

a letto si trova nella sua stanza **con il suo cagnolino** e ha **una rana** in un barattolo di vetro.
to bed is in his room with his little dog and has a frog in a jar.

(9) ARM, IT L1
diciamo c'è ## c'è un protagonista [/] diciamo **c'è un bambino e c'è un cane e eh[!] inizialmente una rana**
well there's ## there's a protagonist [/] well there's a boy and there's a dog and eh[!] at first a frog

In both languages the introduction of new animate referents through definite means (definite, possessive or demonstrative NPs) is usually associated with the first mention of the dog and the frog in relation with the boy, turning them into attributes of the main character of the story, as in examples 7 (*ta de gou*) and 10 (*ta de- ne shi xiao gou*) for Chinese and 8 (*con il suo cagnolino*) for Italian:

(10) LUN, CH L1
eh # ta # he **ta de- ne shi xiao gou** daochu zhao de # zhengge fangjian li dou zhaobian le dou mei you.
eh # he # and his- that dog of his look for everywhere # look for in the whole room it's not there

Turning now to the learner data, Table 2b shows that in the first recording the learners tend to make brand-new referents accessible by means of definite NPs (52%). This tendency significantly decreases in the following two recordings, getting down to 26% and 17%, in favour of the indefinite NP (42% and 58%). In brief, the longitudinal figures show a significant developmental trend from an activation of animate referents with definite NPs towards the introduction of new referents by the target-like indefinite phrase.

[13] In both languages the establishment of reference may also be achieved by means of global marking, that is by introducing the referent in postverbal position.

Table 2b. Referent introduction (RI) – Italian L2

R I	OR L	LU N	DA V	REC1 %	OR L	LU N	DA V	REC2 %	OR L	LU N	DA V	REC3 %
N	-	1	1	2 8	1	2	-	3 16	-	2	1	3 12
IND	1	-	6	7 **28**	4	2	2	8 **42**	6	2	4	14 **58**
DEF	7	4	2	13 **52**	1	-	4	5 **26**	1	1	2	4 **17**
NPRO	-	1	1	2 8	-	2	-	- -	-	-	-	- -
POSS	-	1	-	1 4	-	-	-	2 11	-	2	1	3 12
DEM	-	-	-	- -	-	-	1	- -	-	-	-	- -
TOT	8	7	10	25	6	6	7	19	7	9	8	24

From table 2b other two significant features stand out. First, the pervasive use of full lexical NPs since the first stage significantly differentiates these tutored learners from other mainly untutored Chinese learners of Italian (e.g. Valentini 1992), who still tend to omit unbound morphemes, such as articles, after spending 11 (Chu) and 18 (Xiao) months in Italy. Instead, the learners recorded for the present study produce definite articles since the first retelling, even though their use is not always appropriate to the referential context[14]. Second, the fact that definite articles tend to appear earlier than indefinite ones and are more widely used in the learner data is coherent with other findings on first language acquisition (e.g. Broeder 1991 quoted in Chini 2005), where definite articles appear before indefinite ones. On the other hand, the appropriate marking of referencial newness comes earlier in adult second language acquisition since adults are already aware of the need to take into account the addressee's point of view and are already sensitive to the different degrees of referential accessibility.

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[14] The early pervasive use of definite articles by tutored Chinese learners of Italian with respect to untutored ones may be due to the teaching input, e.g. its iconicity and deicticity, or the teacher's strategy to teach gender by presenting nouns always preceded by their article. However, thes hypotheses need to be tested. See also the experimental study by Chiapedi (in Press).

Now consider the three learners separately (Tab. 2b) and notice how they follow different developmental paths. In fact, DAV uses the indefinite article to make referents accessible since the first recording[15]. On the other hand, LUN produces indefinite articles from the second recording, but shows no significant development in the last recording. Finally, ORL is the learner where the developmenal trend is more evident since he significantly reverses the proportion of definite NPs with respect to the indefinite ones (7/8 to 1/7 occurences). Furthermore, a closer look at the excerpts in which he mentions the new animate entities for the first time demonstrates a development in the macrotextual organissation, as well. In fact, in the first recording (Ex. 11) he begins the retelling by mentioning the three main animate entities within definite NPs in one single clause (the boy as the subject in preverbal position and the dog and the frog in postverbal object position).

(11) ORL, IT L2, REC. 1

mh -, **la ba(m)bina** -, eh ci -, ho -, **il cane** mh # e [...] mh mh # eh # loro eh eh ## eh la bambino -,
mh -, the girl -, eh have* the dog mh ## and [...] mh mh # eh # they eh eh ## eh the girl* -,

ha eh ha eh la ladina ladina mh # lui mende eh mente me me met(t)e **la lan** eh nel , nella ladina -,
has eh # has eh the can can mh # he put* eh put* pu pu put the frog* eh in the , in the can -,

In the second and third recordings (Ex. 12 and 13) not only does he introduce the new referents with the indefinite NP, but he also provides a presentational sequence at the beginning of the narrative, where the main character is actiovated within a presentational sentence (*c'è una ragazza* and *ci sono un bambino*).

(12) ORL, IT L2, REC. 2

eh -, prima -, c'é una mh # **c'è una ragazza** -, mh bambino! (bam)bino lui ha eh -, mh -, **una rana**.

[15] A closer look at the morphosyntax in the first retelling (for instance, at verb-subject agreement) also shows that DAV is the most advanced of the three learners, which supports the hypothesis in favour of a positive correlation between the learner's use of referential devices and his overall morphological competence.

eh -, before -, there's a mh # there's a girl -, mh boy! boy he has eh -, mh -, a frog.

eh # eh quando eh -, lui -, dormire # dor # dorme. eh # la rama -, eh esca -, dalla latti-
na -, latì lattina.
eh # eh when eh -, he -, to sleep # sl # sleeps. eh # the frog -, eh gets* out -, of the
can -, ca can.*

mh # domani -, secunda -, secunda giorno -, eh # eh il bambino eh # sco scopre eh la
lattina è -, talpa [% vuota]!
mh # tomorrow -, second -, second* day -, eh # eh the boy eh # dis discovers eh the
can is -, empty!*

(13) ORL, IT L2, REC. 3

*ORL: mh eh **ci sono un bambino** -, e -, lei ha due eh amici
          mh eh there are a boy -, and -, she* has two eh friends*
*IT0:   alza pure la voce
          speak up please
*ORL: ok eh lui ha due amici -, **un cane** e **un leta**.
          ok eh he has got two friends -, a dog and a frog.*

Summing up, the present learner data feature two main significant phe-
nomena as for the activation of animate referents: first, a large and early use
of definite NPs, which seems to be peculiar to these tutored learners of Italian
and, consequently, could be motivated by the teaching input; second, a devel-
opment during the first year of exposure to Italian from an overuse of definite
means in the activation of unanchored brand-new referents towards the target-
like marking of referential newness, in line with the change observed in first
language acquisition.

3. Topic continuity

In this paper the notion of topic continuity includes not only instances of
local coreference, where the topic entity referred to is the topic of two consec-
utive clauses, but also cases in which the topic is active at least in the two
previous clauses.[16] Before moving to the analysis of anaphoric linkage in the-
se contexts, a look at the distribution of animate topic entities (Tab. 3a) and at

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[16] If the topic entity has been accessible (as a topic) for the last time beyond the two
previous clauses, then it represents an instance of *topic shift*.

topic movement in the L1 retellings (Tab. 4a) demonstates that in the source language the story is mainly told from the boy's perspective (59% vs 39% in Italian) (Tab. 3a), while in the target language more entities are chosen as sentence topics, producing more topic shifts (Tab. 4a, 24% vs 13% in Chinese).

Table 3a. Topic entities (animate)

TOPIC ENTITIES	CH	%	IT	%
BOY	64	**59**	48	**39**
DOG	10	9	23	**19**
BOY+DOG	17	**16**	26	**21**
FROG	9	8	20	**16**
DEER	8	7	6	5
TOT	108		116	

Table 4a. Topic movement (Tmov) – Chinese and Italian L1

Tmov	CH	%	IT	%
(m)it	13	11	22	**15**
mt	91	76	88	60
st	15	**13**	36	**24**
TOT	119		146	

In other words, the two groups of native speakers follow different trajectories in the overall textual organization: in Chinese they build the narrative around one single topic entity[17] while in Italian they take different perspectives.

In the learners' data (Tab. 3b and 4b) the figures show a longitudinal increase in topic continuity (Tab. 4b, from 58% to 76%) together with a stronger tendency to tell the story from the boy's perspective (Tab. 3b, from 52% to 82%, with a steady growth from the second to the third recording).

Table 3b. Topic entities (animate)- Italian L2

TOPIC ENTITIES	ORL	LUN	DAV	**REC1 %**	ORL	LUN	DAV	**REC2 %**	ORL	LUN	DAV	**REC3 %**
BOY	14	15	17	46	9	17	14	40	19	29	14	62

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[17] In that Chinese natives are closer to French natives (Chini &Lenart 2008).

				52				**56**				**82**
Dog	7	1	6	14 16	-	-	8	8 11	-	-	1	1 1
Boy+dog	5	2	7	14 16	4	1	6	11 15	-	-	4	4 5
Frog	2	1	3	6 7	2	1	2	5 7	-	1	-	1 1
Deer	2	2	4	8 9	1	2	5	8 11	3	-	4	7 9
TOT	30	21	37	88	16	21	35	72	22	30	23	75

Table 4b. Topic movement (Tmov) – Italian L2

Tmov	OR L	LU N	DA V	**REC1 %**	OR L	LU N	DA V	**REC2 %**	OR L	LU N	DA V	**REC3 %**
(m)it	(5) 2	(3)	(7) 2	(15) 15	(3)	(3) 1	(7)	(13) 16	(5)	(5)	(2) 3	(12) 12
mt	20	13	26	59 **58**	11	18	28	57 **71**	19	27	32	78 **76**
st	9	5	9	23 23	2	3	4	9 11	2	6	10	18 18
TOT	36	21	44	101	16	25	39	80	26	38	47	102

These longitudinal trends may be regarded as a development in the learners' textual competence, in that they produce a more and more cohesive text. Yet, once they have started organizing the text as a whole, they still seem to take the perspective of their L1. Besides this source-language-specific hypothesis, there may argue in favour of a possible developmental explanation, according to which organizing the narrative around one single topic entity may represent a basic cohesive strategy, easier to be handled by learners not (completely) familiar with the full range of target-like cohesive means (eg., connectives). As a matter of fact, Chini (1998)'s German learners of Italian show a similar feature, in that the learners take the boy's perspective more often than Italian natives (159), despite the fact that in their L1 German natives choose the boy as the sentence topic less frequently than Italian natives. To summarize, it can be concluded that the similarity in perspective-taking between the two Italian varieties (by Chinese and German natives) would stand for the developmental

hypothesis.[18]On the other hand, the former source-language specific transfer of perspective-taking is plausible too since it has been shown that becoming native-like in the domain of perspectivisation is one of the latest developments in a second language (Carroll & von Stutterheim 2003).

Turning now to the linguistic devices for topic maintenance, Table 5a shows that in Chinese L1 lexical, pronominal and empty anaphoric means are equally distributed: 36% of topic entities are maintained by means of pronominal forms, followed by empty anaphoric means (34%) and full lexical means (29%).

Table 5a. Topic maintenance (TM) – Chinese and italianL1

TM	CH	%	IT	%
N	4	5	-	-
IND	-	-	-	-
DEF	2	2	21	**25**
NPRO	10	12	-	-
POSS	4	5	-	-
DEM	4	5	1	1
PRO3	23	**27**	4	**5**
PRO6	8	9	1	1
REL	-	-	3	4
CLIT	-	-	1	1
ZEROP	29	**34**	46	**55**
ZERO	-	-	6	7
TOT	84		80	

The use of heavy anaphoric means occurs in contexts of partial topic maintenance, either restrictive or additive, when one entity only is maintained or when one or more entities are added to a maintained entity, as in example 14 (line 3, *tā hé tā de gǒu*). In fact, pronominal or lexical anaphora may be li-

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[18] "… nel racconto condotto nella lingua meno padroneggiata si preferisce concentrare l'attenzione sul personaggio più topicale e più alto nella gerarchia di animatezza; si tratta forse di una strategia coesiva elementare, ma efficace." (Chini 1998: 159. Quite differently, advanced Spanish learners of Italian in their retellings of *Modern Times* (Chini 2009) tend to rely less on the discourse topic than natives. Nevertheless, *Modern Times* and *The Frog Story* are not fully comparable in that in the former input Chaplin is the undisputable discourse topic while in the latter the boy, the frog and the dog are represented the same amount of times in the visual input and are all potential candidates to become discourse topics.

censed by disambiguating purposes in contexts where there might be a competition between a number of referents for the same referential expression, or by textual boundaries, namely contexts of textual discontinuity, such as a change of scene and/or of topic time or place (Berretta 1986 and Fox 1993) (Ex. 14 line 1, *dì èr tiān zǎoshang, # xiǎo nánhái*).

(14) ORL, CH L1

dì èr tiān zǎoshang, # xiǎo nánhái fāxiàn # zhè ge bōli guànzi shì kōng de , # tā zhīdao tā de qīngwā táozǒu le.
The morning after the little boy discovers that the glass bottle is empty, he knows that his frog has escaped.

ránhòu **tā hé tā de gǒu** zhǎo tā jiā lǐ suǒyǒu de dìfāng, # bāokuò xiézi lǐ hé chuáng yǐxià, dànshì dōu méiyǒu fāxiàn nè ge qīngwā de yǐngzi.
then he and his dog searched all over the house, including in the shoes and under the bed, however, they did not find the frog.

ránhòu tā jiù bǎ tā de gǒu, eh # mh # cóng jiā lǐmiàn chūlái, # ránhòu dào # wàimiàn qù xúnzhǎo tā de qīngwā.
then, he brings his dog with him and goes out of the house and looks for the frog outside.

Similar contexts explain the 26% occurrences of full lexical anaphora for topic maintenance in the Italian L1 corpus (Ex. 15, line 1 *durante la notte poi la rana* and line 3, *lui e il cagnolino*). Yet, in Italian null anaphoric means represent the vast majority of topic continuity devices (62%) while pronominal forms amount only to 11%. The higher propotion of third person pronominal anaphora in Chinese L1 (27% + 9% vs 5% + 1% in Italian L1) may compensate for the lack of subject-verb agreement as a morphological anaphoric device. In other words, where Italian can simply rely on verb inflection to disambiguate between the maintenance of one single referent (e.g., the boy) and the maintenance of two referents (e.g., the boy and the dog), Chinese needs to use at least the third person tonic personal pronoun (*ta/tamen*)

(15) PAT, IT L1

durante la notte poi la rana esce dal barattolo di vetro. la mattina quando il bambino si alza -,
during the night then the frog climbs out of the jar. in the morning when the boy gets up -,

lui e il cagnolino constatano purtroppo che la rana è scappata -, allora il bambino e il cane

he and the little dog realize unfortunately that the frog has run away -, so the boy and the dog

mettono a soqquadro tutta la stanza -, cercano nelle scarpe -, cercano dappertutto -, e eh alla fine -, aprono la finestra
turn the room upside down -, look into the shoes -, look everywhere -, and eh in the end -, open the window

As for learner data, Table 5b shows that in all three recordings full lexical means are preferred in contexts of topic continuity: 59% in the first recording, 49% in the second and 61% in the last session. Empty anaphoric means range from 26-27% in the first and third recording to 33% in the second. Finally, pronominals decrease from 16% to 10% in the last session, but this does not seem to go in favour of zero pronouns (18%+7% in the last recording vs 16%+10% of the first one), as one would expect. Instead, apart from the appearance of one relative pronoun in one learner (ORL) the decrease of tonic pronouns goes hand in hand with a slight increase in full lexical means (from 32%+25% to 19%+40%+2%).

Table 5b. Topic maintenance (TM) - Italian L2

TM	ORL	LUN	DAV	REC1%		ORL	LUN	DAV	REC2%		ORL	LUN	DAV	REC3%	
N	-	-	1	1	2	-	8	-	8	**15**	-	1	-	1	2
IND	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DEF	12	3	5	20	**32**	5	-	3	8	**15**	11	-	-	11	**19**
NPRO	-	11	5	16	**25**	-	-	8	8	**15**	-	16	7	23	**40**
POSS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	**2**	-	-	1	1	2
DEM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	**2**	-	-	-	-	-
PRO3	1	-	-	1	2	3	-	1	4	8	3	2	1	6	10
PRO6	3	-	6	9	14	2	1	2	5	10	-	-	-	-	-
REL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
CLIT		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ZEROP	3	1	6	10	**16**	-	6	6	12	**23**	1	5	4	10	**18**
ZERO	1	-	5	6	10	1	1	3	5	10	-	1	3	4	7
TOT	20	15	28	63		11	16	25	52		16	25	16	57	

Looking at each learner from a longitudinal perspective one notices that if ORL keeps on using mainly definite NPs anaphorically thoughout the three

recordings (Ex. 16)[19], LUN, despite her preference for lexical anaphora (the boy's proper name and bare nouns), produces lighter anaphoric linkage in the last two recordings, which may hint at a slight development in her interlanguage (Ex. 17 and 18).

(16) ORL, IT L2, REC. 3

eh dopo eh domani eh # (secundo xx) giorno il bambino eh si a- a- alza eh mtk eh eh lei eh ### ehm ##
eh after eh tomorrow eh # (second xx) day the boy eh g- g- gets up mtk eh eh she* eh ### ehm ##*

lui eh ### trovare eh trovare eh il eh il eh suo amico eh che ha a- arrivato.
he eh ### to find eh to find eh the eh the eh his friend eh that has a- arrived.

poi mhm eh **il bambino** eh tro- trovare eh ## sotto la (xx) letto eh nella eh scherpa -, eh n- non non si
then mhm eh the boy eh fin- to find eh ## under the (xx) bed eh in the eh shoe -, eh [he] can't*

può trovare il la leta. poi eh eh **il bambino** con mhm suo amico eh il cane eh ## eh # uscite da la casa eh sua.
can't find the the frog. then eh eh the boy with mhm his friend eh the dog eh ## eh # gone* out of the house eh his*.*

(17) LUN, IT L2, REC. 3

eh la matina -, enrico -, en- # enri- enrico -, trovare -, ehm rana non c'è più. ehm enrico è molto -, ehm # triste.
*eh in the moring ., **Enrico** -, en- # enri- enrico -, find* -, ehm frog is no more there- ehm **Enrico** is very -, ehm # sad.*

(18) LUN, IT L2, REC. 3

quindi -, # ma enrico non ## eh non lascia -, non lascia -, # non lascia la mi- la tua -, # la tua -, eh rana. mhm [%colpo di tosse] # mhm qui -, lui -, lui -, eh cred- crede -, mhm crede che mhm tro- mhm trova -, la rana.

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[19] The use of the temporal adverb *poi* (lines 4 and 6) may index the fact that he tends to split the events into sequential chunks, according to their representation in the picture story, rather than orienting to their continuity.

*so -, # but **Enrico** doesn't ## eh doesn't leave -, doesn't leave the mi- your -, # your -, eh frog. mhm [% cough] # mhm here -, **he** -, he -, eh bel- believes -, mhm believes that mhm fi- mhm finds -, the frog.*

However, apart from DAV, who uses a variety of anaphoric means since the first recording and widens the repertoire of NPs in the second recording, in each retelling the other two learners tend to overextend the use of one single type of lexical NP (bare, definite or proper nouns) in all anaphoric contexts. Redundancy in anaphoric linkage may thus result from limited grammatical competence and not (only) from deficiency at the discourse organisational level.

Therefore, the analysis of lsyntactic devices for topic continuity indicates no evident longitudinal developmental trend in the acquisition of light anaphoric means during the first year of the learners' stay in Italy. Coherently with the findings about topic continuity in other interlanguages, the three learners tend to be overexplicit in these anaphoric contexts and are less inclined to use either pronominal or empty means despite the fact that both the source and target language license null subjects[20]. This result is also corroborated by other Italian learner varieties where both source and target languages share the +pro-drop parameter (e.g., Spanish and Italian, Chini 2009). Hence, the present learner data further support the hypothesis that anphoric redundancy in contexts of topic continuity represents a step learners go through regardless of the + prodrop feature of both source and target language.

4. Summary of main findings

This paper has focused on the syntactic means for the activation of animate referents and for topic continuity in narratives in the source and target language and in the learner varieties of tutored Chinese learners of Italian, and has highlighted some tendencies which may reflect either source-target language features or phenomena common to other interlanguages.

First, the most relevant difference depicted in the retellings in Italian and Chinese L1 concerns perspective-taking. On one side Chinese tends to organize the story around one single character producing a highly cohesive narrative by means of topic chains expressed by zero markings. On the other side, Italian varies the point of view more often, which explains the higher propor-

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[20] Licensing null subjects is relevant in that the vast majority of topic entities in the present learner data are codified by the subject.

tion of topic shifts. In fact, in the learner data the most evident interference from the learners' L1 may be at the macrotextual level, since the learners increasingly tend to build the whole retelling around one single entity, as in their L1. On the other side, this possible transfer at the textual organisational level may also represent a feature common to other learner varieties. In other words, it may also be an interlanguage developmental trend, irrespective of source-target language pairs.

Second, from a longitudinal perspective the learners (with some idiosyncrasies) show a significant development in the activation of referents through appropriate syntactic means, moving from an overuse of definite NPs in the first recording to the increasing choice of target-like indefinite means in the following sessions. However, after one year they are still prone to redundancy in topic continuity, which reflects the interlanguage tendency to overexplicit anaphoric linkage typical of intermediate varieties, irrespective of source and target languages. As a consequence, the present study further corroborates Hendriks (2003)'s findings about other Chinese learner varieties (English, German and French): "Chinese are definitely more explicit in the learner variety than in their native tongue. As a result, they rely less on discourse organisation when referring in the second language than in their own language." (61).

Third, the present study also supports the hypothesis that learning how to express newness may be less problematic than managing topic continuity. The latter engages the learner at the interface between syntax and the overall textual organisation of the narrative, requiring the choice of the linguistic means for topic maintenance according to the degree of activation of the entity in the previous textual context. Consequently, overexplicitness may index not only the learners' weak competence in textual organisation in their tendency to plan the narrative at a lower organisational level, as a sequence of sentences rather than as a whole text. It may also reveal a poor mastery of grammatical devices. In fact, in the learner data redundancy in contexts of topic continuity produces linguistically fragmented and scarcely cohesive narratives, despite an increasing cohesion in perspective-taking. As a consequence, one could argue that the causes of discursive fragmentation resulting from redundant anaphoric means should be looked for at the level of grammarical competence more than (or not only) at the textual organisational level.

Given the relevance of the overall textual organisation of the narrative in the understanding of the factors accelerating or slowing down the overcoming of anaphoric redundancy in second language learners, further attention should be devoted to the investigation of the macrotextual structure of the narratives in source and target languages and in learner varieties. For instance, more

work should be done on the interaction between anaphoric linkage in contexts of topic continuity and other topic components, namely topic time and place.

Abbreviations

Cl.	classificatore/classifier
PtC.Perf.	perfective particle
PtC.Res.	resultative particle
Pref.	prefix

NP Type :

N	bare noun
IND	indefinite NP
NPRO	proper noun
DEF	definite NP
DEM	demonstrative NP
POSS	possessive NP
REL	relative pronoun
PRO3	3sg pronoun
PRO6	3pl pronoun
CLIT	clitic pronoun
ZEROP	zero anaphora (in finite clauses)
ZERO	zero anaphora (in non-finite clauses)

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