

Acquisition of negation by adult learners of Italian as a second language

Studies on L2 negation have shown that early learner productions typically involve “no+lexical verb” sequences and non-target constituent negations (e.g., food no good), regardless of L1 or target language. We want to discuss that surface accuracy alone is not a reliable indicator of target-like acquisition, even for speakers of languages with preverbal negation. This study adopts a syntactic perspective, focusing on the role of the TP domain in the acquisition of Italian negation. Specifically, correct placement of both the negator and the verb is considered crucial, together with indicators of a fully developed TP structure: verb finiteness, subject-verb agreement, clitic placement, and adverb position. The analysis focuses on written productions by adult L1-Chinese learners of Italian at A1–B1 levels (LOCCLI corpus). Three features are examined: (a) lexical accuracy of the negator, (b) position of the negator, and (c) TP-related syntactic cues. A cumulative link mixed model predicts proficiency levels based on these features. Results show a clear developmental progression, further confirmed by comparison with the LIPS corpus (A1–B2, mixed L1s).

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