

Ways of grammar: Analytical constructions in the acquisition of L2 Italian by adult learners with limited literacy.

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Despite seminal studies such as Tarone & Bigelow (2005), Tarone et al. (2009), Vainikka & Young-Scholten (2007), the role of literacy in L2 development is still peripheral in Second Language Acquisition research. This is epistemologically problematic due to the low representativeness of studies on sociolinguistically non-diverse convenience samples (Andringa & Godfroid 2020; Henrich et al. 2010).

This especially concerns morphosyntax. Beside the above-mentioned studies on L2 English, we only have analyses on aspects of L2 Dutch (van de Craats 2011) and, more recently, Greek, Italian, Suomi (Janko et al. 2019; Mocciaro 2020; Tammelin-Laine 2014).

Yet, the explicit inclusion of 'literacy' in the analysis of interlanguages might bring out structural specificities concerning the rate and the endstate of acquisition (Tarone et al. 2009) or otherwise specific patterns along the route (Vainikka et al. 2017; Young-Scholten & Mocciaro 2022).

Recent data derived from the analysis of low-literate African migrants' interlanguages, collected in Palermo, Italy, in 2018-2022, show the presence of specific interlanguage constructions (absent in the input and independently developed by learners), in which functional words combine with uninflected lexical verbs to express tense-aspect information in their place. In addition to the copula (Bernini 2003), also light verbs (e.g., do-verbs) are 'placeholders' of functions of which learners are aware, even if they have not yet developed the target form.

The study on L2 Italian presented here shows a more pronounced presence and stability over time of these constructions in low-literate learners' interlanguages, which would suggest a greater propensity towards analytical rather than synthetic (target) solutions. Supported by studies on placeholders in the L2 English of low-literate learners (Vainikka et al. 2017), this hypothesis could be explained by the greater accessibility (due to prosodic salience) of functional words compared to bound morphemes in oral input, the only one accessible to learners with limited literacy.

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