

L2 acquisition of Italian clitic case morphology:
Language transfer or continuity?
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Abstract

This experimental study investigates the acquisition of Italian clitic case morphology by Anglophone speakers to determine whether clitic morphological properties are fully or partially acquired through learners' L1 grammar or through their universal knowledge. English and Italian pronominal systems are so strikingly different that an analysis of their morpho-syntactic features should provide compelling evidence to determine UG availability in adult age. Results from a grammaticality judgment task show that Italian clitic case properties are acquired in a slow but consistent manner. Such acquisition delay has been attributed to several factors: (i) difficulty to 'convert' the syntactic information into appropriate morphological forms, (ii) L1 transfer, and (iii) intrinsic complexity of the case-assignment process. Regarding UG accessibility, data justify some form of continuity since clitic case properties, absent in L1, can be still acquired.

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