Outward over-explicitness and the over-use of overt subject pronouns by L2ers

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Several works have highlighted that advanced L2 speakers of a null subject language over-use overt subject pronouns (OSPs) with respect to native speakers, using them also in topic continuity, even when their L1 is also a null subject language (Bini 1993; Margaza & Bel 2006; Lozano 2006 a. o.). Cross-linguistic influence may play a role if there is micro-variation between the two null subject languages of the speakers (Filiaci *et al.* 2014). Other proposals suggest that properties at the syntax-discourse interface (such as topicality) are complex to compute for L2ers, whose processing resources are more taxed (Sorace 2011, 2016): OSPs appear thus as a convenient default option. Finally, some authors argue that L2ers simply tend to be over-explicit (Ryan 2015 a. o.), violating pragmatic principles banning redundancy more than pragmatic principles banning ambiguity (Lozano 2016). In this work we propose that L2ers' over-explicitness is just outward, and that OSPs are the necessarily explicit devices for L2ers in the contexts where they occur. Analyzing the oral productions (collected through a Story Telling task) of three group of speakers (15 Greek native speakers [GN], 15 Italian native speakers [IN] and 15 L2ers of Italian with L1 Greek) in terms of topicality and number and kind of active referents, we found:

a) no GN/IN differences in the use of OSPs

b) significantly higher use of OSPs by L2ers in topic continuity with respect to GN (p= 0.012) and IN (p=0.023)

c) significantly higher use of OSPs in contexts with two active referents differing for gender and/or number (2rgn) by all speakers' groups (IN p=0.013; L2ers p<0.001; GN p<0.001)

d) significantly higher use of OSPs by L2ers in the 2rgn context with respect to the other groups (p=0.030)

e) use of OSPs in topic continuity by L2ers mostly attested in 2rgn

f) significantly higher use of *pro* in topic continuity by GN with respect to the other two groups (IN p=0.031; L2ers p=0.004)

The use of OSPs in topic continuity by L2ers cannot be due to cross-linguistic influence given a), nor to general difficulties to deal with topicality since they do not transfer into Italian the properties of the Greek *pro* (f)). Given e), we argue that L2ers have difficulties in computing topicality when the presence of an additional character decreases referents' prominence (Arnold & Griffin 2007), making the topic/non-topic distinction unclear. In this situation, the OSP is the necessarily explicit (not over-explicit) device to employ.

We finally analyze comparable data from a group of 12 L2ers of Italian with L1 Serbo-Croatian, where we observe a similar pattern in the distribution of OSPs: the related explanation can be thus extended to speakers with a different null subject L1.

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