FOCUS-INDUCED VARIATIONS IN PROSODY AND WORD ORDER IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE ITALIAN AND FRENCH

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Preface

Studying the linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers is compelling and essential in today's world. As travel abroad and linguistic community exchanges, whether physical or virtual, become constant features of life, understanding how speakers' linguistic repertoires evolve and interact within their mind and speech is fundamental to understand the complexities of human communication. Although the phenomenon of multilingualism and language contact is widely observable, in fact, much of it remains unexplored: among the countless languages (and varieties of languages) and the even greater number of possible combinations between them, many aspects still await a detailed investigation.

A cornerstone of multilingualism research is of course the study of L2 acquisition, which refers to the learning of any language added to a speaker's repertoire after their first language(s). The analysis of acquisition processes – both longitudinally, in terms of development, and synchronically, describing a system captured in each moment of the developing path – offer a window into how linguistic systems interact, restructure, and result in myriad outcomes. Comparing and observing languages in combination can reveal properties of individual linguistic systems that may remain unnoticed when these systems are studied in isolation. Such properties surface more clearly, and show their full proportion and impact, in situations of contact and contrast with other languages or varieties.

With these objectives in mind, since systematic investigation of L2 acquisition began a few decades ago, significant progress has been made in many respects. One particularly fruitful area of research, that has been gaining prominence since the 1990s, is the investigation of information structure within non-native varieties. Information structure is somewhat distinct from traditional levels of linguistic analysis, since it "transcends" them, integrating and using them to shape discourse, textuality, and conversation; it governs how messages are organized and communicated within interactions, thus bridging linguistic forms and functional communication. Non-native language varieties, and especially those developed in unguided contexts, are often described as repertoires prioritizing communicative functions: such varieties are inherently oriented toward interaction, making them an ideal territory for the exploration of communicative and conversational phenomena. Also, phenomena related to information structure are often overlooked in traditional L2 classroom settings: this omission creates a domain where natural, spontaneous acquisition processes – unmediated by grammatical instruction or the influence of written language – can be observed more readily. Thus, studying non-native varieties not only enhances our understanding of language acquisition *per*

se, but also sheds light on universal aspects of conversation, communication, and speech acts, to the same extent of L1s – if not more so.

Our study adopts this broad, integrated perspective on Second Language Acquisition and learners' varieties, while narrowing its focus (if the wordplay may be permitted) to a specific phenomenon: the linguistic encoding of focus, as well as of closely related concepts such as prominence, salience, and contrast. Specifically, it examines how speakers – both non-native and native, through the analysis of test and control groups – employ focus-marking strategies across different linguistic levels, encompassing the whole variety of means, cues, and indices used to perform their communication.

An important aspect in the foundation of this work has been the selection of target languages, Italian and French. Our choice has been far from arbitrary or simply dictated by gaps in the existing literature: disentangling cross-linguistic influence (henceforth, CLI) from language universals – and accounting for typological relationships, markedness, and similar factors – in fact, requires careful deliberation, also in the choice of the linguistic combination. To confidently attribute a phenomenon to CLI, it is essential to compare it across more than two languages. With this in mind, we deliberately chose a combination of languages that would allow us to test the phenomenon in multiple linguistic contexts, with already existing studies. Moreover, among the key questions in studying the acquisition of any linguistic phenomenon is the role of typological distance, with all its possible declinations: do similarities and differences across various linguistic levels exert the same influence? Are linguistic structures inherently more or less difficult to acquire, or does difficulty depend entirely on the relative distance between the source and target languages? All these considerations informed the choice of our combination. The Italian-French pairing features both similarities and differences, providing an ideal test case for examining how typological proximity or distance – whether structural, perceptual, or both – shapes acquisition processes. As a third reason, we chose this combination of Romance languages since an analysis performed on Italian and French would help counterbalance the research bias toward West-Germanic languages, which still dominates current studies, both on L2 acquisition and information structure marking.

Continuing with our methodological choices, the goal of our work is to provide an analysis that is precise, detailed, and instrumental, firmly grounded in experimental evidence. This required developing a robust protocol that includes extensive collection of material, carefully designed tasks, and instrumental measures. However, beyond this, there is also the need to preserve ecological validity. Thus, the tasks were selected to strike a balance between spontaneous speech and precisely analysable content – a challenge we aimed to address with a varied protocol, involving three different tasks, ranging from the most controlled to the most spontaneous.

A clarification is also needed regarding our decision to integrate different levels of linguistic analysis, specifically the combination of phonetics and syntax – an approach not often found in studies of information structure. We did not wish to separate aspects that belong to these linguistic domains, as each contributes to the final "packaging" of

information. Additionally, we aimed not to prioritize one over the other or presuppose any hierarchy. The question of whether prosody determines syntax, *vice versa*, or whether they act independently remains a controversial issue. In our research, we aimed to maintain neutrality on this matter, allowing the results to speak for themselves within a data-driven framework. We hope that the approach we have taken will be appreciated and will contribute meaningfully to the advancement of the field.

Our approach to these issues is reflected in the structure of the manuscript, which we would like to introduce briefly here. The work begins with a description of the key concepts and principles involved in the analysis and interpretation of the phenomena under study. The core chapters focus on the methodology and the research questions, explaining our choices and providing a clear outline of the procedures used for annotation, data elaboration, and analysis. The results are initially presented separately, addressing syntax, word order, intonation phenomena. The integration of these elements is discussed in the final sections, along with a return to the theoretical framework and the predictions made by the models introduced in the earlier chapters. The appendix and the fully accessible online repository further substantiate and complement the work. By initially separating syntax and prosody, we aimed to examine each on its own terms, ensuring a rigorous, detailed analysis that respects their individual contributions to language structure and use. However, the final synthesis underscores our holistic view of language as an organic system, where elements interact to create communication. This structure thus reflects our epistemological stance, that wishes to balance precision and integration, fully acknowledging the interaction of linguistic domains.

By refraining from presupposing hierarchical relationships or deterministic influences, we would like to invite the reader to engage with the data and its interpretations without preconceptions, always in the view of fostering an open dialogue on these still debated issues.

Before closing, it may be helpful to add a note on the intended readership of this work. The manuscript is addressed primarily to linguists and researchers in second language acquisition, and it assumes a certain degree of shared background knowledge in the areas of information structure and prosody. For this reason, I have not systematically retraced every aspect of the theoretical debates or reintroduced the full breadth of prior literature in each instance. Instead, I have focused on positioning the present findings within already established frameworks, while pointing to key references where appropriate.

I wish to conclude by thanking those who have contributed to refining this manuscript through their comments and suggestions. My sincere thanks go to Cecilia Andorno, Antonio Romano, Fabián Santiago, and Sandra Benazzo for their careful readings, both at the very beginning of this work and later on in its book form. I am also grateful to Cinzia Avesani, chief editor of this series, as well as to the entire editorial board and the two anonymous reviewers for the time they devoted to a very careful re-reading and for their constructive feedback. Any remaining inaccuracies are my responsibility alone.

CHAPTER 1

Information Structure marking

In this chapter we will review the concepts that constitute the background of our work, with particular attention to those issues and definitions that play an important role in shaping our research. In the first section, we will deal with Information Structure (IS): its birth and development as a discipline of work, its rooting within the theory of communication; we will establish a working terminology for its basic notions and implicatures in other adjacent fields. In the second and third section, we will review and analyse, in a cross-linguistic perspective, the interactions that IS, and more specifically focus and contrast, entertain with syntax and word order on one hand, and prosody on the other. This separation between syntactic and prosodic phenomena is obviously an abstraction: in the reality of speech, it is very rare (if not impossible) that syntactic movements linked to IS take place without consequences (or motivations) linked to prosody. Nonetheless, we believe it is useful to list the two set of phenomena more schematically in view of the experimental study, in which the different factors were investigated separately at first, and then integrated at a later stage. In the fourth section we will have a closer look at the way these parameters and notions interact in two specific linguistic systems, Italian and French.

1.1 *IS: definition and basic notions*

The term *information structure* (henceforth, IS) refers to the structuring of the sentence in information blocks that differ from each other in terms of communicative function or saliency. It is usually assumed that the father of IS is Mathesius (1928), founder of Prague Linguistic circle, who first coined the terms *theme* and *rheme*, in addition to the otherwise ambiguous terms *subject* and *predicate*. The first organic conception of IS, though, is found later in Halliday (1967) and then in Chafe (1976), under the expression *information packaging*: with this formulation, Chafe designs the way a speaker "packs" the utterance to successfully deliver his message to the addressee. In this view, the string of information can be formulated in different ways, without changing its propositional content: the aim of a particular "packaging" is to better fit the communicative situation, and reach the needs of the addresser and the addressee in a more effective way.

It goes without saying that a certain structure (or packaging) can only be felicitous and useful if anchored in a given communicative context: the notion of information packaging, thus, is strictly linked to that of Common Ground (CG), introduced by Stalnaker (1974) on the basis of Grice's groundwork (1989). In the theory of communication, CG indicates the speakers' presupposition in a given conversational

context and a given moment; in other words, all the background information that is taken for granted by all the participants in a conversation. Conversational moves continuously modify CG and its articulation in what is presupposed/required and what is being asserted/proffered. Going back to Chafe, we can say, then, that the information is "packaged" on the basis of the CG, i.e. what is assumed to be shared with the addressee in a determined point of the conversation.

Drawing from these first, founding works, studies on IS have since explored multiple perspectives and directions, attempting to catch the diverse reflexes of IS on discourse and grammar, and the complex interplay between information – structural categories and all the possible linguistic levels involved in their expression. It is undoubted that the diversity of IS notions and definitions is a consequence of the vast scope of these interactions (Féry & Ishihara, 2016). Furthermore, it must be noticed that IS also reflects, in Bally's terms (Bally, 1932), the *modus* of an utterance (e.g. the attitude of the speaker towards the proposition), thus involving extra-linguistic, cognitive and mental states of referents, actions, locations, and many other (Lambrecht, 1994).

To avert the risk of confusion in this matter, it is crucial to establish precise definitions for these information – structural notions, integral to our interpretation and application throughout the work.

For this purpose, we rely on Krifka's taxonomy (Krifka, 2008) integrating where needed with input from other scholars. We will review some basic notions of IS, and the way they interact with each other, in the following paragraphs.

1.1.1 Focus

Several definitions of focus have been proposed since the advent of the first studies on IS. It must be stated that delineating a notion such as focus is anything but easy, due to its very close relationships with other informational functions, such as those of *new* (as opposed to *given*), *rheme* (in complementarity with *theme*), and *comment* (in complementarity with *topic*); we remind to Lambrecht (1994) for an in – depth definition of all these other categories. If, in fact, "focus", "rheme" and "new" had been considered as overlapping categories in the very first accounts (Sgall, Hajičová & Panevova, 1986), the separation of these categories on different levels of variation has brought to less ambiguity in the field. Since Chafe (1976), scholars have, in fact, started to distinguish the new-given opposition (pertaining to a psychological dimension of "activation levels") and the theme-rheme opposition (pertaining to the semantics of "aboutness") from the focus-background, which is more closely tied to the illocutionary force (Lombardi Vallauri, 2009). An effective definition (if vague, and, perhaps as such, widely agreed upon by scholars) can be the following: focus is the most dynamic part of the utterance, the one which contributes most substantially to the evolution of the CG.

(1)
A. Did Maria buy a newspaper?
B. [Yes]$_F$, she did.

In a conversation like the one in (1), the information sought by the speaker who asks the question is whether the action of buying a newspaper has been performed; the focus of the answer, then, is the assertion of the polarity (in this case, positive) of the action mentioned in the question.

(2)
A. Who bought the newspaper?
B. [Maria]$_F$ did.

In this other case, example (2), the fact that someone bought a newspaper is already asserted in the question, thus not-at-issue; the focus of the answer, then, is the person who performs the action: the communicative move of the speaker consists in specifying an agent associated to the given predicate.

Going deeper and narrowing the scope of this first definition of focus, Krifka also states that "focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions" (Krifka, 2008: 247). This definition is in fact the central claim of Rooth's theory of Alternative Semantics (Rooth, 1992): in his vision, focus assigned to a linguistic expression X always indicates that there are alternatives to X relevant in current discourse. Going back to example (1), if the particle 'Yes' is the focus, the relevant alternative that is set out by this answer is then the negative particle, 'No'. In example (2), on the other hand, the answer 'Maria' gives rise to another set of alternatives, i.e. any other individual (or group of individuals) who could possibly perform the same action of buying a newspaper. Note that the two definitions of focus that we have provided in this section do not restrict this category in function of its semantic implications: indeed, it is up to the different expressive strategies of the focus to attribute nuances on the semantic level.

1.1.2 Contrast

Contrast stands as a pivotal concept within Information Structure (IS), playing a crucial role in communication dynamics. Despite its significance, defining and delineating contrast remains a subject of debate. Recent accounts (see especially Molnár, 2002) view contrast as an independent grammatical category; however, achieving a precise and unanimous understanding of this concept remains elusive.

In broad terms, contrast is characterized by the explicit dissimilarity between two juxtaposed items. Yet, defining the degree of dissimilarity required for elements to be labelled as "contrastive" in information-structural terms poses a challenge. Moreover, the explicitness in expressing opposing units raises questions: must both items be explicitly mentioned and juxtaposed to denote actual contrast?

(3)
A. What did Marie buy, a book or a newspaper?
B. She bought [a newspaper]$_F$.

In example (3), the alternatives (book or newspaper) are explicit: one could, quite straightforwardly, individuate contrast between the two objects – also because

the disjunctive particle "or" implies that, if one has been bought, the other hasn't. Example (4), instead, shows a more ambiguous case:

(4)
A. Marie bought a book.
B. Marie bought [a newspaper]$_F$.

In this case, the object denoted by the focused element in the answer contrasts with the object introduced in the question. Whether both examples should be fully considered as instances of contrast is still lively debated within the scientific community (see Repp, 2010, 2016 and references therein).

The presented examples underscore another layer complicating the definition of contrast – its apparent convergence with both *focus* and *topic* (Vallduví & Vilkuna, 1998). As detailed in the prior section (§ 1.1), the mere presence of focus implies the existence of alternatives, aligning with Rooth's notion that a focus is truly such when set in contrast with its alternatives. However, as pointed out by Repp, contrast is distinct in its explicit relational nature compared to focus: focus centres *on* an item, whereas contrast operates *between* items (Repp, 2010).

In this context, it's worth noting that while focus may suggest the presence of alternatives, these alternatives could remain implicit. Conversely, the manifestation of contrast appears closely tied to the explicitness of alternatives. Another pivotal factor in delineating contrast is the size of the alternative set generated by the presence of a focus: the closer the set, the more conspicuous the contrast, and vice versa.

In light of all these considerations, we could assert that focus and contrast are distinct concepts: from our standpoint, focus triggers considerations of alternatives, while the explicitness and closeness of the set play create (or enhance) contrast. In this view, the "contrastive feature" can be applicable to other IS categories, including topic and focus, influencing the level of contrastiveness they entertain with their alternatives.

1.1.3 Interaction of focus and contrast and focus subtypes

The relationship between focus and contrast, as we have seen, is not one that is easy to delineate: this relationship, in fact, represents a source of disagreement in the classification of different focus subtypes. In this paragraph we will define and analyse in further detail the subtypes that are directly implicated in our research. On the one hand, we find authors (Rizzi, 1997, 2004; Belletti, 2001) according to whom there are types of focus not affected by contrast at all, like information focus (example 5), and others that are, e.g. correction focus or information focus in closed – question exchanges (examples 6 and 7).

(5)
A. Who bought the newspaper?
B. [Marie]$_F$ bought it.

(6)
A. Who bought the newspaper, Julia or Marie?
B. [Marie]$_F$ bought it.

(7)
A. Did Julia buy the newspaper?
B. No, [Marie]_F bought it.

If, however, we take Rooth and Krifka's basic assumptions (§ 1.1) at face value, we must admit accordingly that each of the *foci* in the previous examples carries a certain amount of contrast with respect to its inherent alternatives. In fact, even in example (5), the answer "Marie" *can* be given an exhaustive interpretation, implying that no one else bought the newspaper; in such case, the other propositions evoked by focalization do not hold, and there is contrast between the focus and the non – holding (Vallduví & Vilkuna, 1998; Molnár, 2002; Krifka, 2008; Cruschina, 2021).

Mediating between the two views, it can be said that the degree of contrast entertained by the focused constituent with its potential alternatives constitutes a *continuum*. In this perspective, we can disentangle the two poles: identification focus (example 5), where no clear delimitation of alternatives is provided, and corrective focus (example 7), where the current focus explicitly cancels from the CG a previously asserted one. In this way, example (5) would be a less contrastive type of focus, since the answer "Marie" can – but not necessarily or explicitly does – set out exclusive alternatives to the candidate focus; example (7), on the other hand, would be a more contrastive one (and not the *only* contrastive one).

Another fundamental distinction often explored is focus scope, which centers on the extent to which the focal domain spans within a sentence or a single constituent. When the focal domain encompasses entire sentences, it typically falls under the classification of "broad focus". In such instances, all information is presented with equal saliency, without emphasizing a particular sub-part. Conversely, "narrow focus" pertains to a more localized domain, emphasizing individual words or constituents and drawing attention to a specific segment of the utterance. This segment, being informationally more salient than the rest of the sentence, constitutes the background (Ladd, 2008).

Based on the distinctions that we have just made in this paragraph, a scale of six levels of "strength" – that we take the freedom to call "contrastiveness" – can be described, drawing from Féry (2013), Kiss (1998), Jackendoff (1972), Vallduví and Vilkuna (1998), and Zimmermann (2008). Starting from the weakest, Féry lists: a. All-new sentence (broad information focus); b. Informational narrow focus; c. Exhaustive/identificational interpretation of a narrow focus; d. Association-with-focus (particles); e. Contrastive focus: parallelism, right-node-raising, selection; f. Contrastive focus: correction. We provide examples for each of those cases (examples are from Féry 2013: 690).

(8)
a. All-new sentence (broad information focus)
{What is happening?} Tom is going to VIENNA.
b. Informational narrow focus
{Who is going to Vienna?} TOM is going to Vienna.
c. Exhaustive/identificational interpretation of a narrow focus
{Which of your sons is going to Vienna?} It is TOM who is going to Vienna.

d. Association-with-focus (particles)
{Are both Alain and Tom going to Vienna?} Only TOM is going to Vienna.
e. Contrastive focus: parallelism, right-node-raising, selection
{Where are your sons going to?} TOM is going to VIENNA, and ALAIN to BERLIN.
f. Contrastive focus: correction
{Is Alain going to Vienna?} No, TOM is going to Vienna/No, it is TOM who is going to Vienna.

1.2 *Linguistic reflexes of focus: syntax and word order*

The articulation between focus and background, as well as the function (identification or correction) of the focused constituent, is conveyed through different means, possibly involving multiple linguistic levels: morphology, syntax, word order, lexical particles, intonation. With regard to syntax and word order, several means can be exploited, to an extent that depends on the specific discursive situation and language-specific constraints: postverbal subject, fronting, dislocations, etc. The idea is that languages generally have an unmarked, typical word order; free alternations are not really free, in which they depend on Information-structural meaning and they are mapped with specific functions; they do not, in fact, violate "economy" principles: different orders do not convey identical meanings (Neeleman & van de Koott, 2016); it must be noted, though, that "the application of specific syntactic operations depends both on the size and on the subtype of focus, although not always unambiguously" (Cruschina, 2022: 1).

1.2.1 Word order: fronting and postposition

Operations involving word order are observed in many languages as markers of information structure. In this paragraph we will deal with some of the most frequent instances of word order changes that have been found to be significant in focus marking, with particular attention to SVO languages, since French and Italian belong to this category.

As a general tendency, cross-linguistic preference for placing new information after given information has been observed (Clark & Haviland, 1977; Skopeteas & Fanselow, 2009). However, as we have pointed out in the previous paragraphs, focus and background are not exactly overlapping to the "new" and "given" categories (see par 1.1): the principle "given-before-new" needs then to be refined in order to correctly account for different focus-related movements.

In fact, in many cases focus can also trigger leftward movements, like fronting[1]. These two possible instances of displacement, right- and left-ward (also called D-type and H-type in López, 2016) are usually referred to as postverbal focalization

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[1] We will not deal here in detail with right and left dislocations with clitic resumption, which have been confirmed to be excluded strategies for focus, and apply instead to topics (see Poletto & Bocci, 2016).

(PoF) and Focus Fronting (FF). We will follow Cruschina (2022) in delineating the main features of these dislocations and their contexts of use.

The first category we will deal with is postverbal focus (PoF), i.e. the placement of the focus constituent in the postverbal position, like in (8). PoF corresponds with two principles that have been observed to be fundamental in accounting for focus-induced word order variations (see Neeleman & van de Koot, 2016): "Given-before-New" and "No-focus-resumption". In fact, PoF are considered the most natural and pragmatically appropriate option for narrow focus in Romance, across all focus subtypes and contextual conditions.

(9)
A. Chi ha comprato il giornale?
B. L'ha comprato [Maria]$_F$.

As shown by Dufter & Gabriel (2016), the reordering of the postverbal constituents is admitted, possible or favoured in clauses also depending on the type of the verb (unaccusative, unergative, transitive).

The syntactic marking of PoF is evident with subject inversion but less clear when it comes to focal direct objects, or other constituents that would typically appear at the end of the clause (ex. 9).

(10)
A. Che cosa ha comprato Maria?
B. Ha comprato [un giornale]$_F$.

In such cases, the narrow-focus configuration can be considered as an instance of focus *in-situ*; controversy exists regarding judgments on these matters. For example, Zubizarreta (1998) deems SVOXP, where the focus constituent is not sentence final, ungrammatical in Spanish and Italian but grammatical in French, suggesting that focus *in-situ* is only possible in non-null subject languages, not limited to subjects but also encompassing objects.

Focus fronting (FF) serves as an additional construction in Romance for marking narrow-focus structures; it is typically observed in colloquial and spoken language.

(11)
A. Che cosa ha comprato Maria?
B. [un giornale]$_F$ ha comprato Maria.

While it holds true that the majority of Romance languages use FF as a syntactic strategy for indicating contrastive focus, recent discussions have brought to light two issues with this generalization. Specifically, certain Romance languages appear to diverge from this pattern by incorporating cleft sentences or PoF alongside FF to signal contrastive focus, akin to information focus. French is an example that exemplifies this deviation. This aspect is undoubtedly of primary interest to us, since we French is one of the two languages we will examine in our work; for a comprehensive discussion, we remind to the next sections (§ 1.4).

1.2.2 Focus constructions: the cleft sentence

The study of it-cleft sentences[2] has recently been the subject of a great deal of research, either in terms of their informational properties, or in terms of their frequency and the restrictions to which they are subject, in different languages. To identify the structure, we rely on the definition given by De Cesare: "A cleft construction is a biclausal sentence structure[3], consisting of a copular clause and a relative(-like) clause. Semantically, clefts are specificational constructions associated with an exhaustive interpretation. Pragmatically, clefts can play a variety of functions, which are mostly related to focusing" (De Cesare, 2017: 536). The most frequently named functions for cleft structures are identificative and corrective, exemplified here by examples (11) and (12) respectively:

> (12)
> A. Who bought the newspaper?
> B. It's [Marie]$_F$ who bought the newspaper.

> (13)
> A. Julia bought the newspaper.
> B. No, it's [Marie]$_F$ who bought the newspaper, not Julia.

As the examples show, in both cases the cleft sentence has the function of specifying the identity of a referent about a given predication, which remains in background; in both cases, the identity of the referent is the focused information of the sentence. Both statements are therefore narrowly focused, but the statement in example (12) has the additional function of correcting a previous statement, i.e. it carries a corrective focus.

Identificative and corrective functions are considered in the literature to be part of a contrastive focus *continuum* (Cruschina, 2021; Molnár, 2002; Repp, 2010), with identification being a less marked case (or, depending on the authors, not marked by contrast) and correction a more marked case of contrast.

Several studies have also pointed out the presence of asymmetries in clefts use and function. The first factor that influences the use of this structure is the syntactic role of clefted constituent: subjects more often clefted than non-subject constituents such as other verb arguments or adverbial phrases (Destruel, 2016; van Den Steen, 2005; Roggia, 2008). Another parameter in determining the frequency of this focus strategy is the contrastiveness characterising the focus constituent: in

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[2] For the purpose of our work, we will mainly deal with it-cleft constructions. Other configurations exist, such as presentational clefts, pseudo-clefts and inverted pseudo-clefts (De Cesare, 2014). Yet, we will not thoroughly describe them, since their presence in our corpus is negligible, and in any case does not play a significant role in the subsequent analysis.

[3] While we adopt the view of cleft constructions as biclausal, it should be noted that alternative analyses have been proposed in the literature, treating clefts as monoclausal structures (see Munaro & Pollock 2005; Frascarelli & Ramaglia 2013, among others). A detailed discussion of this debate lies beyond the scope of the present study, but, as a reviewer kindly pointed out, it is important to acknowledge the existence of different perspectives on this matter.

several languages, clefts are more frequent for more contrastive focus types (Dufter, 2009; Destruel & de Vaugh Geiss, 2018).

1.3 *Linguistic reflexes of focus: intonation*

Intonation in non-tonal languages has been considered "around the edge of language", a "half-tamed savage", citing two famous expressions by Dwight Bolinger (1964, 1978). The motivation behind such considerations is that intonation can convey and express many aspects of human communication: speakers' attitude and emotions, physiological states, pragmatic aspects like politeness or grades of illocutionary force, regional and dialectal speaker's background. In other words, intonation doesn't only concern the *dictum*, but also the *modus* (Bally, 1932). In this multi-faceted picture, the role of information structure is hard to place: some scholars, in fact, have argued that information-structural phenomena fall within both grammatical and expressive categories, and crucially, the two are very hard to disentangle.

Moreover, the description and interpretation of intonation patterns poses a problem in terms of distinction between phonological representation and phonetic implementation. Hirst (2024) refers to this dilemma as the "prosodic paradox": what is -etic (i.e. objective, gradient-structured, physiologically constrained) and what is -emic (i.e. discrete, categorical, language-specific) in intonation? When dealing with notions such as "accent", "stress", "tone", how can one escape from terminological confusion and language-specific constraints? While current intonation theories, such as the Autosegmental-Metrical (Pierrhumbert, 1980; Arvaniti, 2022), heavily rely on the concept of discrete and absolute categories in intonation, the validity of this fundamental premise remains a subject of debate. Scholars have scrutinized and contested this notion, as evidenced by the discussions in works of scholars such as Martin (2001), Wightman (2002), Marotta (2008).

Irrespective of one's stance on intonation theories, a more robust consensus emerges when focusing on the expression of two aspects: i. modality, i.e. the distinction between questions and assertions, ii. delineation of focus-background in discourse. The role of intonation, in fact, seems to find greater agreement in serving these two linguistic functions. In Bolinger terms, these two aspects could be said to constitute the ones in which it is easier to tell apart the "tamed half", i.e. the grammatical and linguistic part, and the "untamed half", i.e. the expressive one (Gussenhoven, 2004). The following sections will focus on the aspects of intonation associated with expressing information structure, exploring established patterns of interaction. More specifically, the upcoming paragraphs will provide an overview of the pivotal effects that focus has been observed to exert on two integral elements of prosody: phrasing and rhythm on the one hand (§ 1.3.1), intonation and melodic structure on the other (§ 1.3.2).

1.3.1 Focus and prosodic structure

Speech exhibits an organizational structure that operates independently of other linguistic levels, such as morphology and syntax, yet remains closely intertwined with them. Prosodic elements play a crucial role in shaping the organization and planning of speech, serving as cues for listeners engaged in speech processing and syntactic bootstrapping (Christophe et al., 2008). This prosodic organization involves structuring speech into phrasal constituents, which are phonetically marked at their edges through mechanisms such as articulatory strengthening at the beginning (Fougeron & Keating, 1997) and lengthening at the end (Wightman et al., 1992). Internally, phrases are also organized either by stress – emphasizing specific syllables over others – or by the repetition of a relatively stable tonal pattern within short phrases (Ladd, 2008). Both forms of organization contribute to the perception of rhythm in speech, framing utterances as comprised of groups with similar and repetitive patterns (Dauer, 1983; Cutler, 2005). Some of these prosodic features may be universal and physiologically constrained, such as those linked to breathing, while others are language-specific. For instance, lexical stress is present in English, Italian, and Spanish, whereas the recurrence of intonational edge-patterns is observed in Korean, Japanese, and French (Arvaniti, 2020). Based on these phonetic traits, utterances can be decomposed into precise prosodic hierarchies (Selkirk, 1984; Nespor & Vogel, 1986). In theories of prosodic structure, constituents are represented following a labelled tree-system. As previously mentioned, two features distinguish this bracketing from syntactic representation: the prosodic hierarchy and its strict layering. Fig. 1.1 shows a representation of this hierarchy using a sample English sentence.

The impact of focus on prosodic structure is evident, as it interacts with the position and realization of accents, stress, and boundaries. Often, the presence of focus leads to a specific parsing, involving the insertion (or reinforcement) of a prosodic boundary on either the left or right edge of the focused constituent. This serves to confer greater acoustic prominence to the focused element, or, more simply, to separate it from the less salient part of the utterance, creating a kind of "packaging" that distinguishes constituents bearing different information-structural roles within individual prosodic units (Féry, 2013). The following examples, taken from Samek-Lodovici (2005), illustrate this:

(14)
A. Che cosa hai fatto ieri?
'What did you do yesterday?'
B. (((Sono andato a Roma)ɸ (con Mario)ɸ)ɩ)ʋ
'I went to Rome with Mario.

In example (14), response (b) constitutes a broad-focus utterance, "Sono andato a Roma con Mario" ("I went to Rome with Mario"), parsed into two phonological phrases of the same hierarchical level (ɸ), forming together an intonational phrase (ɩ). In the second example (ex. 15), question (a) specifically inquires about

the location where a particular event (going somewhere) with a certain person (Mario) occurred. The narrow focus in response (b) is on the prepositional phrase "a Roma": this focus placement prompts a restructuring of the prosodic hierarchy of the utterance, introducing a stronger boundary after the focused constituent to separate it from the post-focal part. Consequently, the focus phrase is realised as an independent intonational phrase (ι), to which post-focal material of a lower hierarchical level is added ("con Mario", φ).

(15)
A. Che cosa hai fatto ieri?
B. (((Sono andato a Roma)ι (con Mario)φ))υ.

Figure 1.1 - *Prosodic hierarchy as exemplified in Gussenhoven (2004),*
*with the example sentence "Too many cooks spoil the broth"*
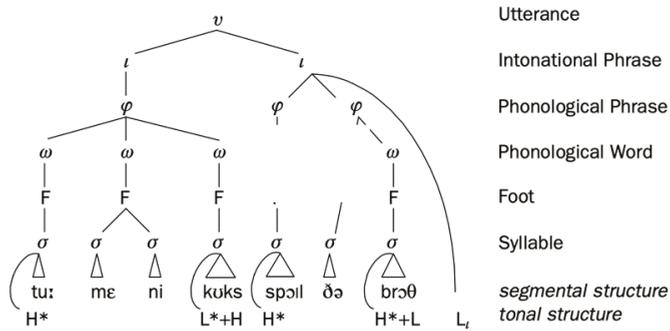
In light of these considerations, we acknowledge that the role of prosodic structuring is fundamental in focus marking; Féry even contends that "prominence and alignment are different correlates of focus, and alignment is more frequent than prominence" (Féry, 2013: 684). In this perspective, however, the phonetic cues that speakers of each specific language use to encode notions such as stress, boundaries, and accents become crucial in defining what "alignment" is and, therefore, in testing its link with focus cross-linguistically.

1.3.2 Focus and intonation

Intonation serves a pivotal role in the nuanced expression of meaning and function within discourse. Phonetically, it encompasses two closely intertwined elements: the fundamental frequency (f0), representing the periodic waveform of speech sounds, and pitch, the perceptual counterpart determining the high or low nature of a sound (Ladefoged, 1995; Gussenhoven, 2004). The function of intonation in indicating focus resides at the intersection of biological codes (Ohala, 1984) and the conventional, "grammatical" correlation between f0 and linguistic meaning (Gussenhoven, 2004). Rather than delving into the debate surrounding these perspectives, our objective is to provide an explanation based on observed patterns of how speakers manipulate f0 to mark focus, while offering a balanced cross-linguistic perspective.

The initial studies on the interplay between focus and intonation primarily focused on English and other West-Germanic languages, leading to the formulation of base rules to account for intonation-information structure interactions (Truckenbrodt, 2016). The extensive tradition of studies on West Germanic languages, including English, German, and Dutch, highlights a close relationship between prosodic accentuation and information structure. Specifically, focus is signalled through specific configurations of f0, identified as pitch accents in Autosegmental-Metrical (AM) theory, used to give prominence to the focus constituent (Bolinger, 1961; Chafe, 1976; Cruttenden, 1986; Halliday, 1967; Pierrhumbert, 1980; Büring, 2010; Gussenhoven, 2004; Jackendoff, 1972; Truckenbrodt, 2016; Zubizarreta & Nava, 2011; Féry, 2013).

Figure 1.2 - *Expected effect of narrow focus (solid line) in comparison*
to the regular downstep pattern of the broad focus condition (dotted line)
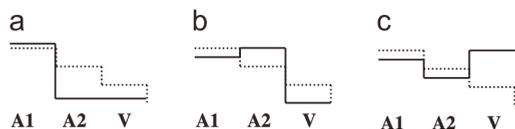
Background and given elements, conversely, tend to be deaccented, showing minimal involvement in major f0 movements (Halliday, 1967; Ladd, 2008; Féry & Kügler, 2008). For further insight into the expected effect of narrow focus compared to the regular downstep pattern of the broad focus condition, refer to Fig. 1.2. This figure illustrates the anticipated impact of narrow focus on different elements, including focus on an initial argument (A1), focus on a non-initial argument (A2), and focus on a final verb (V). The solid line represents the expected effect of narrow focus, while the dotted line depicts the regular downstep pattern of the broad focus condition.

In accordance with the aforementioned descriptions, the configurations of f0 are manifested, or, to use AM (Autosegmental-Metrical) terminology, "anchored" on specific segments of the focus constituent, known as tone-bearing units (TBUs). The exact nature of these TBUs and their placement in the prosodic hierarchy (refer to Fig. 1.1) is language-specific. In stress languages, TBUs align with stressed syllables, more precisely, with their *nuclei*, as observed in English, Spanish, and Italian. On the other hand, in edge-prominent languages like Korean and French, TBUs are typically situated at prosodic boundaries – specifically, in the first or last syllable of the phonological phrase (identified as φ in the description provided in § 1.3.1).

1.4 *Focus in Romance: Italian and French*

This section focuses on Italian and French, the languages central to our study. We aim to highlight their distinctive features in information structure marking and the linguistic expression of focus. Early research on the intonation of West-Germanic languages has contributed to subsequent studies on Romance languages, establishing the conventional binary classification of "plastic" and "non-plastic" languages, initially proposed by Vallduví (1991).

While numerous studies assert that Romance languages primarily employ prosody to mark correction, especially for emphatic stress (Ladd, 2008; Cruttenden, 1986; Lambrecht, 1994; Zubizarreta, 1998), a shift in perspective has emerged with works such as Face & D'Imperio (2005). This evolving understanding transcends the earlier binary framework and offers a more nuanced portrayal of focus marking in Romance languages, revealing specific features distinct from those observed in English or West-Germanic languages.

In the subsequent sub-sections, we will provide an in-depth description of Italian and French, the focal points of our investigation. Additionally, we will conduct a brief comparative analysis between the two languages to identify aspects that may influence our hypotheses concerning the impact of cross-linguistic differences and similarities in L2 acquisition.

1.4.1 Native Italian

Italian has experienced a significant shift in the understanding of variation in focus-marking since being liberated from rigid definitions such as "non-plastic" and "word order language". Numerous studies have explored the phenomenon of focus marking in this language, approaching it from different perspectives. Some studies have focused on prosody, investigating the role of intonation and timing (Farnetani & Zmarich, 1997; Hirschberg & Avesani, 1997; D'Imperio, 2002; Romano & Mattana, 2008; Bocci & Avesani, 2011; Gagliardi, Lombardi Vallauri & Tamburini, 2012); others have examined syntax and word order (Belletti, 2008; Rizzi, 1997); within a formalist framework, some studies have also explored the interface between prosody and syntax (Frascarelli, 2000; Samek-Lodovici, 2005).

However, the complex nature of diatopic variation in Italian has posed a significant challenge to the development of a comprehensive theory of focus representation. As for prosodic marking, most studies have concentrated on regional varieties rather than on general traits valid for the whole system. The comprehensive paper by Gili Fivela *et al.* (2015) constitutes an attempt to synthesize the findings about prosody, but scepticism has arisen due to the substantial amount of variation, leading to doubts about whether particular tonal configurations, seen as categorical intonation units, are systematically observed in all varieties of Italian, and produced by most Italian speakers as markers of focus (see § 1.3).

The presence of strong regional variation, coupled with diverse methodological approaches and the absence of a unified perspective, has resulted in a fragmented understanding of prosodic focus marking in Italian (Sbranna, Ventura, Albert & Grice, 2023). Nevertheless, some recurring themes have emerged from the studies. A prevalent feature of focus marking in Italian seems to be represented by prosodic restructuring: this is the direction proposed by studies such as Frascarelli (2000) and Gagliardi *et al.* (2012). Poletto and Bocci (2016), focusing on the Tuscan variety, also find that major f0 movements are absent, but changes in focus condition can impact duration and phrasing. This goes in the same direction, pointing at the fact that focus marking can be achieved through phrasing and metrical re-structuring, but not through pitch modulation. Furthermore, default prosodic structure requirements can override information-structural prominence, in which post-focal content can be assigned an accent because of its metrical position, despite its information-structural role (Farnetani & Zmarich, 1997; Brunetti, Bott, Costa & Vallduví, 2011; Bocci & Avesani, 2011).

As anticipated in the introduction to this section, several authors have also affirmed that prosodic marking can be present for corrective statements, but not in cases of identification (Bocci & Avesani, 2006). In the case of correction, then, these same authors state that focus is marked through a major pitch movement (which, in the AM frame, is called a pitch accent) of type H+L*, H*+L or L+H*. Fig. 1.3 shows the acoustic representation and f0 contour for a corrective-focus utterance "No, guarda che vivono a Milan o" ("No, they live in Milan"). In this picture, we can retrieve some of the features just listed as prosodic focus markers: stressed syllable lengthening (in this case, vowel [a]), and the presence of a specific f0 movement on in correspondence of the nuclear syllable [la] (labelled by the authors as an L+H* pitch accent).

Figure 1.3 - *Corrective-focus utterance "No, guarda che vivono a Milano",*
uttered by a native Italian speaker from Florence (from Gili Fivela et al., 2015)
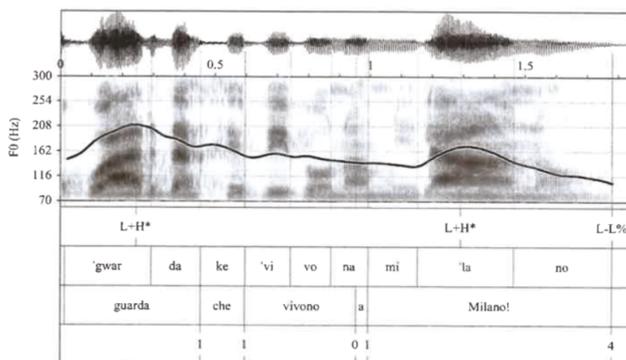
Regarding syntax and word order, Italian is predominantly characterized as a language with flexible word order, employing various structures to emphasize sentence focus. These structures encompass object or adverbial fronting, subject displacements in postverbal positions, and it-clefts. However, the extent to which these movements are discretionary or constrained by pragmatic, semantic, or phonological factors remains an unsettled issue (Cruschina, 2021; Rizzi, 1997; Belletti, 2001; Belletti, 2008). Nevertheless, there is a widely accepted consensus that the structures mentioned earlier are the most commonly encountered in Italian, as well as *in-situ* prosodic marking. In this regard, a quite neglected but to us important issue is that focus constituent embedded in it-clefts, postverbal subject and fronted objects can (and frequently do) share the same prosodic patterns of constituents marked *in-situ* (Pinelli, Avesani & Poletto, 2018). This means that the two types of marking, prosodic and syntactic, do not seem to entertain a mutually exclusive relationship.

We will come back to this issue in the cross-linguistic comparison and in the definition of our research hypotheses.

1.4.2 Native French

French, often considered less flexible compared to other Romance languages, employs specific syntactic constructions, such as the *c'est*-cleft, to mark focus. It has been argued that this structure is largely used because it allows French to accommodate prosodic prominence that aligns with the focus position (Lambrecht 2001; Larrivée 2022). The default strategy appears to be the cleft construction, with a complete absence of VS structures, which are, instead, found in Italian and other Romance languages (Belletti, 2008 among many others). In formalist accounts, it has been explained in terms of pro-drop/non pro-drop opposition: both clefts and postverbal subjects fulfil the same purpose, namely to move the subject in the rightmost position of the intonational phrase (ɸ, see Fig. 1.1); in non pro-drop languages, like French, this can only be achieved by the formulation of a cleft structure, that causes the subject to move rightwards, after the copula.

For what concerns prosody, studies on French have shown that focused elements in French can be marked by a specific f0 contour, with higher pitch and delayed alignment compared to non-contrastive contexts (Di Cristo & Hirst, 1998; Jun & Fougeron, 2000). Other authors have emphasized the role of boundary strengthening (Michelas & German, 2020), within a multidimensional picture of marking that involves phrasing as well as intonation (D'Imperio, Michelas & German, 2012; Féry, 2011). In this same direction, studies have shown a tendency for narrow-focused constituents to be parsed in separate prosodic constituents of lower level ɸ – which, depending on the approach, are called Accentual Phrases (Jun & Fougeron, 2000; Welby, 2006; D'Imperio *et al.*, 2012; Delais-Roussarie *et al.*, 2015) or Phonological Phrases (Féry, 2001; Post, 2000).

Figure 1.4 - *Utterance "Ah non, ils vivront à Limoges", with correction focus on Limoges, uttered by a native French speaker from Marseille (from Delais-Roussarie et al., 2015)*
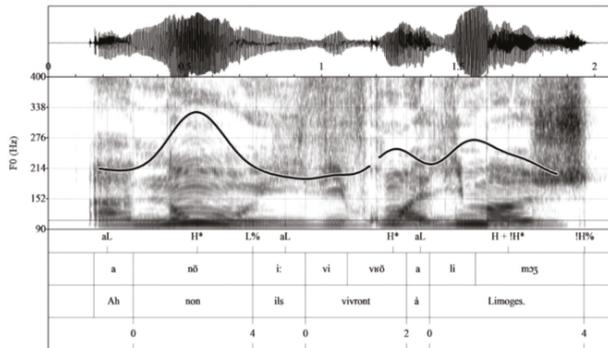
Recent studies have also underlined the importance of the "initial rise", i.e. an increase of f0 associated with the left edge of the Accentual Phrase (D'Imperio *et al.*, 2012; German & D'Imperio, 2012; 2016), and its possible strengthening function of left boundaries in focus AP. In Fig. 1.4, we can see the acoustic representation with superposed f0 track of an utterance carrying a corrective focus on the prepositional phrase, "à Limoges". In the image, readers can identify key features, including two high f0 peaks (labelled as H* and H+!H*) coinciding with the negative particle "non" and the corrective-focus constituent "Limoges". Additionally, the third peak is notably not aligned with the last, default-prominent syllable of the Accentual Phrase, in contrast to the Italian example in Fig. 1.3, where this alignment occurred; it is instead aligned with vowel [i] in "Limoges".

1.4.3 Interlinguistic comparison

The focus-marking systems in French and Italian share commonalities in employing intonation, boundary strengthening, cleft structures and specific word order configurations to highlight focused elements. However, significant divergences exist, notably in word order flexibility, treatment of contrast, and the phonetic encoding of the aforementioned prosodic features. We wish to resume and point out the main ones in the following lines, since these points of contact and divergence will have direct impact on the formulation of our research hypotheses.

French exhibits little flexibility in word order, with a strong preference for the use of it-cleft sentences over other types of constituent displacements – which are mostly considered as ungrammatical, or are anyway seldom attested. In contrast, Italian demonstrates greater syntactic flexibility, allowing for extensive dislocation options, such as verb arguments fronting (with no embedding in it-clefts), or postverbal placement of subjects. Another divergence, that is someway a consequence of French lesser flexibility, lies in the differentiation between focus subtypes: it has been observed that French may treat identification focus more similarly to corrective

focus, blurring distinctions between different degrees of contrast. A further source of divergence between Italian and French lies in the morphosyntactic properties of clefts themselves[4]. In French, c'est-clefts involve a copula that does not inflect for person or number, and the tense is typically restricted to the present. In addition, the relative clause introduces further restrictions, such as the alternation between *qui* and *que* depending on the role of the clefted element. By contrast, Italian clefts show verbal agreement with the clefted constituent in person and number, and the tense of the copula can vary more freely.

With regard to intonation, Italian and French are classified under the same typology, in which both languages are intonation languages, i.e. without lexical meaning of tones (Gussenhoven, 2004). Secondly, they belong to different classes in terms of word prominence: Italian, in fact, is a free-stress language, while French presents a less straightforward structuring, posing problems in both the definition of a prosodic hierarchy and in the identification of pitch accent location and anchoring; the presence itself of a word stress in French is highly debated. In any case, it is agreed that such stress, whether present, isn't distinctive on the word level; rather, it serves as a demarcation at the utterance level, marking the edge of accentual phrases. In addition, accentuation within an accent group is optional, and can depend on many factors, such as phrase length and speech rate. Consequently, French exhibits variability in prosodic prominence placement; moreover, the assignment of both pitch accents and boundary tones to the word-final syllables implies a sort of syncretism between accentuation, intonation and marking of discourse-level prominence. Notably, this divergence also influences the duration of stressed vowels, adding a temporal dimension to the phonetic realization of focus-related prosody.

In light of these considerations, Rasier & Hiligsmann (2007) define Italian's sentence prosody, especially rhythmic and accentual patterns, as firmly structurally determined. French, instead, would be situated in the middle way between structurally and pragmatically determined. According to this typology of sentence prosody, a markedness scale has also been formulated, so that predictions about the acquisition of certain properties can be made, based on the markedness differential hypothesis (Eckman, 1977). In this view, languages in which prosody is structurally determined are less marked than languages where prosody is pragmatically determined; in our case, this translates into French being more marked than Italian.

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[4] Even though our work does not focus on the morphosyntactic properties of focus devices, we find it is useful to briefly outline here some salient divergences, as one of the reviewers insightfully suggested: these contrasts, while subtle, can impact L2 acquisition.

IS and Second Language Acquisition

In this chapter, our primary focus is on the exploration of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), particularly its relevance to how learners and non-native speakers acquire the ability to mark focus in a second language (L2). We commence by presenting a succinct history of the discipline, accompanied by definitions of fundamental concepts that play a pivotal role in our current investigation. The second section focuses on the implications of these concepts and principles on non-native speech, emphasizing the interactions between syntax, prosody, and information structure discussed in Chapter 1. Lastly, we provide an overview of existing research conducted on these themes in the context of Italian and French. This examination highlights unanswered questions, thereby delineating the scope of our research within this rapidly evolving field.

2.1 *L2 acquisition: history and basic notions*

Learning a second language (i.e., a language other than one's mother tongue[1]) is a situation most humans in the world are confronted to in their life. While, historically, contact between languages has always existed in human civilization, today's highly globalized and interconnected world represents a most suitable context for the expansion of this phenomenon. Multilingualism is a state that touches a good half of the world's population today, keeping the estimate down
  (Klein and Dimroth, 2009; Grosjean, 2010): the variety of settings can range from long-established situations of diglossia to migration contexts, through guided education, study-abroad experiences and much more.
  The growing importance and scope of multilingualism is certainly one of the reasons behind the development SLA as an autonomous discipline, starting from the 1980s and 1990s (see Klein, 1998 and references therein). In the last decades, there has been a continuous refinement of methodology and an increasingly precise definition of the various factors and contexts that can influence L2 acquisition. The growing interest in the discipline has also resulted in the development of

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[1] In this work, the terms 'nativeness' and 'mother tongue' are used in a descriptive, non-essentialist sense. By native speaker we refer to individuals who acquired the language from birth in naturalistic contexts of everyday interaction, typically in the home environment. By mother tongue we mean the language(s) to which speakers were first systematically exposed during early childhood. Our use of these terms is limited to providing a practical reference point for distinguishing between first and additional language acquisition in the context of this study.

different entry points and theoretical frameworks for approaching the subject; a proliferation that has not always been beneficial, but nevertheless seems inevitable, given the wealth of factors that characterize SLA. However, the fundamental questions that drive scholarly interest in this area of research remain more or less the same: the goal of SLA studies is to understand "which laws govern this process of language acquisition, which factors influence its course, why it sometimes stops before matching the language of the environment, to which extent it is accessible to intervention, such as explicit correction or even language teaching" (Klein & Perdue, 1992: xi). In the following paragraph we will go through some of the core issues in the field, and in particular those that have a direct impact on our research questions and the interpretation of our result.

2.1.1 Instructed and non-instructed SLA

At the birth of the discipline, studies targeting second-language learners mainly focused on classroom learning (Lado, 1957; Corder, 1975). It was from the 1980s-90s that scholars began to look at the phenomenon of L2 acquisition from another perspective, observing the process outside the context of education, moving toward the study of adult migrant subjects in particular (Noyau, 1988). The fact that two such distant learning contexts may have specificities is certainly intuitive; however, distinction between the two has led to a rigorous definition of methods, categories and frames of study specific to the analysis of these two environments. It must be remembered, however, that in the reality of things it is rare for a speaker's experience to belong totally to one or the other category: an adult migrant worker may come sooner or later to take of a language course, just as a foreign language student may spend many years in the classroom and then land in an immersive situation (Doughty, 2003; Hulstijn, 2005). For the purpose of our work, we will mainly be concerned with non-instructed SLA, bearing in mind that some forays into the world of instructed SLA may be necessary, as we will be dealing schooled adults with (at least) some language learning experience in a school setting.

Immersion in the target country has long been regarded as the optimal environment for language learning, due to abundant genuine input and opportunities for interaction with native speakers (Sieloff Magnan and Lafford, 2018). In such setting, language is learnt without intentional intervention or guidance, through natural and spontaneous interaction and natural communication. The interest of studying non-instructed SLA, thus, lays in the fact that more spontaneous aspects of learning can be observed, isolating the process from tutoring interference: "we must investigate language acquisition in its natural habitat – outside the classroom, without the influence of systematic intervention" (Klein & Dimroth, 2009: 506). The idea of studying unguided acquisition stems from the desire to observe the mechanisms behind the (inherently systematic) functioning and (continuous) evolution of interlanguage. Of course, the analysis of factors or interventions that may hinder the learner in this evolution is also of great practical interest; however, the assumption behind the separation of the two acquisition settings is that these

questions are different in nature, and more easily resolved by distinguishing the two areas of inquiry.

Non-guided acquisition possesses, therefore, specificities, which make it more or less interesting for certain purposes, and which, above all, must be taken into account during all experimental phases, from the design of the methodology to the interpretation of the results. The main features of non-guided SLA can be summarized in three macro points, following the formulation of Klein & Dimroth (2009):

– *Access to the Linguistic System*: in tutored acquisition, linguistic material undergoes pre-processing and is frequently accompanied by metalinguistic descriptions. In untutored SLA, on the contrary, the sounds (or graphic representations) of the language are presented within a meaningful context: from this context, it is the learner who deduces the connection between sound and meaning, and builds the construction of complex expressions from simpler ones;
– *Communicative Pressure*: in immersion settings, learners cannot afford to wait for the acquisition of appropriate structures in the target language: they must immediately utilize the raw material for communication purposes, and expand their repertoire of expressive means to the fullest extent possible;
– *Systematic External Control*: outside the classroom, the learner can gauge their success through two indicators: the ability to comprehend and be understood, and a sense of alignment with others in terms of their speaking style[2].

2.1.2 Interlanguage and learner variety

The passage from a classroom setting to a more spontaneous, migrant-like one, in some way coincided with the shifting interest from the notion of *error* to what appeared instead to be a more organic, autonomous system, namely the *interlanguage* or *learner variety*. The fundamental difference between the two approaches is to evaluate, or not evaluate, learners' productions in terms of their proximity to the target, in other words "the extent to which the learner's language corresponds, or fails to correspond, to the language of those he or she is learning from" (Klein & Perdue, 1992: xi).

The first scholars to adopt this approach and coin a non-error-based definition for the language of learners were Corder (1967) with the notion of *idiosyncratic dialects*, or Selinker (1972), with the notion of *interlanguage*, and Nemser (1971), who used the term *approximate systems*. The vision was then fully developed by Klein & Perdue (1992, 1997), who defined learner varieties as linguistic systems in their own right, instead of imperfect imitations of a real language. Interest in learner varieties has a different (and complementary) motivation than the "traditional" interest in the notion of error and deviation from target. If the analysis of errors can be useful to derive insights and tools to be used in educational perspective, the study

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[2] Our interpretation of 'alignment with others' is in line with processes described in the literature as accommodation or phonetic convergence (see Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). This typically involves adjustments in pronunciation, intonation, or lexical choices, and can be taken as evidence of increasing naturalness and appropriateness in interaction.

of learning varieties is crucial to understand the processes that characterize and shape SLA, as we have already stated in § 2.1.1. Learner varieties, in fact, are linguistic systems that are initially rather simple, characterized by an inherent systematic and evolutionary capacity, and above all, already usable for communication (Klein & Dimroth, 2009: 504); this primacy of communicative function is perhaps the most interesting aspect for those approaching the study of non-guided SLA (Klein & Perdue, 1992, 1997).

Approaching interlanguage as an autonomous and worthy system in its own right implies, in addition to a more fruitful interest in its operation, greater caution against strong biases and dangerous fallacies that lurk in direct comparisons between learners and native monolingual speakers. Many scholars, in fact, have argued against merely comparative approaches, in which juxtaposing learners' productions to a native target leads to the so-called *comparative fallacy*, i.e. mistakenly analyzing the systematic nature of a language by comparing it to another (Bley-Vroman, 1983; Lakshmanan & Selinker, 2001; Dekydtspotter, Schwartz & and Sprouse, 2006): "[A]ny study which classifies interlanguage (IL) data according to a target language (TL) scheme or depends on the notion of obligatory context or binary choice will likely fail to illuminate the structure of the IL" (Bley-Vroman, 1983: 15). In this view, since the learner's system possesses its own intrinsic value, it should be studied based on its internal logic, rather than being viewed solely as a distorted version of the target system. Despite the need for a term of comparison to identify phenomena of an interlinguistic nature, such as *transfer* or *cross-linguistic influence* (notions that will be explored in more detail in § 2.1.3), a solely comparative approach risks diverting attention from the true workings of interlanguages. Another important caveat is put forward by Grosjean (1989) and Cook (1992), who argue against the so-called *monolingual fallacy*. This bias consists of the assumption that monolingualism is the norm for human communication and that native competence is the ideal. Against this view, Grosjean and colleagues argue that 1) there is no such thing as a "perfect" monolingual; 2) multilinguals are individuals with sufficient communicative competence for everyday life. The idea of achieving "equal and perfect knowledge" of multiple languages is considered not only an unattainable condition (a "myth", in the words of Grosjean, 2010), but also an undesirable one (Cook, 1992). The linguistic configuration of multilingual speakers is characterized by the constant interaction of their languages, and this must be valued and highlighted in a bi/multilingual perspective of SLA.

2.1.3 Learning process: mechanisms and factors

Besides from the setting, although in strict correlation with it, different mechanisms shape the process of SLA. Learners acquire a second language through a fundamental capacity, which is that of copying and reproducing a linguistic system (Klein & Dimroth, 2009): this process can be said to be universal, but it is influenced by numerous factors. These variables concern:

–   The "material" that learners process during the acquisition phase (i.e. the characteristics of linguistic input coming from native speakers);
–   The individual characteristics of the learner, such as age, previous knowledge of other linguistic systems, literacy, that determine how the input is elaborated and exploited by learner.

The first category collects the features related to the *input*, that is, the linguistic material coming from speakers of the target language, that learners use to work out their own system. Despite the diversity of approaches taken in the various studies of SLA, scholars agree that input is an essential component of the process (Gass, 1997; Mackey & Gass, 2005). An important distinction that must be made is then between *input* and *intake*, the latter being what the learners "keep" in all they receive (Leow, 1995). Frequency, saliency and transparency can have an impact on what is "taken", interiorized by the learners and used to the evolution of their interlanguage (Goldschneider & DeKeyser, 2005; Ellis, 2006): the more a feature or construction of the target language is frequent, salient and/or transparent, the greater its impact on the system of the learners will be (Bartning & Hammarberg, 2007; Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Ellis, 2002). The way features such as transparency and saliency are perceived and used to develop the learner variety can also depend on contingent factors, as for example the level of proficiency and competence that the learner has in a precise moment. Markedness also plays a significant role in the development of grammatical patterns in individuals learning a foreign language. The Markedness Differential Hypothesis (MDH), proposed by Eckman (1977), is a well-known concept in this field: according to the MDH, when two languages differ, acquiring marked structures is more challenging compared to acquiring unmarked structures.

Moving to the individual factors, the age of the learner is an important parameter in the study of foreign language acquisition. This is especially true in the field of phonology and phonetics (Flege, 1995), where the term "phonological filter" has long been used (Trubeckoj, 1939): as language skills develop, speakers become deaf to non-distinctive elements in their reference language system. At what point in their lives do speakers develop this partial or total "deafness"? The concept of a critical period for L2 acquisition was first introduced by Lenneberg (1967), who argued that after a certain age, individuals may no longer retain the same innate capacity to acquire a language effortlessly through exposure alone. While the idea of maturational constraints remains influential, the precise age at which such limitations arise – and whether they result from a gradual decline rather than a discrete cut-off point – continues to be debated (see Birdsong, 1999 for a thorough discussion of this issue).

Cross-linguistic influence, initially conceptualized as "interference" (Weinreich, 1953) and later termed "transfer" by Lado (1957), remains a critical factor in SLA. This phenomenon encompasses the impact of a learner's native language on the acquisition and use of a second language. More broadly, it can be defined as the influence exerted by one or more languages within a speaker's linguistic repertoire

over one or more of the other languages. Diverging from the conventional perspective that views transfer solely as a potentially negative influence, cross-linguistic influence recognizes that this impact can also manifest positively. The transfer encompasses the migration of linguistic knowledge, structures, or strategies from the native language to the target language, introducing both advantageous and disadvantageous effects to the language learning process.

This influential factor operates across various linguistic dimensions, spanning pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2010: 1). Scholars such as Cook (2003), Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008), Kellerman and Sharwood Smith (1986), Odlin (1989), Ringbom (2007), Selinker (1972), and Tarone, Gass, and Cohen (1994) have extensively explored the nuanced facets of cross-linguistic influence, shedding light on its complexities.

An intriguing aspect to note is that cross-linguistic influence can manifest in different measures, varying across linguistic domains, with certain areas proving more susceptible to its effects. Vulnerable areas include those involving interfaces (Sorace, 2005, 2011; Sorace & Keller, 2005), where multiple levels of linguistic structuring are at play, and cases where linguistic-pragmatic is not one-to-one. Information structure marking encapsulates all these features, prompting our inquiry into this specific aspect. Further elucidation on these characteristics will be provided in the subsequent sections.

## 2.2 *Information structure marking in L2*

Both information structure and L2 acquisition have emerged as expanding research domains, drawing the attention of an increasing number of scholars in recent times. Due to their relatively recent prominence, numerous issues in these fields remain subjects of ongoing and spirited debate. This might lead one to think that it is premature to lump them together in the same research. If, however, we consider the argument presented earlier – that learner varieties, despite their simplified nature, possess inherent organicity and systematicity – it becomes apparent that studying IS phenomena can benefit from the contribution of a linguistic variety purposefully constructed for communicative efficacy and immediacy. This same idea is present behind the work of the scholars who first pioneered this line of research (Benazzo & Giuliano, 1998; Dimroth, 1998; Watorek & Perdue, 1999; Andorno, 2000). Their studies have highlighted a crucial aspect: L2 discourse-management and L2 phonology exhibit a notable similarity, both incorporating L1 patterns deeply ingrained in the learner's communicative behaviour. These linguistic areas tend to resist modification and development to a greater extent than morphological or lexical patterns. From our perspective, they represent a compelling terrain for exploration, and their parallel behaviour suggests them as an effective entry point for studying communicative moves. In the context of natural acquisition and a functionalist research approach, discourse and prosodic meanings serve not merely as among several levels of analysis, but as the perspective from which one

observes the learner's communicative activities through speech. The rationale for examining prosodic realization within discourse, rather than "outside of discourse", lies precisely in the desire to investigate its function. This approach entails studying prosody not merely as a secondary articulation, but as an intrinsic and indispensable functional element in the structure of utterances. Consequently, the inquiry naturally centres on discerning the purpose of specific prosodic realizations and, conversely, understanding how certain informational structures are expressively manifested – often through prosody.

2.2.1 Focus mapping in L2

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, IS and prosody are two challenging areas for second language learners. Despite non-native speakers improving their proficiency in L2 vocabulary and grammar with time, they continue to encounter difficulties in adjusting the structure of their utterances to fit the context and adhering to the discourse organizational principles of the target language (Ringbom, 2006; Benazzo, Andorno, Interlandi, Patin, 2012; Carroll & Lambert, 2006; von Stutterheim & Carroll, 2005; Carroll & von Stutterheim, 2003). As a result, non-native speakers may construct a discourse that aligns with the information flow patterns of their L1 ("discourse accent", von Stutterheim, 2003). While some scholars have attributed this difficulty of L2 learners to the presence of a specific Interface between discourse and prosody (the so-called Interface Hypothesis, Sorace, 2005, 2011), others have argued that the problems arise from the fact that pragmatic categories are not equally explicitly encoded on the same level, and they are not equally relevant, across languages (Matić & Wedgwood, 2003; Dimroth & Narasimhan, 2012).

Figure 2.1 - *Extended markedness scale of sentence prosody (from Zerbian, 2015: 14)*
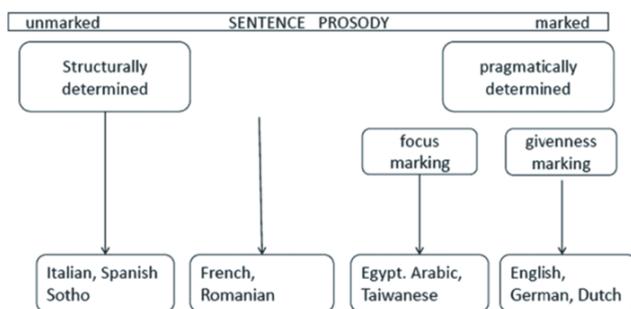
The expression of focus, and namely the information-focus and contrastive-focus subtypes, is especially bound to create difficulties in the acquisition process, since these categories are encoded in discourse through specific syntactic and prosodic patterns (see § 1.2 and § 1.3). In the expression of focus, then, the difficulties of prosody sum up to those of its mapping with syntax: this combination often

represents a "final hurdle" learners hardly overcome, not even in advanced stages of acquisition (Mennen, 2015). According to some authors (Zerbian, 2015), prosodic marking of IS categories is typologically marked (in the sense of Eckman, 1977), and hence difficult to acquire and less likely to be found in learner varieties This would imply, therefore, a lesser markedness of syntax, turning it into a medium that learners may favour over metrical or intonational ones. We will further discuss the position of French and Italian language in Fig. 2.1 in § 2.3.

2.2.2 L2 prosody acquisition models

Phonetics and phonology represent a problematic area for L2 learners, in which L1 transfer seems to be particularly persistent (Mennen, 2004); prosody itself has been described as an important factor in the perception of "foreign accent" (Boula de Mareüil & Vieru Dimulescu, 2006). Previous research in the field of prosodic expression of focus has shown that non-native speakers tend to mark IS through their L1 focus-projection rules and intonational patterns, even at an advanced level of proficiency (Kelm, 1987; McGory, 1997; Rasier, 2007; Swerts & Zerbian, 2010; Ueyama & Jun, 1998, Zubizarreta & Nava, 2011). Additionally, the literature on L2 intonation indicates that L1 transfer can also impact more subtle aspects of prosodic structure, such as the precise phonetic realization of similar pitch movements in phonology (Atterer & Ladd, 2004; Gut, 2009; Mennen, 2004).

Traditionally, however, models of phonological acquisition have focused on the segmental level (cf. Flege, 1995 and Best, 1995), while interest in the prosodic aspect of L2 acquisition is relatively recent. Thus, models of prosodic acquisition are relatively new and still under debate; many issues remain to be clarified, and certain aspects, such as variation in focus marking, have not yet been accounted for (Gili Fivela & Avesani, 2021; Mennen & DeLeeuw, 2014). There is no consensus, thus, as to whether L1 transfer is active on the semantic level (meaning associated to different prosodic configurations); systemic level (inventory of configurations); realizational level (phonetic implementation of phonological inventory) (Rasier & Hiligsmann, 2007; Zerbian, 2015; Mennen, 2004, 2015; Mennen & DeLeeuw, 2014).

2.2.3 Learning a close-related language

The role of typology in learning a closely related language can have both advantages and challenges. When learning a close-related language, in fact, typological similarities between the native and target languages can facilitate the acquisition process; some studies, though, have shown that some drawbacks are also possible in close-related combinations.

Closely related languages often share grammatical structures, vocabulary, and phonological patterns. This similarity can make it easier for learners to recognize and internalize these familiar elements, leading to faster acquisition. Learners can, in some way, leverage their existing linguistic skills and apply them to the target language. Moreover, similarity in typological features can reduce the cognitive load

on learners: they can rely on existing language processing strategies and patterns, leading to quicker understanding and production.

However, acquiring a closely related language is not without its challenges (Ringbom, 2006; Ringbom & Jarvis, 2009; Benazzo & Andorno, 2017).

Noticing a slight difference can be harder than noticing a greater one, and learners may assume they understand the target language without actively engaging in the learning process. This complacency can lead to interference from the native language, resulting in errors or fossilized patterns (Benazzo & Andorno, 2017; Comrie, 2003; Özçelik, 2018; Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro, 2010).

2.3 *Focus marking in L2 Italian and French*

General second language acquisition models, as reviewed in § 2.2.1-2, would predict that French, in comparison to Italian, exhibits a higher degree of "markedness" in its prosody, due to more stringent pragmatic constraints. Specifically, the prosody of French is intricately linked to information structure, while Italian's prosody may offer learners a relatively less marked system (see Fig. 2.1 for an exploration of markedness scale). This observation can align with broader linguistic theories, such as the Markedness Hypothesis (Eckman, 1977), which posits that languages with more marked features pose greater challenges for learners. Additionally, studies, such as (Mengzhu & Calhoun, 2022), have explored the distinction between syntax and prosody in information-structure marking, revealing that syntax is often considered less "marked" than prosody in this context. In this section, our focus is on reviewing studies conducted on IS marking in L2 French and L2 Italian, emphasizing aspects that align or diverge from these predictions, and identifying areas that warrant further investigation.

2.3.1 L2 Italian

As we have already stated in § 2.2, mastering the interplay between prosody and syntax in the expression of information structure is a challenge for L2 learners. A few studies have addressed the question with regards to Italian L2, confirming the persistence of L1 influence in this area, although with different outcomes, mostly depending on the typological distance between source and target languages. In Turco, Dimroth & Braun (2015), Benazzo *et al.* (2012), Andorno & Turco (2015), West-Germanic speakers are said to show effects of CLI in the use of pitch accents and *verum focus* to mark polarity focus in Italian. In Avesani, Bocci, Vayra and Zappoli (2015) German learners appear to have acquired the (negative) relation between discourse properties and their prosodic marking that holds in Italian, but show signs of transfer on the phonological level. In a similar way, Busà & Stella (2012) have observed that English speakers show non-target-like behaviour in prosodic focus marking; in particular, they don't seem to correctly modulate duration, which is an important cue for focus in Italian. With respect to syntax, Belletti & Leonini (2004) investigated speakers of eight different European L1s (primarily Germanic and Slavic) and found that non-native speakers do not effectively

use post-verbal subjects. However, their study provides no information on other IS cues (e.g. intonation, phrasing) that might compensate for the underuse of marked word orders. Some questions still need to be addressed: what could be the outcome of a combination of close-related languages, as in the case of French learners? Many studies have looked at prosody *or* syntax; but what is the interplay between the two?

2.3.2 L2 French

The issue has also attracted the attention of scholars with regard to French as a second language; the general picture is similar to those that we have just sketched for Italian. A good number of studies has observed the behaviour of Germanic learners (Thorle, 2020; Benazzo, Dimroth & Santiago, 2021): when moving to French L2, German speakers set prosody aside, showing that they have grasped that in the target language it plays a more marginal role in the expression of IS; however, despite this approach, they still exhibit effects of cross-linguistic influence or acquisitional features, such as overmarking. As for the syntactic and word order levels, studies such as Donaldson (2011a, 2011b) display native-like behaviour. This result is particularly interesting, because it challenges the general hypothesis that non-native speakers should be limited in acquiring effective means for IS marking. In this same direction, research by Bartning & Hammarberg (2007) describes the use of *c'est*-clefts in French L2 acquisition by Swedish learners, stating that the construction is readily adopted in virtue of its high frequency in input. This finding also aligns with previous work by Véronique (1994). The results of these latter works seem to suggest the idea, already proposed by Zerbian (2015), that syntactic marking is easier to acquire and produce than prosodic marking.

2.4 *Research gaps and the need for further study*

Building on the descriptions and comparison drawn in the previous paragraphs, our goal in this work is to observe the productions of non-native speakers, and try to interpret them in terms of cross-linguistic influence and L2 acquisition universals, bearing in mind the closeness of the two languages in question, and its possible consequences. The novelty of the study lies not only in its consideration of a hitherto little-studied combination of languages[3], but also in combining the syntactic and prosodic perspectives: in this sense, we want to test the possible contribution of a methodology explicitly designed to bring the two together.

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[3] We wish to clarify that the French/Italian L1-L2 combination is not 'generally' understudied, as numerous works have addressed this pairing beyond those cited in the previous sections. The gap we delimit here specifically concerns studies focusing on L2 and the marking of information structure through prosody and syntax. At the same time, we are aware that cross-linguistic influence between these two languages has been described from many other perspectives, which remain relevant to our work even if not directly tied to our research questions – for instance, Cavone & D'Imperio (2016) and D'Imperio (2016) for prosody in general, or Sorace (1993) for syntax, among many others.

While we are aware that analysing prosody through semi-spontaneous speech is not an easy task, we think that fully-scripted speech would reduce the validity of conclusions, especially in investigating information-structural categories such as focus, that draw from the fields of communication and pragmatics.

Our hypotheses are derived directly from the differences between Italian and French (which we have sum up in § 1.4.3), predictions made by acquisition models and hypotheses (Mennen, 2015; Rasier & Hiligsmann, 2007), and our approach in terms of second language acquisition (see § 2.1). The questions can thus be articulated as follows:

1. *Focus marking in French and Italian.* Despite substantial research on the prosodic marking of focus in Italian and French (see § 1.4), unresolved issues persist. Is word order the primary means of expressing focus, or does prosodic marking play a significant role? Do prosodic features in French and Italian reveal unexpected patterns compared to more studied Germanic languages? How do these patterns relate to the phonology of each language?

2. *Prosody-syntax relationship.* In light of the observed increase of contrast across identification and correction contexts in Italian and French (see § 1.4), how is *continuum* expressed by syntax and prosody? What type of relationship do these two entertain, additive or trade-off[4]? How do they interact to mark different degrees of focus and contrast? Does the same relationship between syntax and prosody apply in both L1 and L2 productions?

3. *Interplay of syntax and prosody in L2.* How do L2 speakers mark different focus subtypes, and is there a dominance of syntax or prosody in their productions? Do our results match predictions made by models of L2 acquisition regarding the preponderance of one or the other in non-native speech?

4. *Prosody and L2 learning models.* Given the resistance to change observed in accent patterns and phonological features in L2 learning, how do the dynamics of transitioning from accent to non-accent, intonation to non-intonation, and the role of chunking and parsing impact our understanding of L2 acquisition of prosodic features? Considering observed differences on both phonological and phonetic levels, how do non-native speakers in L2 productions elaborate this divergence, and to what extent does it impact overall prosodic patterns in their speech?

5. *Saliency and Input Factors in L2 Acquisition.* Expanding on the concept of varying saliency in linguistic structures during L2 acquisition, we ask ourselves whether certain marking strategies in L1 exhibit greater ease of identification, processing, and acquisition by learners. Does the relative ease of acquisition depend on the saliency of these structures in the input?

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[4] As stated throughout the work, our analysis is primarily descriptive. Within this framework, we will examine whether syntax and prosody function additively or in a trade-off relation in signaling in-formation structure, without adopting a specific model of the syntax–prosody interface or of online processing.

6. *Two faces of cross-linguistic influence.* What impact does the typological proximity of French and Italian have on shaping L2 productions? Does this proximity facilitate or obstruct the acquisitional process, and is there evidence of both positive and negative transfer? Is this effect equally visible on syntax and prosody?

7. *Non-linearity in L2 acquisition.* Investigating the non-linear path revealed in proficiency levels, what specific connections exist between morpho-syntactic proficiency and target-likeness in information structure marking for L2 learners?

The experimental study: methodology

In this section, we will describe the design of our study and present the methodological choices that underpin our research strategy. As a general posture, we took a quantitative and data-centric approach, revolving around the systematic analysis of large collections of language data (Granger, 2012). We think this approach allows researchers to explore language patterns and regularities directly from the observed data, progressively generalizing and deriving theories or rules based on the patterns found within the corpus. Combined with a quantitative analysis, this method offers the possibility to yield precise and robust data and build up on systematic data observation. However, we also acknowledge that a purely quantitative approach might overlook the intricacies of the complex processes involved in Second Language Acquisition. Therefore, qualitative elements will also be incorporated into the discussion. This combination allows us to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of SLA, leveraging the strengths of both methods. By combining controlled experiments and statistical analyses as well as case studies and more punctual considerations, we can triangulate our findings, strengthening the validity and reliability of our results. The strength of this combination is especially fruitful in the field of SLA, as many previous studies have demonstrated (Larsen & Cameron, 2008; Levis & LeVelle, 2016). Particularly, we plan to integrate qualitative data to analyse the most interesting and complex findings, allowing for a more holistic perspective on language acquisition.

3.1 *Sample*

In this section we will outline the essential framework for selecting and describing the participants who were involved in the study. Careful consideration was put in the choice of the sample, to ensure the generalizability and validity of the study's findings. We will detail the criteria used to recruit participants, including the target population and any specific inclusion or exclusion criteria. Moreover, we will provide demographic information about the selected sample, such as age, gender, educational background, linguistic experience, and any other relevant characteristics that may influence the study's outcomes.

3.1.1 Study design

As we have stated, our study aims at observing and describing the production of Italian L2 and French L2 speakers, and comparing them to the production of native speakers

of both the source and the target languages, i.e. Italian and French. For this purpose, we decided to set up an inter-subjective, cross-sectional, multi-group design.

– *Inter-subjective*: the research focuses on the analysis and interpretation of language data from the perspective of multiple individuals or language users. The term emphasizes the importance of considering and understanding the shared meanings, interpretations, and communicative practices that emerge within a community of speakers.

– *Cross-sectional*: the design involves the collection and analysis of data from different groups of participants at a single point in time. The aim is to compare and examine language-related variables across diverse groups without following them over an extended period. The gathering of data is conducted simultaneously, and the data collected provides a snapshot of the linguistic characteristics, behaviours, or patterns at a specific moment for each group under investigation.

– *Multi-group*: the research design involves the comparison and analysis of multiple distinct groups or populations, that can differ based on various linguistic, cultural, or demographic characteristics. Data is collected from separate groups and then analysed and compared, aiming to investigate potential differences or similarities between them concerning language-related factors.

This approach, as described by Jarvis & Pavlenko (2010), is particularly interesting in the field of SLA, as it combines several elements to investigate trends and correlations across multiple groups. The underlying assumption of this method, as stated by Gass & Selinker (2001), is that comparing multiple groups would yield results similar to what would be found if we observed a single individual over an extended period. Despite the cross-sectional nature of the data, this design allows us to gain insights into inter-subjective patterns and variations among distinct groups while exploring potential longitudinal associations.

3.1.2 Choice and recruitment of the speakers

Participants were recruited and recorded between summer 2021 and fall 2022, in Turin, Italy (Italian L1 and Italian L2 groups) and Paris, France (French L1 and French L2 group). Given that the intonational phonology of Italian strongly varies across regions, special care was taken in circumscribing Italian speakers' areas of origin, to minimize the impact of diatopic variation (see D'Imperio, 2002 and references therein). As for Italian (native and non-native), we chose to adopt as a point of inquiry the area of Turin, whose variety is described, with particular interest for prosodic focus, in Romano & Mattana (2008); native and non-native speakers of French were recruited and recorded in Paris.

Only adult speakers were chosen (*age* ≥ 18), to avoid the so-called *critical period* (Lenneberg, 1967; see discussion about this issue in § 2.1.3). Native speakers were recruited by word of mouth or through interventions during some lectures at the University of Turin and University of Paris 8. For recruiting non-native speakers, in addition to personal contacts and word of mouth, online communities of

expats (such as Facebook groups) were also very helpful. At registration, speakers completed a questionnaire concerning their socio-biographical features and language background; questions were articulated to assess inter-group homogeneity with respect to age, literacy and other learning variables. Blank versions of the questionnaires can be found in both Italian and French versions in Appendix (I). In addition, L2 speakers were administered a written assessment test, which we will discuss in more detail in the next section (§ 3.1.3). Tab. 1 gives a summary of the sample characteristics.

Table 1 - *Summary of the final sample characteristics*

Group	Sex	Age
FRL1	4M / 13F	range = 31, mean = 27,5, SD = 9,5
ITL1	3M / 11F	range = 10, mean = 25,6, SD = 10
ITL2	7M / 10F	range = 35, mean = 27,4, SD = 8,6
FRL2	8M / 8F	range = 25, mean = 32,5, SD = 7,4

3.1.3 Proficiency assessment

To satisfy the cross-sectionality rationale, we recruited the non-native speakers by making sure to cover multiple proficiency levels, to represent different stages of the acquisitional pathway[1]. Proficiency levels were assessed through three complementary tests: self-assessment, written cloze test (Vedder, 2008 for Italian and Tremblay & Garrison, 2010 for French), and evaluation of oral productions by experienced L2 Italian and L2 French teachers. Blank versions of the cloze tests and of the socio-biographical questionnaires containing the self-assessment section are included in Appendix. Oral evaluations were performed over the task-elicited speech; the more informative task for this purpose was the picture comparison, occasionally integrated by the picture story; both tasks will be described in the next paragraph, § 3.2. In assessing L2 proficiency, fellow teachers were advised to employ, in addition to the usual CEFR indicators (CEFR, 2020), the comprehensive framework of CAF, drawing upon the works of Pallotti (2009) and Norris & Ortega (2009). The acronym CAF stands for Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency, and consists in a triadic approach aimed at providing multifaceted evaluation of language proficiency. By applying these diverse indices, a robust and nuanced assessment of L2 proficiency was achieved.

In instances where conflicting evidence arose from the written and oral evaluations, we prioritized the oral assessment over the written one; this decision was based on a well-

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[1] The representation of proficiency levels should, however, be taken with some caveats: it has been evident for several years now that the L2 learning trajectory is not linear, starting from works such as Norris & Ortega (2003) and Larsen-Freeman (2006).

founded approach, widely suggested and endorsed in the field of language proficiency studies (Tremblay & Garrison, 2010). As many other scholars do, in fact, we believe that spoken communication better reflects real-time language processing and linguistic spontaneity, thereby offering valuable insights into a learner's ability to use the language in natural contexts. By giving precedence to the oral evaluation, we aimed to account for the dynamic nature of language use and better capture the learners' communicative competence and language performance in authentic situations. The results of the evaluation and the resulting group breakdown are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - *Proficiency levels of participants taking part in the study*

Group	CEFR level	N. speakers	Total
FRL1	-	17	17
ITL1	-	14	14
FRL2	A1-2	2	
	B1-2	7	16
	C1-2	7	
ITL2	A1-2	4	
	B1-2	7	17
	C1-2	6	

3.2 *Tasks*

In this section we will describe the tasks we used to elicit the speakers' productions. We will explain the reasons that led us to choose certain task types, taking into consideration both the aims of our study and the methods adopted by other works in the field, with a view to cross-linguistic comparability. We will also detail the data collection protocol, and the composition of the material collected. The stimuli and supports used during the collection are fully available in the Appendix.

3.2.1 Types of data

In studying information structure marking an important methodological issue arises: on the one hand, the need to analyse speech that (at least partially) conserves conversational value and illocutionary force is felt; on the other hand, the perspective of a prosodic analysis asks for the elicitation of highly controlled, fully comparable phonetic units. These two requirements, unfortunately, are contradictory and pose problems for designing a viable collection protocol.

Given these challenges, we decided to exclude learner corpora, and instead create a dataset of more controlled productions, containing a sufficiently high number of analysable target structures. For this sake, we have developed a comprehensive

protocol that encompasses different types of data, ranging from more controlled (read-aloud, question-answer pairs) to spontaneous speech. We recognize the importance of analysing speech that retains its conversational value and illocutionary force to understand information structure accurately. By incorporating both controlled and spontaneous data, our protocol seeks to strike a balance between these two conflicting requirements, ensuring a viable and comprehensive collection methodology for our research. This approach will allow us to delve into the complexities of information structure marking while preserving the authenticity and naturalness of the spoken language.

In light of the methodological challenges outlined earlier, we have also chosen to prefer production tasks over grammaticality judgments (GJTs) from our research methodology. The rationale behind this decision is to mitigate potential biases, such as the monolingual/comparative fallacy (see § 2.1.2). Numerous studies in the field of SLA, in fact, have criticized the reliability of GJTs (Ellis, 1991; Gass, 1994; Carroll & Meisel, 1990); especially because grammaticality is not a clear-cut dichotomy, but rather a spectrum, ranging from fully acceptable to marginally acceptable sentences (Sorace & Keller, 2005).

3.2.2 Reproducibility and comparability

Another aspect that we considered in the choice of the experimental design was the need to compare our results with those of other language combinations, which is an essential step in the identification and distinction of CLI from other learning phenomena. In fact, identification of CLI not only depends on intragroup homogeneity, but also intergroup heterogeneity (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2010: 41): the latter can be assessed more reliably if the productions of a group of users in a recipient language are compared to those of other speakers of the same recipient language that don't share the same source languages (e.g., comparisons of German-, French-, Spanish-speaking learners of Italian). Since a direct comparison is viable only with identical type of data and tasks, we decided to take up part of our collection protocol from existent studies. The choice fell on the protocol devised by Gabriel (2010) and then taken over by Feldhausen & Vanrell (2016) and Gabriel & Grünke (2018).

Apart from the specific needs of a study on CLI, we also believe that the repeated use of the same data elicitation protocol is important to ensure comparability and reproducibility of results, a need that is still too little felt, in our opinion, in the field of SLA and linguistics more generally (Marsden, Morgan-Short, Thompson & Abugaber, 2018).

3.2.3 Description of the protocol

Several attempts and pilot studies were made before finding the right set of tasks to meet all these criteria[2]. In the following lines we will present the final set of tasks,

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[2] In a first phase, preliminary recordings were made with a small sample of 4 participants, 2 ITL1 and 2 ITL2, who were administered 5 speech tasks, from most to least controlled. The original design

which includes three: a read-aloud, the picture-story task (from Gabriel, 2010), and a picture comparison task. The quantitative analyses presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the picture-story task. Concurrently, other tasks were transcribed, although they were not libelled for this stage of analysis. These other recordings and transcriptions have been instrumental for qualitative observation and insights; we have anyway preserved these unlabelled tasks for future analyses, with plans to explore task-induced variations. All support material, including pictures and written scripts, is available in the Appendix section.

Read-aloud. The participant is given three short written dialogues, and is asked to interpret, reading aloud, one of the two characters; the second character is played by the experimenter (in this case, the author). These dialogues strategically include a regular number of occurrences of focused elements in marked and unmarked positions, or embedded in it-cleft sentences. The focus constituents span different syntactic categories, including subjects, verbs, arguments of the verb (direct and indirect object). Target constituents were designed to be composed, as far as possible, of sonorous segments (vowels, nasals, approximants), to make it easier to observe f0 movements on the constituents themselves. The task is presented in Italian to participants in the ITL1 and ITL2 groups and in French to those in the FRL1 and FRL2 groups. The length of target constituents (in syllable) in the Italian and French version has been kept the same[3]. Below are two excerpts from the dialogues: example (15) is from the Italian version, and example (16) is from the French version. The complete scripts can be found in the Appendix.

> (16)
> EXP. Hai cucinato la parmigiana?
> 'Have you cooked parmigiana?'
> PART. No, ho cucinato <u>le lasagne</u>. *Correction; Object; SVO; 3 syllables*
> 'No, I have cooked lasagna'.
> EXP. E chi ha fatto il dolce?
> 'And who made the dessert?'
> PART. È <u>Giovanna</u> che ha fatto il dolce. *Identification; Subject; Cleft; 3 syllables*
> 'It's Giovanna who made the dessert'

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involved a read-aloud task, the "picture story" task from Gabriel (2010), and three different *stimuli* for the spontaneous speech: a picture comparison, a customized Map Task (Anderson et al., 1991) and the table game *Guess Who* (2021). The role-playing game Map Task and the "Guess Who" board game proved less productive for our purposes than the picture comparison task; the latter, therefore, was retained at the expense of the other two in the final protocol. Through the analysis of these early productions, we identified the most effective tools for elicitation of the target structures, and with appropriate refinements, additions and cuts we developed the final protocol.

[3] Of course, the actual number of syllables for French constituents (and sometimes for Italian constituents as well) depends on the each participant's realisation.

(17)
EXP. Tu as préparé un gâteau?
'Did you make a cake?'
PART. Non, j'ai préparé de la marmelade. *Correction; Object; SVO; 3 syllables*
'No, I made some jam'
EXP. Et qui est-ce qui a fait le dessert?
'And who prepared the dessert?'
PART. C'est Jean-Marie qui a fait le dessert. *Identification; Subject; Cleft; 3 syllables*
'It's Jean-Marie who made the dessert'

Table 3 shows the number of occurrences placed in the text for each focus subtype, target constituent, and syntactic configuration.

Table 3 - *Occurrences of target constituents in the read-aloud task*

Target const.	Focus type	Word order	N. occurrences
Subject	Correction	Marked	1
		Unmarked	1
Direct object	Identification	Unmarked	1
	Correction	Unmarked	5
	Correction	Marked	2
Indirect (prepositional) object	Correction	Unmarked	1
Verb	Correction	Unmarked	1

Picture story. Following the model of Gabriel (2010), the speaker is shown a Power Point presentation containing two short picture stories, accompanied by a caption, and then some questions pertaining to the illustrated scenes. The speaker is asked to read the questions and answer them aloud, producing a "complete sentence". The questions are phrased to elicit responses with three types of focus: broad focus, narrow identification focus, narrow corrective focus (see § 1.1.3). Identification focus is elicited through a partial question, and correction focus through an assertive statement accompanied by a tag-question[4], through which the speaker's reaction (in this case, corrective) is sought. As in the previous task, the targeted focus constituents belong to different syntactic categories: subject, verb, verb arguments, and adverbials. Participants are not given any guidance on how to formulate the response, other than to avoid elliptic responses (e.g., "Who's buying the newspaper?", "Maria"), and always include a verb. In this way, speakers are free to formulate the structure they

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[4] On the role of tag questions as biased questions, cf. Romero (2020).

deem most appropriate according to the questions they are asked[5]. Like the read-aloud, the task is proposed in Italian to participants in ITL1 and ITL2 groups; in French to those in FRL1 and FRL2 groups. We illustrate below an excerpt from the French version (Fig. 3.1) with examples of questions and expected answers (example 17).

Figure 3.1 - *Some slides from the Picture story task (French version)*

BF   IF   CF

Marie donne le journal   Que se passe-t-il ici?   Qui donne le journal à son   Julie donne le journal à
à son frère   frère?   son frère, n'est-ce pas?
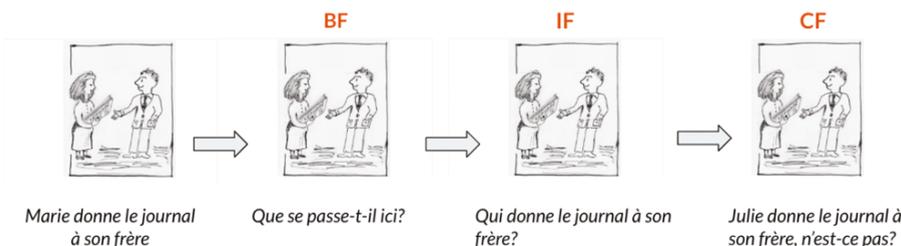
(18)
Q. Qui achète le journal au kiosque?
'Who's buying the newspaper at the newsstand?'
PART. C'est Marie qui l'achète.
'It's Mary who's buying it'
Q. Julie donne le journal à son frère, non?
'Julie is giving the newspaper to her brother, right?'
PART. Non, c'est Marie qui donne le journal à son frère.
'No, it's Marie who's giving the newspaper to her brother'

The total number of questions posed to each participant was 29, including 3 fillers. Table 4 displays the distribution of questions across various focus subtypes and target constituents. As for the phonological composition of target constituents, since the represented scenes were to be kept the same across the two languages, it was not always possible to control for the number of syllables and segmental composition ("kiosque" and "edicola" do not have the same length in syllables, but are the only possible translations in French and Italian for the word "newsstand"). When possible, though, the segmental material was kept similar across the two versions; this is the case, for example, of proper nouns ("Marie" and "Maria" or cognate words like "journal" and "giornale").

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[5] Unfortunately, sometimes - and this is in effect a weakness of our tagset - the part of the prompt regarding the production of "complete" (non-elliptical) sentences was understood as the obligation to produce "canonical sentences", leading to avoid non-SVO orders. We will discuss this issue in further detail in the Results (Chapter 4).

Table 4 - *Questions in the picture-story task*

Target const.	Focus type	N. occurrences
-	Broad	4
Subject	Identification	3
	Correction	3
Direct object	Identification	2
	Correction	2
Adverbial	Identification	2
	Correction	2
Verb	Identification	2
	Correction	2

Picture comparison. The experimenter (in this case, the author) and participant each have an image in front of them; without seeing each other's, they must describe their own and find any differences. The two images present a similar but not identical scene, and are designed to elicit in speakers the production of contrastive focus structures on different syntactic categories. Picture comparison tasks of this type have been widely used to elicit contrastive focus structures in both L1 and L2 speakers (see, among others, Turco et al. 2014, 2015). To avoid priming effects on syntax, the experimenter conducts the conversation following a script that does not involve the use of marked structures. The two pictures used in the task are shown below[6]. An excerpt of transcription of the task performed by an Italian L2 speaker is shown in example (18).

Figure 3.2 - *Picture of the experimenter (left) and picture of the participant (right)*

(19)

EXP. Nella mia immagine c'è una piccola classe di bambini che sta facendo lezione all'aperto. Anche tu ce l'hai?
'In my picture there is a small class of children having a lesson outdoor. Do you have it too?'
PART. Sì, sì sì, proprio così.
'Yes, yes, exactly the same'
EXP. Ok. In basso, cioè davanti all'animale nella staccionata, c'è un bambino vestito di blu coi capelli scuri.
'Ok. At the bottom, I mean in front of the animal inside the fence, there is a kid dressed in blue, with dark hair'
PART. Sì, anche io ce l'ho.
'Yes, I have it too'
EXP. Ok. Il bambino sta tagliando a metà un panino.
'Ok. The boy is cutting a sandwich in half'
PART. Allora no, sta tagliando una torta a fette.
'Then no, he's cutting a cake into pieces'

The three tasks were administered in a random order. Recordings for groups ITL1 and ITL2 took place in the soundproof booth located inside the *Laboratorio di Fonetica Sperimentale 'Arturo Genre'* (Università di Torino), while groups FRL1 and FRL2 were recorded in the soundproof booth of laboratory *SFL - Structures Formelles du Langage* (Université Paris 8). Due to restrictions during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to university facilities was limited at times. Consequently, some participants were recorded in alternative premises, utilizing portable instrumentation while strictly adhering to safety distances.

Recordings within the laboratory facilities were made using a Focusrite Scarlett interface and Shure SM58 microphones. When laboratory access was restricted, recordings were conducted using a portable recorder, Zoom H4N, and an AKG C520 cardioid electrostatic headband microphone. All audio files were recorded in .wav format with a sampling rate of 44100 Hz.

3.3 *Tools for the analysis*

In this section we will describe how the data was treated, i.e. transcribed and labelled, to prepare and enable the analysis.

3.3.1 Transcription

The sum of the three tasks gives about 10 minutes of speech for each participant; with 64 participants, the total of the data amounts to about 10 hours of speech. The audio files of the picture-story task have been transcribed and segmented at the level of utterance, word, syllable and phone. Orthographic transcription was done manually on Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2023). For segmentation, two automatic scripts were used, EasyAlign (Goldman, 2011) for French L1 and L2 and WebMAUS (Kisler, Reichel & Schiel (2017) for Italian L1 and L2. The automatic

segmentation was fully reviewed and corrected, and manually realigned where necessary. The read-aloud and picture comparison tasks have been transcribed, but they have not been segmented, since for the moment they have only been used for an initial inspection and qualitative observation.

3.3.2 Coding

Syntactic and word order level phenomena were manually annotated using a specific tagset, adapted from Brunetti *et al.* (2011). We illustrate the labels, giving a description and examples in Italian and French for each of them[7] in Table 5.

Table 5 - *Taxonomy of non-canonical constructions used in corpus labelling*
(focus constituents are underlined)

Label	Description	Example (IT)	Example (FR)
sbjinv	Subject inversion	L'ha comprato Maria.	-
clld	Clitic left dislocation	Il giornale lo compra in edicola.	Le journal elle l'achète au kiosque.
clrd	Clitic right dislocation	Maria lo compra in edicola il giornale.	Marie l'achète au kiosque le journal.
noncl-d	Non-clitic dislocation	In edicola Maria compra il giornale.	Au kiosque Marie achète le journal.
obj-sep	Object separation	Maria dà a suo fratello il giornale.	Marie donne à son frère le journal.
focfr	Focus fronting	Il giornale Maria compra in edicola.	-
pres	Presentational sentence	C'è Maria che dà il giornale a suo fratello.	Il y a Marie qui donne le journal à son frère.
cleft	It-cleft sentence	È Maria che dà il giornale a suo fratello.	C'est Marie qui donne le journal à son frère.
pscleft	Pseudo-cleft sentence	Quello che dà Maria suo fratello è il giornale.	Ce que Marie donne à son frère c'est le journal.

Establishing a procedure for prosodic annotation was a more difficult process. The challenges encountered encoding prosodic phenomena are compounded by the inherent conflict between assuming a specific phonological system as a framework for analysing learners' productions and the core concept of interlanguage (or *learner variety*, see § 2.1.2). From our point of view, in fact, learners' speech is not merely an "interfered" target language; thus, we cannot presuppose and apply a determined

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[7] In the table, underlined constituents correspond to sentence *foci*; please note that they do not always coincide with dislocated elements.

phonological system for their productions. By definition, non-native speech can display features of both the source and the target languages, along with the outcome of learning universals; crucially, the balance between these components results from individual variables, and above all, from speakers' unique linguistic background and cognitive profile. It is therefore very hard to presuppose what traits should be interpreted as phonological (i.e., discrete and distinctive within a given linguistic system) and what should not. For these reasons, we decided to opt for a purely phonetic, automatic annotation tool, which is at the same time an algorithm *and* a notation, Polytonia (Mertens, 2014), itself based on the *Prosogram* system (Mertens, 2004). The advantage of Polytonia's prosodic transcription is that "[it] does not assume a particular phonological theory of intonation [...]. Rather it aims to determine the pitch level and movement of each syllable in a manner motivated by tonal perception, in such a way that these (categorised) observations can serve as an input to phonological analysis and interpretation" (Mertens, 2022). It is important to note that the only theoretical assumption about prosody and prosodic structure made by Polytonia is related to the syllable.

Another key advantage of the tool is, of course, its ability to process a very large number of audio files in a short amount of time – something that would be very time-consuming with manual annotation. Given that the corpus of our study consisted of approximately ten hours of speech, a reliable manual annotation procedure with inter-annotator agreement across the entire dataset would not have been feasible. The automation provided by Polytonia thus ensures both efficiency and consistency in prosodic analysis, making it particularly suited for large-scale linguistic research. Numerous studies focusing on L2 prosody have successfully employed this tool, with recent examples including the works of Benazzo *et al.* (2021) and Santiago, Mairano and De Paolis (2022).

The algorithm provides a series of symbols that represent tonal levels and the perceptible melodic movements of all syllables, based on the notion of the *seuil de glissando* (Rossi, 1971). The system provides 5 symbols for the tonal level: L (low), M (mi), H (high), B (bottom) and T (top). It also provides 5 melodic movements: R (large rise), F (large fall), r (small rise), f (small fall), and – (level). Finally, the system can provide the combination of these symbols. An example of Prosogram output is visible in Fig. 3.3.

Figure 3.3 - *Example of Prosogram output for the utterance*
"Bon alors ça c'est des idées générales, moi j'ai des questions precises" (from Mertens, 2022)

The intonation of target words, such as "Maria" or "giornale", was profiled by combining the Polytonia labels assigned to individual syllables. For instance, to determine the contour exhibited by the target constituent "Maria", we assembled the Polytonia labels associated to each one of three syllables, [ma.ˈri.:a]. In the example shown in Fig. 3.4, the prosodic contour of the target word would be L-Hf-L.

Prosodic phenomena were thus automatically tagged using the Polytonia script for Praat, and then manually corrected in case of errors[8]. Fig. 3.4 shows an example of complete transcription annotation, including labelling of syntax and prosody, for the utterance "È Maria che compra il giornale in edicola", produced by a native Italian speaker.

Figure 3.4 - *Example of complete transcription and annotation on 6 tiers: Polytonia labels, phones, syllables, utterance, informational context and syntax/word order*
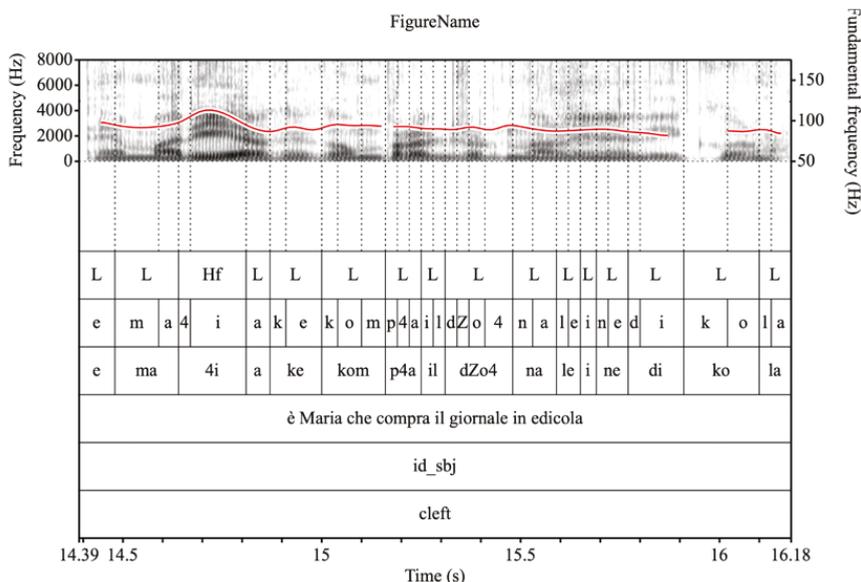
3.3.3 Statistics

We constructed various statistical models through diverse functions in R (R core team, 2022). The main analyses were conducted with generalized linear mixed-effects models (GLMMs), always including random intercepts for both speakers and items, and comprising all four groups of speakers in the same model (ITL1, ITL2, FRL1, FRL2). This approach was chosen to account for the hierarchical structure of the data and to avoid inflating the error rate. However, not all datasets supported such models equally. In some cases, where

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[8] These errors are generally due to erroneous pitch detections by Praat, mostly octave jumps due to glottalization or presence of non-modal voice.

the data exhibited convergence problems or separation issues, we resorted to bias-reduced logistic regression or Firth regression.

The choice of independent variables or predictors varied across different stages of the analyses, including informational context (with a specified number of levels: broad focus, identification focus, corrective focus), syntactic role of target constituent (with a specified number of levels, subject vs non-subject), language (participant's L1/L2), and proficiency levels (A, B or C).

Results: syntax and word order

As we have stated in the very first lines of this work, the separation between syntax and prosody is an abstraction (see Chapter 1). Taking this into account, we will however proceed with the analysis of one factor at a time – syntax and word order, intonation – and then integrate the different components, in a more organic and coherent discussion, at a later stage (see Chapter 6).

Figure 4.1 - *Some slides from the "picture story" task (French version)*
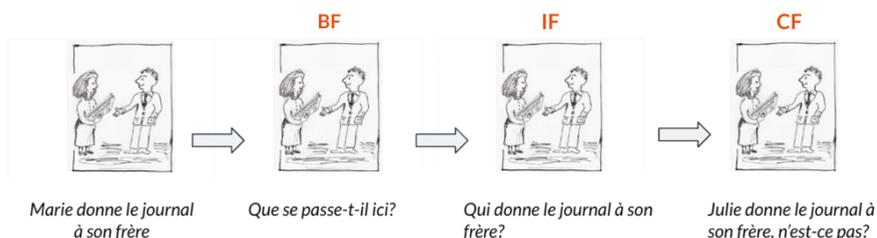
The first step, which is the one we will tackle in this chapter, is the description of surface word order configurations and constructions[1]. As described in the Methodology section (Chapter 3), the corpus we are going to rely on is made up of task-elicited speech, collected through a question-answer task based on a picture story. As mentioned, the questions are formulated in such a way as to elicit answers with three different types of focus: broad, identification focus, corrective focus. The target constituents are of different nature: subject, direct object, indirect (prepositional) object, verb, adverbial.

The production of 60 participants was taken into account, and each speaker produced, according to the protocol, 26 target sentences, resulting in a final dataset of $26 \times 60 = 1560$ utterances. Of these 1560, 51 were discarded because they did not conform to the delivery provided or were not semantically-pragmatically

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[1] As one of the reviewers rightly pointed out, what we present here is not a syntactic analysis of underlying structures, but rather a description of surface orders and constructions. We are aware that different underlying structures may correspond to the same surface configuration, but disentangling these possibilities is not our concern here. Our aim is instead to classify and describe the observable patterns in order to provide a solid empirical basis for subsequent descriptions and modelling.

felicitous[2]. This left a total of 1509 analysable items. The dataset was obtained by extracting the annotations made on Praat in the "syntax" tier, which contains the annotation of syntactic and word order phenomena (see Fig. 4.2).

Figure 4.2 - *Screenshot of Praat window with different tiers of annotation; "syntax" tier highlighted in red*
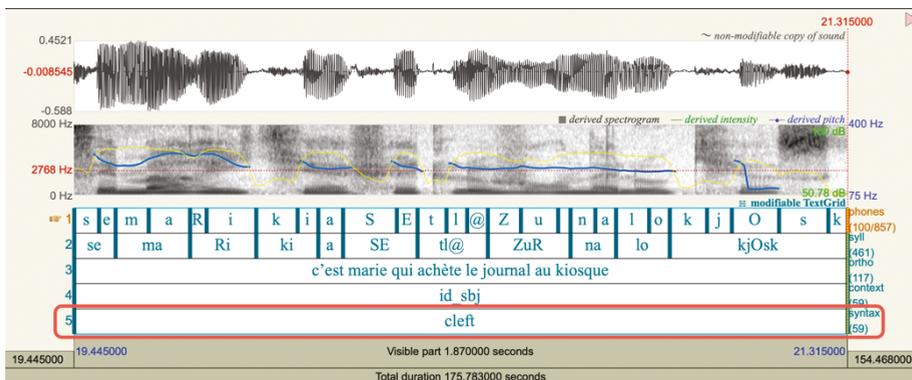
The analysis was then conducted by counting the occurrences of the different labels illustrated in § 3.3.2, in the different information contexts, for different syntactic constituents, in the four groups. After a first inspection and a general description (§ 4.1), we took a closer look at those configurations that occurred most frequently and seemed particularly interesting for our purpose, namely it-cleft sentences. For this more circumscribed phase of the analysis, we fitted a bias-reduced logistic regression model (brglm2) and later tested pairwise contrasts with *emmeans* (Holm-adjusted).

4.1 *Marked word orders in the native groups*

We will first proceed with an overview of the different strategies used by native speakers of French and Italian, commenting briefly on the differences found between the two groups. In a second step, we will focus on observing those configurations and orders that by their frequency or salience we think may deserve a broader analysis, namely cleft sentences (§ 4.1.4).

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[2] Sentences were excluded for two possible reasons. The first is related to non-compliance with the delivery: in the task, the request was to answer the questions by formulating "complete sentences", i.e., containing a finite verb. Cases in which the speakers answered instead with single syntagms (e.g., Q. "À qui Marie donne-t-elle le journal?"; A. "À son frère") or clefts without a relative clause (e.g., Q. "Qui donne le journal à son frère?"; A. "C'est Marie") were excluded from the analysis. The second reason is, on the other hand, related to the semantic coherence of answers: if the utterance is not felicitous or does not express disagreement with an incorrect description of the story, then it is ruled out of the analysis (e.g., Q. "Julie donne le journal à son frère, non?" A. "Oui, Marie donne le journal à son frère" instead of correct answer A. "Non, c'est Marie qui donne le journal à son frère").

4.1.1 L1 French

In the following chart (Fig. 4.3), we show the non-canonical structures used to mark subject focus by French native speakers. The abbreviations used for non-canonical word order configurations are listed in Table 5 (§ 3.3.2, Coding). In this and the following charts, "na" (non-applicable) refers to canonical configurations, i.e. cases without surface-structural variation.

Figure 4.3 - *Non-canonical structures used for subject focus (FRL1 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
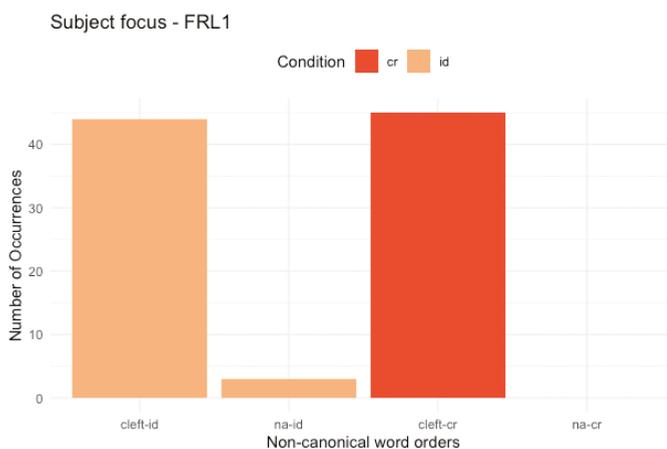
As can be easily observed, the cleft sentence (like the one in example (19), uttered by a French native speaker) is the prevalent strategy in context of subject focus.

(19)
A. Qui achète le journal au kiosque?
B. C'est [Marie]$_F$ qui achète le journal au kiosque.

This structure is used by French speakers in 91.7% of identification focus utterances and 97.8% of corrective focus utterances. The few remaining utterances (8,3% for identification and 2,2% for correction) fall into the "na" category, i.e. they show no marked word order, as in the following example.

(20)
A. Qui achète le journal au kiosque?
B. [Marie]$_F$ achète le journal au kiosque.

We illustrate in the chart below (Fig. 4.4) the results for another syntactic component, direct objects.

First of all, we see that the number of occurrences of it-cleft sentences is substantially lower, if compared to the case of subjects. However, the strategy is still quite frequent: 15,6% of cases for identification, and 12,5% for correction, with realisations similar to example (21).

Figure 4.4 - *Non-canonical structures used for object focus (FRL1 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
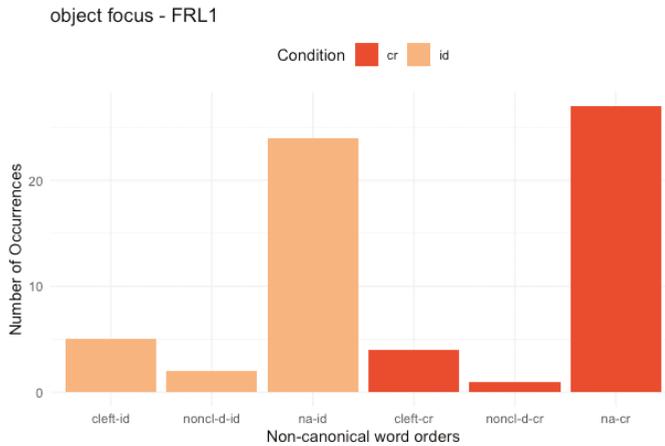
(21)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie donne à son frère?
B. C'est [un journal]$_F$ que Marie donne à son frère.

Unlike the marking of the subject, which was expressed in only two possible structures, here we also observe a third possibility: a few cases (3 for identification and 1 for correction) of displacement without anaphoric anticipation or resolution, i.e., those orders that are labeled in our coding system as "noncl-d". Below we illustrate three examples, taken from our dataset, respectively for the "noncl-d" (ex. 22), "na" (ex. 23), and "obj-sep" (ex. 24) categories.

(22)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie achète au kiosque?
B. Au kiosque Marie achète [le journal]$_F$.

(23)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie achète au kiosque?
B. Marie achète [le journal]$_F$ au kiosque.

(24)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie donne à son frère?
B. Marie donne à son frère [le journal]$_F$.

In cases (22) and (24), the result of the movement is to leave the focused object as the only constituent in utterance-final position. Interestingly, this is essentially a symmetric strategy to that of the cleft, which instead moves the object "to the left", thus to utterance-initial position. In contrast to what happened with subjects, utterances with canonical order (syntactically unmarked) constitute the vast majority of the total here (75% for identification and 84.4% for correction).

Figure 4.5 - *Non-canonical structures used for indirect object focus (FRL1 group)*
across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)
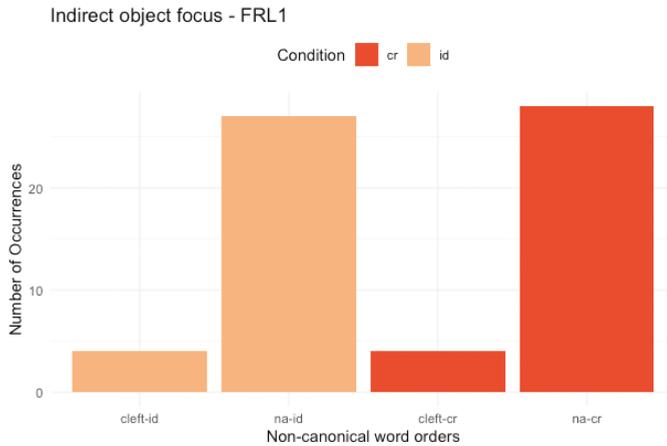
We move now to indirect (prepositional) objects. The results for this syntactic constituent are shown in Fig. 4.5.

For this constituent type, we observe a two-category system similar to what we observed for subjects, but with different proportions. The only non-canonical construction employed by French speakers is, in fact, the it-cleft, which appears in 6 out of 32 cases (18.8%) for the identification condition and 4 out of 32 cases (12.5%) in the correction condition. We provide examples of it-clefts in the two different conditions in (25) and (26).

(25)
A. À qui Marie donne-t-elle le journal?
B. C'est [à son frère]$_F$ que Marie donne le journal.

(26)
A. Jules a téléphoné à Christine, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non, c'est [à Emilie]$_F$ que Jules a téléphoné.

As was the case with direct objects, "na" (unmarked) sentences represent the majority of the cases; we provide an example of this configuration in (27).

(27)
A. Jules a téléphoné à Christine, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non, Jules a téléphoné [à Emilie]$_F$.

We move now to the final category of constituents, namely adverbial phrases, i.e. those components that provide additional information but do not affect the verb's valency. In the following plot (Fig. 4.6) we show the situation for French speakers.

Figure 4.6 - *Non-canonical structures used for adverbial focus (FRL1 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
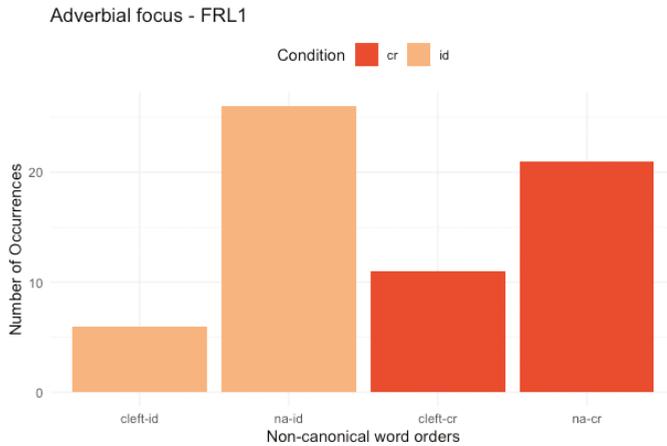
Once again, we are faced with two possibilities: it-cleft structure or unmarked word order in which adverbials are placed at the end of the utterance. Cleft structures represent 18,8% of cases for identification focus and 34,4% for correction focus, while the "unmarked" category (with adverbials in final position) includes the rest of the realisations.

(25)
A. À quelle heure Jules a invité à dîner Émilie?
B. C'est [à neuf heures]$_F$ que Jules a invité à dîner Émilie.

(26)
A. À quelle heure Jules a invité à dîner Émilie?
B. Non, c'est [à neuf heures]$_F$ que Jules a invité à dîner Émilie.

The observation of these data makes it quite clear that, as far as word order and the use of non-canonical structures are concerned, it-clefts are the main – and practically only – means for the expression of focus. This is confirmed by the very small presence of other marked word orders: 4 cases out of a dataset of 461 utterances. While it-clefts are consistently the most frequently used marked structure, the ratio of cleft to syntactically unmarked utterances varies significantly depending on the type of focused constituent. The situation for subjects differs from that of direct and indirect objects, with adverbials falling somewhere in between – closer to objects than to subjects. Moreover, the use of marked structures or word orders does not seem to be influenced by the degree of contrast: in most cases, there is no significant difference in frequency between identification focus and correction focus. The only case in which there seems to be a differentiation between focus subtypes is that of adverbial phrases (see Fig. 4.6). We will discuss all these aspects in more detail in § 4.1.4, after having illustrated the overall results for the native Italian group.

4.1.2 L1 Italian

In the following chart, Fig. 4.7, we show the non-canonical structures used to mark subject focus by the Italian native speakers.

Figure 4.7 - *Non-canonical structures used for subject focus (ITL1 group)*
across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)
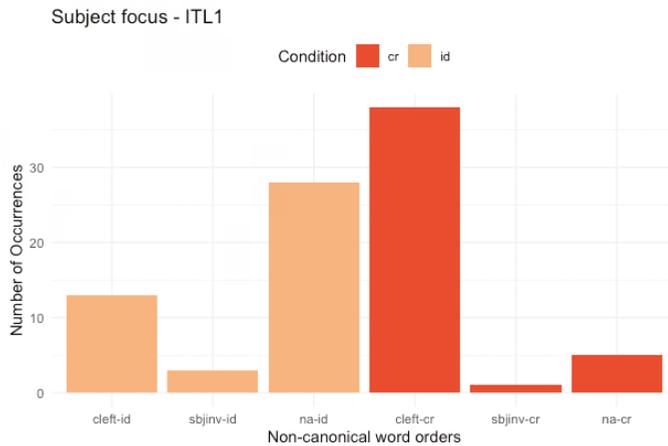
On first observation, we see that the vast majority of utterances fall into a category between cleft and syntactically unmarked, respectively illustrated in examples (28) and (29).

(28)
A. Giulia ha dato il giornale al fratello, no?
B. No, è [Maria]$_F$ che dà il giornale a suo fratello.

(29)
A. Chi compra il giornale in edicola?
B. [Maria]$_F$ sta comprando il giornale.

There are also 3 occurrences of postverbal subjects (with left dislocation of objects), all in the identification-focus condition. We give an example in (30).

(30)
A. Chi compra il giornale in edicola?
B. Il giornale lo compra [Maria]$_F$.

Another interesting observation prompted by this count is the complementarity between it-clefts and unmarked utterances in the identification vs. correction condition. Conversely, occurrences of postverbal subjects show no significant difference between the two conditions. For identification focus, there are a few occurrences of it-clefts and a majority of unmarked utterances; in the correction condition, the situation is reversed, with the majority of utterances featuring an it-cleft structure, and the remaining responses being unmarked.

We now move to the results for direct object marking, shown in Fig. 4.8.

Figure 4.8 - *Non-canonical structures used for object focus (ITL1 group)*
across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)
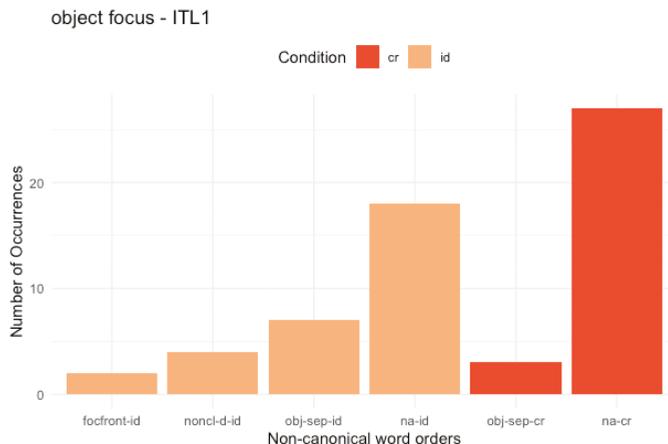
For this syntactic component, the vast majority of utterances produced by native Italian speakers show a canonical word order: 62,5% of identification-focus answers are syntactically unmarked; the percentage increases to 90,6% for correction focus. Interestingly, there is no occurrence of it-cleft structures for object-focus marking. Instead, the few instances of non-canonical structures observed for direct-object marking consist of 2 cases of focus fronting with subject post-position (6,3% of identification focus utterances, ex. (31) and 13 cases of non-clitic displacements (31,3% of identification focus utterances and 9,4% of correction focus utterances, ex. (32). Within these 13 cases, the majority is represented by object separations (*obj-sep*), where the direct object is placed apart from the verb by another intervening phrase, such as an indirect object or an adverbial (ex. 33).

(31)
A. Che cosa compra Maria in edicola?
B. [Il giornale]$_F$ compra Maria.

(32)
A. Che cosa compra Maria in edicola?
B. Maria in edicola compra [il giornale]$_F$.

(33)
A. Che cosa dà Maria a suo fratello?
B. Maria dà a suo fratello [il giornale]$_F$.

Let's now consider indirect objects. The results for this syntactic constituent are shown in Fig. 4.9.

Figure 4.9 - *Non-canonical structures used for indirect object focus (ITL1 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
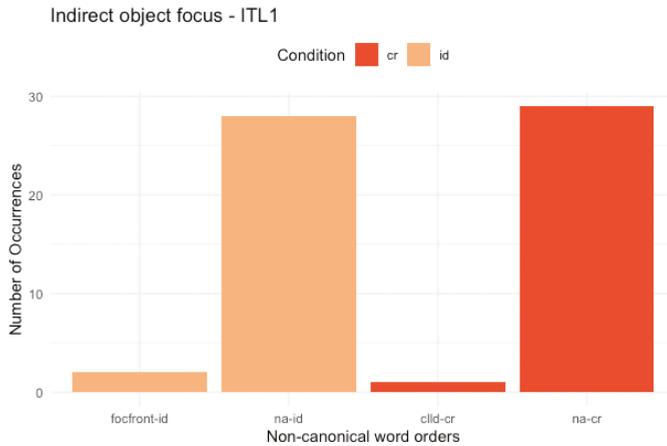
The typical response for this constituent is syntactically unmarked, as in example (34). Canonical word orders make up the 87,5% of cases for identification focus (28 out of 32), and 96,9% of cases of correction focus (31 out of 32).

(34)
A. A chi dà il giornale Maria?
B. Maria dà il giornale [a suo fratello]$_F$.

There are, still, a few exceptions: 3 cases of focus fronting in the identification context, and 1 case of clitic left dislocation in the corrective-focus context. We report one example of each in (35) and (36):

(35)
A. A chi dà il giornale Maria?
B. [A suo fratello]$_F$ dà il giornale Maria.

(36)
A. Maria dà il giornale al fratello di Giulia, no?
B. No, il giornale lo dà [a suo fratello]$_F$.

We now observe the results for the last type of target constituent, namely adverbial phrases. In the following plot (Fig. 4.10) we show the situation for native Italian speakers.

Figure 4.10 - *Non-canonical structures used for adverbial focus (ITL1 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
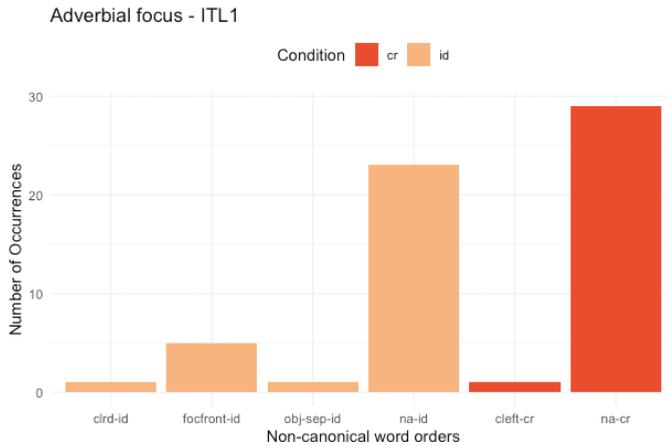
Again, the typical response for this constituent is a syntactically unmarked utterance, as the one reported in example (37):

(37)
A. Dove compra il giornale Maria?
B. Maria compra il giornale [in edicola]$_F$.

This type of answer constitutes 75% of the total for the identification-focus condition and 96,9% of total for the correction-focus condition. The few remaining cases include two occurrences of clitic right dislocation with subject postposition – one for identification and the other for correction (see ex. 38). Additionally, there are five cases of focus fronting, all observed in the identification condition (see ex. 39), and two cases involving object separation. Both instances of this construction are found in the identification-focus context (see ex. 40).

(38)
A. Dove compra il giornale Maria?
B. Lo compra [in edicola]$_F$.

(39)
A. Dove compra il giornale Maria?
B. [In edicola]$_F$ Maria compra il giornale.

(40)
A. A che ora Aurora ha invitato a cena Emilia?
B. Aurora ha invitato a cena [alle nove]$_F$ Emilia.

Observation of the Italian data shows a more varied picture than the French data. The first consideration to be made is that there is a clear distinction in marking strategies for subjects on the one hand, and for all other constituents on the other. In the case of subjects, cleft structures represent the main strategy speakers rely on,

and this is particularly true for corrective focus contexts. When we turn to the other target constituents, instead, we see that instances of marked word orders never reach a significant percentage, and the vast majority of responses are uttered in canonical order. This certainly suggests that the point to look at might be another, namely that of prosodic marking: once again, we refer to Chapter 5 for a more in-depth examination of this aspect. Another noteworthy characteristic we wish to emphasize is the consistent differentiation made by Italian speakers between identification and correction focus. This differentiation is evident in both the use of distinct arrays of constructions for each case, and the frequency of these constructions in the two specific contexts. Specifically, speakers employ a wider range of word order displacements for identification, while they especially use it-clefts for correction. Even if one of the word orders is used in both one situation and the other, however, it is exploited with a different frequency.

4.1.3 Interlinguistic comparison: native groups

Building on the previous analysis of sentence structures in French and Italian, we attempt to provide an overall view of word order-related patterns of narrow focus marking for the two L1s. The following charts show the different strategies used to mark narrow focus (identification and correction) in French (Fig. 4.11) and Italian (Fig. 4.12).

Figure 4.11 - *Proportion of word orders used for NF marking in French L1 (all target constituents mixed)*
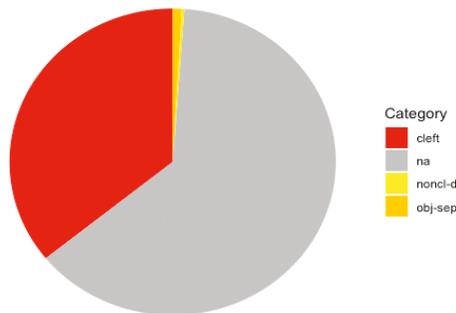
It becomes evident that, while French exhibits a decisive prevalence of cleft sentences, Italian offers a diverse array of possibilities for focus marking. In this group's production, in fact, we observe occurrences of many non-canonical structures: clitic and non-clitic displacements, object separation, fronting, subject inversion (we remind to Tab. 5 for examples of these constructions).

Figure 4.12 - *Proportion of word orders used for NF marking in Italian L1*
(all target constituents mixed)
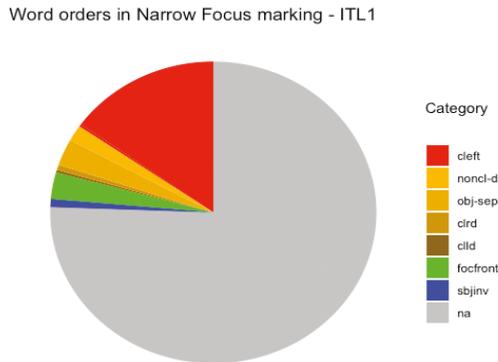
These results reflect trends already described and observed in previous studies, and thus match the descriptions found in the literature (see § 1.2). Despite this diversity, however, the overall presence of marked word orders is lower in Italian than in French, indicating a potential predominance of *in-situ* prosodic marking; we refer once again to Chapter 5 for a discussion of this aspect.

Amid these observations, we deem it necessary to devote a more in-depth description to the structure that stood out most in terms of both frequency and behaviour in the two native groups, namely the it-cleft sentence. The upcoming paragraphs will thus focus on the specific analysis of it-cleft sentences, with the aim of shedding light on their function and properties in the productions of the two native groups.

4.1.4 Cleft structures in the native groups

The definition of cleft sentences and their function has been provided in § 1.2.2. Given their prominent role in expressing focus, notably in Romance languages (see Roggia, 2008 for an overview), and their prominent frequency within our corpus, we opted to dedicate a comprehensive section to their analysis.

Upon initial observation of the data, it became evident that speakers across all groups frequently utilized this construction to articulate their responses in the task. A detailed analysis of the speakers' responses corroborated the observation that the most prevalent marked order in narrow focus situations is, indeed, the cleft sentence.

An equally evident aspect, however, was that the frequency of clefts was sharply different between the two native groups, and that their context of occurrence was constrained by both syntactic and information-structural parameters. For the analysis, we considered all the sentences that matched the

it-cleft prototype[3]. We excluded utterances featuring only the copula without relative phrase (such as "C'est Marie.", or "È Maria.").

As we can see from the charts in Fig. 4.11 and Fig. 4.12, cleft sentences are far more frequent in the French group than in the Italian one (35,2% against 15,3%). This result comes as no surprise, as several studies had already reported similar percentages (Roggia, 2008; Dufter, 2009; De Cesare, Garassino, Agar Marco, Albom & Cimmino, 2016). This difference between Italian and French is not the only sharp tendency emerging from the data: another important asymmetry is that observed between the different syntactic roles of the focus constituents. In both groups, in fact, the percentage of cleft sentences is considerably higher when the focus constituent is a subject (93,6% in French and 55,2% in Italian), compared to the other syntactic types (18,3% in French and 0,5% in Italian for all the other types of target constituent). We can observe this in the next chart, Fig. 4.13.

Figure 4.13 - *Proportion of it-cleft structures produced by the two native groups in narrow-focus context, by role of target constituent*
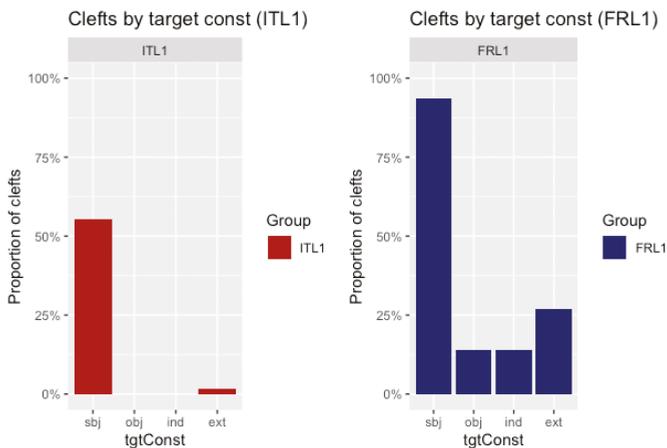
This asymmetry in frequency is also not surprising, and had already been reported in numerous studies, such as Roggia (2008). Attempts to explain this phenomenon have been made from both functionalist (De Cesare *et al.* 2016) and syntactical (Friedmann, Belletti & Rizzi, 2009) perspectives. Functionally, subjects may require more prominent marking than other syntactic elements. This is because, by default, they occupy the initial position within the utterance, which, according to communicative principles, is typically reserved for topics (Givón, 1989). Thus, a more explicit and salient signalling may be necessary

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[3] Our corpus also includes one instance of pseudo-cleft sentence (uttered by a native French speaker) and a few instances of presentational clefts. However, both categories are only observed in broad focus contexts, and are therefore excluded from the forthcoming analysis, that deals specifically with narrow-focus marking.

for non-final *foci*. Within the generative framework, the interpretation suggests that the crucial distinction lies in the varying levels of syntactic complexity between subject and non-subject cleft constructions. This dissimilarity influences the production and frequency of subjects vs non-subject clefts, as well as the speed of their processing in perception. Notably, a quantitative corpus analysis conducted by Samo & Merlo (2021) reveals a similar pattern to what we observe in our French data for adverbial it-clefts: they are less frequent than subjects, but significantly more frequent than objects.

Another element we would like to comment on is the effect of contrast on it-clefts frequency, since it is linked to considerable differences in the behaviour of speakers of the two native groups. In the Italian group, the two types of focus imply a significant difference in it-clefts frequency: the less contrastive function, i.e. identification focus, implies a lower frequency of clefts than the more contrastive function, i.e. correction focus. The different degree of contrast, on the other hand, does not seem to have an effect in French: it-cleft sentences represent the default strategy for both focus types. We show this asymmetry, with all constituent types mixed, in Fig. 4.14.

Figure 4.14 - *It-cleft structures produced by the two native groups in the two different contexts: correction and identification (all target constituents)*
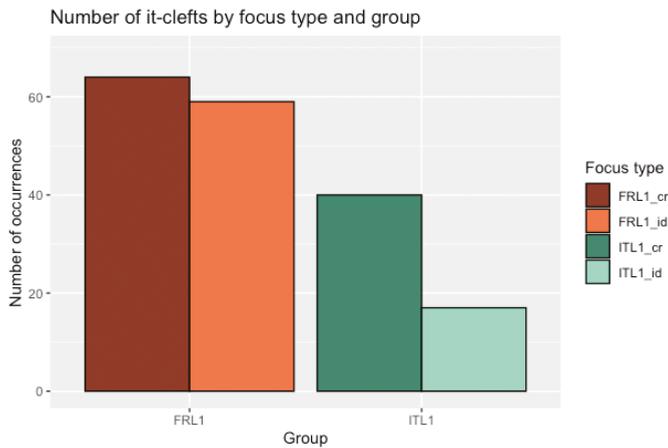
A *caveat* exists in this representation because, as our observations indicate (see Fig. 4.13), the number of clefts produced by speakers for each type of syntactic role can vary significantly. This variation has implications for the emergence of this information-structural distinction. While differences related to the level of contrast are easily observable for the subject component, in fact, the phenomenon might be more challenging to discern for other roles. This is especially true given the much lower absolute frequency of it-clefts for these roles.

In an attempt to disentangle these factors, in the next lines we will show and comment the number of it-clefts produced in the two narrow-focus conditions for each one of the different target constituents tested. We start from showing the results for subjects, in Fig. 4.15.

Figure 4.15 - *It-cleft structures produced by each speaker of the two native groups (subjects)*
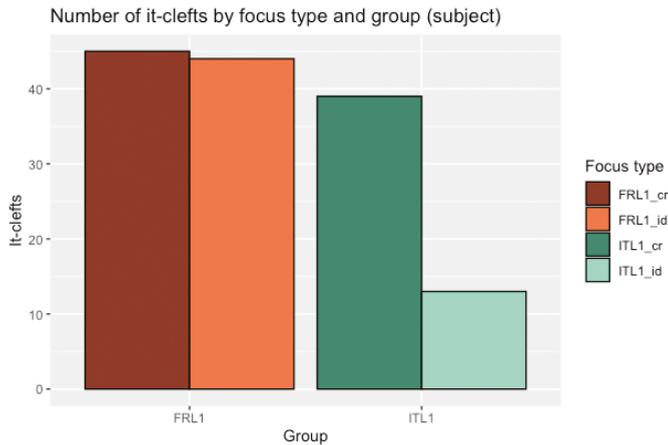
As we can see, the results are quite different between the two groups in this case. In the first context, that of identification focus on the subject, the French speakers produce 92% of cleft structures, whereas the Italian speakers produce 7 out of 27 (26%). In the context of corrective focus on the subject, in fact, the proportion of cleft structures produced by the speakers is similar in the two groups: the FRL1 speakers produce 100% cleft structures, the ITL1 speakers produce 89%. The effect of the focus type is evident for Italian, but not for French. However, it is worth pointing out that for French there could also be a "ceiling effect", since the percentage of cleft is already very high for the identification condition (91,7%). It might be useful, for this effect, to supplement with information on another syntactic components, namely objects and adverbials.

In Fig. 4.16 we can see the percentage of clefts produced for focused objects[4]. As in the previous case, the two narrow-focus conditions are shown, *id* and *cr*.

_____
[4] Since we have seen (cf. Fig. 4.13) that direct and indirect objects behave in the same way with regard to it-clefts, we will consider them in the same calculation.

Figure 4.16 - *It-cleft structures produced by each speaker of the two native groups (objects)*

Number of it-clefts by focus type and group (object)
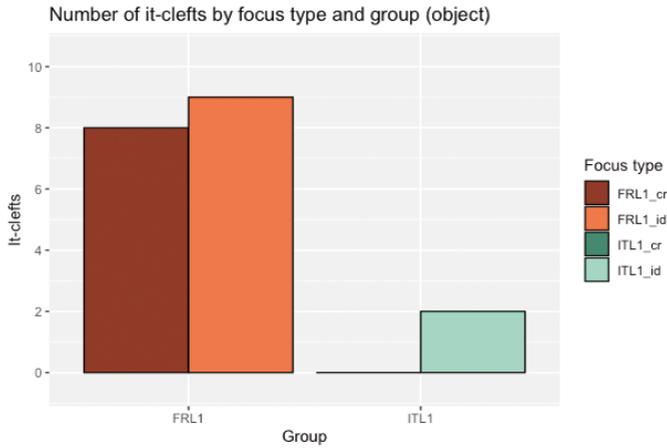
We see that the focus type doesn't have a significant effect on the use of it-cleft structures in the French group (p= 0.7731). On the other hand, it is difficult to say whether the effect is present for object focus in Italian: ITL1 speakers do not produce it-clefts at all for this target constituent. We provide below some examples of typical utterances for the two groups in the two focus conditions, identification and correction focus in Italian (ex. 41 and 42) and French (ex. 43 and 44).

(41)
A. Che cosa compra Maria in edicola?
B. Maria compra [un giornale]$_F$ in edicola.

(42)
A. Maria compra una rivista di cruciverba, giusto?
B. No, Maria compra [un giornale]$_F$ in edicola.

(43)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie achète au kiosque?
B. C'est [un journal]$_F$ que Marie achète au kiosque.

(44)
A. Marie achète des mots-croisés, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non, c'est [un journal]$_F$ que Marie achète au kiosque.

We now move to the third category of syntactic constituent, which seems to behave differently from both subjects and (direct / indirect) objects: adverbials. The results are shown in Fig. 4.17.

Figure 4.17 - *It-cleft structures produced by each speaker of the two native groups (adverbials)*
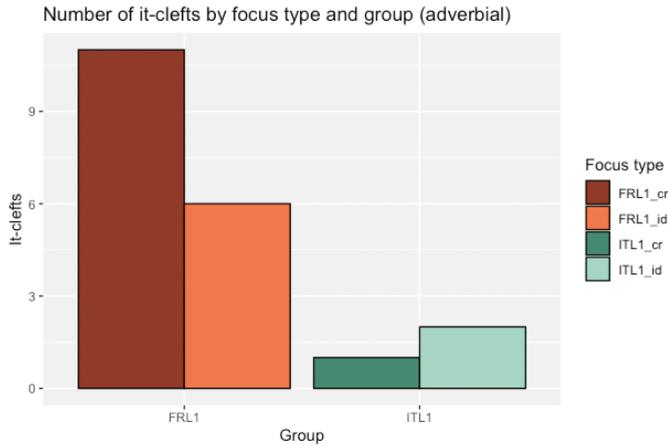
Again, the difference between the two focus subtypes is not significant in French (*p*=0.1724): the lack of statistical significance could also be due to the very low overall number of occurrences of clefts, and high inter-individual variability. The difference between identification and correction, in fact, is not stable across participants: it is pronounced in a few cases, but absent in most others. Similar to the case for objects, it is challenging to determine whether the effect is present in Italian, as there is only one occurrence of it-cleft sentence uttered in a corrective context.

Considering these results, it is quite clear that the two parameters – syntactic role of the target constituent and type of focus – interact differently across groups. While syntactic role exerts a broadly similar effect, the contrast between Identification and Correction seems to be relevant only in Italian, and specifically only for subjects. To assess the effects of focus type and syntactic role on cleft production, we fitted a bias-reduced logistic regression model (brglm2; Kosmidis, 2021) to the Italian L1 data, with predictors focus (Identification vs. Correction), role (Subject vs. Non-subject), and their interaction[5]. The model (Table 6) revealed a significant Correction × Subject interaction (Estimate = 5.69, SE = 2.23, z = 2.55, p = .011),

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[5] Our choice in the revised version of the manuscript was, as kindly suggested by the reviewers, a mixed-effects logistic regression, in order to account for random effects and avoid inflation of error rates. We did attempt this approach, fitting GLMMs with random intercepts for participants and items. However, due to the categorical nature of the data – specifically, near-systematic clefting of subjects in some groups and conditions – the models systematically failed to converge or produced degenerate Hessians. These convergence issues are not a statistical artifact but reflect strong structural asymmetries in the linguistic system under study (e.g., categorical subject clefting in French). To resolve this problem while still following a regression-based approach, we adopted bias-reduced logistic regression. This method provides stable estimates and valid significance tests even in the presence of separation, and thus offers a principled compromise between the reviewers' request for regression modeling and the structural distribution of the data.

indicating that clefting is particularly promoted when subjects are corrected. No other main effects or interactions reached significance.

These results suggest that for Italian natives, clefting is primarily conditioned by the syntactic role of the constituent, and is enhanced in corrective-focus contexts when the target constituent is a subject. Raw numbers for Italian native speakers are reported in Table 6.

Table 6 - *Regression results for group ITL1*

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
(Intercept: BF non-sbj)	-5.118	1.427	-3.587	< .001 ***
Focus: ID vs BF	-0.091	2.017	-0.045	0.964
Focus: CR vs BF	1.029	1.650	0.624	0.533
Role: sbj vs non-sbj	0.373	2.022	0.184	0.854
ID × Role	3.958	2.496	1.586	0.113
CR × Role	5.687	2.233	2.547	0.011 *

To probe our results more directly, we also tested pairwise contrasts with *emmeans* (Holm-adjusted). These showed that for subjects, clefting rates were dramatically higher in Correction than in Identification (CR > ID, odds ratio ≈ 17.3, p < .0001). For non-subjects, instead, no reliable CR–ID difference was found (p = 1.00). Thus, while the global model interaction flagged the pattern, the planned contrasts confirm that the difference is driven specifically by subject clefting in Correction contexts.

For French natives (FRL1), clefting of subjects is near-categorical descriptively (Identification: 94%; Correction: 100%). To verify statistically, we fitted the same bias-reduced logistic regression model, with predictors focus, role, and their interaction. The model (Table 7) revealed significant effects of both focus and role, as well as significant Focus × Role interactions: clefting of subjects was strongly favored in both Identification and Correction relative to baseline, while non-subjects did not show the same behavior.

Table 7 - *Regression results for group FRL1*

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
(Intercept: BF non-sbj)	-3.578	0.645	-5.549	< .001 ***
Focus: ID vs BF	1.931	0.703	2.748	.006 **
Focus: CR vs BF	2.211	0.693	3.189	.001 **
Role: sbj vs non-sbj	1.180	0.786	1.502	.133
ID × Role	3.010	1.005	2.996	.003 **
CR × Role	4.698	1.658	2.833	.001 **

Crucially, the direct pairwise contrasts reveal that for subjects, clefting rates did not differ significantly between Identification and Correction (p = .20), confirming that subject clefting is essentially categorical across focus conditions. For non-subjects, no ID–CR difference was observed either (p = .46). Thus, the statistical model confirms the descriptive picture: French natives cleft subjects systematically, irrespective of whether the function of focus is identification or correction.

Although it does not directly fit into the patterns and hypotheses about focus and contrast that we are interested in, we find it noteworthy that French shows a few instances of it-cleft sentences even in broad-focus contexts, as in example (45). While the phenomenon is rare (only four cases out of 185 broad-focus utterances), it is interesting as a functional extension not attested in Italian.

(45)
A. Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe ici?
B. C'est Marie qui est en train d'acheter un journal.

4.2 *L2 Italian and L2 French*

As we have been able to observe, the speakers of the two native groups adopt partly similar, partly different strategies to highlight focus constituents through word order and syntax. First of all, we observe that it-clefts are the most common syntactic configuration for focus constituents, in both French and Italian. Besides this, native speakers of Italian present a more variegated range of configurations, whereas the French rely almost exclusively on it-clefts, with the exception of two *obj-sep* and one *noncl-d* constructions. By narrowing our view on the use of it-clefts, then, we were able to observe that the frequency of this specific construction depends on different combinations of factors in the two language groups. In French, the likeliness of use for it-clefts is determined by the role of the focused constituent (subject or non-subject); in Italian, it is determined by both the syntactic role of the focused constituent and the focus type (identification or correction).

Having highlighted both the commonalities and the significant points of divergence between the two native groups, the question arises regarding how learners will respond to these factors. Following the methodology applied in the analysis of native groups, we will now outline the examination of diverse word order patterns used to express identification and correction focus within the non-native groups, with the aim to provide an overview of the strategies employed by L2 speakers.

4.2.1 Marked word orders in the non-native groups: L2 French

The analysis will begin with the FRL2 group, comprising Italian learners of L2 French, and subsequently, we will explore the ITL2 counterpart, consisting of French learners of L2 Italian.

In the following chart, Fig. 4.18, we show the range of non-canonical structures used for subject focus, identification and correction.

Figure 4.18 - *Non-canonical structures used for subject focus (FRL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
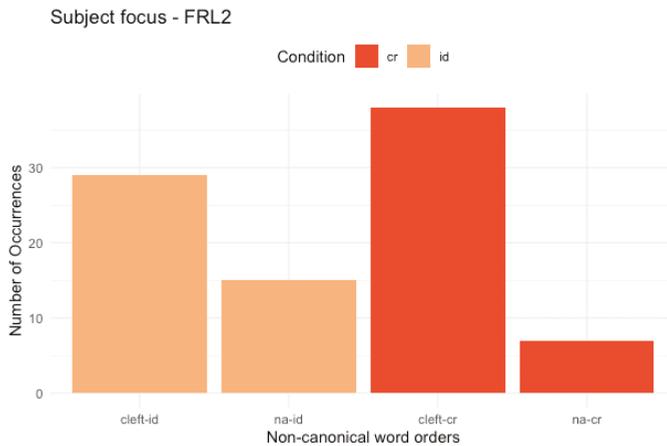
As shown in the chart, the only marked order attested for subject focus marking is the it-cleft structure, of which we provide an example in (46).

(46)
A. Qui achète le journal au kiosque?
B. C'est [Marie]$_F$ qui achète le journal au kiosque.

In this sense, the behaviour of the French L2 speakers seems rather target-like: clefts represent the only possible marking strategy for subjects; there are no occurrences of postverbal subjects, a structure that instead appears, albeit rarely, in Italian L1. Some differences from the native speakers of French, however, are noticeable in terms of frequency and functional differentiation of the clefts; for these considerations we refer to the more detailed discussion that we are going to tackle in § 4.2.3.

We now move to the non-canonical word orders used to mark object focus in non-native French; results are shown in Fig. 4.19.

Figure 4.19 - *Non-canonical structures used for object focus (FRL2 group)*
across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)

object focus - FRL2

Condition ■ cr   ■ id
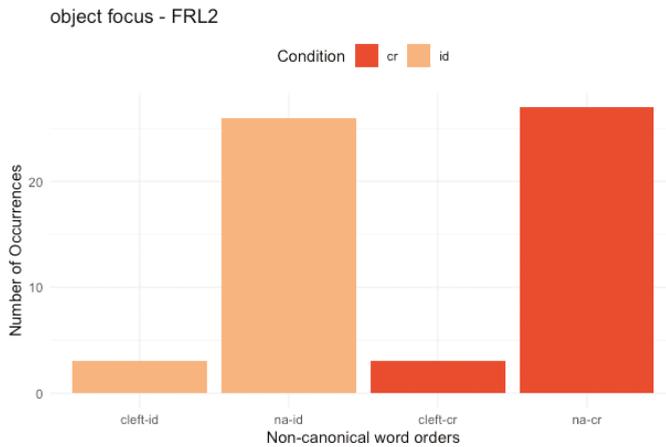
As we can see in the chart, the vast majority of utterances are syntactically unmarked. There are a few instances of it-cleft sentences (2 for identification and 1 for correction, all produced by the same speaker), and a few *obj-sep*; we give an example of each of these two non-canonical orders in examples 47 and 48, respectively.

(47)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie donne à son frère?
B. C'est [le journal]$_F$ que Marie donne à son frère.

(48)
A. Qu'est-ce que Marie donne à son frère?
B. Marie donne à son frère [un journal]$_F$.

If we compare these results to those of the target language (Fig. 4.4), we immediately see that the *obj-sep* order is never attested in the production of French native speakers. Instead, *obj-sep* is a possibility for object focus marking in Italian L1 (see Fig. 4.8): in ITL1 group's productions, the structure occurs several times (14% of cases). For this reason, we could interpret the presence of this construction as an instance of L1 influence.

As for it-clefts, even if they are quite frequent, the number of occurrences in the FRL2 group is much lower compared to what has been observed for native French; we will discuss this thoroughly in the section dedicated to the use of this structure in non-native groups.

Figure 4.20 - *Non-canonical structures used for indirect object focus (FRL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
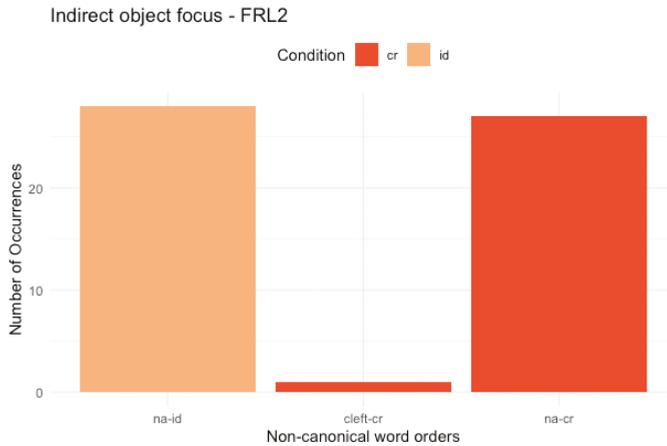
We now move to indirect object focus; the results are shown in Fig. 4.20.

Again, the repertoire of strategies is minimal: the only non-canonical order attested in this context is the it-cleft sentence. This structure recurs 4 times, twice for identification and twice for correction, and all realisations are by a single speaker (the same one who produced the 3 clefts for direct object marking, cf. Fig. 4.19). We provide an example of this structure in context in (49).

(49)
A. À qui Marie donne-t-elle le journal?
B. C'est [à son frère]$_F$ que Marie donne le journal.

These results point to a divergence from the pattern of the speakers' L1, and a partial approximation to the behaviour of the FRL1 group (see Fig. 4.5); there is, however, a divergence from both native Italian and French in the overall frequency of it-clefts, which we will discuss in the dedicated section. As far as the comparison with the ITL1 group is concerned, we notice that the repertoire of strategies is quite different: the group of native Italian speakers showed several occurrences of fronting and clitic dislocations (see Fig. 4.9); clefts, on the other hand, were completely absent.

To conclude this subsection, we show the results for adverbial focus. As shown in the chart, Fig. 4.21, Italian learners of FRL2 produced some instances of it-cleft sentence (2 for identification and 4 for correction; this time uttered by four different speakers) and one focus fronting. We give examples of these two structures in (50) and (51).

Figure 4.21 - *Non-canonical structures used for adverbial focus (FRL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
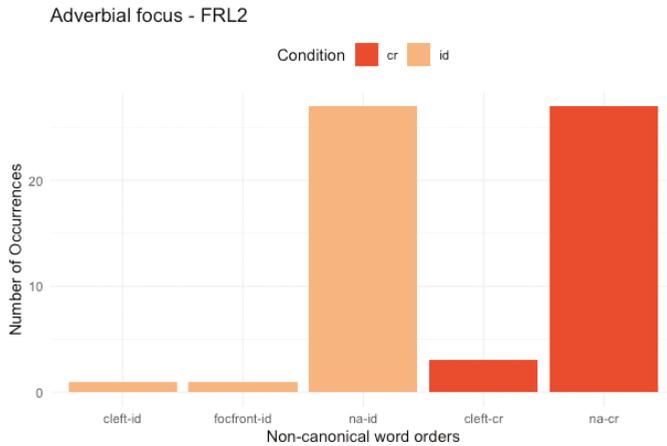
(50)
A. Jules a invité Émilie à sept heures, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non pas du tout, c'est [à neuf heures]$_F$ que Jules a invité Émilie.

(51)
A. Où est-ce que Marie achète le journal?
B. Au [kiosque]$_F$ Marie achète le journal.

Overall, these results show an approximation, albeit partial, to the French target: in fact, learners produce cleft sentences even though they are not part of the repertoire of native Italian for this constituent type (cf. Fig. 4.10). Nonetheless, the frequency of these structures is low, and does not match the levels of native French group (cf. Fig. 4.6); we will deal in further detail with the difference between identification and correction in § 4.2.3. Compared to the source L1 of the speakers, it is quite evident that the repertoire of solutions has shrunk: among all the strategies observed in the native Italian group, only focus fronting is used here, and not frequently; all other types of word order manipulations, with and without clitics, are not attested.

To sum up, we show in Fig. 4.22 a representation of all the possible strategies used by FRL2 speakers to mark narrow focus – all constituents and focus types mixed.

Figure 4.22 - *Word orders used to mark narrow focus (all constituents mixed)*
by FRL2 speakers
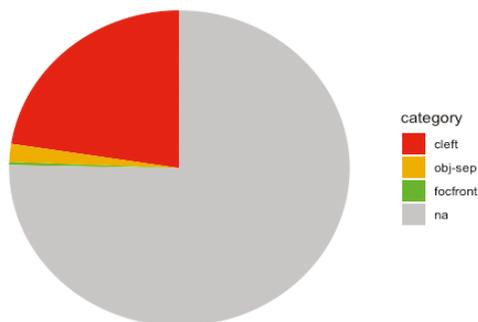
We observe that the chart exhibits similarities with both French L1 (Fig. 4.11) and Italian L1 (Fig. 4.12). While the overall repertoire of strategies is more extensive compared to the target language, it is less extensive when compared to the L1. There are some instances of word order manipulations, but the majority of marked structures is represented by it-clefts; this constitutes a similarity to the L2, and an approximation to the target language. However, in comparison to the native French group, the frequency of marked structures remains lower: the proportion of canonical and non-canonical sentences is more similar to that of the ITL1 group than the FRL1 group. The number of occurrences of object separation and fronting, anyway, is lower than in the ITL1 group, demonstrating that learners have grasped that French is less prone than Italian in making use of these constructions.

The responsibility for the overall lower proportion of marked structures seems to lie in the limited number of it-cleft sentences, not compensated for by a broader range of marked structures and non-canonical word orders. Consequently, compared to the target language group, a higher number of focus phrases are not marked at all at the word order level. Two possible explanations emerge: first, learners might not have mastered it-clefts sufficiently to use them confidently and effectively for expressing information structure. The second possibility is that a less decisive role of syntax is compensated for by a preponderant use of prosody. We will deepen the analysis of this aspect in Chapter 6, following our observation and analysis of the prosodic phenomena in Chapter 5.

4.2.2 Marked word orders in the non-native groups: L2 Italian

We will now move to the results of the other L2 group, namely that of French learners of L2 Italian. As we did for the previous groups, we will start from the

observation of different word orders used to mark focused subjects. The results for this syntactic role are shown in Fig. 4.23.

Figure 4.23 - *Non-canonical structures used for subject focus (ITL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr))*
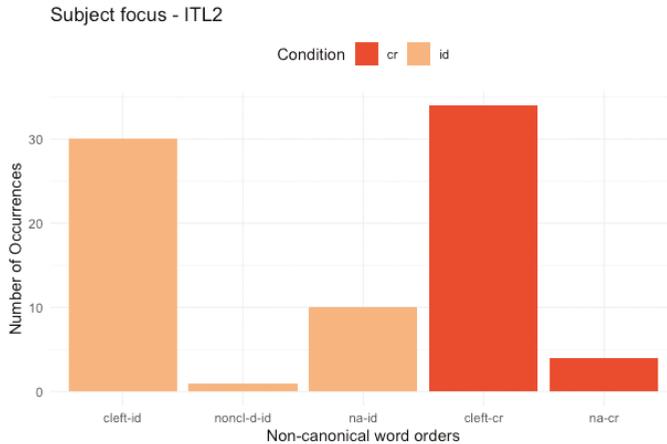
It-cleft structures clearly constitute the main strategy that ITL2 speakers use to highlight subject focus, 79,5% of cases for identification focus and 82,9% for correction. Apart from it-clefts, we observe one occurrence of non-clitic displacement; the few remaining utterances are syntactically unmarked. In (52) and (53) we provide examples of the two marked word orders.

(52)
A. Chi ha telefonato a Emilia?
B. È [Giulio]$_F$ che ha telefonato a Emilia.

(53)
A. Chi compra il giornale in edicola?
B. In edicola [Maria]$_F$ compra il giornale.

As for direct objects, the results are shown in Fig. 4.24. The picture here is quite different, since there is more variety in marked structures. We can observe two occurrences of it-cleft sentences (both in the correction context), two occurrences of object separation (one for identification and one for correction), and two occurrences of non-clitic displacement (both for identification). We provide examples of all these structures in (54), (55) and (56).

Figure 4.24 - *Non-canonical structures used for object focus (ITL2 group)*
across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)
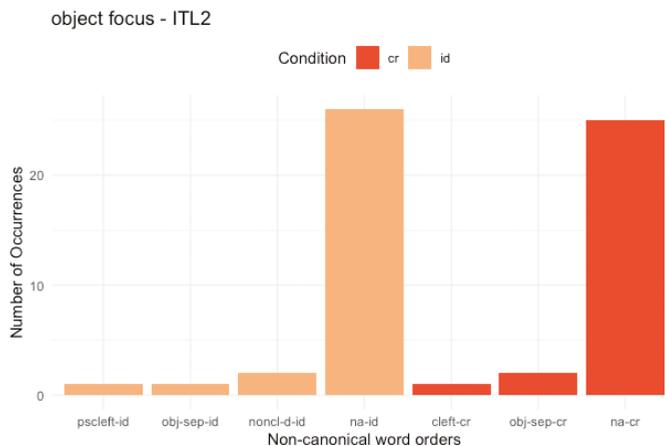
(54)
A. Maria dà a suo fratello una rivista di cruciverba, giusto?
B. No, non è una rivista di cruciverba, è [il giornale]$_F$ che Maria sta dando a suo
fratello.

(55)
A. Maria dà a suo fratello una rivista di cruciverba, giusto?
B. No, Maria dà a suo fratello [un giornale]$_F$

(56)
A. Che cosa dà Maria a suo fratello?
B. A suo fratello Maria dà [un giornale]$_F$

Interestingly, ITL2 speakers exhibit a distinct pattern of behaviour compared to
both the source language and the target language speakers. The majority of ITL2
answers, in fact, remain syntactically unmarked: 93.3% for identification and
73.3% for correction. Unlike native French speakers, who mostly rely on it-cleft
constructions, ITL2 learners don't adopt this strategy exclusively: utterances from
this group feature other constructions, such as object separation and non-clitic
displacements. However, the frequency of these word order configurations is not
comparable to that observed in the native Italian group.

Moving on to the expression of focus on indirect objects, the results are presented
in Fig. 4.25. Except for one occurrence of clitic left dislocation (see example (57),
the only instances of marked structures are it-cleft sentences (58).

Figure 4.25 - *Non-canonical structures used for indirect object focus (ITL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr)*
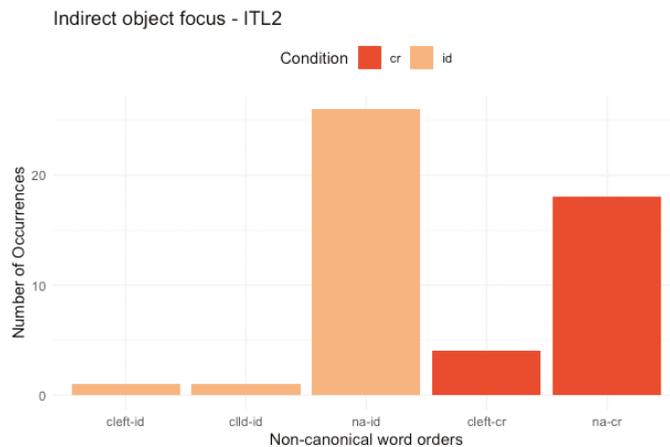
(57)
A. A chi dà il giornale Maria?
B. Il giornale lo dà [a suo fratello]$_F$.

(58)
A. Giulio ha telefonato a Cristina, giusto?
B. No, è [a Emilia]$_F$ che ha telefonato Giulio.

This behaviour certainly reminds of that of the native French speakers. In this case, however, we can observe a quite sharp differentiation between the two focus types, identification and correction, which is instead more typical of L1 Italian speakers: the amount of clefts rises considerably in the corrective context; consequently, syntactically unmarked sentences are less numerous in this condition.

We conclude this section with the analysis of adverbial focus in Italian L2; the results are as shown in Fig. 4.26. In this case again, the vast majority of answers is syntactically unmarked. We can observe 3 occurrences of it-cleft sentences (see ex. 59), one of clitic right dislocation (ex. 60) and one of focus fronting (ex. 61).

Figure 4.26 - *Non-canonical structures used for adverbial focus (ITL2 group) across the two narrow-focus conditions: identification (id) and correction (cr))*
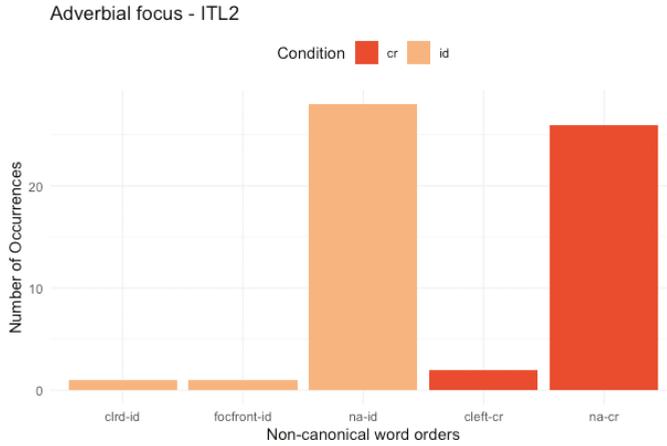
(59)
A. Giulio ha invitato Emilia a cena alle sette, giusto?
B. No, è [alle nove]$_F$ che Giulio l'ha invitato a cenare.

(60)
A. Dove compra il giornale Maria?
B. Lo compra [in edicola]$_F$ il giornale.

(61)
A. A che ora Giulio ha invitato a cena Emilia?
B.[A nuove]$_F$ Giulio ha invitato a cena Emilia.

As we did for the other three groups, we will now take a comprehensive look at the word order strategies used to mark narrow focus for Italian L2 speakers. The chart for Italian L2 is depicted in Fig. 4.27. The examination of this group reveals a more varied linguistic landscape compared to the speakers' native language, French L1, suggesting an approximation to the target language, Italian. However, it is noteworthy that in the Italian native group, ITL1, these diverse linguistic solutions not only appear sporadically, but occur rather frequently. In Italian L2, instead, they often constitute a "unicum", as it-cleft sentences remain the predominant structure.

When examining the chart depicting the word order strategies employed by Italian L2 learners (Fig. 4.27), notable similarities emerge with both French L1 (Fig. 4.11) and Italian L1 (Fig. 4.12). The overall frequency of marking through word order is lower if compared to the source language, and slightly higher if compared to the target. Italian L2 learners exhibit a wider repertoire of strategies; however, when the order is marked, it is almost exclusively done using it-clefts, resembling the pattern observed in their source language. This prompts a question: does the relatively low frequency of marking among Italian

L2 learners reflect a preference for prosodic marking, or does it only indicate potential challenges in managing non-canonical orders other than it-clefts, without compensation through prosody? Further exploration of these aspects are reserved for Chapter 6, following our examination and analysis of the prosodic features in Chapter 5.

4.2.3 Cleft sentences in the non-native groups

As we did for L1 groups, we are now interested in seeing whether the models we applied for French L1 (one factor) or Italian L1 (two factors) can be fit with L2 data. If we look more specifically at the difference between the two focus-conditions, identification and correction, we immediately see that the picture is different from that of the two source languages (Fig. 4.28).

Figure 4.27 - *Non-canonical word orders for narrow focus marking in L2 Italian (all target constituents)*
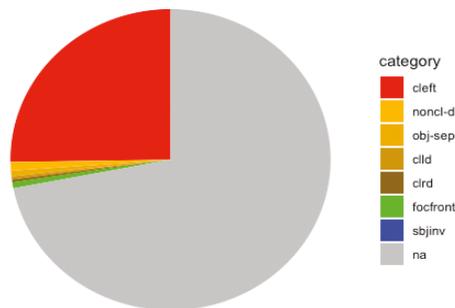
The results from the two L2 groups indeed show striking similarities, setting them apart from both L1 groups. Specifically, regarding the overall occurrence of clefts, French L2 and Italian L2 display noteworthy parallels, positioning them between the two L1 groups.

As for the functional differentiation, it was evident that French L1 and Italian L1 exhibited different behaviours; in the L2 groups, the two focus conditions seem distinguishable, albeit to a lesser extent compared to Italian L1. The following paragraphs will outline the outcomes of statistical tests conducted to ascertain the significance of these differences, focusing specifically on subject versus non-subject cases.

Figure 4.28 - *Count of it-cleft structures produced by the four groups, all types of constituents mixed*
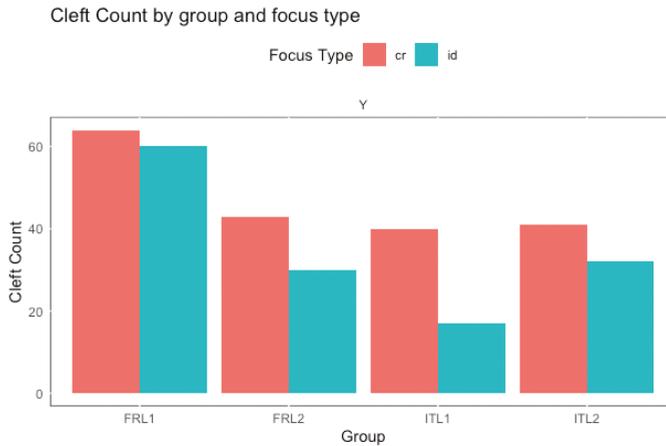
We begin our discussion observing the target constituent that had showed the most interesting results in the two source language groups, namely subjects (Fig. 4.29).

Figure 4.29 - *Count of it-cleft structures produced by the two L2 groups (target subjects)*
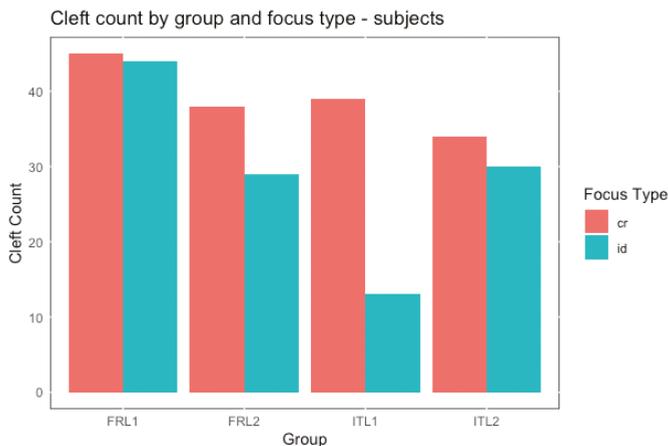
The insights drawn from the chart focusing on subjects echo those encompassing all constituents. Yet, the distinction between focus subtypes becomes more pronounced in this specific analysis. In terms of overall it-cleft usage, both the ITL2 and FRL2 groups find themselves positioned between the respective source and target language groups, indicating a convergence toward the target language, but also, potentially, signs of influence from the L1. Specifically, Italian learners of French L2 exhibit a higher frequency of it-clefts than native Italian speakers, while French learners of L2 Italian use the structure less extensively than native French speakers. However, L1 influence seems to manifest on the functional level, i.e. in the

treatment of the two focus types. Italian learners of French L2 appear to distinguish between identification and correction (even if in a less clear manner than ITL1); conversely, French learners of L2 Italian do not exhibit such a sharp differentiation.

We move to the observation of clefted direct and indirect objects (Fig. 4.30). We decided to group the two categories together, as we did for L1s, since we have noticed that the behaviour of direct and indirect objects is similar, at least for what concerns it-clefts (see Fig. 4.19, 4.20, 4.24 and 4.25).

Figure 4.30 - *It-cleft structures produced by the two L2 groups for objects (direct and indirect)*
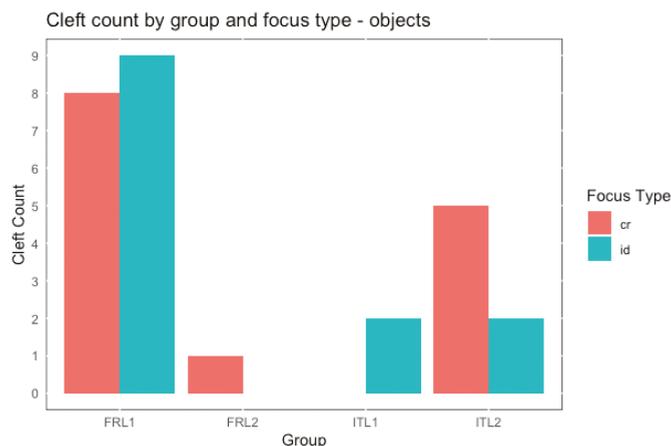
In the case of this specific target constituent, notable differences emerge between the L2 groups. Specifically, only French learners of L2 Italian demonstrate a productive use of it-clefts. In the FRL2 group, on the other hand, there is only one occurrence of this construction, rendering any consideration on functional role impossible. However, insights can be gained from the ITL2 group. For this syntactic constituent, the speakers exhibit signs of L1 influence, evident in their use of clefts to mark narrow focus – a practice not typical for native Italian speakers. Notably, ITL2 speakers shows a partial approximation to the target, as they appear to distinguish between the two focus subtypes. Correction focus, in particular, prompts a higher frequency of it-cleft constructions; in fact, the difference between "id"and "cr" for Italian L2 nears statistical significance (p=0.07155).

We close our survey with the observation of results for adverbial constituents (Fig. 4.31). For this syntactic role, we observe a limited number of occurrences of it-clefts in both L2 French and L2 Italian groups, notably fewer than in French L1. This pattern could suggest an approximation to the target for French-speaking learners of L2 Italian and, conversely, a closer adherence to the L1 model for Italian-speaking learners of French L2. However, we posit that this divergence in L1 effect and approximation to the target is actually a secondary effect, and not the primary interpretation of these results. Instead, we attribute the generally low frequency of it-clefts for adverbials to the inherent complexity of the construction within this

syntactic role, regardless of the drive towards the target model or the influence of the source language. In fact, both groups of learners struggle to master the construction, resulting in cross-group infrequent usage. The scarcity of occurrences in the L2 groups for this target constituent, however, limits our ability to draw further conclusions about the influence of L1 from the functional perspective (identification vs correction focus).

Figure 4.31 - *Proportion of it-cleft structures produced by the two L2 groups (subjects and objects)*
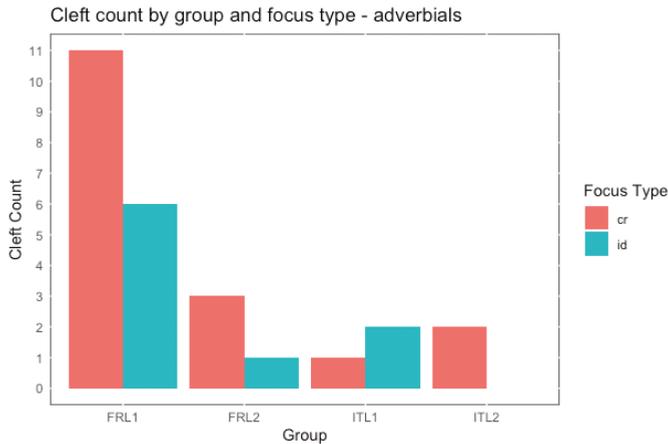
Examining the previously presented results across all target constituent types, we observe a partial approximation to the target language in terms of overall frequency in L2 productions. However, crucial asymmetries persist, closely aligning with the model of the mother tongue. French speakers of Italian L2, for instance, use clefted subjects in all pragmatic contexts, thereby retaining the syntactic role as the sole active parameter, consistent with their L1. In contrast, Italian speakers of French L2 increase the use of it-clefts specifically in those pragmatic contexts typical of their L1, namely corrective focus.

From a qualitative point of view, it seems also interesting to us to specify that in the group of FRL2 learners we find many utterances that start with a cleft, and are later auto-interrupted and reformulated into unmarked sentences, as in example (62):

(62)
A. Marie donne le journal au frère de Julie, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non ce n'est pas le frère de Julie, c'est le frère de Marie... Marie est en train de donner le journal [à son frère]$_P$, pas au frère de Julie.

Such sentences were initially coded as *cleft-noVP*, i.e. cleft without verbal phrase, showing only copula and pivot. In Fig. 4.32, we show the overall proportion of clefts realised by the non-native groups, including clefts without relative clause. Cleft without relative clause will not be included in the further analysis.

Figure 4.32 - *It-clefts produced by the two L2 groups
(all target constituents, narrow-focus condition)*
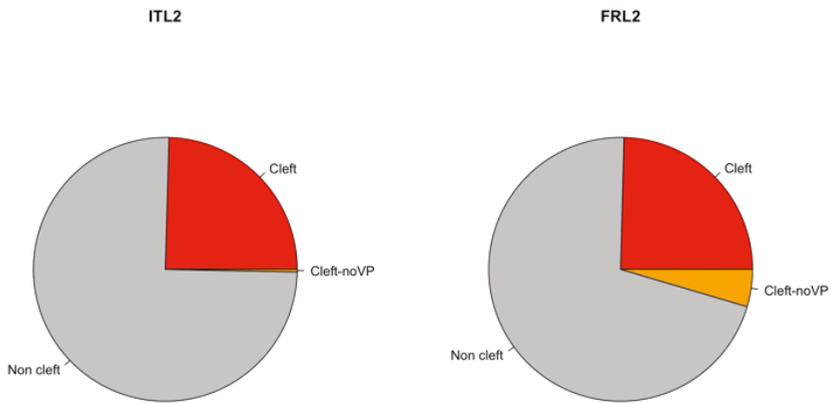
For both learner groups, we fitted the same bias-reduced logistic regression model as for natives, with predictors focus (BF vs ID and CR), syntactic role (subject vs. non-subject), and their interaction. The results (Tables 8–9) showed that for both ITL2 and FRL2, the only significant predictor was syntactic role, with subjects clefted more frequently than non-subjects (ps < .001). Neither focus type nor the interaction reached significance.

Table 8 - *Regression results for group FRL2*

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
(Intercept: BF non-sbj)	-5.069	1.428	-3.551	< .001 ***
Focus: ID vs BF	1.086	1.651	0.658	.511
Focus: CR vs BF	2.223	1.509	1.473	.141
Role: sbj vs non-sbj	1.458	1.654	0.882	.378
ID × Role	3.383	1.881	1.799	.072
CR × Role	3.535	1.796	1.968	.049 *

Table 9 - *Regression results for group ITL2*

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p-value
(Intercept: BF non-sbj)	-5.081	1.427	-3.560	< .001 ***
Focus: ID vs BF	1.538	1.567	0.982	.326
Focus: CR vs BF	2.827	1.479	1.911	0.56
Role: sbj vs non-sbj	0.286	2.022	0.141	0.888
ID × Role	4.234	2.151	1.986	0.049 *
CR × Role	4.006	2.120	1.890	0.059

To probe further, we tested pairwise contrasts between ID and CR for subjects: both L2 groups showed no reliable CR–ID difference (ITL2: p = .75; FRL2: p = .62). In both cases, thus, we can say that the only significant predictor is the syntactic role of focus constituent, while the variation in focus type does not yield significant changes[6].

4.2.4 Role of proficiency level

Since one of our research questions focused on exploring the role of proficiency levels to try and trace a possible acquisitional path, an essential aspect of our work involved examining differences between beginner (A), intermediate (B), and advanced (C) sub-groups within our dataset. We have already highlighted the challenges associated with defining proficiency and L2 competence (see § 3.1.3), and we are not revisiting that topic here. Before we go into the presentation and discussion of the results, though, further specifications about the inclusion or exclusion of certain data are necessary. For instance, the results for the A-level group of French L2 are omitted here, due to the small size of the subgroup (two individuals) and the significant internal variation, which make it unsuitable for this specific analysis.

Figure 4.33 - *Number of cleft structures produced by each speaker of B- and C-level in all narrow-focus conditions*
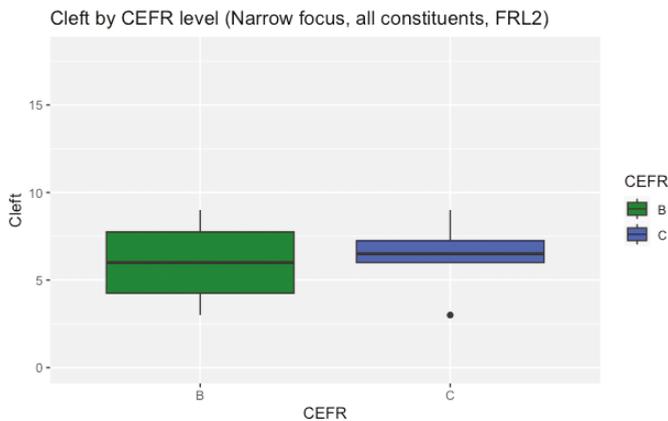
Moving forward, we present the results for Italian learners of L2 French in Fig. 4.33. The figure illustrates that the average for the C-level group is higher, and the speakers' behaviour is more homogeneous and compact towards the top. However, the difference between the two groups, intermediate (B) and advanced (C), is not statistically significant ($p=0.9831$).

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[6] For group FRL2, we fit the same model to a database including it-cleft without relative clause. In this case, results are still not statistically significant, but with a lower *p*-value for the interaction focus type * target constituent ($p=0.173$).

Given that the differentiation between focus subtypes has emerged as a significant aspect influenced by L1, we also examined whether proficiency levels were linked to the use or non-use of this functional differentiation.

Figure 4.34 - *Cleft structures produced by of B- and C-level speakers of FRL2,*
in identification and correction condition
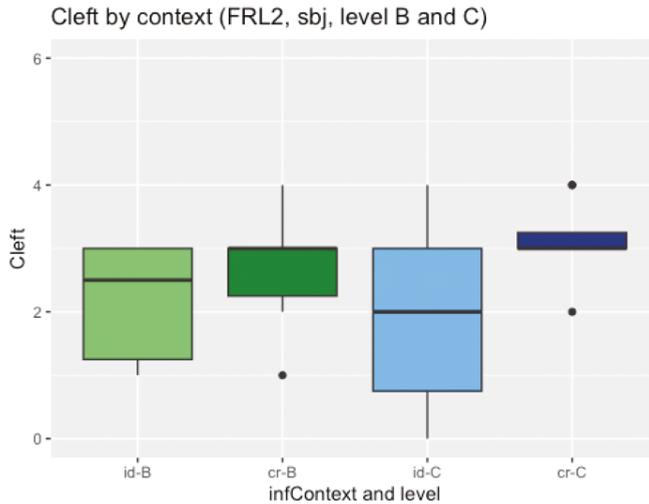
Fig. 4.34 displays the results for groups B and C of French L2 (Italian learners). We can see that B-level speakers show an impression of the same behaviour adopted in their L1, namely a higher use of clefts for corrective contexts, but the difference is not significant ($p=0,2$). On the other hand, the difference is slightly significant for C-level speakers ($p=0.04342$): surprisingly (or not?), more advanced speakers behave in a less target-like manner.

We ran the same analysis for L2 Italian; results are shown in Fig. 4.35.

Figure 4.35 - *Cleft structures produced by A-, B- and C-level speakers of ITL2*
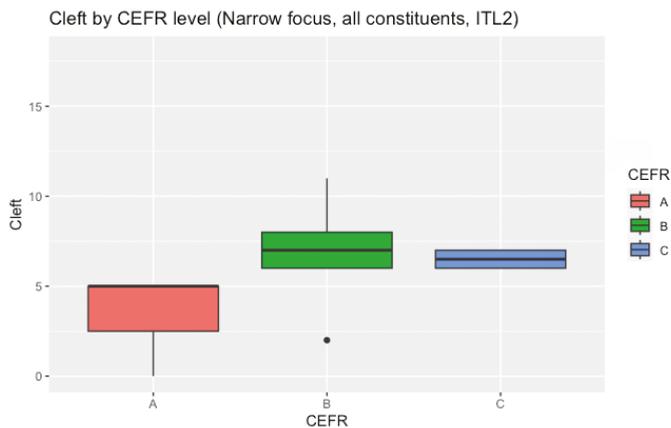
The output is similar, but with an opposite trend. The more advanced group realises fewer cleft sentences overall; although, the difference is not statistically significant (*p*=0.1421). Again, the results of speaker group B is more scattered, while the behaviour of speaker group C is more compact.

If we have a deeper look at the situation for different narrow-focus subtypes, we see that the trajectory is similar to that observed for L2 French: A- and B-level speakers behave in a more target-like manner that C-level speakers. Interestingly, among the Italian L2 A-level speakers, the two conditions *id* and *cr* are at the most distinct; but the difference does not reach statistical significance (*p*=0.5614). As for the B-level group, the difference is again not statistically significant, and *p* is higher (*p*=0.2707).

As for level C, we see that the pattern is even opposite than that of the target language: more clefts are produced in the identification condition than in the correction. The difference between the two conditions is, nonetheless, not statistically significant (*p*=0.1449); this is also due to the strong variation among different answers in the corrective condition. A comparison between the three groups is shown in Fig. 4.36.

Figure 4.36 - *Cleft structures produced by A-, B- and C-level speakers of L2 Italian in identification and correction condition*
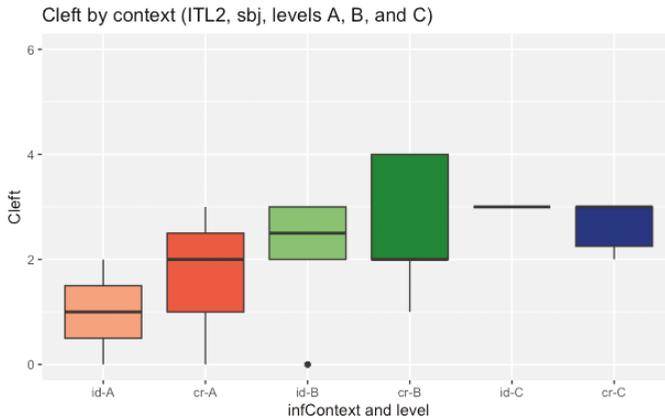
4.3 *Discussion*

French learners of Italian L2 seem to have grasped that Italian speakers use it-clefts to a lower extent, and that there are other focus marking strategies through word order. We see, in fact, that the repertoire of marked orders is wider than that observed in the group of native French speakers: there are, for example, various occurrences of non-clitic displacements, subject inversion, focus fronting. We can see a comparison of the results for Italian L2 with both source language and target language strategies in Fig. 4.37.

With regard, however, to the differentiation between the two focus subtypes, identification and correction, ITL2 learners seem to retain the source language model rather than the target language model: contrastive *foci*, in fact, are not marked differently from non-contrastive ones.

Figure 4.37 - *Non-canonical constructions produced by ITL2 speakers in narrow focus condition, with comparison to source language (left) and target language (right)*
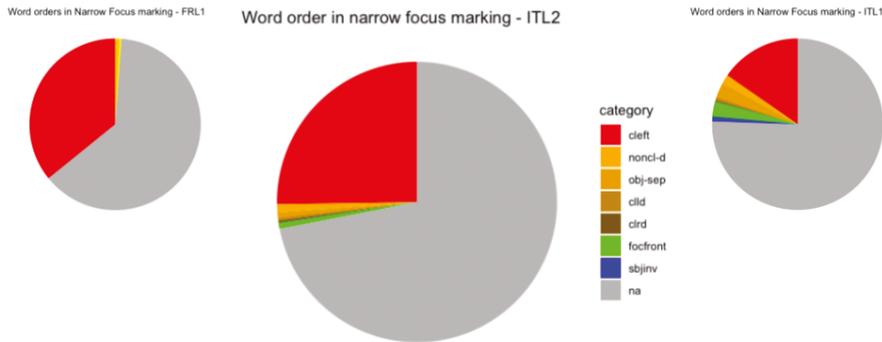
As the analysis of it-clefts has showed, the counts for this specific syntactic construction are not statistically different for identification and correction; the situation is thus closer to that of French L1 than that of Italian L1. Moreover, analyses by proficiency level, although limited by the small size and internal variability of subgroups, show that proficiency does not linearly correlate with target-likeness in syntactic focus marking.

From a qualitative inspection, however, we notice that the variation is considerable within the group of learners. For this reason, and also in relation to our initial research questions, we have also investigated whether a possible diversification factor could be found in the proficiency levels. The analysis, illustrated in the dedicated section, has provided good insights and helped paint a more detailed picture; we will further comment on this in the following lines, building on the data from the other learner group as well.

As for Italian learners of French L2 (group FRL2), we see a comparative picture in Fig. 4.38. Similar, and to some extent complementary, considerations can be made about this group. With regard to the overall count of the different non-canonical orders used for narrow focus, we see that Italian learners have increased the proportion of clefts and narrowed the inventory of possible solutions, adapting to the norm of the target language, which as we have seen provides for less flexibility in word order. Despite this, the overall proportion of clefts remains rather far from the level observed among native speakers of French. Crucially, the area where Italian learners struggle most to conform to the target seems to be the focus on the non-subject components. We think that the amount of *cleft-noVP* observed of objects and adverbials is a clue that leads us in this direction: Italian learners "understand" that they should use more clefts for these target constituents, but the operation is harder

than for subjects. In addition to issues of accessibility and syntactic hierarchies, which we already mentioned for L1 groups, we think that an additional obstacle in the employment of this structure could be represented by the presence of two relative pronouns in French, 'qui' and 'que', as other studies have already described (Helland, Larrivée & Foucher Stenkløv, 2021). In French clefts, in fact, speakers must distinguish between 'qui' for subjects (e.g. C'est Marie <u>qui</u> achète le journal) and 'que' for objects (e.g. C'est un journal que Marie a acheté). Italian, by contrast, employs the single complementizer 'che' uniformly in both contexts (e.g. È Maria che compra il giornale / È un giornale che Maria ha comprato). This additional morphosyntactic choice in French, absent in Italian, likely increases the complexity of the structure for Italian learners and helps explain their greater difficulty with non-subject clefts.

Figure 4.38 - *Non-canonical constructions produced by FRL2 speakers in narrow focus condition, with comparison to source language (left) and target language (right)*
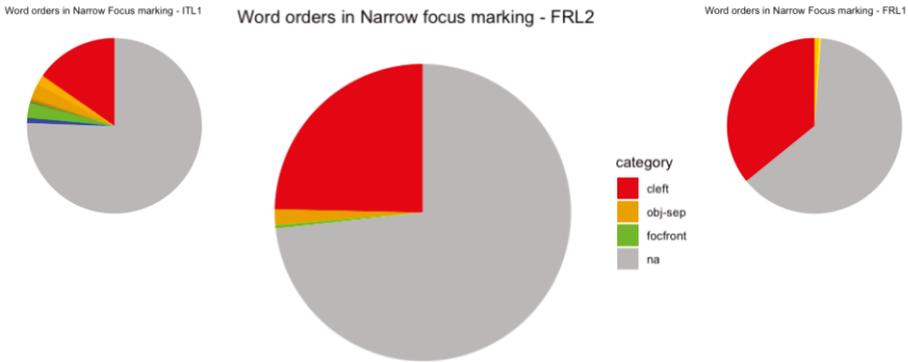
As for the distinction between the identification and correction focus-type, which is very strong in the learners' source language. Results for L2 learners fall "in between" those of the source and target languages. While FRL2 learners exhibit different behaviours from native speakers, particularly in distinguishing between the identification and correction conditions, the difference is not as pronounced as observed in Italian native speakers. Moreover, analyses by proficiency level suggest that proficiency does not linearly correlate with target-likeness in this group either.

Considering these findings, we are prompted to explore an additional question: why do Italian learners seemingly perform better in approximating the target frequency of it-cleft usage compared to French learners, who deviate from the observed tendency in the target language, exhibiting a less frequent use of it-cleft constructions? This inquiry aligns with an ongoing debate in the field of second language acquisition, particularly centred around concepts like "unlearning" or, more precisely (in our view), "learning a non-use".

Scholars argue that unlearning an L1 property or structure poses greater challenges than learning an L2 one (Schwartz & Goad, 2017; Gass & Mackey, 2002).

Unlearning, in fact, involves inhibiting the activation of an L1 feature in L2 contexts where it may be erroneously triggered: to achieve this, learners must recognize that an L1 feature is not shared by the L2, relying on indirect negative evidence, while learning entails detecting the presence of new elements in the L2 input, with positive evidence playing the crucial role. Moreover, the similarity between the learner's L1 and the L2 can compound these challenges, which is very interesting in our case: assumptions of similarity between L1 and L2 may lead to attentional breakdowns, resulting in incorrect input analysis and fostering inappropriate and fossilized form/meaning mappings (Benazzo & Andorno, 2017; Kellerman, 1983; Ringbom & Jarvis, 2009). Nevertheless, we also observe that Italian learners of French adeptly avoid structures unacceptable in French, such as postverbal subjects or left dislocations of objects and adverbials: this observation presents a counterpoint. To reconcile the two views, we could say that, in our case, "misuse" and "use" are easier to recognize and correctly categorize than "non-use". Despite differences between L1 and L2, in fact, Italian learners of French demonstrate proficiency in steering clear of structures deemed unacceptable in French. These outcomes align with considerations made in previous similar work (Sleeman, 2004) learners employ appropriate syntactic constructions to emphasize *foci*, but quantitatively, they do not use these syntactic constructions in a target-like fashion.

Additionally, a question persists: what implications might prosody hold? Will the outcomes of the intonation study yield substantial insights into its function and its interplay with syntactic structures? These issues will be addressed in the upcoming sections, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

Results: prosody

As noted in the introduction, the umbrella term "prosody" encompasses phenomena related to intonation, such as f0 and pitch movements, as well as phenomena related to parsing, chunking, and rhythm, which include the placement and hierarchization of prominence patterns and boundaries between different prosodic constituents. All these elements interact with various linguistic processes, such as the management of discourse-level prominence and evolution of common ground, and are thus susceptible to variations linked to the articulation of information structure. As we have seen in § 1.3.1 and § 1.3.2 of Chapter 1, in fact, every aspect of the phonic realisation of a sentence *can* carry indices of focus. The results that we will illustrate in this Chapter concern the analysis conducted on one of these aspects, namely intonation. This section will therefore be devoted to the part of the analysis conducted using the Polytonia automatic annotation tool (Mertens, 2014)[1].

5.1 *Methodological clarifications*

In this section of the chapter, we aim to provide some methodological clarifications. Specifically, since this phase of the study involves a more restricted and filtered

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[1] As articulated in the introduction (§ 1.3), the predominant, extensively studied, and widely acknowledged feature of focus is a distinct intonation pattern, primarily concerning pitch movements. Consequently, while there exist studies addressing other prosodic (or even segmental) cues to focus, they remain less established and more fragmented, particularly concerning the languages under scrutiny here, Italian and French. Hence, our decision to center our core analysis on what is more robust, broadly recognized, and thoroughly described. Other prosodic cues were investigated in a second moment, after the idea arose, directly from our data, during the transcription and the analysis; thus, in a decidedly "bottom-up" perspective, rather than from pre-existing hypotheses, more grounded in the literature. Since our initial research questions were formulated based on descriptions from prior studies, though, our methodology is inherently geared towards investigating "classical" focus-related phenomena, namely syntax and intonation. For the analysis of other prosodic cues, which often necessitate stricter phonetic measurements and are less readily detectable, a different methodology might have been more appropriate. However, some preliminary considerations about these aspects can be found in related works on the same corpus, such as De Paolis, Abbà & Romano (2023), De Paolis & Lo Iacono (2024); De Paolis, Lo Iacono & De Iacovo (2024) and De Paolis & Lo Iacono (2025). While we acknowledge the significance of these additional indices and their value in enhancing our understanding of the data, we believe it is more prudent to focus our core discussion on the measures initially considered, upon which our methodology was constructed. This emphasis does not diminish the importance of the supplementary measurements, to which we will dedicate a separate chapter. However, we refrain from drawing strong conclusions about them at this stage, as we believe it would be better to subject them to extensive scrutiny under a more controlled and tailored protocol.

dataset compared to the syntactic one, we intend to express the reasons behind the creation of this subset and offer a detailed explanation of the prosodic annotation and labelling rationale. This will be accompanied by comprehensive examples extracted from our corpus.

5.1.1 The dataset

The constituents taken into consideration for this analysis are part of the same data frame on which the syntactic analysis was conducted, as illustrated in the previous section (Chapter 4). Hence, some of the target phrases may be part of syntactically marked utterances or utterances with non-canonical word orders. It follows that the constituents analysed, even though they are always constituted by the same head-word (*Marie*, *Jules*, *journal*, *kiosque*, etc., and respective Italian correspondents), are subject to variation regarding their position within the utterance, and can be embedded in longer or shorter constructions, with potential impact on the prosodic aspect. For example, the position of the constituent within the utterance can impact the phonetic implementation of its prosodic profile: in fact, for linguistic reasons as well as purely physiological ones (f0 declination, decrease of airflow and consequently of subglottal pressure), constituents at the beginning and at the end of the utterance feature different f0 patterns (Cohen, 1982; Ladd, 1984; Gussenhoven, 2016; Poschmann & Wagner, 2016). Moreover, an initial position of the constituent, if analysed from the perspective of the general "focus last" and "given before new" principles (Givón, 1989; Neeleman and Van de Koot, 2016), makes a prosodic marking more compelling than a final position.

However, not all these variation factors have the same impact, and not for all annotation and labelling systems. For this reason, we asked ourselves which of these factors could have such an impact as to justify, in our case and for the purpose of our analysis, the exclusion of tokens from the data frame, and which could not.

The first variation factor that we have taken into account are major displacement of constituents from their default position within the utterance, such as fronting of objects or adverbials, and movement of subjects to postverbal positions. These displacements substantially affect prosodic realization of target constituents, since initial and final positions in the utterances are by default characterized by substantial differences, at least on the phonetic level (see references above). As a result, tokens involving this type of "radical" displacement were excluded from the data frame: 3 postverbal subjects (0.2%), 31 adverbials (7 fronted + 24 clefted; 1.9%), 16 indirect objects (2 fronted + 14 clefted; 1.0%), and 12 direct objects (2 fronted + 10 clefted; 0.7%). In total, these exclusions account for 66 tokens, corresponding to 4.0% of the total. Minor dislocations, such as *obj-sep* or *clrd*, *clld*, instead, did not substantially differ in prosodic realization[2], and where thus kept as part of the data frame.

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[2] This affirmation is based on qualitative observations made by the author, and was not supported by the analysis of fine-grained phonetic parameters.

Another possible case was when participants used alternative phrases instead of expected target constituents, such as "une personne qui s'appelle Marie" or "una signora che si chiama Maria" instead of "Marie" and "Maria". Obviously, these formulations are significantly longer in terms of syllables, and this has an impact over the prosodic realization of the single target word ("Maria" or "giornale"), primarily because it reduces their relative duration. This can of course influence perceived prominence, and, consequently, the nature of the labels assigned by Polytonia algorithm. For this reason, we decided to also exclude this type of realisations from our data frame (4 occurrences).

Another case we considered in this respect was that of it-cleft sentences. The use of this structure, in fact, also implies movements and changes of varying magnitude, depending on the nature of the constituent being clefted. The insertion of a subject within an it-cleft sentence, in fact, only entails the addition of a syllable before the target word ([ɛ], "è" in Italian or [sɛ], "c'est" in French). This seemed to us intuitively a negligible change in terms of its impact on the intonation contour. In order to support this methodological choice, we consulted literature and found confirmation that it-cleft sentences and subject focus *in-situ* are not observed to exhibit dramatically different prosodic properties, at least in Italian and French (Mertens, 2012; Pinelli, Poletto & Avesani 2020). Therefore, we decided to include them in the dataset for the analysis of subjects. However, for what concerns clefted objects and adverbials – which involve, conversely, a more significant displacement from the default position – we decided to adopt the same criterion we adopted for fronting and postverbal subjects, leading to their exclusion from the dataset.

The results that we will show in the following paragraphs are conducted on a data frame of 1591 tokens (target constituents); their distribution is shown in Tab. 10.

Table 10 - *Distribution of token types in the dataframe,*
including both L1 and L2 productions

Token type	Italian	French	N. of tokens
Subject	Maria, Giulio	Marie, Jules	589
Direct object	giornale	journal	394
Indirect object	suo fratello, Emilia	son frère, Émilie	325
Adverbial	alle nove, in edicola	à neuf heures, au kiosque	283

As the reader will see in the upcoming pages, we have organized the data into two sections for each group: first, presenting results for target subjects, and then, collectively, all other constituent types. This choice is primarily driven by the necessity to avoid fragmenting the data: as seen in Tab. 10, the tokens belonging to the subject category outnumber those in the other three categories, especially

adverbials. Predictably, this affected preliminary analyses, in which trends were more challenging to discern with fewer tokens. This lower number of non-subject tokens is not due to the protocol itself, but should be attributed to various factors. As mentioned earlier, for more than one reason we decided to exclude clefted/fronted adverbials and objects from the intonational analysis, and this led to a more significant reduction if compared to subjects. Furthermore, even if the non-subject constituent was present in the baseline sentences of the task, speakers often omitted it in their responses when it was not the explicit target of the question. Both factors particularly affected adverbial constituents. In (63) we provide an example of an answer to a broad-focus question where the participant, a native French speaker, omits the adverbial "au kiosque":

(63)
A. Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe ici?
B. Marie achète un journal.

5.1.2 Prosodic annotation

As mentioned in the Methodology section (Chapter 3), we used an automatic system of annotation, Polytonia, for the labelling of intonation. The notation system and the algorithm, created by Piet Mertens (2014), processes tonal labels from raw phonetic values, without phonological interpretation, in relation to the individual characteristics of each speaker (pitch range, speech rate, etc.). The algorithm provides a series of symbols that represent tonal levels and the perceptible melodic movements of all syllables, based on the notion of the *seuil de glissando* (Rossi, 1971). For each syllable of the utterance, the system provides 5 symbols for the tonal level: L (low), M (mid), H (high), B (bottom) and T (top). It also provides 5 melodic movements: R (large rise), F (large fall), r (small rise), f (small fall), and -- (level). Finally, the system can provide the combination of these symbols.

As one can easily imagine, a range of 5 levels plus 5 movements can give rise to a large number of combinations. Moreover, the labels of each syllable combine sequentially to describe the profile of the entire focused constituent, which is made up of a number of syllables ranging from one to five: the result is that each constituent will easily show a combination of its own, making statistical processing, as well as the interpretation of trends, quite a hard task.

This is actually neither discouraging nor problematic, on the contrary: this wide range of possibilities accounts for the actual intra- and inter-speaker variability, and testifies to the extent to which the tool provides a phonetic output and not a phonological one. Nonetheless, it is evident that an interpretation leading to a higher level of abstraction is required to navigate the data. For this reason, we decided to use the Polytonia labels to further elaborate a closed set of prototypical melodic profiles of constituents under the different informational conditions: broad focus, identification focus and corrective focus. In order to define our own taxonomy, we considered the extent to which Polytonia symbols capture:

(i) the presence of an initial/final accent (in French) or a particular melodic accent associated with the lexical accent (Italian), (ii) the presence of a major melodic break at the end of the constituent, (iii) a tonal enhancement showing prosodic salience or (iv) no particular prosodic marking. Tab. 11 summarises the final prosodic annotation used in our study, accompanied by the labels obtained by Polytonia for the syllables contained in the Marie/Maria and journal/giornale constituents and the stylisations of f0. A more detailed interpretation of these types is provided in the list below.

Table 11 - *Prosodic types retained from Polytonia, with the example Marie/Maria*

Category	Language	PT labels	Melodic profile
Falling	FR	MR-HF, M-Mf, r-f, r-HF	
	IT	Lr-HF-L, 0-LR-HF, M-HL, 0-H-L	
Flathigh	FR	M-M, H-H	
	IT	H-H-H, 0-H-H, 0-M-M, M-M-M	
Rising	FR	L-LR, M-H, L-M, L-Mr, L-MR	
	IT	L-0-H, 0-L-M, L-Lr-M	
Flatlow	FR	0-0, L-L, 0-L	
	IT	0-0-0, L-L-L, 0-0-L, 0-L-0	
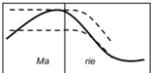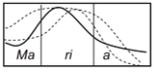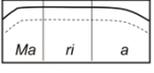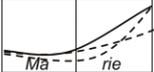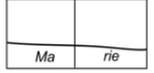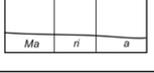
- *Falling*: for French, a melodic rise/high tone is perceived at the beginning of the first syllable [ma] (initial accent) followed by a significant melodic fall on the last syllable, indicating a major break. For Italian, a melodic rise/ high tone is perceived in the syllable carrying the lexical accent, followed by a significant melodic fall on the last syllable, indicating a major break.
- *Flathigh*: for both French and Italian, the whole constituent is perceived in the high- or mid-range in the speaker's tonal range, indicating tonal enhancement.

– *Rising*: a melodic rise of relative importance is perceived at the last syllable of the constituent, indicating the boundary of the canonical accentual group in the non-final position of the utterance (French) or a continuation rise (Italian). The profile corresponds to the one that, in several account, is referred to as a "continuation" contour (Delattre, 1966).
– *Flatlow*: the entire constituent is perceived in the speaker's low tonal range, with no major melodic movement.

In the following figures we provide some examples of these intonational types as found in our corpus. Fig. 5.1 and Fig. 5.2 show four cases of contours labelled as "rising", two from native speakers of Italian and French, and two from non-native speakers. All examples show the contour uttered for a target subject in broad focus condition.

Figure 5.1 - *Intonational type "rising" with the word "Maria" uttered by a native Italian speaker (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a native French speaker (right)*
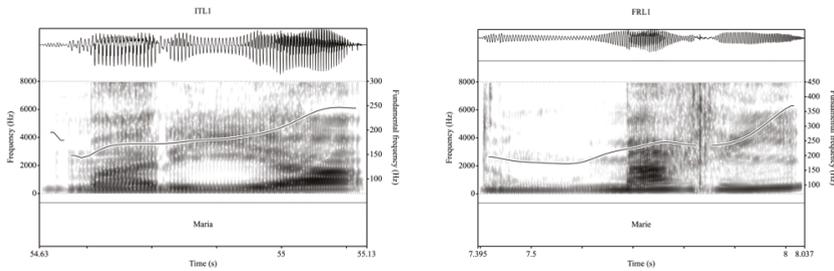
Figure 5.2 - *Intonational type "rising" with the word "Maria" uttered by a speaker of L2 Italian (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a speaker of L2 French (right)*
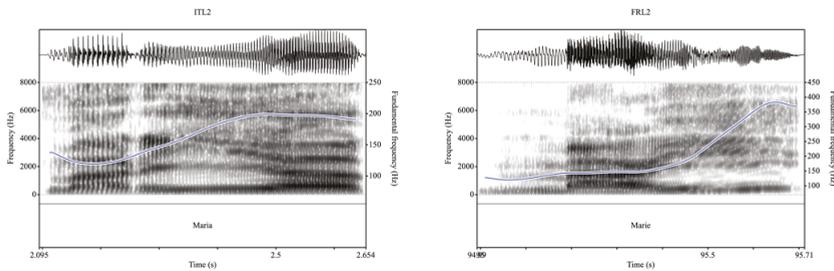
Fig. 5.3 and 5.4 and show four cases of contours labelled as "flatlow", two from native speakers of Italian and French, and two from non-native speakers. All examples show the contour uttered for a target object, in identification focus condition.

Figure 5.3 - *Intonational type "rising" with the word "giornale" uttered by a speaker of L2 Italian (left) and with the word "journal" uttered by a speaker of L2 French (right)*
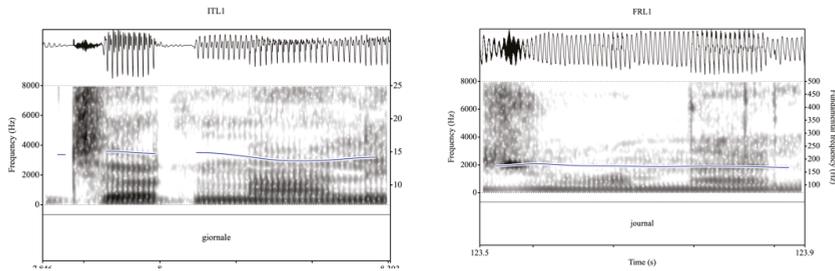
Figure 5.4 - *Intonational type "flatlow" with the word "giornale" uttered by a speaker of L2 Italian (left) and with the word "journal" uttered by a speaker of L2 French (right)*
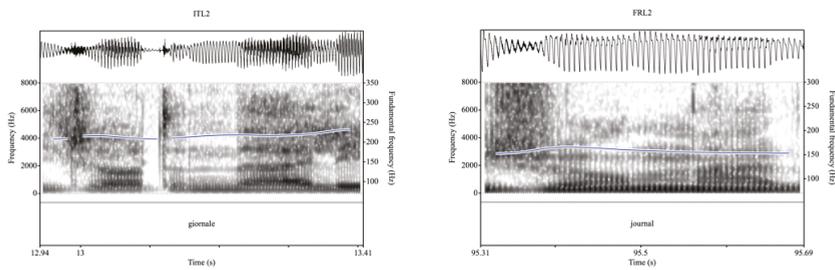
Fig. 5.5 and 5.6 and show four cases of contours labelled as "flathigh", two from native speakers of Italian and French, and two from non-native speakers. All examples show the contour uttered for a target subject in identification focus condition.

Figure 5.5 - *Intonational type "flathigh" with the word "Maria" uttered by a native Italian speaker (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a native French speaker (right)*
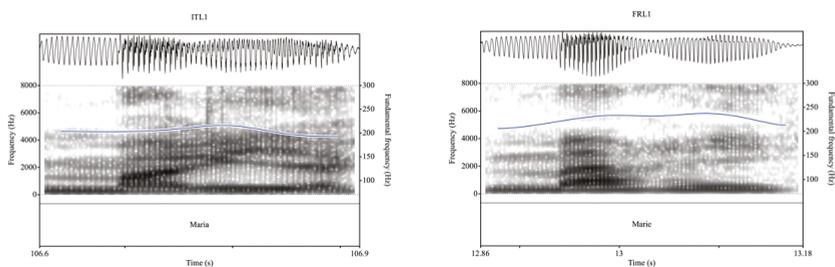
Figure 5.6 - *Intonational type "flathigh" with the word "Maria" uttered by a speaker of L2 Italian (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a speaker of L2 French (right)*
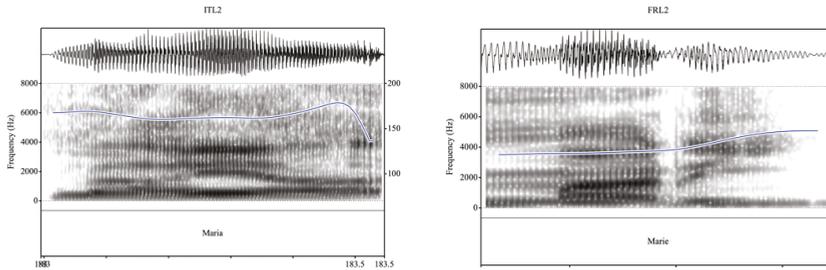
Fig. 5.7 and 5.8 show four cases of contours labelled as "falling", two from native speakers of Italian and French, and two from non-native speakers. All examples show the contour uttered for a target subject in correction focus condition.

Figure 5.7 - *Intonational type "falling" with the word "Maria" uttered by a native Italian speaker (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a native French speaker (right)*
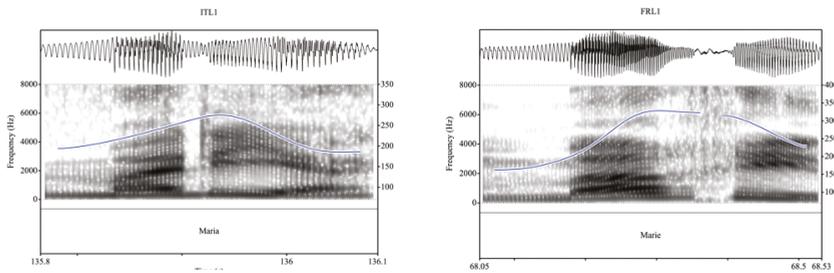
Figure 5.8 - *Intonational type "falling" with the word "Maria" uttered by a speaker of L2 Italian (left) and with the word "Marie" uttered by a speaker of L2 French (right)*
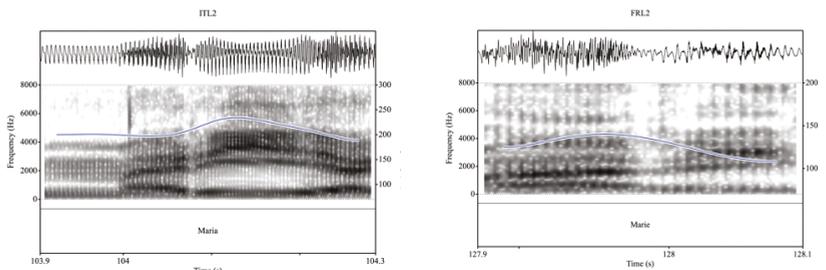
5.2 *Prosody in the native groups*

In this section we will show the results obtained from the two native groups, illustrating the output of the analysis conducted with Polytonia. Following the same sequence of Chapter 4, we will start with French and then move to Italian speakers. The entire dataset (including also non-native speakers) was analysed

within a unified statistical framework, using a generalized mixed-effects model that incorporated all groups, focus conditions, and target constituents, with random intercepts for speakers and items. Direct comparisons were then performed using *emmeans*, This approach allowed us to avoid inflating the error rate, properly account for the hierarchical structure of the linguistic data, and carry out crucial comparisons consistently across the different speaker populations. In the following paragraphs, we present the results for each group separately, highlighting the contrasts most relevant to our research questions.

5.2.1 L1 French

The following charts represent the distribution of different intonational types observed in the two groups in the three focus conditions: broad focus, information focus, correction focus. The first chart, Fig. 5.9, summarizes the distribution of intonational types realised by native French speakers for target subjects.

Figure 5.9 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target subjects (group FRL1)*
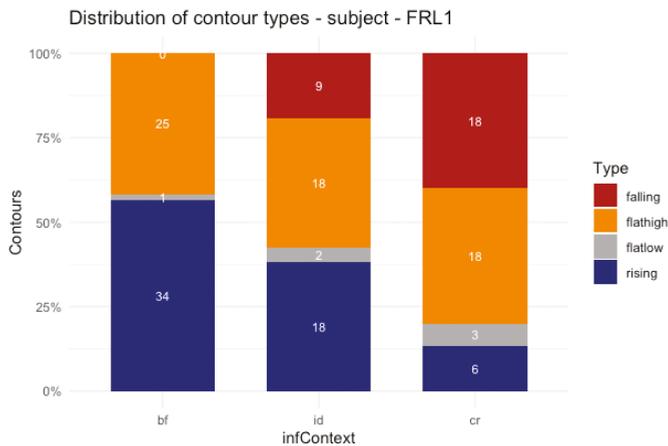

As the chart shows, in the broad focus (bf) condition the majority of constituents "Marie" and "Jules" are realised with a rising contour (dark blue, 57%). The remaining part of the tokens shows an overall tonal enhancement, which we have named the flathigh type (yellow, 40%). There is only one occurrence of type flatlow (grey, 2%), and no occurrence of falling. As we move to the identification-focus condition (id), the bar in the centre, we see that the proportion of flathigh and flatlow remains similar (38% and 4% respectively), but falling profiles increase (19%), at the expense of rising ones, that fall to 38%. The same trend is visible in the passage from the second to the third condition, the correction-focus one (cr). In this last case, in fact, the proportions of flathigh and flatlow contours remain quite stable (40% and 6%), while that of falling further increases, reaching 40%; rising contours further decreases, dropping to 13%.

For French native speakers, the analysis of subject focus revealed that intonation patterns vary significantly across focus conditions. The mixed-effects model showed a reliable distinction between identification and correction: corrective contexts were more likely to be realised with a falling contour than identification contexts, while broad focus exhibited a distinct profile dominated by rising contours. Direct pairwise comparisons (ID vs CR) confirmed the effect ($p = 0.037$), indicating that French speakers prosodically encode a contrast between the two narrow focus subtypes.

We move now to the results obtained for the other types of target constituents: direct and indirect objects and adverbials, shown in Fig. 5.10.

Figure 5.10 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification,*
correction focus utterances for target direct and indirect objects and adverbials (group FRL1)
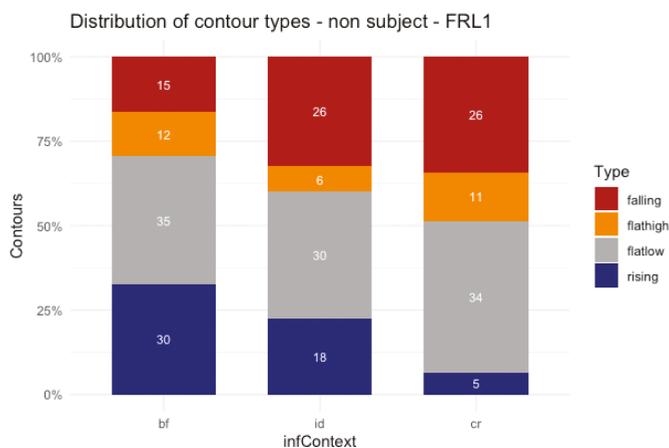
In the first condition, broad focus, the biggest portion is represented by flatlow (38%) and rising contours (33%). It is interesting to notice that the first type, which represented a minor part for subjects, takes up a relatively large space for these constituent types. Another difference between subjects and non-subjects lies in the presence of falling contours in the broad focus condition: while they were absent in the realisation of target subjects, for target objects they represent 16% of the total. The remaining tokens (13%) belong to the flathigh type. As we move to the identification focus condition, we see that, despite the substantial difference we can still see for the flatlow/flathigh ratio, the pattern is the same as observed for subjects: the proportion of rising contours falls (in this case, to 23%), and that of falling contours increases, reaching 32%. The proportion of flatlow remains similar to the bf condition (38%), and that flathigh decreases (7%). In the third condition, correction focus, we observe the same trend: the amount of falling contours keeps raising, reaching 34%; that of rising contours keeps falling, touching 7%. Both flathigh and flatlow contours increase; their proportion over total is 14% and 45%, respectively. It is interesting to notice that, together, flatlow and flathigh cover roughly the same space in subjects and in objects, and this over all three

focus conditions; what changes throughout the different focus contexts is the ratio between the other two types, rising and falling contours, that seem to undergo a progressive trade-off, from broad to identification to corrective focus.

For French native speakers, the analysis of non-subject constituents did not reveal a reliable difference between identification and correction contexts. The mixed-effects model estimated similar probabilities of falling contours across the two narrow-focus conditions, and the direct ID–CR contrast was non-significant (p > .2). This suggests that, unlike for subjects, prosodic marking of the ID/CR distinction is not systematically extended to non-subjects in French L1.

5.2.2 L1 Italian

We now move to the analysis of the native Italian group. In the next chart, Fig. 5.11, we show the results for target subjects.

Figure 5.11 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target subjects (group ITL1)*
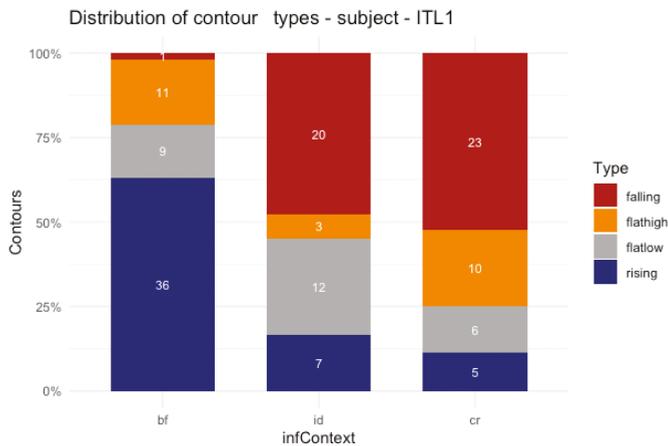
As the chart shows, in the broad focus condition the majority of subject phrases are realised with a rising contour (63%). Around a third of the target constituents are produced with a flathigh or flatlow contour, which take up respectively 19% and 16% of the total. The remaining 2% – which corresponds to one single case – shows a falling contour. If we move to the identification-focus condition, we can see that the situation changes quite considerably. In fact, while the proportion of both flathigh and flatlow remains constant (7% and 29%), the ratio between falling and rising is almost reversed: the first type takes up 48% of the target constituents, while the latter falls to 17%. When moving from identification to correction-focus condition, we observe a similar situation, albeit with a slight shift along the same trend. Once again, flathigh and flatlow constitute together around a third of the total (23% plus 14%), while the majority of target constituents features a falling contour (52%). The rising category further decreases, reaching 11%.

For Italian native speakers, the analysis of subject constituents did not reveal a reliable difference between identification and correction contexts. The mixed-effects model showed comparable probabilities of falling contours across the two narrow-focus conditions, and the direct ID–CR contrast was not significant (p = .60).

We now move to the other categories of target constituents, namely objects (direct and indirect) and adverbials. The results of this analysis are shown in Fig. 5.12.

Figure 5.12 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target direct and indirect objects (group ITL1)*
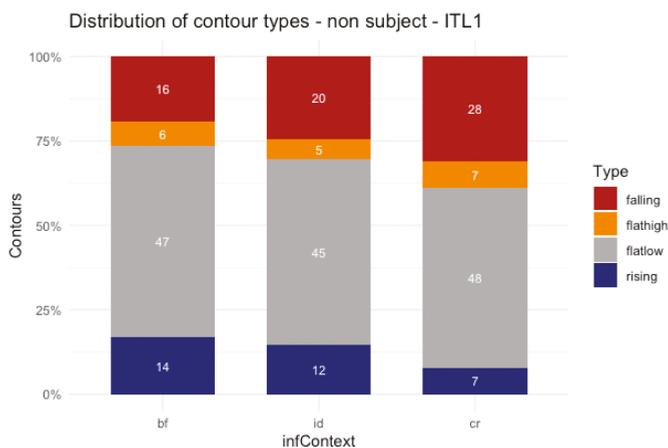
In the broad focus condition, the flatlow contour covers an outright majority of the total (57%), while the other flat type, flathigh, is minoritarian (7%); together, they account for roughly two thirds of the total. As for the other two types, rising and falling, they are almost even: the first recurs 14 times out of 83 tokens, thus accounting for 17% of the total; the latter accounts for 19%. For the second condition, identification focus, we see that the sum of the two "flat" types remains quite stable: 55% for flatlow and 6% for flathigh. As for the other two types, we see that the ratio between rising and falling slightly changes, in favour of the second type: rising contours fall to 15%, while falling contours rise to 24%. A similar trend is visible in the passage to the last condition, correction focus. In this context, flatlow and flathigh account respectively for 53% and 8% of the total. The proportion of falling contours further increases and reaches 31%, at the expense of rising ones, which fall to 8%. At an overall glance, it is immediately apparent that the pattern for objects is similar to that observed for subjects, except that the proportion of flatlow contours appears to be preponderant for this type of syntactic constituent.

For non-subjects, the model estimated very similar probabilities of falling contours across the two conditions, and the direct ID–CR contrast was not significant (all ps > .64).

5.2.3 Interlinguistic comparison

Several considerations can be made, stemming from the observation of our data. For instance, it appears that focus marking is in some measure asymmetric in both French and Italian, depending on the syntactic role of the target constituent, or – and we lean towards this second interpretation – depending on its position within the utterance. The distribution of intonational profiles in different focus conditions, in fact, varies significantly depending on whether the focus constituent is a subject (see Fig. 5.9 and 5.11) or an object or adverbial phrase (see Fig. 5.10 and 5.12). As previously mentioned, we posit that the prominence of intonational marking is contingent on position rather than syntactic role. Specifically, when objects and adverbials are shifted towards the utterance-initial position, intonational marking becomes more systematic. This shift in word order may be linked to constraints of the phonology/syntax interface[3], but also be attributed to physiological reasons, as discussed in § 5.1.1. Regardless, the reordering of elements likely serves a functional purpose in facilitating intonational marking: it would be interesting to study this aspect systematically, with a specific study on the same corpus, in which initial and final constituents of the same syntactic nature are explicitly compared. Anyway, this interplay between prosody and word order aligns with existing literature in this field, in both French and Italian (Frascarelli, 2000; Szendroi, 2001; Selkirk, 2011; see footnote 22).

The observed distributions also reveal nuanced differences in how French and Italian respond to the ±contrast parameter. In French, the ratio between falling and rising contours evolves gradually from the least contrastive (BF) to the most contrastive (CR) condition, as illustrated in Fig. 5.9 and 5.10. This progression is visible both in the transition from broad focus to identification and from identification to correction. Statistical tests confirmed that the difference between identification and correction is significant. By contrast, Italian shows only two distinct distributions, with a boundary between broad and narrow focus but no further differentiation within narrow focus. In other words, the distributions of identification and correction are largely overlapping, a pattern confirmed by statistical testing – particularly for target subjects (Fig. 5.11). This observation is very interesting in our view, as it complements our findings on the frequency of it-cleft sentences (cf. § 4.1.4). Further exploration of this aspect will be undertaken in the Chapter 6.

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[3] When we refer to "constraints of the phonology–syntax interface," we have in mind widely documented principles such as the alignment of prosodic prominence with the edges of prosodic/intonational phrases (Selkirk, 2011; Szendrői, 2001) and the relative weakening of medial positions (Frascarelli, 2000). These factors plausibly underlie the greater systematicity of prosodic marking in initial and final positions in both French and Italian. That said, it is not our intention here to enter into a detailed discussion of the information-structural mechanisms that regulate this interaction. We limit ourselves to noting that the combinations observed in our corpus fall within the range of possibilities described in the literature, without attempting to establish a one-to-one correspondence with specific focus-marking options – also because our data already show that such a correspondence does not hold systematically, making a distributional description more appropriate.

5.3 *Prosody in L2*

Maintaining a consistent structure with our previous section, we will now present findings from the L2 groups. The charts will depict the outcomes of the tonal analysis carried out using Polytonia, focusing on the variables examined thus far. As we did for the native groups, we will start with French and then move to Italian. We will address target subjects first, followed by direct and indirect objects and adverbials.

5.3.1 L2 French

In the first chart, Fig. 5.13, we show the results for target subjects, in this case "Marie" and "Jules", as uttered by Italian learners of L2 French.

Figure 5.13 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target subjects (group FRL2)*
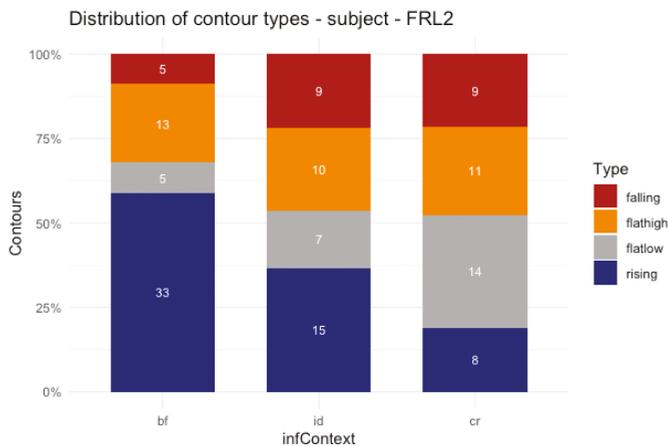
As the first bar shows, the majority of subjects phrases are produced by FRL2 speakers with a rising contour (59%). Another 23% is realised with a flathigh contour, while the remaining 18% is divided exactly in half between flatlow and falling. If we observe the second bar, the one representing identification focus condition, the first thing we notice is that rising types decrease to 37%, while falling ones go up to 22%. Interestingly, flatlow contours also become more frequent, going up 17% of the total. The amount of flathigh types, on the other hand, remains quite stable (24%). The last bar, the one that represents the correction condition, is for the first half identical to the second one: falling and flathigh portions remain stable (21% and 24% respectively); the number of flatlow contours instead increases, reaching 33% of the total, to the expense of rising, that drops to 19%.

The mixed-effects analysis revealed no significant difference between the identification and correction conditions (odds ratio = 1.03, p = 0.96). This suggests

that this group of learners did not systematically differentiate the two focus subtypes in their prosodic marking when focusing on subjects.

We move now to Fig. 5.14, to comment the results for target objects (direct and indirect) and adverbials, involving the following target phrases: "journal", "son frère" and "Émilie", and "à neuf heures", "au kiosque".

Figure 5.14 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification,*
correction focus utterances for target direct and indirect objects (group FRL2)
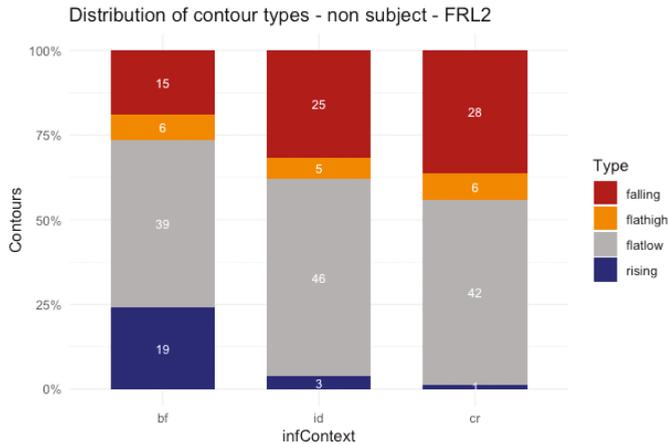
As depicted in the first bar of the graph, the preeminent share of object phrases is produced by FRL2 speakers with a flatlow contour, constituting 49%. Following closely behind, the rising contour comprises 24%, while falling and flathigh contours contribute 19% and 8%, respectively. Upon shifting to the second bar, corresponding to the identification focus condition, a different situation is visible. The rising type undergoes a decrease to 4%, and flathigh types also slightly decrease, dropping to 6%. On the other hand, falling types increase, reaching 32% of the total; the portion taken up by flatlow also rises, touching 58%. The final bar, representing the correction condition, is quite similar to the second one. The prevalence of flatlow and falling contours persists, with the first remaining around 54% and the second slightly increasing to 36%. The other two contours behave someway consequently: rising types diminish, dropping to 1%; flathigh, though reaching 8%, remains a minority.

For non-subject constituents, the contrasts between identification and correction did not reach significance (odds ratios between 0.33 and 1.35, all p > 0.17), indicating that, as with subjects, FRL2 learners did not display a consistent prosodic distinction between the two narrow-focus subtypes.

5.3.2 L2 Italian

We conclude this survey with the analysis of productions by ITL2 group, French learners of L2 Italian. In Fig. 5.15, we see the results for target subjects, "Maria" and "Giulio", in the three focus conditions.

Figure 5.15 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target subjects (group ITL2)*
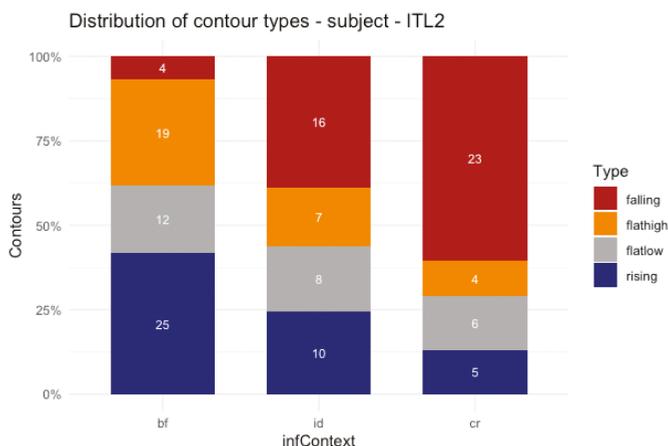
In examining the distribution of contours among the subject phrases, notable patterns emerge. The primary contributor in broad focus condition is the rising contour, constituting a relative majority at 42%. Following, the flathigh contour contributes 32%, while flatlow and falling contours account for 20% and 7%, respectively. Moving to the identification focus condition, a discernible shift is evident. rising contours, that were prevalent in broad focus condition, decrease to 24%. flathigh contours decrease as well, dropping to 19%. These two first types leave space to falling contours, which constitute in this condition 37%. On the other hand, flatlow contours remain stable: they represent 20% of the occurrences, as they did in the broad focus condition. As for the last bar, representing the correction-focus condition, the distribution continues the trend of the second bar. falling contours increase further, and reach 60%; this, at the expense of all three other categories. In fact, flathigh contours drop to 10%, flatlow fall to 16%, and rising to 13%.

For Italian learners of French L2, the mixed-effects model showed a significant difference between identification and correction focus when the target was the subject (odds ratio = 0.37, p = 0.045). Learners were thus more likely to associate a falling contour with corrective focus than with identificational focus.

With Fig. 5.16, we move to target direct and indirect objects and adverbials, featuring constituents "il giornale", "a suo Fratello", "a Emilia", "in edicola", "alle nove".

Figure 5.16 - *Distribution of contours in broad, identification, correction focus utterances for target direct and indirect objects (group ITL2)*

Distribution of contour types - non subject - ITL2
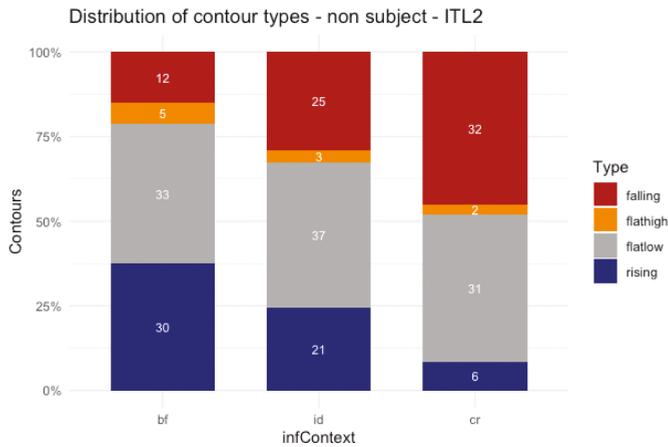
In the first bar, corresponding to the broad focus condition, the majority of target constituents is realised by ITL2 speakers with a flatlow contour (41%) or a rising (38%). The two portions are quite balanced, and account for more than three-quarters of the total. The remaining part is made up of falling contour, 15%, or flathigh, 6%. The second bar, representing the identification focus condition, is partly different. The portion occupied by flatlow and rising contours slightly diminish: the former accounts for 43%, and the latter 24%. flathigh contours have a moderate decrease, and drop to 3%; falling, on the other hand, increase and reach 29%. A similar shift is visible in the passage to the third column, representing corrective focus condition. In this case, in fact, flatlow and rising reduce their contribution, decreasing to 44% and 8% of the total, respectively; together, they cover around half of the total. This change happens in favour of the falling portion, that, conversely, increases to 45%. The last type, flathigh, remains stable at 3%.

For non-subject targets, Italian learners of French L2 did not show a significant distinction between identificational and corrective focus (odds ratio = 0.30, p = 0.100). Although the distribution points toward a higher likelihood of falling contours in the corrective condition, the effect does not reach statistical significance.

5.3.3 Prosody in L2: inter-group comparison

Comparing the results of the two groups of learners reveals some similarities and some divergences; the latter seem to carry evidence of influence of the source language.

As for the aspects in common, we see that in both learners' group there is an asymmetry between target subjects and the other syntactic components. This aspect mirrors a characteristic found in both groups of native speakers, as detailed in § 5.2.3. For non-native speakers as well, the prominence of intonational marking could hinge on position rather than syntactic role: specifically, when focus constituents are found in utterance-initial position, intonational marking is more systematic. This mechanism,

also potentially influenced by physiological factors (see § 5.1.1), serves a functional purpose: as we have mentioned discussing the results of L1 speakers, stronger marking of utterance-initial focus constituents responds to the need of compensating the fact that initial focus violates functional principles such as "focus-last" and "given-before-new", and thus has to bear stronger marking and prominence.

As for the differences, we identify two lines of divergence that parallel distinct aspects in the behaviour of French L2 learners and Italian L2 learners. The first one is that the role of contrast in the two narrow-focus types has different results in the learners' productions; it seems, in this regard, that the marking strategies of the two different focus types are affected by the influence of L1. In fact, the Italian learners' group FRL2 hypo-differentiates between the two conditions, which is then what happened for the ITL1 group. The French learners in the ITL2 group, on the other hand, mark the contrast gradient in the transition from identification to correction, enhancing the use of falling contours; this behaviour reflects the pattern found in the native French group. A second aspect of divergence between the L2 groups is that French learners of Italian exhibit a heightened reliance on intonation compared to Italian learners of French as a second language (FRL2): in fact, the intonational analysis of ITL2 reveals an infrequent use of flatlow contours in narrow-focus conditions, particularly in relation to subject constituents. This divergent pattern sets ITL2 apart not only from FRL2, but also from the target language, Italian (ITL1), where major tonal movements are less prevalent.

Conversely, the FRL2 group, comprising Italian learners of French, demonstrates a less extensive utilization of major tonal movements, identified in our classification as flathigh and falling. The frequency of flatlow tokens in the FRL2 group is higher than in the ITL2 group, and even in comparison to native speakers of the target language, French (FRL1). This symmetry in behaviour across language pairs strongly suggests a link to the source languages. In the next paragraph, § 5.4, we will comment on these outcomes and try to account for them in terms of both learning universals and cross-linguistic influence.

Unlike in the syntactic analysis, proficiency levels were not taken into account here. This is due to the sparsity of the prosodic dataset, where outcomes were distributed across multiple intonational categories, making models with proficiency as a factor unstable and not interpretable.

5.4 *Discussion*

The observed outcomes prompt a nuanced consideration of both learning universals and L1 influence. A consistent feature across all four groups is the intonational marking of initial position, while final position often remains unmarked. The increase in flatlow contours for the more contrastive condition, which appears more in the L2 groups, is, however, a rather unexpected result. This trend may be attributed to two different reasons. The first is that there may be prosodic strategies other than intonation (phonetically, cued by f0 movements) to mark

focus. Another possible explanation could be the use of overexplicit negations: in corrective contexts, L2 learners often realise utterances with the explicit negation of the erroneous proposition in the first part, with the correct alternative presented subsequently. We provide an example of this in the following example:

(64)
A. Marie donne à son frère des mots croisés, n'est-ce pas?
B. Non, Marie ne donne pas des mots croisés à son frère, Marie lui donne [un journal]$_F$.

In this structure, the corrective focus, "un journal", is positioned at the end of a lengthy utterance, and this already makes it less likely to be marked by major f0 movements. Moreover, its salience at the discourse level is diminished, given that the function of refuting the incorrect preposition has already been fulfilled in the initial part of the utterance, by the explicit negation of the proposed predicate.

Regarding the differences between the two L2 groups, we think they closely mirror the divergences noticed in the two L1 groups. In fact, Italian learners of L2 French do not mark the distinction between identification significantly through intonation. In contrast, in Italian L2, French learners keep marking this difference, increasing the use of falling contours in the more contrastive condition (i.e. correction focus), reflecting the behaviour of L1 French speakers.

Obviously, to have an overall view, it is first necessary to integrate the results illustrated in this chapter with those shown in the previous section, i.e. the one concerning constituent order and specific syntactic constructions. Once these two aspects have been put together, which we will do in the next section (Chapter 6), we will be able to better understand these results, trying to formulate an interpretation of the role of L1 influence and universals of acquisition also in relation to models of L2 prosody acquisition. For this final step, we refer to the concluding section (Chapter 7).

Integrating prosody and syntax

In this section we will present the results of syntax, word order and intonation, put together. As we did in the previous chapters, we will start with the results from the two native groups and then move to those of the L2 speakers. In the subsequent analysis, we classify as marked word orders any instances of the structures previously identified and discussed in Chapter 4, such as it-cleft sentences, object separation, fronting, postverbal subjects, etc.

Regarding intonation, we define as marked any constituents realised with either a flathigh or falling contour type, as detailed in Chapter 5.

6.1 *Syntax and intonation in the native groups*

As we did in the previous chapters, we will first deal with the two native groups, and the analysis of L2 productions will follow. The aim of these sections is to integrate results from the two distinct analyses, to have a more comprehensive and realistic picture of speakers' behaviour in information-structure marking. As we have reminded in the very first lines of the work (see Chapter 1), in fact, the separation between syntax and prosody in this regard is an abstraction. Nonetheless, looking at the two aspects separately has allowed us to observe a very larger number of phenomena in a clear and fine-grained perspective, which will be useful for the thorough discussion we are about to present.

6.1.1 L1 French

In Fig. 6.1 we show the marking strategies employed by native French speaker to mark narrow focus (identification – and correction – conditions are mixed).

For this group, intonation alone accounts for 27% of the total (labeled "int", coloured blue), while syntax[1] contributes 10% (labelled "syn", coloured magenta). The combination of both syntax and intonation represents approximately 20% of the total (labelled "bth", which stands for "both", violet). Notably, around 42% of target focus constituents remain unmarked, lacking specific word order and/or intonation configurations[2] (designated as "null" and represented in grey).

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[1] In this chapter, the label "syn" (standing for syntax) encompasses all phenomena related to both syntax and word order, including all the non-canonical structures discussed in Chapter 4.

[2] In this and in the upcoming charts of this chapter, falling and flathigh contours are considered as marked, while rising and flatlow are considered as unmarked.

Figure 6.1 - *Marking strategies used in narrow-focus contexts by FRL1 speakers,*
all target constituents mixed
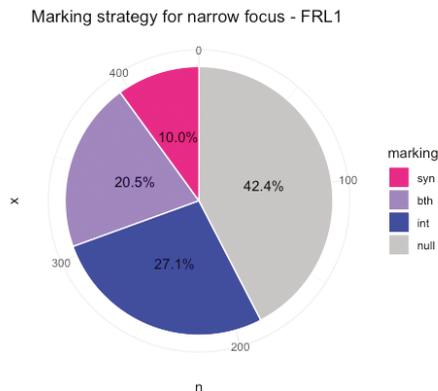
Consistent with our approach in the previous chapters, though, we find it more informative to examine results separately, on the basis of the syntactic nature of the target focus-constituent and of the focus type, i.e. distinguishing identification focus from correction focus and target subjects from target non-subjects. In Fig. 6.2 and 6.3 we present the results for the four possible combinations of syntactic role and focus subtype.

Figure 6.2 - *Marking strategies used by FRL1 speakers*
for target in identification focus context (left) and correction focus context (right)
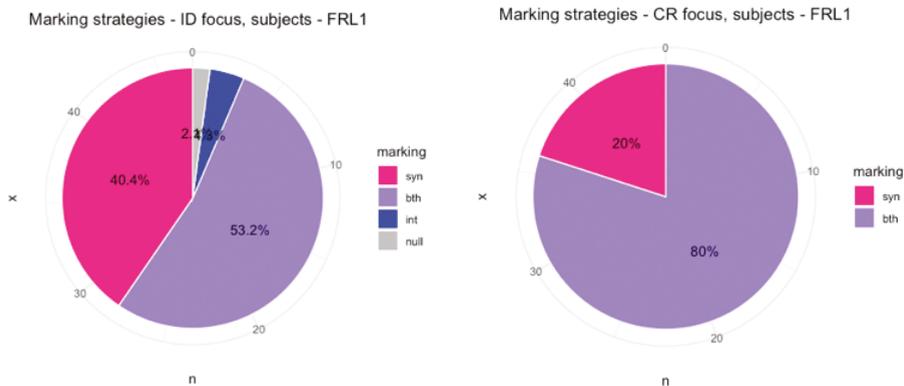
The four charts illustrate significant variations in outcomes under specific isolated conditions. In Fig. 6.2, results for target subjects in both focus conditions, identification (left) and correction (right), are presented.

Comparing these findings to those in Fig. 6.1, it becomes evident that the percentage of unmarked tokens for this syntactic role is substantially reduced. With only one exception, represented by a token in the identification condition,

all target subjects are marked by syntax, and a significant portion is also marked by intonation.

In the identification condition, intonation is used in approximately 60% of the cases, with just two occurrences exclusively relying on syntax. In the correction condition, there is a notable increase in the use of intonation to mark this focus subtype. Consequently, 80% of target constituents are marked by both intonation and syntax, while the remaining 20% is marked through syntax alone.

Figure 6.3 - *Marking strategies used by FRL1 speakers for non-subjects in identification-focus context (left) and correction-focus context (right)*
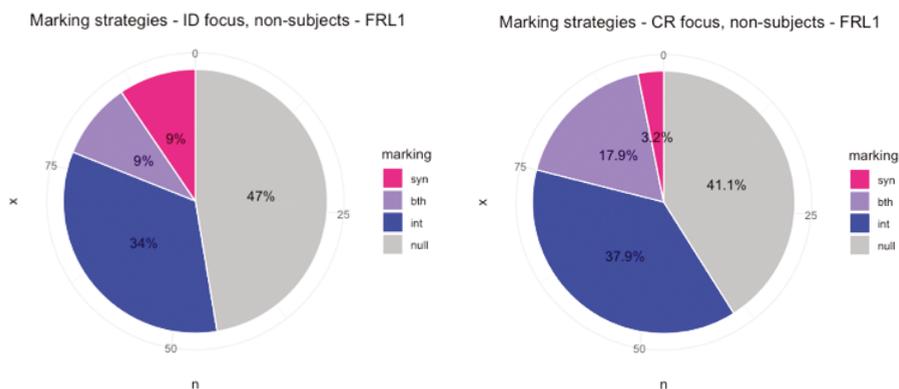
Proceeding to Fig. 6.3, we present the results for all non-subject targets in the two focus conditions. In comparison to subjects, the first notable observation is tokens, comprising almost half in the identification condition (47%) and slightly less in the correction condition (41%).

Additionally, we see that non-subjects are more frequently marked by intonation alone than by both syntax and intonation. This finding echoes our earlier results in Chapter 4, in which we found that syntactically marked structures, primarily it-clefts for the French L1 group, are more prevalent for subjects and rarer for other types of syntactic constituents.

Turning to the comparison between the two focus conditions, we notice that the difference is not as pronounced as observed for subject constituents. Although to a lesser extent, however, the same trend is observed: in the transition from the less to the more contrastive condition, the percentage of unmarked constituents decreases, and this is mostly due to a rise in intonational marking.

6.1.2 L1 Italian

In this subsection we will illustrate the results obtained from the integration of syntax and intonation for the second native group, native Italian speakers (ITL1).

For this group, unmarked tokens make up slightly more than half of the total, at 52%. As for marked tokens, intonation alone accounts for 26%, while syntax

contributes to roughly 10%. The combination of both intonation and syntax, instead, occurs in 12% of cases.

Figure 6.4 - *Marking strategies used in narrow-focus contexts by ITL1 speakers, all target constituents mixed*
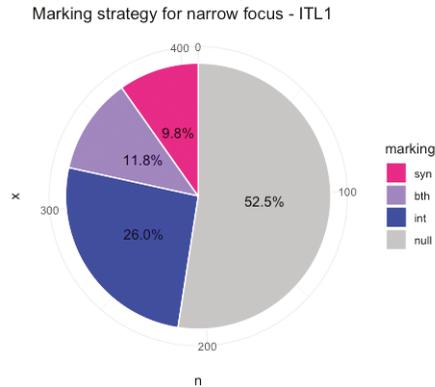
When comparing these results to those of the native French group (Fig. 6.1), it becomes apparent that there is a difference in both tonal and word order marking in Italian, the contribution of both aspects being reduced, compared to the French counterpart. We will elaborate on this aspect, which may be somewhat unexpected or surprising, in § 6.1.3, after having examined the four conditions (roles of target constituent and focus types) separately.

Figure 6.5 - *Marking strategies used by ITL1 speakers for target in identification focus context (left) and correction focus context (right)*
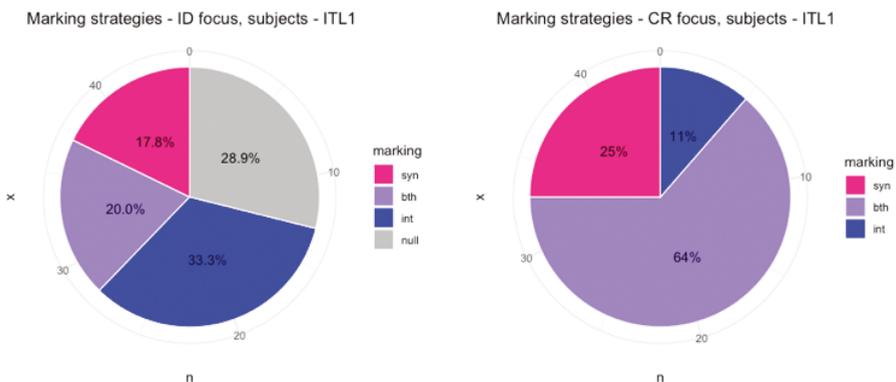
Fig. 6.5 illustrates the results for target subjects. In the identification condition, a consistent portion (29%) remains unmarked. The remaining tokens show a relatively even distribution: one-third is marked through intonation alone, 18% through syntax alone, and 20% through a combination of syntax and intonation.

Moving from identification focus to correction focus, we observe a significant shift. In the corrective condition, 89% of target subjects are marked by syntactic means, often reinforced by intonation; the two together, in fact, cover 64% of the total. While tonal marking gains a larger share, the most notable increase is that of syntax. Importantly, unmarked tokens are entirely absent in the corrective condition.

In a quick comparison to the French group, we observe that in the correction-focus picture 11% of tokens are marked by intonation without alterations in word order or syntax: this combination is never attested in the French group in this condition.

Figure 6.6 - *Marking strategies used by ITL1 speakers for non-subjects in identification-focus context (left) and correction-focus context (right)*
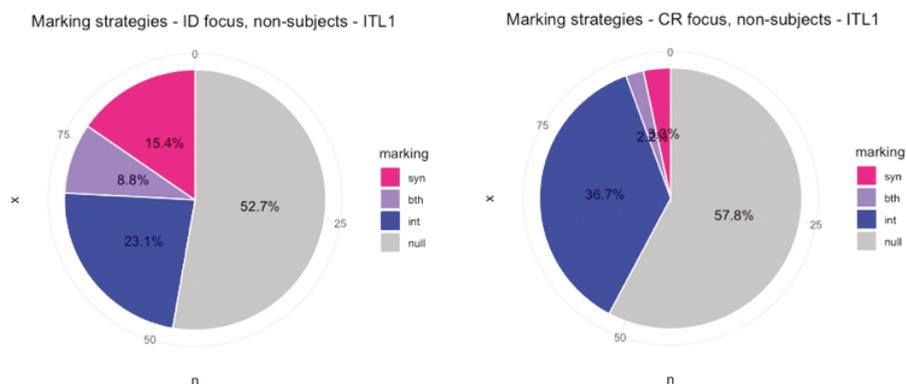
Shifting our focus to target non-subjects, illustrated in Fig. 6.6, we observe a noteworthy difference between identification and correction. The primary driver of this differentiation seems to be an increase in the use of intonation, as depicted in the chart on the right. Remarkably, in the correction-focus condition, focus constituents are predominantly signalled through intonation alone. What is quite surprising, however, is the unexpected outcome in the corrective condition: in this context, unmarked tokens are more numerous that in the identification-focus condition. This trend deviates from our expectations, and from the situation observed in the French group[3].

6.1.3 Interlinguistic comparison

A noteworthy observation stemming from our results pertains to the interplay between tonal and syntactic marking: these two mechanisms don't appear as mutually exclusive

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[3] One possible explanation is that Italian speakers may rely more heavily on cues other than f0 modulation when marking contrast. Subsequent work has in fact examined separately other cues, such as duration or glottalisation at prosodic boundaries, providing evidence that Italian speakers exploit these cues more systematically than intonation, compared to French speakers (De Paolis *et al.,* 2023; De Paolis *et al.,* 2024). A promising direction for future research would therefore be to investigate these parameters separately, in order to obtain a more detailed picture of how corrective focus is signalled.

options, but rather as two strategies that increasingly overlap to mark higher degrees of contrast, in an additive relationship. Figure 6.7 shows a comparison of the results observed for the two groups of native speakers, in all the three focus conditions.

Figure 6.7 - *Proportions of syntactic and prosodic marking of subject focus in FRL1 and ITL1 across focus conditions (bf = broad focus, id = identification, cr = correction)*
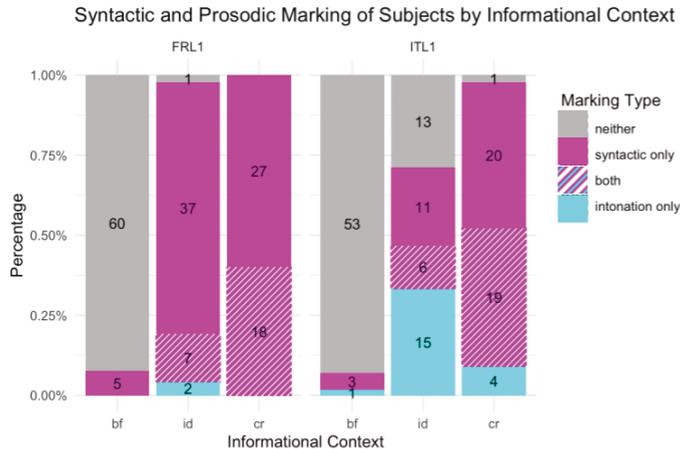
While earlier studies (Arnold, 2021, 2024) have observed this phenomenon, its widespread acceptance in cross-linguistic descriptions of focus marking remains contentious. Many accounts still view syntax and prosody as either complementary or alternative strategies. This, of course, could be the result of the fact that many descriptions of the phenomenon in Italian and French have focused more on one of the two aspects than on the other, as we have already pointed out in the introduction (see § 1.4). In fact, many cross-linguistic studies on focus have aimed to establish a typology of information-structure marking: rather than exploring the relationship between syntax and prosody in various informational contexts, these studies typically aim to categorize languages as either syntax-predominant or prosody-predominant.

Another crucial observation that can be done considering our results concerns the substantial difference between the two languages, Italian and French, in balancing syntax and intonation in the two different focus-conditions, identification and correction. In both French and Italian, a clear distinction between focus subtypes is achieved by adjusting the balance between these two marking strategies based on the contrast condition. In Italian L1, intonation emerges as the primary and foundational strategy, with syntax coming into play when the informational context becomes more contrastive. Conversely, for French L1, we observe the inverse mechanism: syntax serves as the fundamental strategy, and tonal marking is introduced as the level of contrast increases.

In such a vision, the marking of focus through word order and specific syntactic constructions, or through intonation, is not a matter of two optional, freely alternated

methods, nor redundant strategies. On the contrary, the combination of the two is influenced by the level of contrast conveyed by the focus, and this influence operates through a mechanism that is language specific.

To conclude, we provide two examples of what seems to be the predominant marking strategy for correction focus in both Italian and French, i.e., a significant tonal movement realised on a constituent that is also clefted or dislocated. These examples are depicted in Fig. 6.8 (French) and 6.9 (Italian), where readers can observe spectrograms with f0 tracks alongside transcriptions of the targeted constituents within an it-cleft structure.

Figure 6.8 - *Acoustic representation and transcription of sentence "Non, c'est Jules" as uttered by a male native French speaker in corrective-focus context*
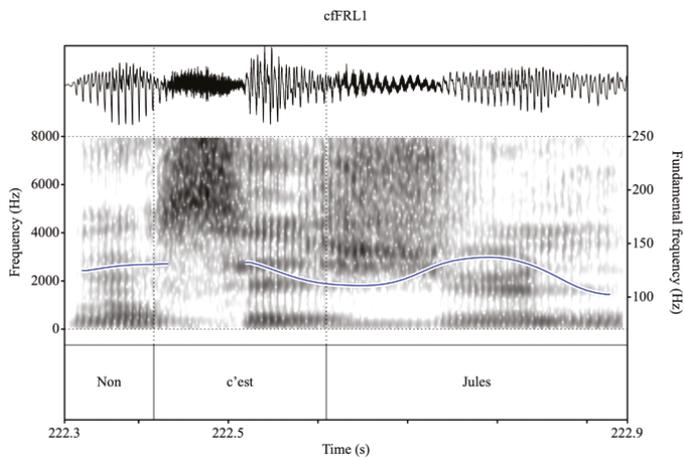
Figure 6.9 - *Acoustic representation and transcription of sentence "No, è Giulio" as uttered by a female native Italian speaker in corrective-focus context*
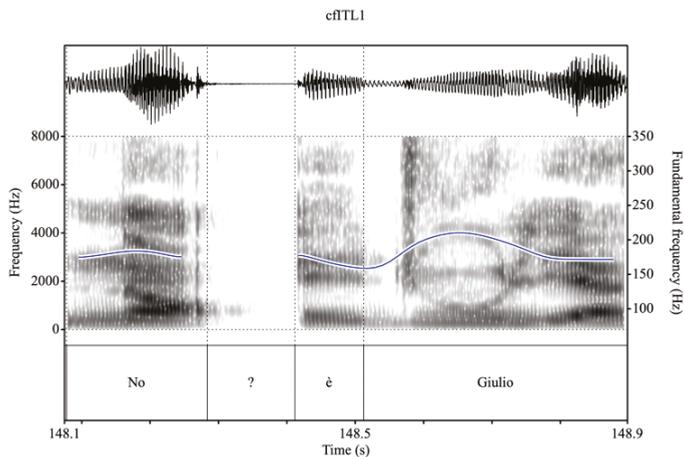
6.2 *Syntax and intonation in non-native groups*

As we transition into the analysis of non-native speakers, we are guided by the two key observations derived from our examination of native speakers. These observations pose fundamental questions about the strategies employed by non-native speakers in focus marking. Firstly, we inquire into how non-native speakers navigate these different strategies in focus marking; secondly, we explore how non-native speakers handle the additive relationship between tonal and syntactic marking, and whether this relationship manifests differently in their production. Our first aim is to examine whether the distinct mechanisms of interrelation between syntax and intonational movements that we identified in the native languages are mirrored, and to what extent, in the two groups of learners. The second one is, conversely, to look at potential divergences from both source and target languages, and try and account for them in terms of peculiar features of learners' varieties.

6.2.1 L2 French

We will start from group FRL2, Italian learners of L2 French. Fig. 6.10 shows the results for the two narrow-focus conditions and all target constituents mixed. The outcome is very close to that of group ITL1; yet, this is not very informative, since we have already noticed that ITL1 is itself quite similar to FRL1.

Figure 6.10 - *Marking strategies used in narrow-focus contexts by Italian speakers of L2 French, all target constituents mixed*
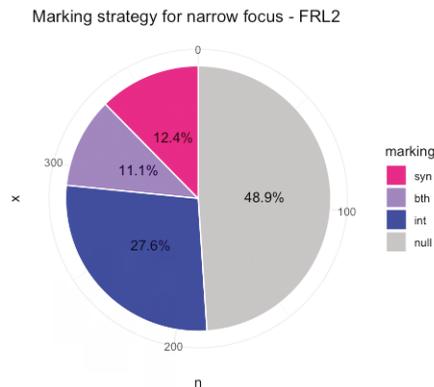
What we are interested in, though, is the interaction of syntax and intonation depending on the informational context and syntactic role of the target constituent, which we will illustrate in the upcoming charts, Fig. 6.11.

Figure 6.11 - *Marking strategies used by FRL2 speakers for subjects in identification-focus context (left) and correction-focus context (right)*
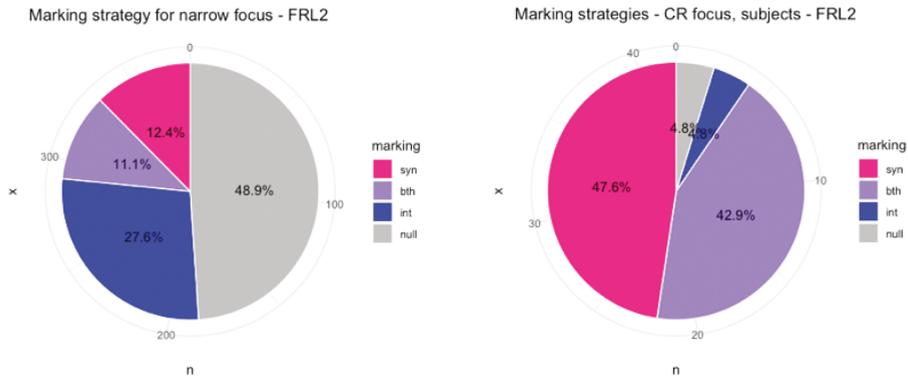
In the case of target subjects, we see that syntax is already a primary marking strategy in the identification condition. This result represents an approximation to the target by Italian learners: their performance lies exactly in-between the two outcomes of FRL1 group and ITL1 group in terms of frequency of marked syntactic structures (Fig. 6.2 and 6.5, respectively). However, it's crucial to note that learners deviate from both their native language (L1) model and the target language (L2) when transitioning from identification to correction. While there's a significant uptick in the use of syntactic marking, L2 French speakers don't correspondingly increase intonational marking, which contrasts with the behaviour of native speakers in this context.

Figure 6.12 - *Marking strategies used by FRL2 speakers for target non-subjects in identification-focus context (left) and correction-focus context (right)*
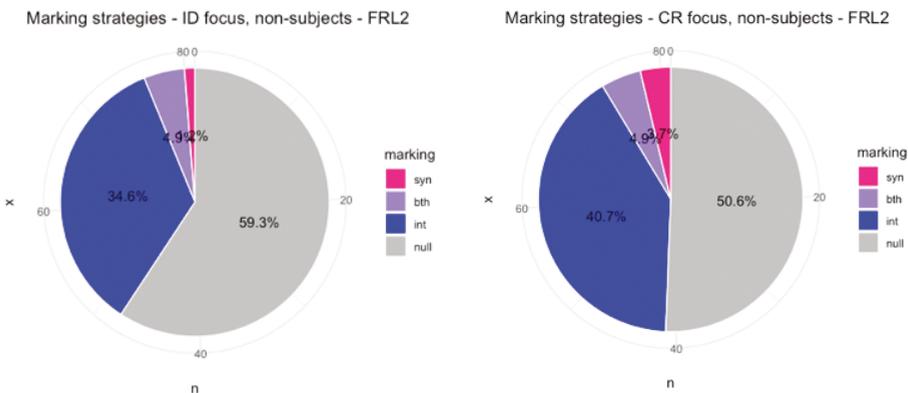
Fig. 6.12 displays the findings concerning non-subject constituents. The charts offer a straightforward interpretation: the FRL2 group notably underuses syntax compared to the target language, and does not compensate for this through

intonation. Both in identification and correction tasks, there is a high percentage of unmarked tokens: 59% in the former and 50% in the latter. This observation might suggest either a negative impact of cross-linguistic influence or a language-independent effect stemming from the inherent complexity of it-clefts structures. Specifically, Italian learners of French demonstrate a reduced frequency of using it-clefts: taking a cross-linguistic perspective, this tendency can be attributed to the "habit" these speakers have in their L1, where this construction is not at all employed for non-subject constituents. As highlighted in Chapter 4, even learners who recognize the target use of it-clefts may struggle to produce them, particularly with constituents other than subjects.

Notably, FRL2 speakers do not compensate with intonational marking: as a consequence, an overall higher proportion of unmarked tokens is observed compared to both the source and target languages.

6.2.2 L2 Italian

We will now move to the last of our four groups, French learners of L2 Italian.

Figure 6.13 - *Marking strategies used in narrow-focus contexts by French speakers of L2 Italian, all target constituents mixed*
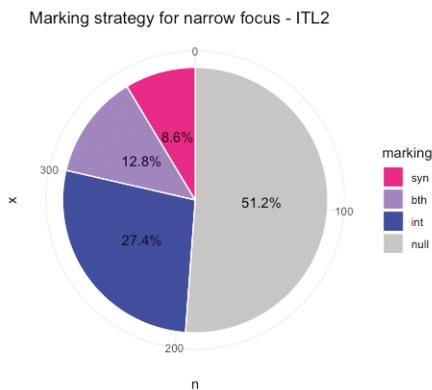
As with the other learner group, the overall output resembles that of both the target and source languages. However, for a more insightful analysis of the results, we will promptly shift our attention to examining individual conditions, since this approach has proven to be more informative in the case of the other groups of speakers.

The charts in Fig. 6.14 illustrate the results for target subjects.

Figure 6.14 - *Marking strategies used by ITL2 speakers for target subjects in identification context (left) and correction context (right)*

Marking strategies - ID focus, subjects - ITL2

Marking strategies - CR focus, subjects - ITL2
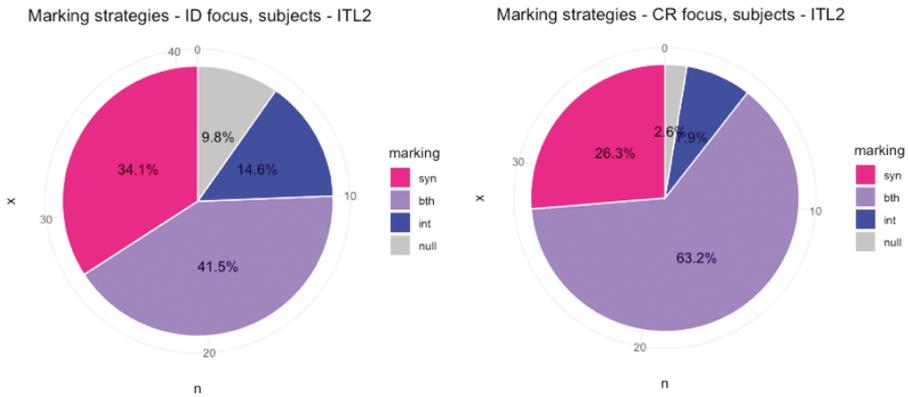
In the case of identification focus, French learners of Italian L2 demonstrate a partial approximation to the target, wherein they reduce the use of syntactic marking and increase the use of intonation alone. The resulting situation is, as observed for the FRL2, a sort of intermediate stage between the behaviour of the source and that of the target language.

Regarding correction focus, we observe that the result is very close to that of the target language. With the exception of 2.6% of unmarked tokens, the learners' behaviour closely mirrors that of ITL1 group. Almost two-thirds of tokens are marked by it-clefts and intonation together, a quarter by syntax alone, and a smaller portion by intonation on canonical word order.

Figure 6.15 - *Marking strategies used by ITL2 speakers for target non-subjects in identification (left) and correction context (right)*

Marking strategies - CR focus, non-subjects - ITL2

Marking strategies - ID focus, non-subjects - ITL2
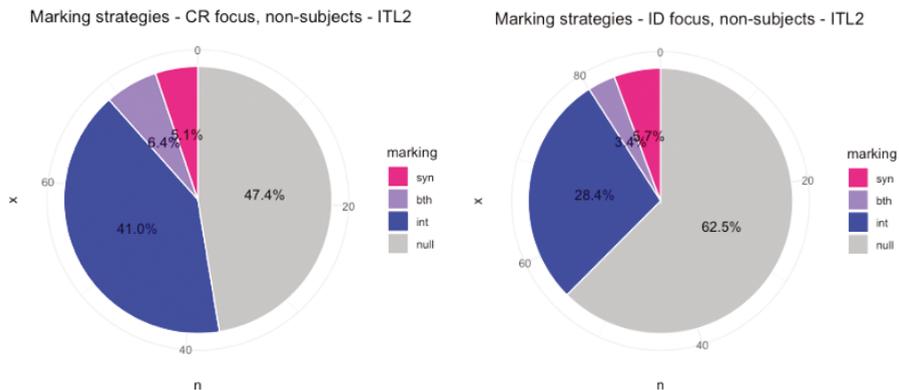
As for non-subjects, more significant deviations from both the source and target languages become apparent. In the identification condition, the ITL2 group's results exhibit less tonal marking than FRL1 and less syntactic marking than ITL1. In

summary, there is an overall reduction of both means, favouring the remaining portion of unmarked tokens. In the correction focus condition, the results are more akin to the target language and more distant from the source. Compared to the FRL1 group, tonal marking is notably reduced – although it remains the primary marking strategy.

6.2.3 Comparison and discussion

The charts (see Fig. 6.9 and 6.13) presenting the combined results of the two focus conditions and all syntactic components exhibit a similar pattern for both L2 groups. However, a closer examination of subsequent representations, particularly those illustrating the interplay between syntactic role of target constituent and focus subtype, is crucial. The separate analysis has proved essential for discerning distinct behaviours within the two groups of learners, shedding light on both shared characteristics, likely stemming from non-native speech universals, and divergent elements, that may serve as indicators of L1 influence. Figure 6.16 shows a comparison of strategies used by L2 speakers for target subjects in all three focus conditions: broad focus, identification, correction.

Figure 6.16 - *Proportions of syntactic and prosodic marking of subject focus in FRL2 and ITL2 across focus conditions (bf = broad focus, id = identification, cr = correction)*
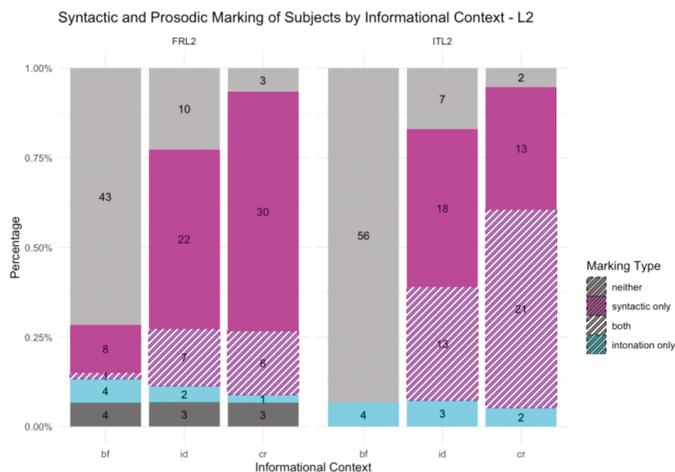
Predictions based on Basic Variety (as proposed by Klein & Perdue, 1992) would imply focus marking primarily through prosody or manipulations in word order, thus neglecting particles and it-clefts. However, our findings confirm that these L2 learners, even those classified as A-level (beginners), are already past this step. The close proximity between Italian and French, in fact, expedites learners' recognition of focus marking strategies in the target languages, allowing them to exploit similar constructions to those used in their respective L1s. In our case, we find it more

interesting to focus on the effects of this real and/or perceived similarity, rather than on universal marking phenomena in very early acquisition phases.

Our post-basic learners are past "universal strategies", and must cope with target language preferences and/or constraints. In this context, the similarity between source and target language can be a much relevant factor (Benazzo & Andorno, 2017; Kellerman, 1983). Our data, in fact, shows that L2 Italian and L2 French learners have correctly identified the it-cleft sentence, formally similar in the two languages, as a legitimate and effective means to mark narrow focus. However, they have not fully grasped that, functionally, the structure serves different purposes in Italian and French: in this respect, a more significant sign of transfer is on the functional level, rather than the formal, a point consistent with observations in the acquisition of information structure more broadly (Dimroth & Narasimhan, 2012).

As for the underuse of intonational marking, more than one interpretation is plausible. The first is that, in L2 focus interpretation, it-clefts are perceived as more "salient" and "explicit" than prosody (Yan & Calhoun, 2022; Sleeman, 2004), leading learners to neglect intonational marking in favour of syntactic marking, even in production.

Another hypothesis posits that L2 speakers might have employed prosody, but our methods may not have accurately captured it. In other words, it's possible that either the phonetic cues we observed were not the right ones, or we misinterpreted the learners' use of them. For instance, French speakers learning Italian as a second language might have signalled focus with final rises, driven more by a primary constraint on boundary insertion rather than specific pitch accent contours, as proposed by Féry (2001). So, even if we did not categorize rising contours as marked, they could still carry significance.

Moreover, an analysis dealing with tonal movements only, while informative, may offer a partial description of the prosodic dynamics. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this work (see § 1.3 and subsequent discussions), there are other aspects that could bear a distinctive function and thus warrant consideration, even if they have been somewhat overlooked in the literature compared to intonation. This oversight may arise from a research bias, stemming from a predominant focus on West-Germanic languages, which use intonation to convey information structure. Exploring whether Romance languages, like French and Italian, use different prosodic cues – such as syllable or vowel duration, or manipulations of phrasing –wcould provide valuable insights. Also, looking into how typological differences, like the presence or absence of phonological lexical stress, might affect prosodic phenomena related to information structure can enhance our understanding.

Another aspect worth exploring is whether the underuse of tonal marking is compensated by means other than syntax. *Overexplicitness* could be one of these compensatory strategies. To illustrate this, consider the context of corrective focus: while native speakers typically employ a straightforward sentence structure with a negative particle and a correct description (see example 66), non-native speakers might explicitly express the negation of the incorrect option before providing the correct one. Examples

of these two constructions, drawn from our corpus, are presented below. The first is from a native French speaker, while the second is from an Italian learner of L2 French.

(65)
A. Marie vole le journal au kiosque, non?
B. Non, Marie [achète]$_F$ le journal au kiosque.

(66)
A. Marie vole le journal au kiosque, non?
B. Non, elle ne vole pas le journal, elle [achète]$_F$ le journal au kiosque.

In this regard, L2 behaviour often differs from that of native speakers. This phenomenon of overexplicitness has been described as characteristic of L2 speech, particularly in reference tracking (Hendriks, 2005; Ryan, 2015). Starting from this qualitative consideration, we think that a systematic analysis of this phenomenon could provide further interesting results on the behaviour of non-native speakers.

Discussion

In this concluding section, we aim to synthesize the primary and noteworthy findings from our study, providing commentary on their relationship to existing literature and emphasizing their contributions to the field.

7.1 *Main findings: native groups*

We will structure this section following the same order and ratio of the research questions (see § 2.4). Following this approach, we will start with some considerations about the outcome of our analysis on native groups. To initiate our discussion, we will compare expectations with results regarding the analysis of two source languages, focusing on strategies for expressing information structure, specifically in terms of focus and contrast.

7.1.1 Information structure marking

In our introduction, we provided an overview of studies dealing with the characterization of Romance languages in this context, highlighting the specifics of French and Italian. While early characterizations of focus marking categorized Italian and French as "non-plastic" or "word order" languages, as proposed by Vallduví (1991) and Ladd (2008), subsequent studies, including works such as Face & D'Imperio (2005) and, more recently, Sbranna *et al.* (2023) have painted a more detailed picture of Romance languages. These more flexible descriptions allow for exceptions and variations in Italian and French focal typology: if it's true that speakers of these two languages favour focus marking through specific syntactic structures or dislocations of constituents, this does not necessarily entail that prosodic marking doesn't play a role as well. And, crucially, prosodic marking does not only surface as a consequence of word re-ordering (as implied, for example, in Ladd, 2008); the use of prosodic cues exists as an autonomous strategy, and even alternative to operations at the syntactic or word order level.

   In addition, a distributional approach to prosodic and syntactic marking of information categories may be able to reveal nuances at the level of the information structure itself. Indeed, observation of the variation in the interaction between syntactic and prosodic marking contributes to a fine-grained description of gradient levels of emphasis, contrast and illocutionary force, useful for delineating a *continuum* such as that described in § 1.1.3.

Our results strongly align with these recent studies, demonstrating that native French and Italian speakers can – and do – use both prosody and syntax for expressing information categories like focus and contrast. Furthermore, the interplay between these notions, focus and contrast, is achieved through the modulation of both means. Consequently, speakers adeptly differentiate categories of informational structure. Whether through syntax or prosody, utterances within diverse informational contexts exhibit distinct marking combinations. It is crucial to note that examining only one of these two marking strategies would have rendered the analysis incomplete.

Of course, besides these general considerations, divergences arise in the comparison of French and Italian native speakers' behaviour. Among Italian speakers, word order is more flexible: the account of possible orders and syntactic combinations in focus marking showed that various solutions surface (see Fig. 4.12). The range of possibilities observed in our data corresponds to existing descriptions in the literature: object or adverbial fronting, postverbal subjects, right dislocations, etc.

An unexpected result arises from the relatively low frequency of certain structures in our Italian data, especially when compared to the prevalence of canonical order in the majority of utterances. When we compare our findings with the observations and predictions of literature, such as in Leonetti (2017) and Cruschina and Remberger (2017), the overall frequency of structures like postverbal subjects and object fronting does not seem to align. As previously mentioned, there are two plausible interpretations for this discrepancy. The first points to a task-related effect: the instructions for the picture-story task prompted participants to generate "complete sentences". However, this expression might have been slightly misinterpreted by speakers, leading them to produce "canonical" utterances, rather than more broadly considering "utterances including a main verb". The second interpretation is that the distribution found in our data is not due to a task-related effect, but actually highlights a more significant role of *in-situ* (prosodic) marking than previously described for the Italian language. In this respect, anyway, we would like to underscore the importance of considering distributions, since it's not always the case that a single structure perfectly corresponds to a specific information or structural context. Categorical accounts, while informative, may not fully capture the complexity of both inter- and intra-speaker linguistic variation. To exclude, or at least mitigate, task-related effects, resorting to spontaneous and corpus data is essential – an avenue we plan to explore in the future. However, for the current work, our primary objective is on comparing native data with non-native results: we acknowledge the observed phenomenon and its potential implications in non-native speech, finding reassurance in the fact that, with the same task, any bias introduced will be consistent in L2 productions.

In the case of French, our results are more in line with previous literature. As anticipated, the preferred structure in narrow focus contexts is the it-cleft, consistent with findings from earlier experimental and corpus studies (Dufter, 2009; Destruel, 2016 among others). The correlation between the role of the focal constituent and

cleft frequency – higher frequency for subjects, lower for adverbials, and even lower for objects – is also consistent with the patterns described earlier. Moreover, as noted in other studies, this structure is often accompanied by prosodic emphasis and realised with specific tonal movements (Greif and Skopeteas, 2021; Mertens, 2019).

7.1.2 Focus and contrast marking strategies

What adds novelty and interest to our study is the mapping of the previously mentioned structures onto the notions of focus, contrast, and the various combinations of the two. In many existing accounts of focus marking in Italian and French, the distinction between focus and contrast is not clearly controlled for in the protocol. In our case, instead, we intentionally distinguished these two informational categories, to observe potential variations in the use of marked forms by our participants. The behaviour of native speakers has proven to be particularly intriguing in this respect, as French and Italian do not appear to exhibit identical patterns; in our case, this is particularly interesting, since this divergence is likely to influence the production of L2 speakers – as indeed observed.

In Italian, prosody plays a default role in marking focal elements in both identification and correction contexts. On the other hand, Italian speakers selectively resort to it-cleft structures for syntactic marking, primarily in contexts of higher contrast, such as corrective focus. In contrast, French speakers default to it-cleft structures as their primary narrow-focus strategy, using prosody, especially on clefts, for more contrastive contexts.

These divergent tendencies indicate two key observations. First, syntax and prosody are not alternative means, and they do not engage in a trade-off relationship. Instead, they can reinforce each other, and the combined use of more than one marking mean crucially contributes to the delineation of a gradient of contrast in various types of focus.

7.2 *Main Findings: L2*

Shifting our focus to non-native productions, we will now explore our findings from this perspective. In this section, we will adhere to the order and ratio of the research questions outlined earlier (see § 2.4).

7.2.1 Input and salience in L2 acquisition

The similarity between Italian and French does not uniformly influence language use: the varying salience of linguistic structures, in fact, contributes to a discrepancy in the acquisition of certain structures in relation to others. It-clefts, for example, have been found to be more salient than other dislocations in focus processing (Yan & Calhoun, 2022), and this is observable in our results: the option of using it-clefts to highlight focus constituents is the first resort for L2 speakers when articulating the information structure of utterances. By "first resort", we mean both in terms of frequency – it-

clefts are by far the most frequent focus structure in the productions of both L2 Italian and L2 French speakers – and in terms of being used even by A-level speakers. This aligns well with the notion of this structure being particularly salient, easy to perceive, process, and appropriately use at a later stage. So, even if other (almost) equivalent tools are available to convey information-structural functions, it can be inferred that they are not as salient in the input as it-clefts are. The behaviour of learners in our sample can be considered, in this sense, as characteristic of interlanguage grammars, which prioritize perceptually salient structures even if their frequency or distribution diverges from both the L1 and the L2.

Another consideration that can be made in this regard pertains to the presence or absence of these structures in the input, and the impact this has on their acquisition by non-native speakers. Our results, especially those derived from the analyses on syntax and word order, suggest that learning a particular linguistic feature is easier than avoiding its use. In fact, as mentioned in § 4.3, the presence of a structure in the input is easier to detect than the absence of that same structure: positive evidence is more easily processed than indirect, negative evidence in interlanguage development (Schwartz and Goad, 2017; Gass and Mackey, 2002).

7.2.2 Two faces of cross-linguistic influence

French and Italian, being cognate languages, share numerous similarities. One of our research questions aimed at exploring the implications of this (perceived and/ or real) linguistic similarity on learners' productions (refer to § 2.2.3). Initially, we anticipated that the close relationship between the learners' native (L1) and target (L2) languages would facilitate the acquisition of complex structures, such as it-clefts, present in both languages. However, we also hypothesized that learners might exhibit non-target-like usage in terms of frequency, either overusing or underusing these structures, due to the less-easily perceivable distance between French and Italian in this regard. Moreover, we expected that cross-linguistic influence may initially be facilitating, but could turn negative at advanced levels, potentially due to attentional breakdowns and incorrect input analysis.

In line with these expectations, features perceived as similar, such as the form and structure of it-clefts, were easily acquired, at least in terms of their correct formation. However, regarding their frequency, which may not be readily perceived as different in the two languages, the behaviour varies slightly. While the overall tendency of the groups leans towards approximation to the target, preferences and frequency of use reveal that advanced learners do not exhibit more target-like behaviour. The lack of perceived distance between French and Italian preferences possibly leads to a non-target performance in terms of frequency of use, which is observable in both L2 groups.

On the other hand, a distinct trajectory is evident for linguistic aspects consistently perceived as distant in the two languages, such as the reduced flexibility of French compared to Italian and the different treatment of drop/pro-drop. Learners are aware of the stronger unacceptability of certain structures (such

as postverbal subjects or fronting in French, subject-drop in French, and subject non-drop in Italian) due to this perceived distance, resulting in the absence of such structures in their production. These findings support the notion that both real and perceived similarities and differences between Italian and French, rooted in their partial typological proximity, influence acquisitional patterns, as indicated by previous studies (Benazzo & Andorno, 2017; Della Putta, 2016).

In sum, our results have shown that when learners perceive structural overlap, transfer is facilitative and pushes their interlanguage closer to the L2; when they perceive differences, transfer is inhibitory, leading to fallback on L1 strategies.

7.2.3 Non-linearity in L2 acquisition

A categorization into sub-groups of proficiency levels is crucial for a pseudo-longitudinal study, since such design aims to trace a hypothetical path describing the development of focus marking strategies in L2 speakers. Nevertheless, the problem of proficiency assessment is well-known and felt in second language acquisition studies (Thomas, 2006), and we have ourselves experienced difficulties in categorizing non-native speakers into sub-groups of proficiency levels. In fact, despite our attempts to accurately triangulate proficiency through multiple evaluation tests (see Chapter 3), uncertainties persist regarding whether these assessments have truly captured the complexity of speakers' competence. We will thus propose some consideration on this matter, keeping this caveat in mind. Assuming our assessment procedures reflect the speakers' competence accurately, our analysis revealed a non-linear path in the acquisition of focus and contrast markers. In fact, learners assessed as more lexically and morpho-syntactically competent did not necessarily adopt target-like behaviour in the marking of information structure. For example, in both L2 Italian and L2 French groups, speakers belonging to C-level sub-groups were the most prone to treat the distinction between identification and correction as they would do in their respective L1s (see § 4.2). This is not surprising, given that the non-linearity of second language acquisition is a well-known phenomenon in the field of research, largely observed for other linguistics levels, such as morphology and lexicon (see Larsen-Freeman, 1997; De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2007; Verspoor, De Bot & Lowie, 2011). This, in a way, is both the reason for and the consequence of the complexity.

All such patterns reinforce the notion of interlanguage as a gradient, evolving system: even advanced learners do not simply replace their L1 system with the L2, but continue to negotiate between the two.

7.2.4 Prosody and L2 learning models

The persistence of prosodic patterns inherent to learners' L1 suggests resistance to change at this level. These findings align with existing literature, which consistently suggests that learners tend to retain sensitivity to the constraints of their L1, especially for what concerns information structure and prosody (Colantoni & Mennen, 2023; Zubizarreta and Nava, 2011).

Upon closer examination of the specific level at which this influence is activated, it becomes apparent that the effect is not uniformly distributed. Consistent with Mennen's categorization, our research questions proposed that transfer in L2 prosody can occur on different dimensions: semantic, systemic, and realisational. Our results indicate a discernible influence of speakers' L1 in the semantic, frequency, and realisational dimensions, but not in the systemic dimension.

On the semantic front, our observations reveal that the mapping of prosodic marking onto different categories of contrast (identification and correction) closely mirrors L1 patterns. Notably, native French speakers prosodically distinguish between identification and correction, particularly for subject focus, whereas native Italian speakers do not. This distinction extends to L2 behaviour, with French learners of L2 Italian maintaining this distinction, while Italian learners of L2 French do not seem to acquire this feature of the target language.

Turning to the systemic dimension – which essentially aligns with the phonological level – we posit that transfer does not actively influence L2 productions, as mentioned earlier. In fact, if we assume that both native French and native Italian speakers mark focus through prosodic alignment (Féry, 2013), we can state that L2 French and L2 Italian learners, when encoding contrast prosodically, correctly employ this marking strategy. In fact, if focus marking involves aligning the edge of the focus domain with the edge of a higher prosodic constituent (as discussed in § 1.3.1), both L2 groups successfully achieve this goal. However, since the phonetic traits that indicate the presence of a prosodic boundary in Italian and French are distinct, the observed disparity in L2 speech lies in the phonetic implementation – and this is where transfer at the realisational level becomes evident. Specifically, native French speakers use glottalization and f0 modulation for boundary insertion or strengthening, while native Italian speakers rely more on glottalization and segments' duration (De Paolis *et al.*, 2023; De Paolis *et al.*, 2024). Remarkably, these distinctive means are mirrored in the production of L2 speakers from both language backgrounds: as we have illustrated through Chapter 5, Italian learners of L2 French employ f0 movements to a lesser extent that speakers of their target language, while French learners of L2 Italian fail to modulate vowel duration in such target-like manner. The management of glottalization and glottal stop, on the other hand, points to a positive influence of learners' L1. This selective mirroring confirms that transfer is not uniform but dimension-specific: learners import strategies from their L1 where the L2 does not provide salient cues, further supporting the view of interlanguage as a dynamic mix of source- and target-language properties.

7.2.5 Interplay of syntax and prosody in L2

The synthesis of results from various analyses on syntax, word order, and intonation in native speaker groups reveals an additive relationship between these different strategies of information-structure marking, contrary to a previously observed trade-off. In non-native speech, syntax consistently takes precedence over intonation,

suggesting that non-native speakers exhibit a higher comfort level with syntactic marking rather than prosodic marking.

This preference could stem from two potential reasons. Firstly, learners may face inhibitions in the phonetic implementation of intonational marking due to phonological differences between their native and target languages. In simpler terms, non-native speakers might feel less confident in managing the phonological constraints of their target language when using intonation, while the perceived similarity on the syntactic level remains higher, fostering an easier – and consequently, more frequent – use of marked syntactic structures.

Alternatively, the markedness scale hypothesis, proposed by Zerbian (2015), provides another perspective (refer to § 2.2.1). According to this hypothesis, the imbalance between prosodic and syntactic marking in non-native speech results from a universal, greater accessibility of syntax compared to prosody for learners. Consequently, word order emerges as more salient and easily processable than prosody in L2, leading to a higher ease of use and implementation. Learners tend to successfully adopt certain syntactic structures while neglecting prosodic markings in their non-native speech.

7.3 *Closing remarks*

In conclusion, our study has explored the intricate interplay of prosody, syntax, and their roles in marking information structure, particularly focus and contrast, in native Italian and French speakers as well as L2 learners. The examination of native speaker behaviour has revealed the additive nature of the relationship between syntax and intonation, challenging previous assumptions of a trade-off. This finding also challenges binary distinctions in the focal typology of Italian and French, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how focus and contrast are realised in Romance. Additionally, our results have shed light on the nuanced relationship between notions such as focus and contrast, advocating for a more refined description of these two information-structural notions and their relationship.

The investigation into non-native productions also sheds light on the dynamics of L2 acquisition. The salience of certain linguistic features, such as it-clefts, plays an important role in shaping the stages of L2 acquisition: learners tend to rely on structures that are more perceptually salient in their input, emphasizing the importance of positive evidence in the learning process. The influence of cross-linguistic factors is also evident, with learners demonstrating both facilitative and inhibitory effects as they manage the similarities and differences between their L1 and L2.

Furthermore, the non-linearity of L2 acquisition is evident, as proficiency levels do not consistently correlate with target-like behaviour in the marking of information structure. Learners at higher proficiency levels may still exhibit patterns reminiscent of their L1, emphasizing the complexity of competence assessment and the need for a fine-grained understanding of L2 development.

Overall, the L2 data depict interlanguages that operate as intermediate systems, shaped both by universal acquisitional pressures and by L1 transfer: facilitative where L1 and L2 converge, inhibitory where they diverge.

In the realm of prosody, our study reveals that transfer from L1 to L2 occurs in various dimensions, including semantic and phonetic aspects. While certain phonetic traits are successfully transferred, differences in the phonological constraints of the native and target languages lead to variations in the implementation of prosodic features.

Taken together, these findings call into question accounts that present syntax and prosody as mutually exclusive resources for focus marking, and instead support the view that the two can function in a complementary way. We believe that this perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how information structure is realised in both native and non-native speech. The evidence for a *continuum* of contrast, the non-linear trajectory of L2 acquisition, and the additive relationship between syntax and prosody all point to the complexity of language production, and we hope that this study provides a basis for further work in linguistics, second language acquisition, and prosody.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions and future perspectives

In this study, our primary objective was to investigate how both native and non-native speakers of Italian and French encode information structure, and in particular the categories of focus and contrast, with a specific interest in understanding the interplay between prosody and syntax. We adopted a methodology that combined both syntactic and prosodic perspectives, to gain a nuanced understanding of language acquisition dynamics in this linguistically distinct context. We consider the experiments successful, yielding rich and compelling outcomes that have the potential to make contributions to the field.

Throughout our investigation, we also identified additional perspectives and tasks essential for deepening our understanding and enhancing the robustness of our analyses. Firstly, the inclusion of results from our other two tasks, already recorded and transcribed, will add valuable layers to our analysis. The diversity of tasks, in fact, allows for a "triangulated" examination of speech, addressing potential task-related biases. For example, the analysis of the read-aloud task could provide a more objective assessment of prosodic profiles used for focalization, examining features such as duration and prosodic boundary strengthening. In contrast, spontaneous speech could be leveraged to explore a wider range of non-canonical constructions, which, as observed, did not occur as frequently as expected in the picture-story task. These steps are something we intend to pursue, given the available data.

Additionally, we propose that the prosodic description of focus-related phenomena could benefit from the analysis of more controlled, fine-grained data with purposeful design. While our set of tasks has provided insights into the interplay between syntax and prosody for focalization, the irregularity in the length, order, and position of target tokens within utterances poses challenges for a comprehensive phonetic analysis. Future experiments could involve more controlled protocols, for example incorporating insights from contour clustering analysis to support observations on L1 influence in peak alignment, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Lastly, recognizing the crucial yet ambiguous link between perception and production in L2 learning, we propose incorporating a perception study. This complementary perspective will enrich our analysis by providing valuable insights into how learners perceive and interpret prosodic and syntactic cues, enhancing our overall comprehension of the complex dynamics of information-structure marking. Bridging the interplay between production and perception, particularly challenging in the context of L2 learning, could offer valuable insights into how learners comprehend and respond to different marking strategies, furthering our understanding of the factors influencing strategies of prominence marking in L2.

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Appendix

I.

Questionnaire

Codice: _____   Data: _____   Ricercatore: _____

Questionario sul background linguistico

A. Informazioni generali
Anno di nascita: _____
Sesso: F [   ]   M [   ]
Età:_____Luogodinascita:_____
Settore di studio/lavoro: _____
Problemi di vista o udito? In passato: _____, adesso: _____

B. Conoscenze linguistiche generali
Madrelingua/e, dialetto/i: _____
Lingua della madre: _____ Regione di origine della madre: _____
Lingua del padre:_____Regione di origine del padre:_____
Lingua/e parlata/e in casa fino a 6 anni: _____
Lingua/e parlata/e in casa dopo i 6 anni: _____
Lingua/e in cui sei stato/a scolarizzato/a:

	Materie generali	*Inglese*	*Francese*	*Altro:_____*
Scuola elementare				
Scuola media				
Scuola superiore				

Lingue conosciute: *(1= elementare A1; 6 = nativo C2)*

	Compr. scritta	**Compr. Orale**	**Prod. Scritta**	**Prod. orale**
Italiano	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
Inglese	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
Francese	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6
_____	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6

C. Francese

Hai avuto il primo contatto intensivo con il francese quando avevi _____ anni.

Contesto del <u>primo</u> contatto:
    [   ] scuola   [   ] lezioni private   [   ] università [   ] altro: _____
    ore di lezione a settimana: _____

In totale hai studiato francese per _____ anni.

Segui attualmente un corso di francese?   Sì [   ]   No [   ]

Da quanti anni frequenti l'università? [   ] 1-3   [   ] 4-6   [   ] 7-9

C'è stata una pausa nello studio del francese da quando hai iniziato fino a oggi?
    Sì [   ]   No [   ]
    Puoi specificare la ragione? _____
    Per quanto tempo? _____

Stima il tuo livello: A1   A2   B1   B2   C1   C2

Hai un diploma di francese?
    [   ] DELF A1   [   ] DELF A2 [   ] DELF B1
    [   ] DELF B2   [   ] DALF C1 [   ] DALF C2
    Altro: _____ Livello: _____

D. Soggiorni in Francia o altri Paesi francofoni

La prima volta che sei andato/a in un Paese francofono avevi _____ anni.

Hai fatto il soggiorno più lungo (senza interruzione) in un Paese francofono quando avevi _____ anni.
    Durata: _____
    Paese/Regione: _____
    Motivo: _____

Quante volte sei stato/a in un Paese francofono negli ultimi 5 anni? _____
(all'anno).
    Motivi principali:
    Visite ad amici/famiglia (specifica il Paese e la regione): _____
    Vacanze: _____Corso di lingua: _____
    Studio: _____ Altro:_____

E. Utilizzo del francese

In che occasioni utilizzi il francese?
    [   ] parlando (es. telefonate/incontri con amici o familiari)
    [   ] leggendo (es. libri, giornali, internet)
    [   ] scrivendo (es. mail ad amici, documenti di studio o lavoro)
    [   ] ascoltando (es. film, TV, musica)

Come hai imparato il francese?
    [   ] All'estero   [   ] A scuola   [   ] Con amici
    [   ] All'università [   ] In viaggio   [   ] Con i media

    In che contesto utilizzi il francese?
    [   ] All'estero   [   ] A scuola   [   ] Con amici
    [   ] All'università [   ] In viaggio   [   ] Con i media

F. Francese vs. altra lingua straniera (inglese, oppure specificare: _____)

Come giudichi il tuo francese rispetto all'altra lingua?
    Prod. orale: [   ] uguale   [   ] meglio in francese [   ] meglio nell'altra lingua
    Compr. scritta: [   ] uguale   [   ] meglio in francese [   ] meglio nell'altra lingua
    Prod. scritta: [   ] uguale   [   ] meglio in francese [   ] meglio nell'altra lingua
    Compr. orale: [   ] uguale   [   ] meglio in francese [   ] meglio nell'altra lingua

Conoscenze e uso dell'altra lingua

A che età hai cominciato a imparare l'altra lingua? _____

Come hai imparato l'inglese?
    [   ] All'estero   [   ] A scuola   [   ] Con amici
    [   ] All'università [   ] In viaggio   [   ] Con i media

In che contesto utilizzi l'inglese?
    [   ] All'estero   [   ] A scuola   [   ] Con amici
    [   ] All'università [   ] In viaggio   [   ] Con i media

II.

Assessment tests

II.1 *Italian*

Leggete il testo e completate, inserendo la parola mancante.

In carcere per Lara

Un padre deciso a rivedere la sua bambina è pronto a tutto. Anche a farsi arrestare.

Lara, una bambina italiana di 9 anni, vive in Norvegia, ... paese di sua madre. Da due anni e mezzo non ... il padre, l'italiano Silvio Berlini. Gliel'hanno portata via ... gendarmi, proprio come nelle favole tristi, per riconsegnarla alla mamma.

... genitori di Lara hanno divorziato. Nell'agosto 1997, il padre, ... oggi ha 39 anni, portò la figlia per una vacanza ... un mese in Italia, perché era deperita, la madre aveva ... problemi psicologici e rendeva sempre più difficili gli incontri con ... bambina. Di fatto Berlini 'rapì' Lara e la moglie ... per sottrazione di minore. Sino all'agosto del 2001 l' ... sparì con la bambina, protetto dalla comunità del paesino alle ... di Bologna in cui si ... era nascosto. Un atto d' ... che nelle pagine dei codici è però un reato.

... Così ... 4 agosto del 2001 le forze dell'ordine ... strapparono letteralmente ... bambina al padre ... e la madre riuscì a riportarla in ... . Però, in questi anni, Berlini ha convinto la magistratura ... italiana ... aver ragione. Ha dimostrato che ... l'ex moglie Lisbeth F., ... anni, rifiuta ... di far curare Lara, alla quale i medici ... hanno prescritto alcune medicine salvavita per un deficit immunitario.

... Non ...: la donna ha chiesto ingenti somme per ... consentire a Berlini ... incontrare la bambina, ... (800 mila corone norvegesi, circa 100 mila ...), negandogli anche il permesso di sentire al telefono la ... figlia. ... il 28 marzo di quest'anno, il tribunale ... affidato Lara in via esclusiva al padre.

... Ma la sentenza ... è stata neanche considerata dalla madre e dalle autorità norvegesi.

... , per poter avviare una causa ... confronti ... della moglie per ... Lara, Silvio Berlini deve ... presentarsi a una udienza di mediazione ... Norvegia, dove nei suoi confronti è stato emesso un ... ordine ... cattura. 'Appena scendo dall'aereo sarò arrestato', spiega Silvio Berlini, ... così non potrò presentarmi all'udienza.'

... 'Riteniamo inaccettabile che Lara ... privata del ... contatto con il papà', spiegano dall'ambasciata ... italiana ... Oslo, 'e purtroppo non possiamo ... spiegare quello che adesso stiamo ... .' Parole impeccabili. Che però non bastano a un uomo ... disperato ... da più di due anni non vede la sua bambina.

Damiano Iovino

II.2 *French*

"Le taux de CO2 dans l'atmosphère augmente plus vite que prévu"

La croissance économique mondiale _____ provoqué un accroissement de _____ teneur en dioxyde de _____ (CO2) dans l'atmosphère beaucoup _____ rapidement que prévu, selon une étude _____ lundi dans les comptes rendus de l'Académie _____ des sciences des ÉtatsUnis. Cette étude _____ que la concentration des émissions _____ gaz carbonique dans l'atmosphère a _____ de 35 % en 2006, entre le début _____ années 1990 et les ____ 2000-2006, passant de 7 à 10 milliards de tonnes ____ an, alors que le protocole de Kyoto prévoyait _____ en 2012, ces émissions responsables _____ réchauffement climatique devaient ____ baissé de 5 % par _____ à 1990. « Les améliorations dans l'intensité carbonique de l'économie ____ stagnent depuis 2000, après trente _____ de progrès, ce qui a provoqué cette ____ inattendue de la concentration de CO2 _____ l'atmosphère », indique dans _____ communiqué le British Antarctic Survey, _____ a participé à cette étude. _____ les chercheurs, les carburants polluants _____ responsables de 17 % de cette augmentation, _____ que les 18 % restant sont _____ à un déclin de la capacité des « puits » naturels comme ____ forêts ou les océans _____ absorber le gaz carbonique. « ___ y a cinquante ans, pour chaque tonne de CO2 émise, 600 kg _____ absorbés par les puits naturels. _____ 2006, seulement 550 kg par tonne ont été _____, et cette quantité continue à baisser », explique _____ auteur principal de l'étude, Pep Canadell, du Global Carbon Project. « La baisse de l'efficacité _____ puits mondiaux laisse _____ que la stabilisation de cette ___ sera encore plus _____ à obtenir que ce que l'on pensait jusqu'à ____ », indique pour sa _____ le British Antarctic Survey. Ces _____ obligent à une révision à la hausse _____ prévisions du Groupe intergouvernemental d'experts _____ l'évolution du climat qui, dans son _____ de février, tablait sur l'augmentation de la température _____ de la terre de 1,8 °C à 4 °C _____ l'horizon 2100.

III.

Tasks

III.1 *Picture story*

III.1.1 French version

Figure III.1 - *Baseline-picture slides for story n.1 (French version):*
picture 1a (left) and picture 1b (right)
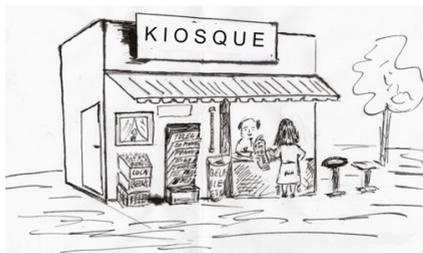
Marie achète le journal au kiosque.

Après, elle le donne à son frère.

Stimulus 1a.
Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe ici? *Broad focus*
Qu'est-ce que Marie achète au kiosque? *Identification focus; object*
Qui achète le journal au kiosque? *Identification focus; subject*
Marie achète des mots croisés au kiosque, non? *Correction focus; object*
Où est-ce que Marie achète le journal? *Identification focus; adverbial C'est Marie* qui achète le journal, n'est-ce pas? *Confirmation*
Que fait Marie avec le journal? *Identification focus; verb*
Marie achète le journal au supermarché, non? *Correction focus; adverbial*
Que fait Marie au kiosque? *Identification focus; verbal phrase*
Marie vole le journal au kiosque, non? *Correction focus; verb*

Stimulus 1b.
Qu'est-ce qu'il se passe ici? *Broad focus*
Que fait Marie? *Identification focus; verbal phrase*
Qui est en train de donner le journal à son frère? *Identification focus; subject*
À qui Marie donne-t-elle le journal? *Identification focus, indirect object*
Julie donne le journal à son frère, n'est-ce pas? *Correction focus; subject*

Qu'est-ce que Marie donne à son frère ? *Identification focus; object*
Marie donne à son frère des mots croisés, non ? *Correction focus; object*
Marie donne le journal au frère de Julie, n'est-ce pas ? *Correction focus; indirect object*

Figure I.2 - *Baseline-picture slides for story n.2 (French version):*
picture 2a (left) and picture 2b (right)

Jules a téléphoné à Émilie…
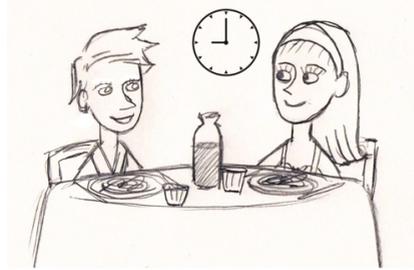
… et il l'a invitée à dîner à 9 heures.

Stimulus 2a.
Qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé ici ? *Broad focus*
À qui a téléphoné Jules ? *Identification focus, indirect object*
Jules à téléphoné à Christine, non ? *Correction focus, indirect object*
Qui a téléphoné à Émilie ? *Identification focus, subject*
Qu'est-ce que Jules a fait avec Émilie ? *Identification focus, verb*
Marc a téléphoné à Émilie, n'est-ce pas ? *Correction focus, subject*
Jules a envoyé un message à Émilie, non ? *Correction focus, verb*

Stimulus 2b.
Qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé ici ? *Broad focus*
À quelle heure Jules a invité à dîner Émilie ? *Identification focus, adverbial*
Jules a invité à dîner Émilie à 7 heures, n'est-ce pas ? *Correction focus, adverbial*
Stéphane a invité à dîner Émilie à 9 heures, non ? *Correction focus, subject*

III.1.2 Italian version

Figure III.3 - *Baseline-picture slides for story n.1 (Italian version):*
picture 1a (left) and picture 1b (right)

Maria compra il giornale in edicola.

Poi lo dà a suo fratello.

Stimulus 1a.
Che cosa succede qui? *Broad focus*
Che cosa compra Maria in edicola? *Identification focus; object*
Chi compra il giornale in edicola? *Identification focus; subject*
Maria compra una rivista di cruciverba in edicola, giusto? *Correction focus; object*
Dove compra il giornale Maria? *Identification focus; adverbial*
È Maria che compra il giornale, giusto? *Confirmation*
Che cosa fa Maria con il giornale? *Identification focus; verb*
Maria compra il giornale al supermercato, no? *Correction focus; adverbial*
Che cosa fa Maria in edicola? *Identification focus; verbal phrase*
Maria ruba il giornale in edicola, giusto? *Correction focus; verb*

Stimulus 1b.
Che cosa succede qui? *Broad focus*
Che cosa fa Maria? *Identification focus; verbal phrase*
Chi sta dando il giornale a suo fratello? *Identification focus; subject*
A chi dà il giornale Maria? *Identification focus, indirect object*
Giulia dà il giornale a suo fratello, vero? *Correction focus; subject*
Che cosa dà Maria a suo fratello? *Identification focus; object*
Maria dà a suo fratello una rivista di cruciverba, giusto? *Correction focus; object*
Dà il giornale al fratello di Giulia, no? *Correction focus; indirect object*

Figure I.4 - *Baseline-picture slides for story n.2 (Italian version):*
picture 2a (left) and picture 2b (right)
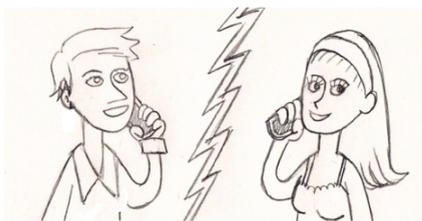
Giulio ha telefonato a Emilia...   … e l'ha invitata a cena alle 9.

Stimulus 2a.
Che cosa è successo qui? *Broad focus*
A chi ha telefonato Giulio? *Identification focus, indirect object*
Giulio ha telefonato a Cristina, giusto? *Correction focus, indirect object*
Chi ha telefonato ad Emilia? *Identification focus, subject*
Che cosa ha fatto Giulio con Emilia? *Identification focus, verb*
È Marco che ha telefonato ad Emilia, vero? *Correction focus, subject*
Giulio ha mandato un messaggio a Emilia, no? *Correction focus, verb*

Stimulus 2b.
Che cosa è successo qui? *Broad focus*
A che ora Giulio ha invitato a cena Emilia? *Identification focus, adverbial*
Giulio ha invitato Emilia a cena alle sette, giusto? *Correction focus, adverbial*
Stefano ha invitato Emilia a cena al ristorante, no? *Correction focus, subject*

III.2 *Read aloud*

III.2.1 Italian version

Dialogo 1. Leggi la parte di Giulio!

Giulio è a casa sua e sta cucinando il pranzo per lui e la sua amica Nina. Nina arriva e Giulio le apre la porta.

Giulio: Ciao Nina! Benvenuta.
Nina: Ciao Giulio! Che profumino! Hai cucinato le lasagne?
Giulio: No, ho cucinato la parmigiana.
Nina: Davvero? L'hai fatta tu?
Giulio: Sì, la parmigiana l'ho fatta io. È Giovanna che ha fatto il dolce, invece.
Nina: Chi ha fatto il dolce, scusa?
Giulio: Giovanna ha fatto il dolce.
Nina: Mi ricordo di lei. La settimana scorsa ha preparato la torta al limone. E oggi che cosa ha fatto?
Giulio: Oggi ha fatto la torta caprese.
Nina: Peccato! La fa benissimo la torta al limone.
Giulio: Ma no, è la torta caprese che fa benissimo. Vedrai che non mi sbaglio.
Nina: Allora non vedo l'ora di mangiarla!

Dialogo 2. Leggi la parte di B!

A e B sono in macchina, A sta guidando.

A: Dobbiamo avvertire del nostro ritardo. Preferisci telefonare a Giulia o a Elena?
B: Preferisco telefonare a Giulia.
A: D'accordo. Fallo subito.
B: L'ultima volta, però, è a Giulia che ho telefonato. Magari è meglio cambiare.
A: Fai come vuoi, basta che avverti.
B: Ecco fatto.
A: Ma come? Hai già mandato il messaggio a Elena?
B: No, ho telefonato a Elena.
A: Sei stato rapido. Non è che mi dici una bugia?
B: Che ho telefonato è vero. Ma alla fine ho richiamato Giulia!

Dialogo 3. Leggi la parte di B!

Dal fruttivendolo.

A: Buongiorno! Le è piaciuta la frutta che ha comprato ieri?
B: Sì, mi è piaciuta molto. I mandarini li ho mangiati già tutti.
A: Benissimo. Ne vuole ancora?
B: No, oggi vorrei prendere dei limoni.
A: Preferisce il cedro o proprio il limone?
B: Non il cedro, grazie. Sono i limoni che mi servono oggi.
A: Eccoli qui. Vuole altro? Delle arance, visto che le ha mangiate tutte?
B: Ho ancora molte arance: i mandarini sono finiti.
A: È vero, che sciocca, me lo ha appena detto. A lei capita che la memoria non funzioni?
B: La memoria, quella funziona sempre.
A: Forse dovrei mangiare più spinaci. Gli spinaci aiutano la vista o la memoria?
B: Gli spinaci aiutano la memoria.
A: Ha ragione! Ecco qui la sua frutta. Arrivederci!
B: Arrivederci!

III.2.2 French version

Dialogue 1. Lisez la partie de Jules !

Jules est chez lui et prépare le déjeuner pour lui et son amie Nina. Nina arrive et Jules lui ouvre la porte.

Jules: Salut Nina ! Bienvenue.
Nina : Salut Jules! Ça sent bon ! Tu as préparé un gâteau ?
Jules: Non, j'ai préparé de la marmelade.
Nina : Vraiment ? C'est toi qui l'as faite ?
Jules: Oui, la marmelade, je l'ai faite moi-même. C'est Jean-Marie qui a fait le dessert, par contre.
Nina : Pardon, qui a fait le dessert ?
Jules: Jean-Marie a fait le dessert.
Nina : Je me souviens de lui. La semaine dernière, il a fait une tarte au citron. Et aujourd'hui, qu'est-ce qu'il a fait ?
Jules: Aujourd'hui, il a fait un gâteau meringué.
Nina : Dommage ! Il la fait très bien, la tarte au citron.
Jules : Mais non, c'est le gâteau meringué qu'il fait très bien. Tu vas voir, je ne me trompe pas.
Nina : Alors j'ai hâte de le manger !

Dialogue 2. Interprétez B !

A et B sont dans la voiture, A conduit.

A : Nous devons prévenir de notre retard. Tu préfères appeler Julie ou Hélène ?
B : Je préfère appeler Julie.
A : D'accord. Fais-le de suite.
B : La dernière fois, par contre, c'est à Julie que j'ai téléphoné. Peut-être qu'il serait mieux de changer.
A : Tu peux faire ce que tu veux, pourvu que tu les préviennes.
B : C'est fait.
A : Comment ça ? Tu as déjà envoyé le message à Hélène ?
B : Non, j'ai téléphoné à Hélène.
A : Tu as été rapide. Tu ne me dis pas un mensonge ?
B : Que j'ai téléphoné, c'est vrai. Mais au final j'ai rappelé Julie !

Dialogue 3. Interprétez B !

A l'épicerie.

A : Bonjour ! Avez-vous aimé les fruits que vous avez achetés hier ?
B : Oui, j'ai beaucoup aimé. Les mandarines, je les ai déjà toutes mangées.
A : Très bien. Vous en voulez encore ?
B : Non, aujourd'hui je voudrais acheter des melons.
A : Préférez-vous la pastèque ou les melons ?
B : Je ne veux pas de pastèque, merci. Ce sont les melons que je veux aujourd'hui.
A : Les voici. Ce sera tout ? Voulez-vous des oranges, puisque vous les avez toutes mangées ?
B : J'ai encore beaucoup d'oranges : les mandarines sont terminées.
A : C'est vrai, je suis bête, vous venez de le dire. Cela vous arrive-t-il que votre mémoire ne fonctionne pas ?
B : Ma mémoire, elle marche toujours bien.
A : Peut-être que je devrais manger plus d'épinards. Les épinards aident-ils à la vue ou à la mémoire ?
B : Les épinards aident à la mémoire.
A : Vous avez raison ! Voici vos fruits. Au revoir !
B : Au revoir !

III.3 *Picture comparison*

Figure III.1 - *Confederate speaker's picture*

Figure III.2 - *Participant's picture*
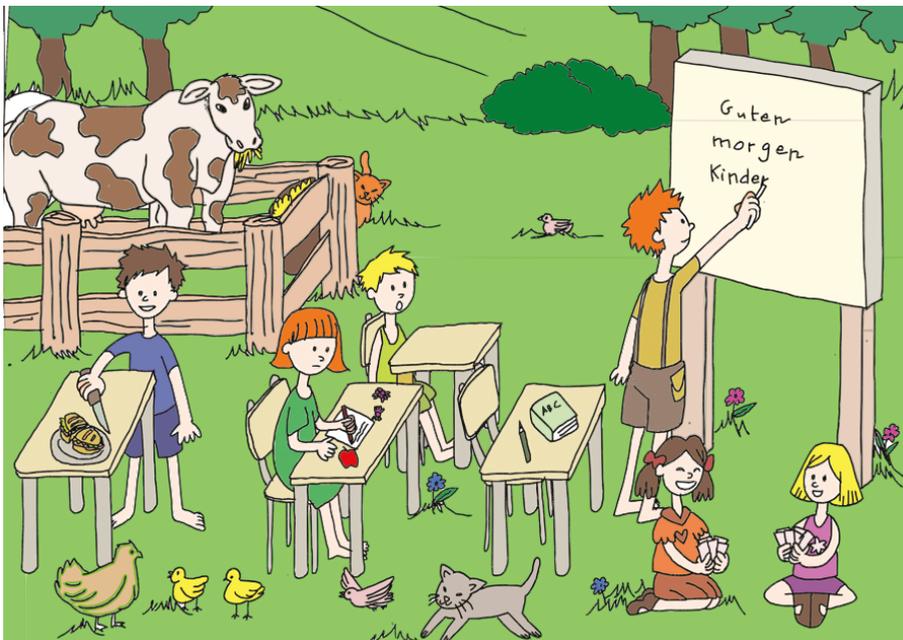
Figure III.3 - *Experimenter's script for the PC task*

Script de l'expérimentateur, tâche de comparaison d'images (PC)

Mon image représente une petite classe d'enfants en plein air, dans un pré. Tu l'as aussi ?

D'accord. En haut à gauche il y a une vache. <u>La vache</u> mange.

A côté de la vache, à droite, il y a un chat. Mon chat est orange.

Plus bas, il y a un enfant blond, assis <u>sur une chaise</u>.

A côté de l'enfant j'ai une petite fille habillée en vert. La fille <u>est en train d'écrire</u>.

D'accord et il a deux bonbons et une pomme sur sa table, non ?

A côté de ces deux enfants sur la droite se trouve un bureau vide.

A la table de gauche, un enfant est en train de couper <u>un sandwich</u>.

Ci-dessous, il y a une poule avec deux poussins.

A côté de la poule, j'ai un chat, et le chat poursuit <u>un oiseau.</u>

D'accord. A droite, deux petites filles jouent <u>aux cartes</u>.

La petite fille de gauche <u>rit.</u>

Et l'un est vêtu d'orange et l'autre de rose.

Juste au-dessus, <u>un garçon</u> écrit au tableau.

Combien d'arbres vois-tu derrière ?

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