

Learners' options in syntax: A Processability Theory approach

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The presentation aims to show that integrating pragmatic information in utterances is difficult for learners who can barely handle the L2 phonology and morpho-syntax. On the other hand, native speakers use a range of means to guide the listener's attention and achieve their communicative intention – among them prosodic, grammatical, and linear order means (Levelt 1989). Languages may use any, or a mix, of such means (e.g., prosodic stress, topicalization, null or full subject and object realization, precedence relations, etc.) to make this pragmatic information available (cf. Lambrecht 1994; Van Valin 2004). L2 learners will need to discover and appropriate these specific means along their path towards ultimate target language attainment. An added difficulty in this appropriation is that such speaker choices are, by necessity, marked, hence less frequently heard by learners (e.g., questions are less frequent than canonical declaratives).

The talk will trace the developmental path of Topic and Focus realization among adult learners acquiring Italian according to the Topic Hypothesis proposed by Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi (2005) as extending Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998). Results suggest a clear path from inappropriate use of prodrop and full or pronominal subject realization towards canonical word order, to the addition of a fronted topical adjunct or focal question phrase, up to the competent manipulation of marked constituent orders.

References

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- Pienemann, M., Di Biase, B. & S. Kawaguchi 2005. Extending Processability Theory. In M. Pienemann (ed.), *Cross-linguistic aspects of Processability Theory*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Van Valin, R.D. 2004. *Exploring the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Camilla Bettoni is an applied linguist and Professor at University of Verona, specialising in the fields of bilingualism and language contact. Her main research areas are second language acquisition, first language loss, cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, the (socio)linguistics of migration, language policy, and language education, with particular attention to: (a) Italian as a second language, in the case of foreign immigration to Italy; and (b) Italian in contact with English, in the case of Italian emigration abroad.