Prominence patterns in L2 acquisition. The differential learning of the prosody - information structure interface in L2-German and L2-Italian.

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1. Romance and Germanic languages are claimed to differ in their use of the prosodic marking of discourse-related properties. Germanic languages massively deaccent Given information (e.g. Ladd, 1996; Cruttenden, 1993), while Romance languages fail to deaccent it (e.g. Ladd, 1996; Swerts et al., 2002; Avesani et al., 2005). However, the picture is not so clear-cut: English and German can accent *Given* entities (e.g., Terken and Hirschberg, 1994; Bauman, 2008), and Italian requires deaccenting in some configurations (e.g., post-focal elements). Crucially, though, deaccenting in Italian has been shown to be void of any role in marking the information status of an entity and to be only driven by phonological requirements on the prosodic structure (Bocci, 2013); while in German items can be deaccented by virtue of being Given in the discourse or by virtue of the syntactic configuration in which the constituent occurs (Truckenbrodt, 2011).

2. The present work addresses the question of how the information status of a discourse entity is prosodically realized by romance learners of a germanic language and by germanic learners of a romance language. We will address the issue of whether differential learning patterns emerge in two groups of speakers by examining how *Given*, *New* and *Constrative* information is intonationally realized in their interlanguage compared to their source language and their target language. Our hypothesis is that speakers of L1-German, in which deaccenting cues aspects of both pragmatic structure and syntactic structure, will have less difficulty in learning the intonational patterns of Italian, in which deaccenting is ruled by phonological constraints, compared to speakers of L1-Italian learning L2-German.

3. In our production study we adopted the experimental setting previously used by Swerts et al. (2002), where the *New*, *Given* and *Constrative* pragmatic status of an Adjective and of a Noun was systematically changed within the same DPs (e.g., "melone verde" – "grüne melone") that have been elicited via dialogue games. Six Italians, fluent in L2-German, and four Germans, fluent in L2-Italian uttered 160 items that were ToBI transcribed and measured for syllable and vowel duration, pitch accent (PA) alignment and scaling.

4. The distributional analysis of PA association as a function of the DP's pragmatic status (fig.1) shows that: 1) in L1-Italian *Given* information is pitch accented as much as *Contrastive* and *New* information, confirming previous data. 2) In L1-Italian, word1 – in contrast to word2 – can be optionally left unaccented. 3) In L1-German *Given* infomation is deaccented 100% only on word 2, while it is mostly accented in word 1 (prenuclear position); however, if deaccenting occurs in word 1, it only occurs on Given items, differently from Italian. 4) Germans do always accent Given items in their L2-Italian, while Italian speakers fail to deaccent them in nuclear position in L2-German. 4) Duration is not a significant acoustic correlate of information status in neither language.

5. Overall, our results show that at the level of the mapping between prosody and information structure, Italians transfer their L1 intonation onto their L2-German, while Germans appear to master the Italian intonational patterns. We will discuss the learning mechanisms at different levels: the pragmatic-prosody interface, the phonological and the phonetic level.

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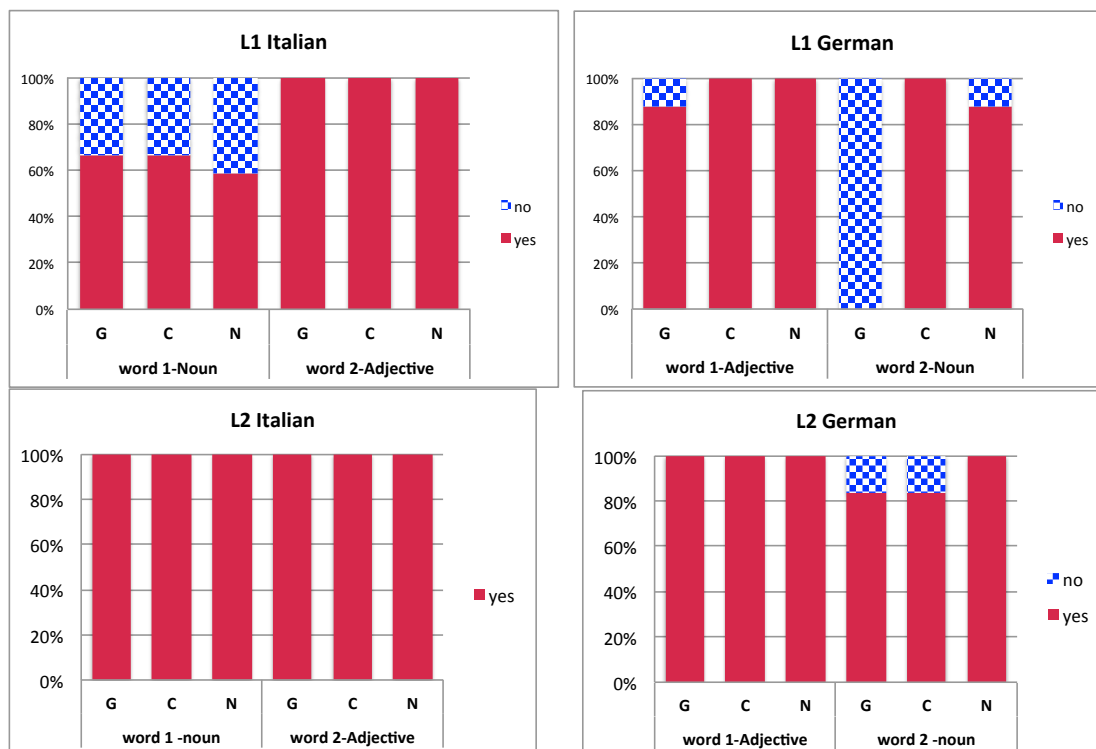
Figure 1. Percent pitch accent distribution in L1- and L2-Italian and in L1- and L2- German according to the information status of word 1 (in Italian: Adjective; in German: Noun) and word 2 (in Italian: Noun; in German: Adjective). G= *Given*, C = *Contrastive*, N = *New*. Yes = the item is pitch acented; no = the item is deaccented.