

Resolving pronominal anaphora in real-time: a comparison between Italian native and near-native speakers*

CARLA CONTEMORI¹, LENA DAL POZZO^{2,3},
SIMONA MATTEINI³

¹Pennsylvania State University, ²Università di Firenze, ³CISCL-Università di Siena
cuc29@psu.edu, lena.dalpozzo@unifi.it, si.mat@libero.it

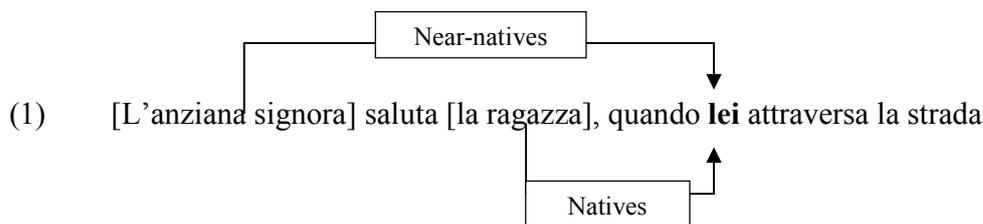


“Toivotamme sinulle oikein hyvää syntymäpäivää!(We wish you a very happy birthday)”

“Una vita senza ricerca non è degna per l'uomo di essere vissuta.”(Socrate)

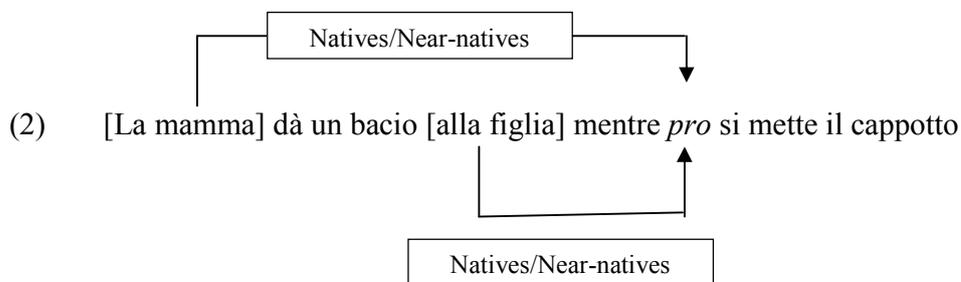
In this study we aim at investigating the interpretation of overt and null subject pronouns in English near-native speakers of Italian through an on-line experiment, thus contributing to an issue raised in Belletti, Bennati & Sorace (2007) a.o.. The authors, besides observing different answering strategies adopted by near-native speakers when dealing with the production of null subjects/VS order, also found diverging interpretation patterns in anaphora resolution contexts between Italian native speakers and near-native speakers whose L1 is a non-null subject language (English). Specifically, the findings reveal that near-native speakers tend to interpret the overt subject pronoun as co-referential with the lexical matrix subject significantly more than the native speakers:

* The related article will be part of Di Domenico, E., C. Hamann and S. Matteini (eds.) (to appear) *Structures, Strategies and Beyond. Studies in Honour of Adriana Belletti*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, Benjamins Publishing Company.



‘The old lady says hello to the girl, when she is crossing the road’

Interestingly, no difference between natives and near-natives emerged in the interpretation of *pro* in forward anaphora resolution contexts: for both groups *pro* in the subordinate clause could co-refer with either the subject or the object of the matrix clause:



‘The mum kisses the daughter, while *pro* put on the coat’

Such discrepancy has been attributed either to different constraints on discourse options imposed by the L1 grammar (Belletti, Bennati and Sorace 2007) or to a more general indeterminacy in the processing strategies that are responsible for establishing a link between pronouns and antecedents, regardless of (non) null subject nature of languages (Sorace and Filiaci 2006).

Differently from previous studies, in the present research, results of the on-line experiment are compared with data obtained through an off-line task (a picture verification task) administered to the same group of experimental subjects (n.14 Italian native speakers, n.12 English near-native speakers of Italian). The contrast between off and on-line processing data is particularly revealing in that it suggests that divergent patterns between L1 and near-native speakers might be attributed to competition for processing resources between languages, rather than specific processing difficulties.

Selected references

- Belletti, A., Bennati, E. and Sorace, A. (2007) Theoretical and developmental issues in the syntax of subjects: evidence from near-native Italian. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 25: 657-689.
- Sorace, A. and Filiaci, F. (2006) Anaphora resolution in near native speakers of Italian. *Second Language Research* 22(3): 339-368.