Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea Magistrale
in Scienze del Linguaggio
(ordinamento ex D.M. 270/2004)

Tesi di Laurea

The acquisition of Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish by Italian university speakers

Relatrice
Prof.ssa Sílvia Perpiñán Hinarejos

Correlatrice
Prof.ssa Laura Brugè

Laureando
Alberto Curione
Matricola: 879786

Anno Accademico
2020 / 2021

Contents

Abstract

Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish is realized through the insertion of *a* before [+animate] and [+specific] objects. So far, no study has investigated the use of DOM in Spanish by Italian speakers, and this is the aim of this study. Standard Italian, as well as the Northern Italian varieties, do not use DOM, whereas the distribution of DOM in Central-Southern varieties is practically identical to that of Spanish. For this reason, we questioned whether the knowledge of a Central-Southern Italian variety could facilitate the Italian learners in the acquisition of Spanish as an L3 and help them acquire the distribution of DOM in Spanish. 60 Italian university students and 30 monolingual Spanish native speakers participated in this study. Italian learners were divided into four groups, according to their geographical region of birth (Northern and Central-Southern Italy) and Spanish proficiency level (Intermediate and Advanced). Following Westergaard's Linguistic Proximity Model (2019), the prediction is that proficiency-matched Central-Southern learners will significantly be more accurate in the use of DOM with respect to the Northern participants. To test these hypotheses, the participants completed a grammaticality judgment task and an oral elicited production task of DOM. The results did not confirm the prediction, suggesting that the effects of the knowledge of a local variety cannot be perceived at intermediate and advanced stages of L3 acquisition.

Introduction

The present study aims to investigate the use and the production of Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish by Italian speakers who are learning Spanish as a L3 or as an additional language (Ln). A good amount of studies have been conducted on the production, interpretation, and use of DOM in Spanish by speakers of different languages but no study has ever dealt with speakers whose L1 is Italian or a Italo-Romance variety. This study, amongst its purposes, tries to fill this gap and to lay the groundwork for future research. The Italian participants, who are university students, have been divided into four groups according to their geographical area of origin (Northern Italy and Central-Southern Italy) and their Spanish language level (Intermediate and Advanced). This division has been realized on the basis of DOM realization in Spanish and Italian varieties and, therefore, is essential for the purpose of this work. If, on one side, standard Italian and Northern Italian varieties do no show the morphosyntactic phenomenon of DOM (despite some rare exceptions), on the other side Central-Southern Italian varieties, as well as Spanish, do. DOM is a very variable phenomenon, whose distribution changes both in Spanish and in Central-Southern Italian varieties according to the geographical area of the speaker. However, its realization in these varieties is quite similar (almost identical) to that of Standard Spanish, which requires the marking of direct object if, for example, it presents the features [+animacy]. Given this similarity, the main purpose of this study was to find out if and how the occurrence of Spanish DOM develops in Italian speakers as a function of their geographical area of origin (and, therefore, their home variety) and level of Spanish.

The performance of Italian speakers has been compared to that of two control groups: Spanish and Colombians, whose L1 in Spanish. The choice of Colombian participants is not random: since Spanish of Spain differs in some respects from Colombian Spanish, it was interesting to investigate if there were differences in the use and production of DOM by both groups. Italian students' level of Spanish was assessed through a reduced standardized Spanish proficiency test. For the experimental part, on the other hand, an online grammaticality judgment task and an oral elicited production task of DOM were administered to the participants. The interpretation of the results was based on different recent theories about language acquisition and linguistic transfer, from the L1 to the L2 or from both the L1 and L2 to L3 or additional languages.

This study is divided in four chapters. In the first one, a general theoretical background about generative approach to language acquisition is presented. The attention is firstly focused on Generative Second Language Acquisition (Gen SLA) and the main theories that attempt to account for Universal Grammar access and linguistic transfer from previously acquired languages, like Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (Lardiere, 2008, 2009) and Full Transfer Potential (Westergaard, 2019). Then, a brief section about the most recent theories about the acquisition of L3 and Ln concludes the first chapter.

The second chapter is dedicated to the presentation and description of the linguistic phenomenon of Differential Object Marking, first from a general and formal point of view, and then how it is realized in Spanish, Standard Italian and in Northern and Central-Southern varieties of Italian. In order to clarify where Northern varieties end and where Central-Southern ones start, a section is devoted to the modern dialectological situation of Italy. The notion of feature will guide this chapter, due to the fact that features such as *animacy*, *definiteness*, and *specificity* may establish whether a certain direct object can be case-marked or not.

The third chapter is an overview of the various studies that have been carried out on the acquisition and use of DOM in Spanish as a L2, foreign language, or as a heritage language (Montrul 2004; Montrul & Bowles 2009; Montrul & Sánchez-Walker, 2013; Montrul, 2014; Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis, 2011). Speakers of these studies have different cultural and linguistic background and speak different L1s, like English (Guijarro-Fuentes & Marinis, 2007, Guijarro-Fuentes, 2012) or Turkish (Montrul & Gürel, 2015).

The fourth and last chapter covers the experimental part of this study. In the first part, the description of the experimental and control groups is given, along with that of the materials, the tests, and the methods of administration that have been used. After this, results and graphics are shown and discussed in the light of the theories and the predictions proposed.

Chapter 1: Generative language(s) acquisition

1.1. Introduction

Many researchers have devoted their studies to the processes underlying human language acquisition, a natural process that includes the main elements of the language: sounds, words, grammar, and sentences. Defying language as «a system of signs and the rules governing how those signs combine; a grammar that generates all the acceptable sentences in a language while excluding unacceptable ones» (Slabakova et al., 2020: p.2), a system that allows speakers to produce and comprehend utterances that they have never heard before, these researchers have attempted to establish where this knowledge comes from. L1 acquisition, for example, is a spontaneous and effortless process, that occurs «without explicit teaching, on the basis of positive evidence (i.e. what they hear), under varying circumstances, in a limited amount of time, and in identical ways across different languages.» (Guasti, 2002: pp.2-3). L2, L3 and additional language acquisition processes are quite different from that underlying L1 acquisition, but they have all been studied through the generative approach to language acquisition. This approach was initially proposed by Noam Chomsky in the second half of the 20th century and is largely shared and accepted among linguists. The term *generative* is correlated to the idea that a speaker is able to generate language, in particular, s/he is able to generate an illimited number of grammatical sentences rather than reproduce them from a mental inventory of ready-made sentences.

Chomsky (2005) proposes three factors that interact and determine the nature of language:

1. Genetic endowment (F1).
2. Experience (F2).
3. Principles not specific to the faculty of language (F3).

These factors interact not only in L1 acquisition process but also in L2 and additional language acquisition, but in a different way. These three factors will be defined and analysed in the light of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) process in the next section.

1.2. Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Understanding L2 acquisition processes is very important for the aim of this study. Indeed, the majority of the Italian participants know and use an Italo-Romance variety as a first or a second language, a variety that can interact and interfere with standard Italian, creating a peculiar linguistic system that becomes the starting point for the acquisition of an additional language, in the case at hand, Spanish.

The field of second language acquisition (henceforth SLA) deals with the process through which speakers, who already speak their L1, learn, process, and use a second, third, and additional languages. In particular, SLA mainly focuses on adult learners of an L2: its process «is embedded in a linguistic environment, happens in social situations, and depends on a culture of the societal group» (Slabakova et al., 2020: p.1) and its speed, accuracy, and final result are affected by many variables of different typologies, such as *learning strategies*, *cultural characteristics,* and individual variables, like speaker's *age, motivation, aptitude,* and *cognitive style.* The multiple aspects and variables that characterize SLA lead, as a consequence, to the presence of different approaches to this field. They may be mutually exclusive, but it is essential to state that «no current theory of SLA is "correct" in absolute terms» since «the history of scientific inquiry […] has shown that virtually no theory at any snapshot in time is completely correct. This is unproblematic because the goal of science is not to be "right," but rather increasingly more accurate over time» (Rothman & Slabakova, 2017: p.418).

As already stated in the previous section, the approach that will guide this study is the generative approach, in particular, the generative approach to SLA (henceforth GenSLA), a cognitive-based theory that, since the 1980s, aims to study learners' mental representations of implicit L2 knowledge. According to GenSLA, the three factors that Chomsky (2005) reported to determine the language attainment are the same coming into play in the L2 acquisition process.

1.2.1 Universal Grammar (UG)

The core of this approach is the concept of Universal Grammar (henceforth, UG), defined as «the genetically endowed blueprint to the most generalizable facts about language» (Rothman

& Slabakova, 2017: p. 419) or as «the set of constraints with which all human beings are endowed at birth and that are responsible for the course of language acquisition» (Guasti, 2002: pp.17-18). The generative approach explains that language capacity is innate and is part of the biological endowment of every human being, and that UG (F1) is not a real grammar but the genetic predisposition of the human mind which allows children to learn any human language without much trial.

Psychologically speaking, this is confirmed by a study conducted on twelve full-term neonates and their brain's response to linguistic stimuli (Peña et al., 2003). They were exposed to two kinds of stimuli: normal linguistic speeches (forward condition) and their backward counterparts (backward condition), that is to say, the same utterances but played in reverse, with pauses between one piece of speech and the other. Using the near-infrared spectroscopy method, the researchers found out that the left periphery temporal areas, where there are the Broca and the Wernicke areas designated to language comprehension and production, showed significantly more activation in the forward condition than the backward condition, suggesting that children's brain perceives linguistic signals differently from other types of stimuli.

UG consists of two types of constraints: principles and parameters.

- Principles: abstract and general universal properties that are common to all languages. They are innate and fully accessible and available before experience. An example of principle is the presence of a subject position in a sentence
- Parameters: properties that contribute to the variation from a language to another. Unlike principles, parameters are set through experience. An example of parameter is the pro-drop parameter, namely the possibility to omit the subject pronoun in a sentence. While Italian and Spanish are pro-drop languages, other languages like, English and French, are not.

During the so-called early GenSLA, a period which covers the last two decades of the 20th century, the main objects of study were the Principles and Parameters and linguists wondered whether L2 learners (henceforth L2ers) had access to UG grammar or not. Researchers at that time conducted multiple studies about this topic (Hawkins & Casillas, 2008) but this topic will be widely discussed in 1.3.

1.2.2 Linguistic input exposure

In spite of its importance in the development of language, UG is not sufficient. The second factor which contributes to the growth of a natural language is experience, namely exposure to the linguistic input (F2). It is not possible to think of acquisition without experiencing language. Differently from UG, input is not innate and corresponds to the specific characteristics of the language or languages to which speakers are exposed. According to Chomsky, experience «is not the locus of linguistic diversity, but actually provides the trigger experience for acquisition, which proceeds through exposure to the primary linguistic data (PLD) [namely, the set of utterances to which a speaker is exposed during his process of language acquisition]» (Slabakova et al., 2020: p.24).

The right quantity and quality of input are important for the parameter setting. The more varied, extensive, and richer is the input to which L2ers are exposed, the easier, faster, and more efficient will be the new language acquisition. This is confirmed by a study conducted on two groups of Greek-English bilinguals with the same age of acquisition: Greek–English speakers with naturalistic exposure to an English-speaking environment and Greek-English speakers with only classroom exposure to English (Pliatsikas & Marinis, 2013). The researchers aimed to investigate the effect of naturalistic exposure in processing long-distance wh-movement in English and they found out that the naturalistic learners' performance was very similar to the one shown by native speakers, suggesting that naturalistic exposure, like studying abroad, furnishes richer language experience and leads to better performance. Moreover, input provides the speaker the parameters of the new language that he or she is learning and, for this reason, is «the main driving force of parameter resetting» (Rothman & Slabakova, 2017: p. 429) and is crucial to fix the main differences between the L1 and the L2. Therefore, to go from the L1 to the L2, learners will often have to reset existing L1 parameters or reassign new values to them if they are similar but not identical to those of the L2.

1.2.3 Principles not specific to the faculty of language

The third and last factor mentioned by Chomsky (2005) is «principles not specific to the faculty of language» (F3). On the one hand, these third factors comprise computational principles of data analysis and principles belonging to domains of cognition other than language acquisition learning; on the other hand, it also comprises constraints that make

computation more efficient. Despite sharing the same three factors, L1 and L2 acquisition processes differ because of an additional important factor in SLA: *speaker's L1 or L1s*. These learners already speak a fully developed L1, which constitutes a great source of information and may influence the acquisition of additional languages. The main theories about the L1 transfer will be discussed in §1.3 and partially in §1.4.

In conclusion, GenSLA is the guiding cognitive-based approach of this study which aims to explain and describe how L2 knowledge is mentally represented in speakers' brain. L2 acquisition results from the interaction between the Universal Grammar, computational principles not specific to language and the input, which works in tandem with mother-tongue influence.

1.3. L1 transfer and UG access in GenSLA

The two main issues on which many generative researchers have focused are:

- The role that a native or first language may play in the acquisition of the L2.
- L2ers' possibility to still have access to Universal Grammar after L1 acquisition.

The first part of this paragraph, §1.3.1, will be dedicated to the L1 influence on second language acquisition, while §1.3.2 will deal with the UG access in the SLA process.

1.3.1 First language (L1) transfer

As anticipated in 1.2, the main difference between L1 and L2 acquisition is prior experience. When learning a second language, speakers already speak their mother tongue and, therefore, «this means [they] not only have lexical items to describe the world around [them], but also detailed abstract language representations – a generative grammar – that allow [them] to put an infinite number of sentences together in real time» (Slabakova et al., 2020: p.13). At this point, the main research question is whether there is a transfer from L1 to L2, so if their L1 represents a starting point when learning an L2. There are three different possibilities, namely the possibility of:

1. *Full Transfer.*
2. *Partial Transfer.*
3. *No Transfer.*

Before providing a detailed explanation of these possibilities, it is significant to highlight that, in the case of Full Transfer, the transfer can:

- Lead to a violation of L2 grammatical rules: in this case, Foley and Flynn (2012) prefer to talk about *interference* rather than *transfer*. An example would be an Italian learner of English who produces a sentence like **rains* in place of *it rains*, an error which can occur because Italian is a pro-drop language and does not express the expletive pronominal subject before weather verbs. The Italian version of *it rains* is *piove* (rains-3SP).
- Produce no particular errors, remaining invisible. An example of the invisibility of the L1 transfer would be the production of a main clause by a Dutch speaker who is learning Swedish. Swedish and Dutch are two "V2" languages, those that require the finite verb to be always the second constituent in the sentence structure, even if the first constituent is a non-subject constituent, like adverbials. The Dutch speaker will find no difficulties in producing a Swedish sentence like *igår mötte jag Kristina* (literally: yesterday, met I Kristina) because the corresponding sentence in Dutch is *gisteren ontmoette ik Kristina* (literally: yesterday, met I Kristina). Moreover, these similarities in the word order may lead to a facilitative transfer as well.
- Concern discretional elements of a language and, therefore, produce grammatical but less appropriate forms (Bettoni, 2001). A further example would be the production of a sentence like *I don't hear you* rather than the more appropriate equivalent *I can't hear you* by the same Italian speaker learning English as an L2, if he or she wanted to translate the Italian sentence *non ti sento*, literally *(I) not you-ACC hear*, namely *I don't/can't hear you.*

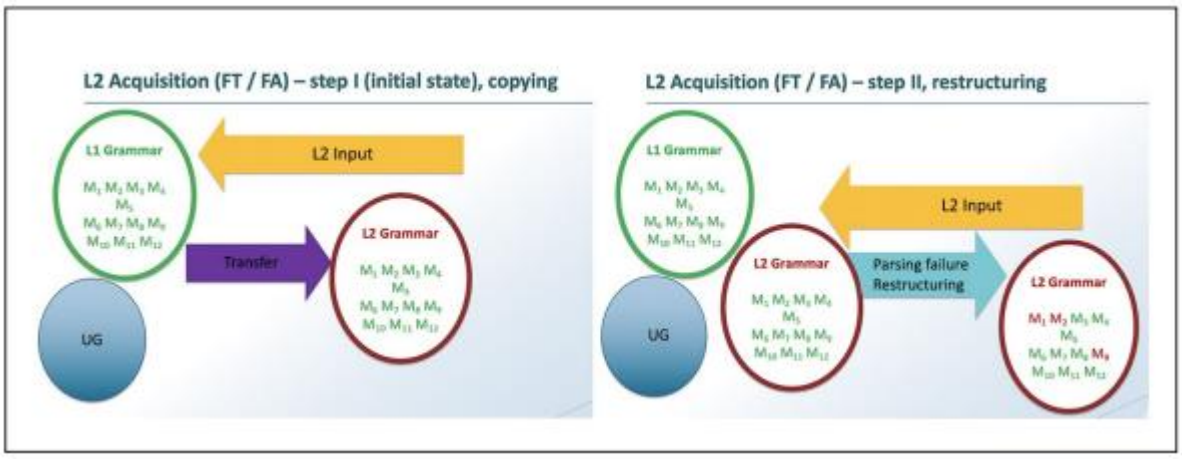
Having described how L1 transfer may be, it is necessary to explain how different linguistic theories provide hypotheses for the presence or absence of the first language transfer.

The first theory that will be taken into account is the one according to which there is *Full Transfer* of the L1 abstract linguistic system. Its main supporters are Bonnie Schwartz and Rex Sprouse, two researchers who have proposed the Full Transfer/ Full Access (FT/FA) model (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). In this little section, it will be considered only the first "part" of the model, that is Full Transfer (FT), because the second will be the topic of §1.3.2.

According to the authors, the FT/FA hypothesis «provides the most coherent picture of the L2 initial cognitive state», whose principle claims is that « the initial state of L2 acquisition is the final state of L1 acquisition» (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). So, the term "Full Transfer" refers

to the process according to which the whole L1 grammar (with the exclusion of the phonetic part of the lexical items) corresponds to the initial state of L2 and that all the principles and parameters «as instantiated in the L1 grammar immediately carry over as the initial state of a new grammatical system on first exposure to input from the target language».

Figure 1. SLA according to FT/FA[1]



A second step concerns this initial stage of the L2 system, which «will have to change in light of TL (target language) input that cannot be generated by this grammar; that is, failure to assign a representation to input data will force some sort of restructuring of the system» (p.41). Figure 1 represents more clearly these passages through Westergaard's Micro-cue model (which will also account for L3 acquisition in §1.5), where a cue is defined as a piece of abstract syntactic structure. She proposes that L2 acquisition proceeds by parsing[2]: the first image shows the copying of L1 at the initial state of L2 acquisition and the second one the subsequent restructuring based on parsing failure. A change of color for some micro-cues (the "M" stands for *micro-cue*) in the second image represents the product of the grammar restructuring.

The Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis differs from those theories maintaining a *Partial Transfer* of the L1, like the *Minimal Trees Hypothesis* the *Weak Transfer Hypothesis*. According to these hypotheses, some but not all L1 properties transfer into the L2: in the case of the *Minimal Trees Hypothesis*, these properties are the lexical categories and their linear orientation; in the case of the *Weak Transfer Hypothesis*, both functional and lexical

[1] (Westergaard, 2019: p.6). Figure 1 is a more recent re-interpretation of FT/FA hypothesis based on the Micro-cue Model.

[2] Generally speaking, the parser is a language-neutral grammatical analyser and parsing is a process that involves the rapid assignment of grammatical structure to a sentence encounter in the input.

projections transfer but values dependent on morphology, such as morphological affixes and the strength of inflection, do not.

The third possibility is that there is *No Transfer* of the L1's properties into the L2 and this idea is supported by researchers such as Samuel David Epstein, Suzanne Flynn, and Gita Martohardjono (1996).

As Schwartz & Sprouse (1996) specify, it is the *initial state* of L2 acquisition (in other words, the *interlanguage)* that is fully influenced by L1 linguistic properties. For this reason, evidence for a possible transfer from the native language must be traced in beginning learners' production and not in intermediate and advanced ones. Full- Transfer hypotheses, according to Slabakova et al. (2020), «have received a good deal of support from empirical investigations and remain one of the most influential in generative SLA studies» (p.15). One example comes from a study conducted by Haznedar (1997) on a Turkish child learning English. Turkish is a verb-final language, while English is an SVO language. She studied the child's spontaneous production of English in the first period of his or her new language introduction, predicting the child's production of English utterances that would follow the Turkish verb-final order. The results confirmed her hypothesis because the beginning English L2 learner produced English utterances such as *I something eating*, a verb-final utterance that would be completely grammatical in Turkish.

Eventually, Bettoni (2001) lists several factors that play a crucial role in the process of L1 transfer on the speaker's interlanguage. Amongst these factors, there are:

1. *Levels of the grammar system.* Bettoni (2001) explains that not all levels of the language are equally transferred from the L1 to the L2 and proposes a scale, being the first level the most subject to linguistic transfer: phonology> pragmatics> lexicon> syntax > morphology. So, while the phonology of L1 (both segmental and suprasegmental features) is the most transferred level of the grammar system, morphological transfers are quite rare.
2. *Speaker's level of linguistic competence.* The more advanced the speaker's linguistic competence, the less should be L1 transfer at all levels of analysis.
3. *The markedness of transferred elements.* The less marked elements, in brief, those elements that result less complex, long, and rare, are more likely to be subject to linguistic transfer than more marked ones. An example of a marked element in English is the word *waitress*, which longer and more complex that the male equivalent *waiter*.

4. *Typological distance between L1 and L2.* According to Foley and Flynn (2013) «similarities between L1 and L2 are predicted to facilitate acquisition: L2s with more differences from the L1 are predicted to take longer to learn» (p.98). This is evident considering the language typology: it is clear that a Chinese speaker, whose language is an isolating language, will find more difficulties in learning Italian (which is a fusional language) than a German speaker, whose language belongs to the fusional or inflected languages like Italian.

1.3.2 Possible access to Universal Grammar in SLA

The second main research question in GenSLA approach is whether second language learners have access to Universal Grammar and so the possibility that UG might constrain the course of SLA in some form. There are four possibilities and hypotheses (illustrated in Figure 2) that explain if and in what form UG is accessible in SLA process:

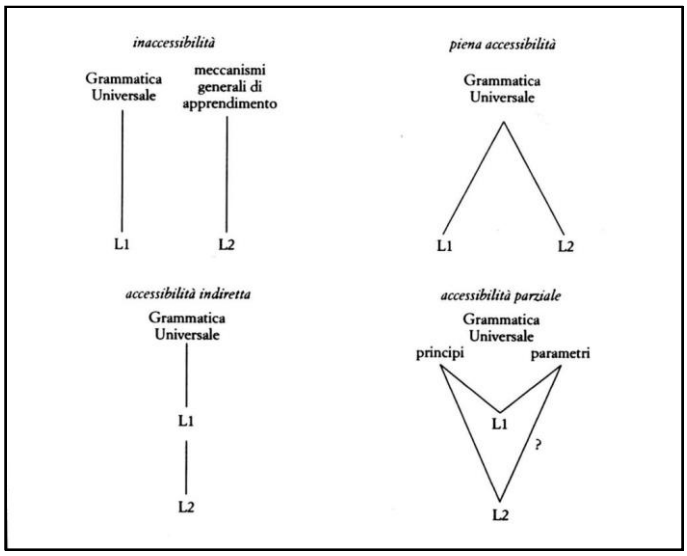
- *Full Access.*
- *Partial Access.*
- *Indirect Access.*
- *No Access*

The first approach, the ***Full Access*** to UG, proposes that Universal Grammar is still available and accessible in second language learners and constraints L2 acquisition. This means that the universal principles guide the development of L2 and work at all stages of SLA becoming, together with L1, its starting point. Supporting this view, linguists want to «point to knowledge which is present in L2 interlanguage grammars, but could not be acquired based on observation of the input alone, transferred from the native language, or taught explicitly, in the case of classroom learners» (Rothman & Slabakova, 2017: p.420).

Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) are amongst those linguists who support the UG *Full Transfer* in SLA process, and this is clear from the name of their hypothesis: Full Transfer/*Full Access* hypothesis, introduced in §1.3.1. They explain that the initial state of the L2 system corresponds to the final state of L1 acquisition and that this initial state changes as soon as the speaker is exposed to L2 input that cannot be generated by his or her L1 grammar. They talk about a "restructuring" of the learners' intermediate system, namely their interlanguage, which draws from options of UG, being accessible to speakers. This restructuring, which may occur both rapidly and more slowly, makes it possible for the L1 values to match those of the

L2. «The course that L2 development takes is determined in part by the initial state, in part by input, in part by the apparatus of UG and in part by learnability considerations» (p.41). It results that both the starting point and, very probably, the endpoint of L1 and L2 acquisition differ «precisely because the constraints on the processes (i.e., UG and learnability principles) are constant, whereas the initial states are distinct» (p.42). However, this is not true for the cognitive processes underlying L1 and L2 acquisition because, according to the authors, the processes underlying L2 acquisition are precisely those mechanisms that constrain L1 acquisition.

Figure 2. Four possibilities accounting for UG access in SLA[3]



A second possibility is ***Partial Access*** to UG, according to which L2 learners have access to UG in a limited way since they have access to principles but not to the full range of parameters. A set of hypotheses supporting the *Partial Access* to UG take the name of *Representational Deficit Hypothesis* (RDH) or *Interpretability Hypothesis.* According to these hypotheses, L2s are not processed in the same manner as a native language: while UG principles and operations are available in SLA, some linguistic features are not. The features that result inaccessible are those called *uninterpretable* features, whereas only the meaningful *interpretable features* remain accessible to adults in SLA. [4] As for *uninterpretable features*,

[3] (Bettoni, 2001: p.179). Since it is an Italian handbook, Italian expressions have been used, which respectively mean: *inaccessibility* (accessibilità), *full accessibility* (piena accessibilità), *indirect accessibility* (accessibilità indiretta) and *partial accessibility* (accessibilità parziale). Moreover, "Grammatica Universale" stands for *Universal Grammar*, "principi e parametri" for *principles and parameters* and "meccanismi generali di apprendimento" for *general learning mechanisms.*

[4] The definition of *feature* and the distinction between *interpretable* and *uninterpretable features* will be explained in §1.4.

not all but only those that are not instantiated in the L1 present a barrier to L2 learners and cannot be acquired by L2 speakers, although learners may compensate by using the L1 grammar to approximate them. This means that there is partial access to UG and that there is a critical period for uninterpretable features. A simple example comes from experimental studies which have shown that native Chinese speakers of L2 English tend to omit third-person singular agreement morphology in obligatory contexts in English and this might be explained by the absence of the uninterpretable features for subject–verb agreement in Chinese.

A third possibility, which has not gained much attention yet, is the ***Indirect Access*** hypothesis, according to which in L2 learners UG is only accessible indirectly through the L1 grammar. Supporters of this hypotheses do not deny the importance of the language faculty (the UG) in the development of the L1 but affirm that activation of the principles occurs only once, during L1 acquisition indeed, and «what L2 speakers know of universals is constructed through their L1» (Farahani et al., 2014).

The fourth and last possibility is the ***Inaccessibility*** to UG. One of the hypotheses supporting this view is the *Fundamental Difference Hypothesis* (Bley-Vroman 1989, 2009). According to this hypothesis, L1 and L2 acquisition are not totally alike but the processes involved in SLA and first language acquisition are different because UG is said not to operate and to be involved in the former process. Indeed, Bley-Vroman proposed that «the native language, rather than UG itself, shapes the initial hypothesis space and is also the chief source of initial expectations about the likely character of the target language» (Bley-Vroman, 2009: p.180).

In conclusion, various are the assumptions and the hypotheses around the L1 transfer and the access to UG in the SLA process, and all together clearly confirm what has been said in 1.2, namely that GenSLA is characterized by views that are truly mutually exclusive. Some hypotheses diverge in little details, such as *Partial* or *Full Access hypothesis* to UG, others seem to have nothing in common and to be diametrically opposite, like *Full Transfer* and *No Transfer* of the L1. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say whether there is not a better or a worse proposal, but it is widely accepted that there are theories that result more convincing and which have gained more attention than others.

1.4. The interest in features: *The Feature Reassembly Hypothesis*

In the late 1990s and in the 2000s, the attention of GenSLA shifted from Principles and Parameters to the notion of *feature* thanks to the Chomsky's Minimalist Program of 1995. Following Lardiere (2009), «features - phonological, formal and semantic - are the primitive elemental units that make up the lexical items of every language, and the differences between languages are due to differences among these features» (p.173). So, features are linguistic units of grammar that reflect variation across languages and that carry two different kinds of meanings: conceptual, on the one hand, and grammatical on the other. On the basis of this, features can be distinguished in two major categories:

- *Interpretable features.* Interpretable features are those that carry a conceptual meaning and that contribute to the semantic interpretation of a word (in other words, they contribute to the meaning of a word). For this reason, they are also called *semantic features*.
- *Uninterpretable features.* Uninterpretable features, on the contrary, have no semantic value on any lexical item but they carry grammatical meaning and serve only grammatical purposes. For this reason, they are called *formal features*.

Formal features, like case, finiteness, and agreement, «are considered to be the building blocks of grammatical representations» and, together with *semantic features*, such as definiteness, specificity, animacy, tense, aspect, person, number, and gender «are expressed on lexical items such as verbs and nouns and reflected in functional categories on a linguistic tree structure» (Slabakova et al., 2020: p.10). Many features may be incorporated in one functional category, such as determiner (D), negation (Neg), preposition (P) or tense (T). For example, the conjugated verb *goes* in a sentence like *Tony usually goes to Starbucks* expresses different features: 3rd person, singular, present, and habitual action.

According to the Minimalist Program, UG provides children with a universal set of linguistic features and, since not all languages make use of all the features in this universal set, «the child's acquisition task is to select only that subset of features actually detectably deployed in the particular language(s) being acquired, while 'disregarding' or 'discarding' or 'forgetting' the others […]. The selected features are assembled by the child into language-specific lexical items» (Lardiere, 2009: pp.174-5).

One theory that attempts to explain L2 development and that offers an acquisition model that can explain how the development of interlanguage proceeds is Lardiere's Feature Reassembly

Hypothesis (Lardiere, 2008, 2009). According to the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH), the L2 learner brings to the SLA process an «already-fully-assembled set of (LI) grammatical categories», confirming the first part of the Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996) previously mentioned (§1.3.2). There is a distinction between the way in which these features have been combined in the native language and in the L2. The FRH adds an important element to the FT/ FA Hypothesis, explaining that acquiring a second language grammar requires the assembly of the L2 features and Lardiere (2009) proposes that «this will require that the learner reconfigures or remaps features from the way these are represented in the L1 into new formal configurations on possibly quite different types of lexical items in the L2» (p.175). The main operation in SLA are:

1. The mapping of linguistic features encoded by L1 words onto L2 lexical items. Lardiere predicts that L2 «learners will attempt to look for morpholexical correspondences in the L2 to those in their L1, presumably on the basis of semantic meaning or grammatical function» (Lardiere, 2009: p.191). Therefore, L1 transfer plays a crucial role in establishing a direct mapping between L1 and L2 forms.
2. The reassembly of the features that do not coincide in the L1 and the L2.

Lardiere observed that L2 acquisition involves processes that might be more complex than simple parameter setting and feature selection. Feature reassembly is not an easy task, even when the L1 and the L2 share the same features but, of course, if the L1 and the L2 select the same formal or semantic feature, the L2 learner would not presumably need to reset this feature. Intuitively, the more L2 speakers advance in their L2 proficiency and the more they are exposed to a rich L2 linguistic input, the easier will be for them to properly reconfigure and remap the features in the L2: for this reason, it is within the interlanguage state that L2 speakers will find more difficulties in reassembling features. A final observation is that, contrary to the *Interpretability Hypothesis* (§1.3.2), Lardiere assumes that all features, independently from the meaning they convey, are ultimately acquirable.

1.5. Westergaard's Micro-cue model (2019): Full Transfer Potential and L3/Ln acquisition

This final section is dedicated to Westergaard's Micro-cue Model, previously mentioned in §1.3.1 when talking about Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis. This model not only proposes a re-interpretation of Full Transfer hypothesis in SLA process, but it also accounts for L3 and Ln acquisition and, therefore, can be extended to multilingual situations. Multilingual situations are those in which the participants of this study live: they speak Italian and, the majority of them, use daily a variety of Italian with their parents or friends. Moreover, they have also learnt or are still learning English, along with other foreign languages, like French, German and, of course, Spanish. Trying to understand the processes underlying L3/Ln acquisition and the role of the L1 and L2 is relevant for the purpose of this work.

According to Westergaard (2019), L1, L2, and L3 acquisition are the same process, based on learning by parsing. According to the researcher, while it is true that «L2 and L3 learners are different from L1 children in that they (L2/L3 learners) are not always conservative learners», there is an element that is shared amongst them, namely the fact that «they are also sensitive to fine linguistic distinctions, in that transfer/crosslinguistic influence takes place on a property-by-property basis» (Wastergaard, 2019: p.1). These "fine linguistic distinctions" are the so-called *micro-cues* (where a cue is defined as a piece of abstract syntactic structure).

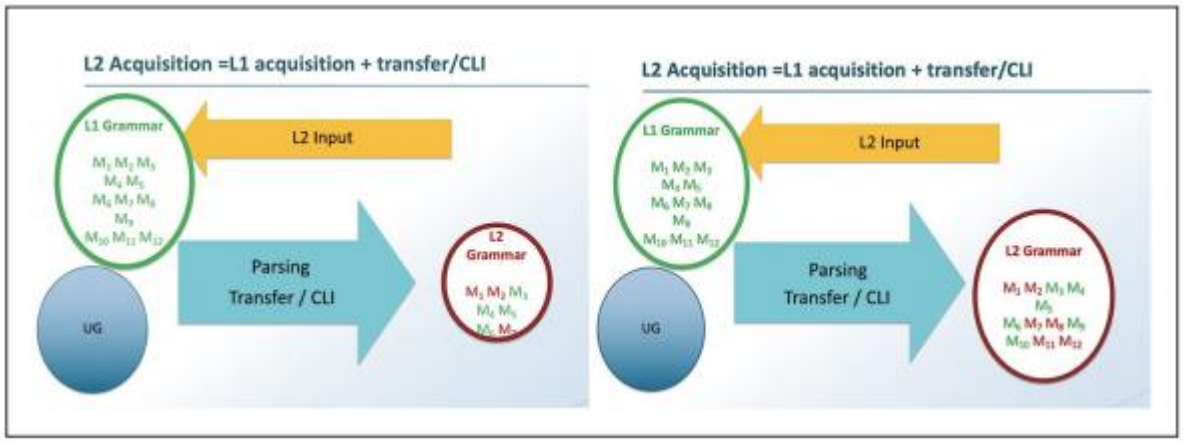
1.5.1 Full Transfer Potential

On the basis of her assumption, she partially rejected the FT/FA hypothesis, interpreting Full Transfer as a metaphor, stating that «the influence from the L1 should take place in a step-wise fashion, only when there is a need for a particular structure» (p.10). For this reason, she proposes the *Full Transfer Potential*, which explains that 'anything may transfer', not that 'everything does transfer'.

It differs from FT/FA because there is not wholesale L1 transfer, but transfer takes place property by property. For *Full Transfer Potential*, which is graphically represented in Figure 3, the initial state of the L2 is characterized both by the L1 and the UG, as in FT/FA, but the L1 does not create a copy of itself. L2 acquisition is learning by parsing: «if there is an

identical or similar micro-cue available in the L1, this will be used to parse the L2. If there is no similar structure in the L1 grammar, the learner resorts to UG» (p.11).

Figure 3. Second language (L2) acquisition according to Full Transfer Potential[5]



In other words, if there is an L2 structure that is identical in the L1, parsing will be facilitated, and the transfer will be a positive one. This is clear from the first part of Figure 3: only some of the L1 micro-cues, those in green, enters the L2 linguistic system. The situation changes when the L2 learner perceives that the L2 structure is identical to that of the L1, but in reality, it is not: in this case, the learner will tend to use the L1 structure to parse it, producing a wrong and unstable representation of the L2 structure. It is possible that, with increased input, these representations will either stabilize or they will be replaced by others that correspond more closely to the L2 structures. Eventually, «if there is no identical or similar structure in the L1, the learner will resort to UG for parsing». Consequently, structures that are identical in the L1 and the L2 are not to be learned since they are copied onto the L2 at the initial state. The second half of Figure 3 shows that the more the speaker is exposed to L2 input, the more his/her L2 linguistic system grows and includes both L1 and L2 micro-cues.

1.5.2 Models accounting for L3/Ln acquisition

In the last decades, there has been a substantial increase in the number of generative studies about third or additional language (L3/Ln) acquisition. If SLA, as it has been said before, deals with the process through which speakers, who already speak their L1, learn, process, and use a second, third, and additional languages, its main focus is on L2 adult learners. For this reason, L3/Ln acquisition deserves a separate discussion. Terminologically speaking, it is

[5] (Wastergaard, 2019: p.13). The "Ms" stand for micro-cues.

difficult to determine what a third language is. For some, as Rothman, Amaro, and De Bot (2012) explain, «L3 acquisition is simply chronological: the third language acquired in the literal sense. For others, the L3 is any language currently being learned in adulthood after at least two other languages have been acquired» (p. 372). In this sense, the term L3 embraces also the fourth and fifth language acquired from a chronological point of view.

A great deal of studies in the domain of L3/Ln has been conducted in order to detect to what extent the knowledge of the learner influences the task of acquisition. Following Rothman et al. (2012), there are four logical possibilities describing the initial state in L3 syntax acquisition, which could involve:

- No transfer.
- Absolute L1 transfer.
- Absolute L2 transfer.
- Either L1 or L2 transfer.

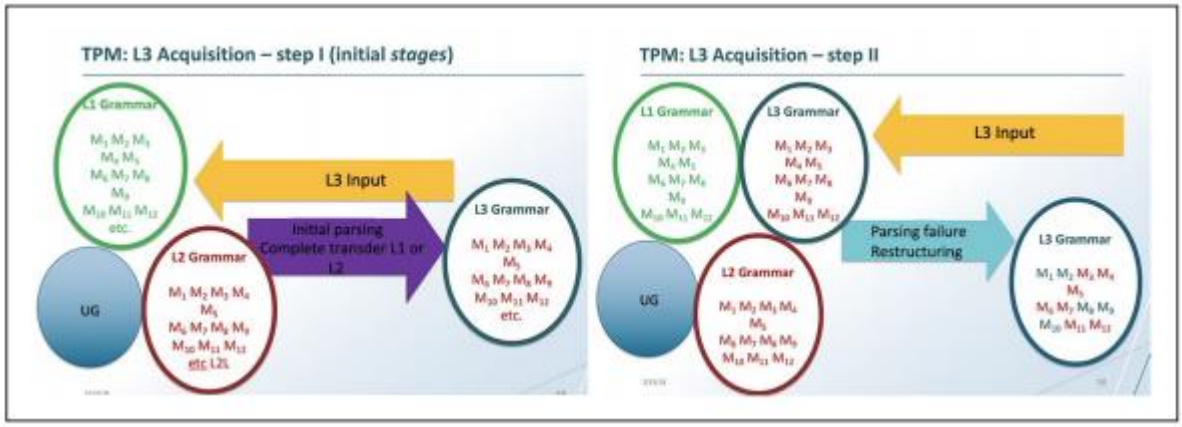
Considering the *multicompetence* term, according to which the L1 and the other languages are in the same mind and, therefore, are not separate entities, it is uncontroversial to support that there is some level of transfer between these languages. For this reason, the possibility that there is no transfer of previous languages does not gain much reliability. If, on one side, the possibility of an absolute and full transfer of L1 has never been advanced, the *L2 Status Factor Hypothesis,* maintains that the L2 plays a crucial role in the initial state of L3 syntax, functioning as a filter blocking direct access to L1 properties.

There are various models of the initial state of L3 dealing with the possible syntactic transfer from all previously acquired language. In this section, the models taken into consideration will be:

- The *Typological Primacy Model (TPM).*
- The *Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM).*

According to TPM, represented in Figure 4, the L3 acquisition process is a two-step process. The first step (step I), the initial L3 stage, involves the wholesale transfer of one of the previously acquired grammars (and not a property-by-property transfer): generally, this transfer is constrained by language typological proximity (Figure 4, for example, assumes that it is the L2 the closest language from a typological point of view). At the initial stages, therefore, the L3 is identical to one of the languages previously acquired.

Figure 4. Third language (L3) acquisition according to the Typological Primacy Model (TPM)[6]



In Figure 4, the red color of the micro-cues show that L2 and L3 grammar share the same micro-cues. In the second step (step II), as a result of parsing failure, the L3 grammar undergoes a restructuring process based on continued L3 input (Westergaard, 2019). Now, L3 grammar contains both L2 micro-cues (which are identical to those of L3) and new micro-cues, those represented in blue, which characterizes only the L3 grammar.

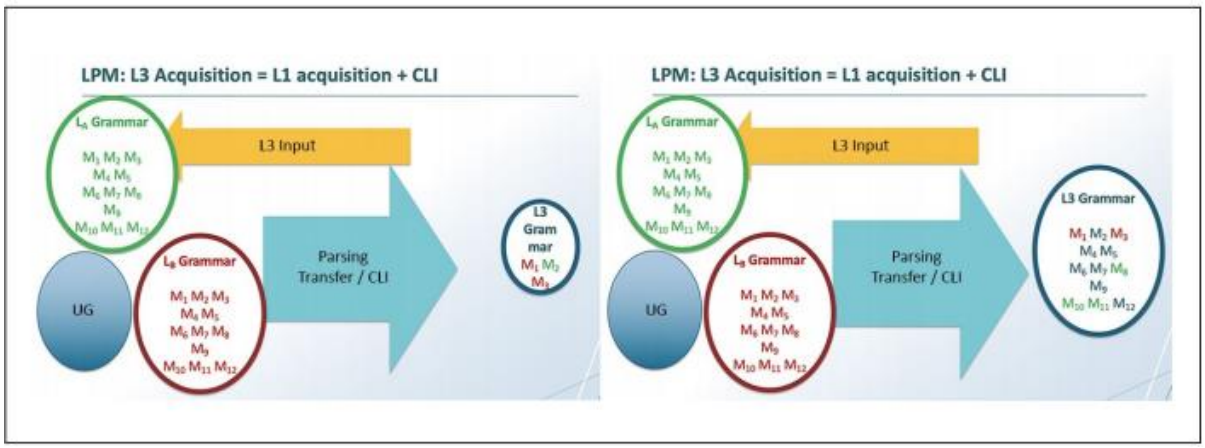
On the other side, *Linguistic Proximity Model*, graphically represented in Figure 5, attempts to account for any stage of L3 acquisition and explains that L3/Ln acquisition involves an incremental property-by-property learning which takes place through:

- transfer from one or both previously acquired languages.
- Parsing.

L3 learners have access to all previously acquired linguistic knowledge, at all stages of acquisition; «thus transfer could be from either or both of the previously acquired languages. This means that it is perfectly possible for one language to be the major source of transfer, in some cases perhaps even the only source at an early stage, if the L3 is very similar to one of the previously acquired languages» (p.16). Like TPM, *Linguistic Proximity Model* emphasizes the structural similarity between the previously acquired languages involved in L3 acquisition. Indeed, Crosslinguistic influence (CLI) is argued to take place property-by-property and occurs when a linguistic property present in the L3/Ln input is similar to linguistic properties of L1 or L2, or both. The only mechanism responsible for CLI is parsing, like in L1 and L2 acquisition. Thus, when a learner is exposed to L3 input, he or she uses the abstract grammars of the previously acquired languages to parse L3 input.

[6] (Westergaard, 2019: p.15)

Figure 5. Third language (L3) acquisition according to the Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM)[7]



The parsing makes it possible for the L3 learner to build the new grammar and, the more the process continues and the L3 learner is exposed to input, the larger will become grammar. This is clear in Figure 5, where in the first image the L3 grammar is very small while in the second image it becomes bigger thanks to L3 input exposure. So, parsing will gradually and incrementally lead to stable linguistic representation.

What has been presented in the last part of this first chapter is just a quick overview of some of the last tendencies in L3/Ln acquisition field. The difficulty in giving a clear and unified definition of L3 makes it hard to study the phenomenon adequately and properly. Some researchers, like Rothman and Westergaard, have attempted to but the issue of linguistic transfer from previously acquired languages is still open and needs further in-depth analyses. The next chapter will deal with the description a complex linguistic phenomenon, Different Object Marking (DOM), which will be the core of the present study.

[7] (Westergaard, 2019: p.17)

Chapter 2: Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish and in Italian varieties

2.1 The linguistic phenomenon of Differential Object Marking

Differential Object Marking (henceforth DOM) is a quite complex and variable morphosyntactic phenomenon, which characterizes the languages with overt case-marking of direct objects. The name of this phenomenon, introduced by the linguist Bossong (1991), suggests that in languages with DOM, nominals in the function of direct objects (DO) are overtly marked, while the term *differential* specifies that not all but some objects are morphologically marked. The marking of the DO depends on its semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic features, but the feature(s) which finally interact(s) with the realization of DOM in a given language differ(s) from language to language. Romance languages that widely present DOM are Spanish and Rumanian, but DOM also appears in Romance varieties, like Galician and Corsican, an Italo-Romance variety. In DOM languages, among the multiple factors that interact in its distribution, two features of the DO that are tendentially responsible for the presence or absence of the DOM-marking are *animacy* and *referentiality* (definiteness), which are usually represented in hierarchies or prominence scales (see Figure 6 and 7). An additional factor is s*pecificity* that, along with *animacy* and *referentiality*, is an interpretable and semantic feature belonging to the referential categories. The basic principle underlying DOM is the following one: «the higher in prominence a direct object, the more likely it is to be overtly case-marked» (Aissen, 2003: p.436). So, the elements at the beginning of these scales are more likely to be marked than those at the end of them. These scales are also implicational: if in a language a DO, at some rank of the scale, can be overtly case-marked, then a DO at a higher rank in that language receives the a-marking, but a DO at a lower rank is not necessarily.

Animacy can be defined as a «lexical feature of linguistic expressions that describes a certain property of the intended referent» (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2003: p.43) and plays a significant role in DOM.

The animacy scale (represented in Figure 6) is as follows:

Human > Animate > Inanimate

Figure 6. Animacy scale[8]

human	animate	inanimate
+ human	– human	
+ animate		– animate

Following Figure 6 and the basic principle previously mentioned, on one side there are languages in which only human DO are case-marked; on the other, there are languages in which only animate DO (including human ones) are case-marked. However, it is hard to find languages in which all and only human DO are case-marked. In Yiddish, for example, DOM is optionally used only with human direct objects, but overt case-marking is restricted to eight nouns, like *tate* (father), *rebe* (teacher), *mame* (mother) and *bobe* (grandmother).

Figure 7. Definiteness Scale[9]

Pro >	PN >	Def >	Spec >	NSpec
+ definite			– definite	
+ spec				– spec

In many languages, *definiteness* is the second determining feature for the presence of DOM, which is a «discourse-pragmatic property that indicates that the discourse referent associated with a definite expression can be identified with an already introduced discourse item. Thus, definiteness […] expresses familiarity in a discourse structure» (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2003: p.44). Figure 7 represents the definiteness scale, proposed by von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) following Aissen (2003):

Personal pronoun (Pro) > Proper name (PN) > Definite NP (Def) >
Indefinite specific NP (Spec) > Non-specific NP (NSpec)

As for *specificity*, it is not assigned a scale, but it is integrated into the Definiteness Scale, splitting the whole scale into two main parts, [+specific] and [-specific] and splitting the cell for indefinite NP into two: Indefinite specific NP (Spec in Figure 7) and Non-specific NP (NSpec in Figure 7). To give an example, if the DO in sentence (1) is followed by a sentence like (1a), it receives a specific and wide scope interpretation. On the contrary, if it is followed by a sentence like (1b), no specific and wide scope interpretation is given:

[8] von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2005 (p.37) following Aissen, 2003 (p.437).
[9] von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2005 (p.38) following Aissen, 2003 (p.437).

(1) I desired to meet a monk.
(1a) His name was Bill.
(1b) For this reason, I decided to visit a monastery last year to find one.

In some languages, like Spanish and Italian, definiteness is marked using articles, demonstratives, and possessives, while specificity is not lexically encoded in nouns and can be obtained from contextual information and semantic factors, like (1) shows. In Turkish, for example, all definite objects and indefinite-specific objects are obligatorily case-marked by the accusative case marker –(y)I: being an implicational scale, it means that personal pronouns, proper names, definite common nouns, and indefinite specific noun phrases are marked, irrespective of animacy. Montrul and Gürel (2015) report these examples from Turkish:

(2) (Ben) bir kitab-l oku-du-m. (indefinite and specific direct object).
(I) a book-DOM read.past.1sg.
'I read a certain book.'

(3) (Ben) kitab-l oku-du-m. (definite direct object).
(I) book-DOM read.pst.1sg.
'I read the book.'

Eventually, there are languages in which DOM is determined by both dimensions of prominence, namely animacy and definiteness. Figure 8 represents the ranking obtained by crossing the animacy scale (Figure 6) and the definiteness scale (Figure 7). The principle underlying DOM that was mentioned above is still valid for this ranking: the higher in prominence a direct object, the more likely it is to be overtly case-marked. This means that higher elements are more likely to get case-marking than lower elements. Therefore, human pronouns outrank all other elements and are more likely to be case-marked because [+human] is the most prominent value on the animacy scale, and pronouns outrank all other values on the definiteness scale.

Romanian is a Romance language where direct objects are marked by the accusative case marker *pe* when they are [+animate] and [+definite]. Pe-marking, for example, is obligatory with proper names pointing at [+human] DPs (4) and with demonstratives and personal pronouns (5):

(4) Deseori (o) văd **pe** Ioana stând la fereastră.

Often (him-clitic.3sg.f.acc) see.pres.1sg pe-DOM Ioana sitting at window.

'I often see Ioana sitting by the window.'

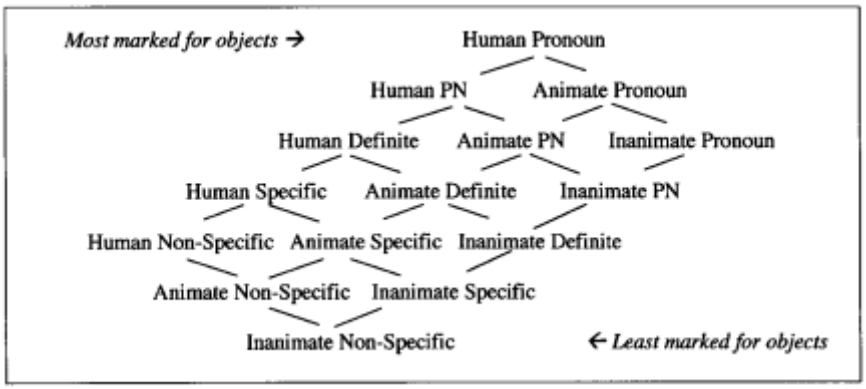
(5) Îi aşteptam **pe** ei.

Them-clitic.3pl.m wait.past.1sg pe-DOM them.M

'I was waiting for them.'

(Tigău, 2012: pp.60-1).

Figure 8. Relative markedness on the dimensions of animacy and definiteness[10]



Amongst the hypotheses that aim to explain the phenomenon of DOM, there is the so-called *Disambiguation Hypothesis*. It assumes that DOs that share certain morphosyntactic, semantic or functional similarities with the subject need to be distinguished formally from it and, therefore, should be marked. If the object is too similar to the subject, the marking is necessary to indicate objecthood. The disambiguation- based argument as the only mechanism behind DOM systems has been criticized for different reasons. First of all, in some Romance varieties, like Corsican, (Neuburger & Stark, 2014), strong personal pronouns (above all 1st and 2nd singular person) with DO-function already show a different form with respect to those with a subject-function: in other words, they are already differentially marked from subject strong personal pronouns. Secondly, in some languages like Spanish, DOM may lead to an ambiguity with other elements. This is the case of the indirect object in ditransitive constructions in Spanish, expressed by the prepositional dative marker *a*, which is identical to

[10] (Aissen, 2003: p. 459)

the DOM-marker *a*. This overlapping is likely to produce ambiguity if a sentence with a ditransitive verb presents a marked DO with particular features[11], like animacy (6).

(6) Ayer por la noche, presenté a mi novio a mis padres.
Yesterday for the night, present.past.1sg to-DOM my boyfriend.ACC to my parents.DAT
'Yesterday night, I presented my boyfriend to my parents'

However, in ditransitive constructions like this, the DOM marking of the direct object can create ambiguity and, since indirect objects in Spanish are always obligatorily marked by *a*, it occurs that direct objects may appear unmarked in sentences like these for both a "stylistic rule" and to distinguish the DO from the indirect object (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2007: p. 89).

2.2 Differential Object Marking in Spanish

As mentioned before, Spanish is characterized by DOM, which in Spanish is called *complemento directo prepositional* (prepositional accusative), which bears this name because in Spanish direct objects are marked with a preposition, the preposition *a.* Being an instance of Differential Object Marking, there are some objects that are marked and others that do not get case-marking. The presence of *a* is not a generalized phenomenon because its realization is triggered by some features of the nominal expression occupying the DO position, features which are the object of controversial discussions in linguistics, and which contribute to the difficulty of clearly defining this linguistic phenomenon. DOM in Spanish can be explained by the interaction of several elements, like the interaction of some properties of the direct object, its competition with other arguments in the sentence (like the subject), and the lexical semantics of the verb. The last part of §2.1 has already been dedicated to the "competition" between the direct object and other arguments in the sentence. The following sections, instead, will be dedicated to the properties of the direct object that are pointed at to be responsible for the presence or the absence of DOM in Spanish. Finally, the last part will quickly deal with transitivity and lexical semantics of the verb, whose interaction with referential properties of the DO can motivate and explain the variation in DOM in Modern Spanish.

[11] These features will be widely discussed in 2.2

2.2.1 Animacy

Brugè and Brugger (1996), according to previous literature on this topic, consider the feature [+animate] on direct object one of the two features needed for the realization of the accusative *a*[12]. In fact, this functional element is required in sentences like (7) because the DO bears the feature [+animate], while it is impossible and ungrammatical in sentences like (8), where the direct object is [–animate].

(7) Vi *(a) la mujer
see.past-1.sg to-DOM the woman
'I saw the woman'

(8) Vi (*a) la mesa
see.past-1.sg to-DOM the table
'I saw a table'

This confirms what has been previously said about prominence scales: low prominence objects, namely the inanimate ones, are unmarked while higher prominence objects, such as animate objects, must be marked. However, there are cases where animate direct objects are used without *a*. This is the case in sentences like (9) provided by Brugè and Brugger (1996: p.6):

(9) ... una fuente de vida nueva que purificaba el hombre moral.
… a source of life new that purify.past.3sg the man moral
'... a source of new life which purified the moral man'

The absence of *a*, in this example, seems to be due to the fact that the DO does not denote an individual but, on the contrary, it receives a "kind interpretation". So, according to the authors, *el hombre moral* in (9) is considered as a type rather than as a nominal expression referring to a particular human entity (p.7). Despite this, in (9), the direct object can be optionally preceded by *a*, guaranteeing the grammaticality of the sentence.

Another case where an animate direct object cannot be preceded by the *a* is when it is a bare plural [13], as (10) shows:

[12] The second feature that the authors propose is [+accusative].
[13] Bare plurals are plural NP which appear without determiners

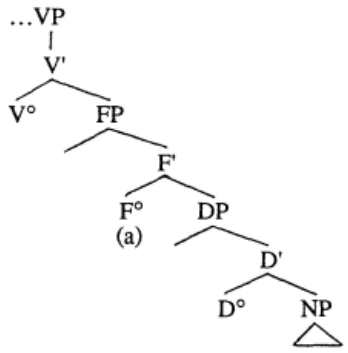
(10) Esta mañana he visto (*a) hombres en la calle

This morning have.pres-1sg seen (*to-DOM) men in the street

'This morning I have seen men in the street'

In order to explain this phenomenon, it is important to present Brugè and Brugger's proposal of the structure of direct object in Spanish (Figure 9). According to them, *a* occupies the head of a Functional Projection, FP, which is conceived as a case projection and which can select a DP. This FP is said to be always projected in syntax and the head, F, contains some features, like [±accusative] and [± animate]. The *a* will appear in F if and only if this position chooses the features [+animate] and [+accusative]. Keeping this proposal in mind, the insertion of the *a* in (10) would be ungrammatical because, according to the Minimality Condition, the empty category in D could not be properly governed by V.[14] The ungrammaticality of (10) would therefore depend on an ECP violation.

Figure 9. Structure of the Direct Object in Spanish[15]



Moreover, there is an exception in the exception. There are cases, provided by Brugè and Brugger (1996) where bare plurals in DO position may be preceded by *a*. These cases are:

a. When these bare plurals are modified[16], as (11a) shows.
b. When they enter a Coordination Relation with another bare plural (11b).
c. When they are focalized (11c).

(11) a. He visto (a) admiradores con ropas informales

have.pres-1.sg seen (to-DOM) fans with clothes informal

'I saw fans with informal clothes'

[14] The authors adopt Longobardi's (1994) hypothesis on the syntax of bare plurals.

[15] (Brugè and Brugger, 1996: p.11)

[16] A further exception concerns the PPs introduced by the preposition "de" that, despite rare cases, do not allow the realization of *a* before the animate direct objects that they (PPs) modifies, like the sentence *He visto (*a) admiradores de Madonna* (I saw Madonna's fans). For a more detailed explanation, see (Brugger & Brugè, 1996)

b. Han conocido (a) hombres y mujeres.
have.pres.3pl met (to-DOM) men and women
'They met men and women'

c. María ha conocido (a) HOMBRES (y no a mujeres).
María have.pres.3sg met (to-DOM) MEN (and not to-DOM women)
'María met MEN (and not women)'

2.2.2 Definiteness/ specificity

Standard Spanish generally marks [+animate] direct objects with the *a* independently of the definiteness of the object. Instead, following Jaeggli (1982), according to researchers like von Heusinger and Kaiser (2003, 2005, 2007, 2011), the choice of *a* with DOs is also determined by *specificity*. They came to this conclusion observing that even a sentence with a [-definite] direct object immersed in a linguistic context that gives the DO a [+specific] interpretation, is grammatically preceded by the *a*, as (13) shows:

(13) Vi (a) una mujer
see.past-1.sg (to-DOM) a woman
'I saw a (certain) woman.

Conversely, Brugè and Brugger do not agree with the proposal that the presence of the accusative *a* is sensitive to the [+specific] feature, given the many counterexamples that can be observed in syntax. Instead, in order to explain the optionality of accusative *a* with indefinite animate DOs they propose that, in Spanish, these nominal expressions can receive by the verb both accusative and partitive Case. If the indefinite (existential) animate DO receives accusative case *a* obligatorily appears in F (cf. Figure 9) (*Vi a una mujer*), instead if the same nominal expression receives partitive case the head F will be filled by an empty functional element (*Vi ø una mujer*), since in Spanish grammar there is no functional marker for partitive case. The authors, moreover, to justify that in Spanish existential nominal expressions can receive, in addition to partitive case, also accusative case, show that in some specific contexts these expressions can only receive accusative case. These contexts are: a) when the existential nominal expression has D-linked interpretation; b) when the existential nominal expression has wide scope interpretation; and c) when the existential nominal

expression has function interpretation.[17]. In all these cases, if the existential nominal expression is animate, *a* must appear. Resuming from von Heusinger and Kaiser's assumptions, they are graphically represented in Figure 10, where it is clear that it is not a question of definiteness rather a question of interaction between animacy and specificity.

Figure 10. DOM in Modern Spanish: Animacy Scale and Definiteness Scale combined[18]

Standard Spanish	Strong Pro >	PN >	Definite >	+ Spec >	– Spec
human	+	+	+	+	±
animate	+	+	+	+	–
inanimate	Ø	±	–	–	–

Standard Spanish	+ Spec	– Spec
animate	+	–
inanimate	–	–

The authors are perfectly aware that these two tables cannot explain the phenomenon in its integrity and complexity. For example, [-specific] and [+animate] quantifiers like *alguien* (somebody) and *nadie* (nobody) always require *a* in order for the sentence to be grammatical, as can be seen in (14). In other cases, the DO presenting the same features can be optionally accompanied by *a*, like in (15):

(14) Está buscando *(a) alguien
is-3.sg looking *(to-DOM) someone
'(S)he is looking for someone.'

(15) Vi (a) una mujer
see.past.1.sg (to-DOM) a woman
'I saw some (or other) woman'

The role of specificity can be also observed in (16) and (17), two clauses where a [-definite] and [+animate] object is modified by a restrictive relative sentence and where the indicative and subjunctive mood of the verb of the relative sentence is responsible for the specific (indicative mood) and non-specific (subjunctive mood) interpretation of the whole direct

[17]A D-linked (discourse linked) animate DO must be preceded by the accusative *a*. In a sentence like *Juan ha visto *(a) muchas de estas chicas* where the DO can only receive D-linked interpretation, due to the presence of a partitive complement, *a* is mandatory. Then, indefinite DOs interpreted with a wide scope with respect to a quantified subject must be preceded by accusative *a*, as the following sentence shows: *Todas las chicas vieron *(a) un chico. Era muy guapo.* (all the girls saw to-DOM a boy. He was very nice). In this case, the only possible interpretation is "there is a boy such that every girl saw him". Finally, a distributive indefinite DO with the function interpretation must be preceded by the accusative *a*. This can be observed in: *Cada chico ha visto *(a) una chica: su hermana.* In this sentence, the only available interpretation is" only if it were interpreted as "for every boy there is a certain girl, his sister, such that he saw her".

[18] (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2005: p.40)

object. The functional category *a* must precede [+specific] direct objects (16) and it is normally omitted when the object is [–specific], like in (17), even if the presence of *a* in (17) is still grammatical:

(16) Busco *(a) una cocinera que sabe hablar inglés. [+animate], [-definite], [+specific]
search-1.sg *(to-DOM) a cook who knows-IND to-speak English
'I'm looking for a cook who can speak English'

(17) Busco (a) una cocinera que sepa hablar inglés. [+animate], [-definite], [–specific]
search-1.sg (*to-DOM) a cook who knows-SUB to-speak English
'I am looking for a cook who can speak English'

2.2.3 Transitivity and semantic properties of verbs

The verbal semantics has been investigated less deeply and accurately than the other factors. Hopper and Thompson (von Heusinger and Kaiser, 2007) proposed the parameters of Transitivity, represented in Table 1, in order to explain that «all high transitive values contribute to the discourse salience of the event described by the verb and its arguments» and that, consequently, «languages prefer to mark categories with high transitivity values morphologically [the middle column] rather than categories with lower transitivity values [the last column]» (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2007: p.90).

Table 1. Parameters of Transitivity proposed by Hopper & Thompson[19]

	High transitivity	Low transitivity
1. Participants	Two participants or more (A and O)	one participant
2. Kinesis	Action	Nonaction
3. Aspect	Telic	Atelic
4. Punctuality	Punctual	Nonpunctual
5. Volitionality	Volitional	Nonvolitional
6. Affirmation	Affirmative	Negative
7. Mode	Realis	Irrealis
8. Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
9. Affectedness of O	O totally affected	O not affected
10. Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O nonindividuated

Spanish, for example, marks not only highly individuated and affected animate DOs, but a-marking on animate direct objects is also obligatory with telic verbs[20]. For example, there is a

[19] (von Heusinger & Kaiser, 2007: p.90).
[20] Telic verbs are those referring to events that have endpoints, like to insult

class of verbs that obligatorily take the functional category *a* with animate direct objects, like *odiar* ('to hate'), *insultar* ('to insult'), *atacar* ('to attack'), *asesinar* ('to murder) or *despedir* ('to release). On the other hand, there are verbs that optionally require *a* before animate DOs, like *encontrar* ('to find'), *buscar* ('to look for'), or *ver* ('to see').

To conclude, the overt morphological marking of direct objects in Spanish depends not only on some features and properties of the direct object, such as animacy and specificity, and on its competition with other arguments in the sentence, mainly the subject, but also on the lexical properties of the verb. In Modern Spanish, the insertion of the functional category *a* immediately before the direct object is triggered by two main features, animacy and specificity as von Heusinger and Kaiser have shown (2003, 2005, 2007, 2011). As the last part of this chapter will show, these features are also those responsible for the presence or absence of DOM in the Central-Southern varieties of Italy.

2.3 Sociolinguistics of Italian: the map of Italian dialects

The term *dialect* is used to define a non-standardized linguistic variety that is restricted to oral uses and familiar, informal, and colloquial contexts. Dialects have frequently been considered as altered and corrupted forms of the "national language" but, obviously, this is not true. Dialects have to be conceived as Italian's sister languages: for this reason, it would be better to talk about *Italian varieties* instead of dialects, where variety is a sociolinguistic term designating a linguistic system that excludes the notions of prestige, use and geographical extension. Italian dialects are independent Italo-Romance varieties which are also defined as "primary Romance dialects" and which diverge from the notion of "regional Italians". Regional Italians are intermediate varieties between Standard Italian and local dialects which are spoken in a specific geographical area and which are influenced by some phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical elements of the local dialect. (Loporcaro, 2009). Even if the speaker does not actively use the local dialect, she is exposed to the particular regional Italian spoken in the area and will unconsciously use some dialectal structures or words. Berruto (2012) makes a distinction between "popular regional Italian" and "medium educated regional Italian"[21], being the first one full of dialectal interferences and the second one a flexible Italian variety (also called neo-standard Italian[22]) which is actually spoken throughout Italy

[21] Respectively, "italiano regionale popolare" and "italiano regionale colto medio" (Berruto, 2012: pp.23-4).
[22] Neostandard Italian is a term proposed by Gaetano Berruto in 1957

and which is sensitive to diatopic differentiation, including both (literary) Standard and regional features.

Figure 11. The map of Italian dialects proposed by Giovan Battista Pellegrini[23]

The most used and studied classification of the Italian dialects (or varieties) is that of the "map of Italian dialects" proposed by Giovan Battista Pellegrini in 1977 (Figure 11). Pellegrini groups the Italian dialects in five dialectal areas:

1. Northern dialects (subdivided into Venetian dialects and Gallo-Italic dialects). They are spoken in the yellow areas, namely Lombardy, Piemonte, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto.
2. Friulian dialects, used in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the orange area.
3. Tuscan dialects, spread in Tuscany, the green region
4. Central-Southern dialects (subdivided into Central Italian dialects, Intermediate-Southern Italian dialects, and Extreme-Southern Italian dialects). They occupy a larger area, the pink one, which includes regions like Lazio, Umbria, and the Central part of Marche (where Central dialects are spoken); Campania, Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata and the Northern part of Apulia and Calabria (along with the Southern part of Marche, where Intermediate-Southern dialects are spoken) and Sicily (along with

[23] Retrieved from Loporcaro (2009: pp.68-9)

the Southern part of Apulia and Calabria, where Extreme-Southern dialects are spoken).

5. Sardinian, spoken in Sardinia, the brown island.

Finally, in Valle d'Aosta, the red area, Franco-Provençal is spoken**,** while in South Tyrol (Alto Adige in Italian), the grey zone, German is spoken.

2.4 Differential Object Marking in standard Italian and Northern varieties

Generally speaking, the morphosyntactic strategy of prepositional accusative is believed not to appear in Standard Italian and in the Northern Italian dialects and varieties. However, as Renzi (1988) first noticed, Northern Italian varieties and Standard Italian resort to the insertion of the functional category *a* (like Spanish) immediately before the direct object, but in very restricted and limited contexts that will not be taken into consideration in this study.

According to Renzi (1988), the presence of *a* is only possible if:

- The direct object is a deictic pronoun (mainly I and II singular pronouns).
- This direct object is left-dislocated.
- There is the pronominal anaphora of the direct object through an atonic pronoun.

An example may be sentence (18), retrieved from Renzi (1988: p.155), with the left-dislocated personal pronoun *me*:

(18) *(A) me, non mi hanno invitato
'*(To-DOM) me, not me-CLITIC invite-past.3.pl'
Me, they did not invite me

However, Renzi specifies that this phenomenon is not mandatory but optional and that it is limited to an informal and colloquial style. Furthermore, Renzi (1988) also noticed that 3rd person singular deictic pronouns and proper names with an accusative function get the *a*-marking when a psychological verb is used, providing that the object is left-dislocated and that there is the clitic anaphora, like in (19), where the *l'* is the clitic:

(19) *(A) Lui/Giorgio, questi argomenti non l'hanno convinto
*(To-DOM) Him/Giorgio, these topics not him-CLITIC convince-past.3.pl
'These topics did not convince Giorgio'

Berretta (1989, 1991) agrees with these three conditions, but she stated that there are some exceptions that need to be pointed out. Whilst it is true that the most frequently marked objects are I and II singular deictic pronouns, it is also the case that some plural deictic pronouns receive the a-marking as well, as in (20) in Berretta (1989, p.18):

(20) Così *(a) noi bianchi ci lasciano in pace…
So, *(to-DOM) us whites us-CLITIC keep-pres.3.pl in peace…
'In this way, they leave us, white people, in peace…'

Proper names are hardly ever marked but, in any case, they probably constitute the boundary below of which prepositional accusative cannot appear. The second point concerns the position of the deictic pronoun, which has to be left-dislocated, according to Renzi (1988). If, on the one hand, it is true that most of the direct objects which are case-marked in these varieties tend to appear in the left-periphery of the sentence like in (18), on the other hand it is also true that these marked objects may appear both in cleft or pseudo-cleft sentences, and in a post-verbal position, like in (21):

(21) Ho pensato quanto avrebbe stancato *(A) ME quel viaggio
Have-pres.1.sg thought how much would-have.3.sg tired *(TO-DOM) ME that journey
'I thought how tired that trip would be for ME'

The third and last point of Renzi's assumption regards the pronominal anaphora which, according to him, is necessary when a deictic pronoun is left-dislocated and gets a-marking. Berretta noticed that the insertion of the clitic is not always obligatory, and its presence depends on the kind of verb of the sentence. She proposed that with psychological verbs such as *preoccupare* 'to worry' (22) and with causative constructions (23), the clitic is less likely to appear[24]:

(22) A me non preoccupa
'To-DOM me not worry-pres.3.ps'
'It does not worry me'

[24] Causative constructions, in Italian, are constructed through the use of the verb *fare* ('to do') or *lasciare* ('to leave'/'to let') + the infinitive form of a verb. The tendency to eliminate the functional category *a* can be explained by the fact that these verbs and constructions do not take 'real' direct objects. As for psychological verbs, direct objects are experiencers, while those in causative constructions are the subjects of the verb.

(23) A me il sonnifero ha fatto dormir bene
'To-DOM me the sleeping pill has done sleep well'
'The sleeping pill let me sleep well'

On the one hand, the insertion of the clitic is always possible with these verbs and in these contexts, but it leads to a more colloquial and informal sentence: for instance, sentence (22) could also be structured as *"a me non mi preoccupa"*, with the clitic *mi*. On the other hand, the omission of the clitic is not always possible. A sentence like "*A me nessuno mi protegge"* (to-DOM me nobody me-CLITIC protects, 'nobody protects me') would be hard to accept without the clitic "mi" before the verb.

To conclude, (Neo)Standard Italian and Northern Italian varieties present the accusative *a* in restricted contexts with respect to Spanish and Central-Southern Italian varieties (see §2.5). This phenomenon is widely spread in informal and colloquial varieties but, as Berretta affirms, «siamo quindi di fronte a uno di quei fenomeni che sono rimasti a lungo endemici, presenti magari in varietà substandard ma non accettati dalla norma, e che ora riemergono conquistandosi più spazio nell'uso e più attenzione da parte dei linguisti[25]» (1989, p.24). Renzi highlighted the optionality of prepositional accusative in the contexts that he proposed. In reality, this assumption does not fit with the real use of prepositional accusative nowadays because it seems that it is mandatory in some contexts, in particular in preverbal position and with psychological verbs and causative constructions.

2.5 Differential Object Marking in Central-Southern varieties

D'Achille (2003) and Rohlfs (1969, 1971) are only two of the numerous linguists that have dealt with the phenomenon of DOM in the Central-Southern dialects. In addition to them, the Italian Encyclopedia of Science, Letters, and Arts (best known as Treccani), one of the most famous Italian language encyclopaedias, contains an entry created by Giuliana Fiorentino in 2010 dealing with this phenomenon[26]. What emerges from this literature is that the particular type of DOM which characterizes Central-Southern regional Italians and dialects is the same occurring in Spanish, namely the prepositional accusative (also called prepositional object).

[25] "We are therefore facing one of those phenomena that have long remained endemic, which were present in substandard varieties but were not accepted by the norm, and which are now re-emerging, gaining more space in the use and more attention by linguists" (my translation).
[26] Fiorentino (2010), retrieved from accusativo preposizionale in "Enciclopedia dell'Italiano" (treccani.it)

Like Spanish, in these varieties some direct objects are preceded by *a* if they present some particular features, like those mentioned in the section dedicated to prepositional accusative in Spanish. According to Guardiano (2010), prepositional accusative in these dialects is conditioned by diamesic variables because it is more frequent in oral conversations than in written contexts.

2.5.1 The driving features for prepositional accusative

As Rohlfs (1969, p.8) and D'Achille (2003, p.170) explain, the use of prepositional accusative is determined by the need to distinguish the subject from the object and is used if and only if the object bears the feature [+animate]. Inanimate objects can only function as direct objects and, therefore, the a-marking is no longer necessary. A lot of descriptive studies on the syntactic and semantic properties of prepositional accusative in Central-Southern dialects have been conducted in the last decades, in particular in Sicilian dialects (Guardiano, 2010), Barese dialect (Andriani, 2016), Neapolitan dialect (Fiorentino, 2003) and Calabrese dialect (Ledgeway et al., 2019). The conclusions to which the authors have come are multiple. First of all, they agree with the importance of the agentivity of the subject, which turns out to be crucial for the prepositional accusative to surface both in Spanish and in these varieties. «Only when such predicates take an agentive subject will the PA [prepositional accusative] occur, otherwise the a-marking will be absent regardless of the semantic nature of the DO» (Andriani, 2016: p.69). This can be concretely shown in (24), where the subject *malatìjə* (disease) is specified for the [-agent] feature, which blocks the presence of the prepositional accusative:

(24) La malatìjə accədì (*a) Ccolìnə [Barese dialect]
The disease kill.past.3sg (*to-DOM) Nick
'The disease killed Nick'

Furthermore, they confirm what has already been said about prepositional accusative in Spanish: animacy[27] is the driving feature for the presence of prepositional accusative in these varieties[28], and this can be seen in (25), where the DO (*la bbəscəclèttə-* the bicycle) is

[27] To be more precise, despite being hard to generalise a phenomenon in such a big geographical area as Central-Southern Italy, it would be better to say that it is humanness the driving feature for the presence of prepositional accusative in these varieties. Common nouns for animals rarely receive the a-marking (as in Spanish) and only the proper names of anthropomorphised animals may do. Owning to the presence of some exceptions, for the rest of this section it will be used the animacy feature instead of the humanness one.
[28] An exception is represented by bare non-specific plurals, as Brugger & Brugé (1996) explain for Spanish.

[+specific] but [-animate] and, for this reason, the insertion of the functional category *a* is not grammatical:

(25) Ciccìllə aschənnì (*a) la bbəscəclèttə [Barese dialect]
‘Frankie hid (*to-DOM) the bicycle’
‘Frankie hid the bicycle’

However, in order for the prepositional object to be licensed, DOs must also be [+specific]. Taking the scheme in Guardiano (2010, p. 90) as a model, the following implicational scale tries to summarise the most frequent linguistic contexts where prepositional accusative appears in these varieties. The basic principle proposed by Aissen (2003) is still valid: “the higher in prominence a direct object, the more likely it is to be overtly case-marked”:

1	I/II personal pronouns
2	III personal pronouns
3	Proper (human) names
4	Animate definite NP
5	Animate, indefinite, and specific NP
6	Animate non-specific NP

Prepositional accusative is obligatory before personal pronouns, mainly 1st and 2nd person pronouns, like in (26) and (27), but also with 3rd person pronouns, as in (28). All the examples that follow are retrieved from the studies previously cited and try to cover almost all the Central-Southern varieties:

(26) Semə vistə *(a) vu [Abruzzese dialect]
‘Be.pres.1.pl seen *(to-DOM) you.pl’
‘We have seen you’

(27) Cerchieno proprio *(a) tene [Roman dialect]
‘look for.pres.3.pl exactly *(to-DOM) you.sg’
‘they are exactly looking for you’

(28) Canuscìa *(a) ida, no *(a) idu [Sicilian dialect]
‘know.past.1.sg *(to-DOM) her, not *(to-DOM) him’
‘I knew her, but not him’

As for proper names, they always are preceded by *a* when the name refers to humans, like in (29). However, when an animal is anthropomorphised and has a proper name, its name can be preceded by *a* as well, like in (30), where "Sauru" is a horse's name (Rohlfs, 1971):

(29) Va truvannə *(a) Don Luigino [Neapolitan dialect]
'go.pres.3.sg searching *(to-DOM) Don Luigino'
's/he's looking for Don Luigino'

(30) Vindimmu (a) Ssauru [Calabrese dialect]
'sell.past.1.pl (to-DOM) Sauru'
'we sold Sauru'

Animate and definite DOs behave like proper names, in that the insertion of the prepositional accusative is grammatical and obligatory. As to be defined definite, the DO can be preceded by a definite article, a demonstrative, or a possessive, like in (31) or can present a postponed enclitic possessive, like in (32):

(31) Cərcàvə *(a) lla səgnórə də sùsə [Barese dialect]
'seek.past.1.sg *(to-DOM) the lady of up'
'I was looking for the upstairs neighbour'

(32) Salutəmə *(a) 'ssorətə [Neapolitan dialect]
'greet.imperative.2.sg.from-me *(a) sister.your'
'say hello to your sister for me'

Indefinite, specific, and animate direct objects are harder to describe in terms of prepositional accusative. Two quite similar sentences can be interpreted in two different ways, receiving a [+specific] or [-specific] interpretation according to the elements that follow Noun in (33). In (33a), "du previti" (two priests) refers to a set of two non-specified priests and, so, cannot be preceded by *a*, while "du previti" in (33b) denotes two referents which are identified in the speaker's mind and, therefore, the insertion of *a* is needed:

(33) a. Petru mazzau (*a) du previti [Calabrese dialect]
Petru killed *(to-DOM) two priests
'Petru killed two priests (two non-specific priests).'

b. Petru mazzau *(a) du previti chi canuscia jeu.
Petru killed *(to-DOM) two priests whom know.past.1.sg I
'Petru killed two priests (=two specific priests) whom I knew.'

In §2.2.2, dealing with prepositional accusative in Spanish, it has been shown that [-specific] and [+animate] quantifiers like *alguien* (somebody) and *nadie* (nobody) always require the functional category *a* to form grammatical sentences. In Central-Southern Italian varieties, the insertion of *a* is required with bare quantifiers in some dialects, like Calabrese (34) or Neapolitan, but not in others, like Barese[29], particularly with DOs with a non-specific reading (35):

(34) Iu no vitti *(a) nudu / Iu vitti *(a) calcheduno
I not see.past.1.sg *(to-DOM) nobody/ I see.past.1.sg *(to-DOM) someboby.msg
'I did not see anybody/I saw somebody'

(35) Non zo vvìstə de trasì (*a) nəssciùnə jìnd à ccàsətə
Not be.pres.1.sg seen of enter (*to-DOM) no one into house.your
'I haven't seen anyone entering your home'

2.5.2 Dislocation and prepositional accusative

Although Guardiano (2010)'s description focuses on Sicilian, almost all the Central-Southern varieties work similarly with respect to dislocated constructions: dislocated direct objects take the prepositional mark more systematically than those which are not dislocated[30]. In order for the dislocated objects to be marked, they must always be [+animate] and [+specific]. This DO, like in Northern varieties, can be reduplicated by an accusative clitic, like the following examples show:

(36) *(A) Ggiuànnə, u vədìbbə [Barese dialect]
*(To-DOM) John, him see.past.1.sg
'I saw John'

(37) Io *(a) Teresinə nun la lassə [Neapolitan dialect]
I *(to-DOM) Teresina not her.ACC leave.pres.1.sg
'I'm not leaving Teresina'

[29] An exception is the bare quantifier "tuttəquándə" (everyone), which always require the prepositional accusative because it is a universal quantifier.
[30] «gli oggetti dislocati prendono la marca preposizionale più sistematicamente rispetto ai non dislocati» (p.86)

The reduplication is mandatory only with pronouns, but it is almost always present with proper names and animate, definite, and specific DOs. Furthermore, it is sometimes possible for the object to be doubled by an accusative clitic in a pragmatically neutral and unmarked sentence, but it is not structurally required.

To conclude, prepositional accusative is licensed in Central-Southern regional Italians and dialects provided that the DO is [+animate] and [+ specific], being the first feature the driving and necessary one and the second the ultimate discriminant factor determining the insertion of *a* in indefinite DOs and, in some varieties (like Barese), in bare quantifiers. Therefore, prepositional accusative occurs with personal pronouns, proper names, animate and definite DOs and animate, indefinite, and specific DOs. It is important to remark an important concept. Despite not speaking their local dialect or speaking it less frequently, speakers of these areas are likely to use this construction in their regional Italian, above all in colloquial and less-controlled styles. This notion will be essential when describing the participants who took part in this study and their social and linguistic background.

Chapter 3: Previous studies on the acquisition of DOM in Spanish

In recent years, during these last two decades, DOM in Spanish, the overt morphological marking of some DOs, has gained attention in the acquisition literature because it appears to be a vulnerable area in language contact situations. The increasing interest in this morphosyntactic phenomenon has led to the conduction of a huge number of studies on its acquisition, perception, and use in Spanish. In the field of second and third language acquisition, many populations with different linguistic and cultural background took part in these studies, but further research is needed in order to properly investigate the main difficulties that speakers with different L1s find while learning Spanish DOM. Amongst them, there are several existing studies on DOM in Spanish as an L2 by speakers whose L1 does not mark DOM, like English (Guijarro-Fuentes, 2012; Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis, 2007). Spanish DOM has also been widely studied in child and adult Spanish heritage speakers in the United States (Montrul 2004; Montrul & Bowles 2009; Montrul & Sánchez-Walker, 2013; Montrul, 2014) and the UK (Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis, 2011), where the dominant language, English, does not exhibit DOM. Finally, Montrul and Gürel (2015) carried out a study investigating the acquisition of DOM in Spanish by Turkish learners of Spanish, whose L1 instantiates and exemplifies DOM but in a different way with respect to Spanish. Despite our participants are neither heritage speakers nor speakers whose L1 is English or Turkish, it is interesting to report the tasks and methodologies used and see how the performance of the participants changes according to the tasks administered to them.

3.1 DOM in Spanish heritage speakers

A heritage language is defined as a minority language learnt and spoken at home which does not correspond to the dominant language of the society where the heritage speaker lives. Heritage speakers are second-generation immigrants, children of first-generation immigrants, who were either born in the new country (the United States and the UK in these cases) or immigrated in early childhood, who are exposed to the heritage language at home since birth in a naturalistic setting. They can be simultaneous or sequential bilinguals because they can be introduced to the majority language together with the family language, soon after (simultaneous bilinguals) or during the pre-school and school years (sequential bilinguals). What has been shown by many studies is that heritage speakers exhibit language attrition,

language loss, or incomplete acquisition of their family/heritage language under conditions of exposure and use of the majority language of the society. A given grammar is considered incomplete when it does not reach age-appropriate linguistic levels of proficiency with respect to the grammar of monolingual speakers of the same age. However, the same studies also showed that «while syntax proper is impervious to language loss or attrition, syntax-related interfaces like lexical-semantics and discourse-pragmatics are not» (Montrul, 2004: p.125). The studies conducted by Montrul et al. (2004, 2009, 2013, 2014) take into account a particular subgroup of heritage speakers, namely Spanish heritage speakers living in the United States, that Valdés defines as «bilinguals brought up in a home where Spanish language is spoken, who speak or merely understand the heritage language [Spanish], and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language» (Montrul, 2004: p.125). In the United States, heritage language children are usually schooled in English and, pushed by the pressure to assimilate to the majority culture, they might decide to use Spanish less at home and begin speaking in English, reducing, as a consequence, exposure to the family language. Differently from Montrul's studies, the study conducted by Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis (2011) involves simultaneous British English-Spanish bilinguals who have been raised in the United Kingdom.

Montrul (2004) conducted a study aimed to investigate whether the long exposure of adult Spanish heritage speakers to English, the dominant language of the United States, led to structural transfer or convergence of English features into Spanish. In particular, this study investigated the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic distribution of subjects, direct objects, and indirect objects in the Spanish grammar of Spanish heritage speakers. She predicted that, since incomplete language acquisition affected more the syntax-semantics and the syntax-pragmatics interfaces than the purely syntactic domain, Spanish heritage speakers would have found no difficulties with object clitics and null subjects in Spanish. To say it in other words, they would not have omitted the object clitics and they would have used both null and overt subject, even if English is not a pro-drop language. For the same reasons, heritage speakers were predicted to display variable behaviour with the accusative *a* with animate direct objects because they would have tended to misuse and omit it where it was necessary. 20 monolingual Spanish speakers and 24 adult bilingual Spanish heritage speakers of Mexican-American background took part in this study. The heritage speakers were raised bilingually in the United States and received schooling in English. All the participants were administered a proficiency test in Spanish, which allowed a division of the heritage speakers in two groups: advanced and intermediate, hypothesizing that intermediate speakers would have been more

likely to show language loss or convergence than advanced ones. They completed an oral production task, during which they had to tell the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* in Spanish thanks to the help of some coloured pictures from the tale. Focusing only on the object expression, in particular on the accusative *a*, the results showed that the heritage speakers significantly differed from the monolinguals in the rate of omission of *a* with animate NP: 6% of omission for the advanced heritage speakers and 21.3% of omission for intermediate ones of the total animate objects produced. Generally speaking, the hypotheses were confirmed. The results confirmed that syntactic features of subjects and objects remained intact in Spanish heritage speakers, while linguistic structures at the syntax-semantics and syntax-pragmatics interfaces (which are dependent on input, use and context) did not, above all in the grammars of intermediate heritage speakers, a grammar that appeared more unstable and vulnerable and that was undergoing a process of erosion. With the erosion of pragmatic and semantic features, the grammars of bilinguals tended to converge at the morphosyntactic level with the dominant language, English.

Since this study was focus on different grammatical structures, in 2009, Montrul and Bowles decided to conduct two experiments aiming to expand the findings of Montrul (2004) by investigating further the extent of incomplete acquisition of DOM in adult heritage speakers. In the first experiment, 67 Spanish heritage speakers and 22 monolingually-raised native speakers of Spanish participated in the study and took a short written Spanish proficiency test, which divided the heritage speakers in three groups (and not in two as in Montrul, 2004): low, intermediate, and advanced heritage speakers. They were administered a written acceptability judgment task and an oral production task (the same of Montrul, 2004) in order to investigate whether they marked [+animate] and [+specific] direct objects with the *a* in production and whether they accepted grammatical sentences and rejected ungrammatical ones with or without the *a.* The results showed that, in the acceptability judgment task, the heritage speakers accepted ungrammatical sentenced with unmarked animate and specific direct objects significantly more than native speakers, while in the oral production task, heritage speakers omitted DOM with animate and specific objects significantly more than native Spanish speakers (29.1% of omission for the heritage speakers and <1% of omission for the native speakers). The second experiment aimed to re-examine the knowledge of DOM in another group of heritage speakers, namely 69 Spanish heritage speakers from the Chicago metropolitan area, whose performance was compared to that of 13 Spanish native speakers. As in the first experiment, all participants completed the same written Spanish Proficiency test and they were divided into three groups: advanced, intermediate, and low proficiency

heritage speakers. They were only administered an acceptability judgment task similar to the one in the first experiment with grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, testing not only DOM but also indirect objects and psychological verbs like *gustar* (to like). As far as DOM sentences are concerned, differently from experiment 1, the objects were both animate and inanimate. The results of DOM sentences with animate objects showed that the native speakers rated grammatical *a*-marked sentences as significantly more acceptable than the three groups of heritage speakers, who accepted ungrammatical sentences without *a* significantly more than the native speakers. As for DOM sentences with inanimate objects, all groups rated sentences with unmarked direct objects as grammatical, but heritage speakers also rated as acceptable the ungrammatical sentences with *a*-marked direct objects. In conclusion, Montrul and Bowles' study (2009) showed that heritage speakers had unstable knowledge of the grammatical phenomenon of DOM, and this can be due to reduced input and to limited use of Spanish throughout heritage speakers' childhood, which led to an incomplete acquisition of the family language. The «incomplete acquisition due to reduced input in childhood leads to some sort of "fossilization" or linguistic gap in adult Spanish heritage speakers. This type of fossilization is localized and selective, since it does not affect the entire grammar» (p.381) and leads to convergence of the syntax of Spanish objects with that of English, the majority language.

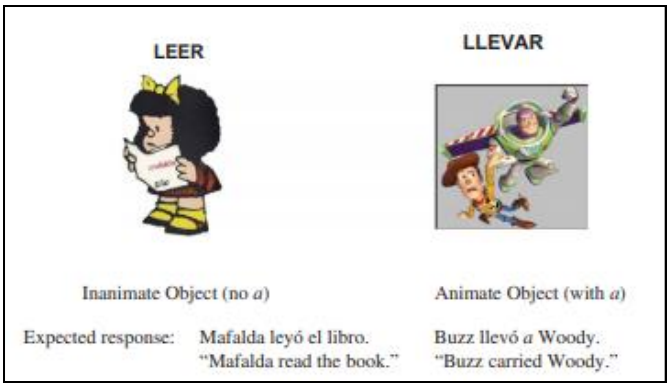
The fact that heritage speakers' recognition and production of DOM is probabilistic and that it is not a matter of language attrition (Montrul, 2004) but a matter of incomplete acquisition (Montrul, 2009) is also demonstrated by two other studies conducted by Montrul and Noelia Sánchez-Walker (2013). They both test the knowledge and use of DOM but what is innovative in these studies is the choice of the participants: simultaneous and sequential bilingual children for the first study and first-generation immigrants and simultaneous and sequential young adult heritage speakers for the second study. First-generation immigrants, in this case, are people who grew up in their country of origin, are dominant in Spanish and have English as a second language. The researchers investigated whether simultaneous and sequential bilingual children and first-generation immigrants would have shown omission of DOM as adult heritage speakers in the previous studies (Montrul, 2004; Montrul & Bowles, 2009). They also questioned whether the age of onset of bilingualism and exposure to the major language, English, might have affected omission of DOM in child and adult heritage speakers. They predicted that it would have been possible to talk about incomplete acquisition if both bilingual children and young adult heritage speakers had omitted DOM. On the contrary, if the children had been more accurate than the young adults, not omitting DOM, it

could have been inferred that heritage language gradually was undergoing a process of attrition in young adult heritage speakers. In general, the researchers predicted that, if quantity of early input matters, simultaneous heritage speakers would have omitted DOM more than sequential bilinguals. As far as first-generation immigrants are concerned, who had been living in the United States for more than 10 years, if they had shown omission of DOM with [+animate] and [+specific] objects, this would have been a sign of language attrition. The participants of the first study were 39 Spanish–English bilingual children ages (17 simultaneous bilinguals who were born in the United States and 22 sequential bilinguals, arrived in the United States after the age of 3) and 20 monolingual children of Spanish, while those who took part in the second study were 127 adults, so divided:

- 64 Spanish heritage speakers, of which 35 were simultaneous bilinguals exposed to Spanish and English since birth or to English before the age of 5 and 29 were sequential bilinguals, exposed to English later.
- 20 young adult native speakers of Spanish, matched in age to the heritage speakers.
- 23 adult immigrants from Mexico and other countries, who immigrated to the United States and had been residing in the country for many years.
- 20 Mexican native speakers tested in Guanajuato, matched in age to the adult immigrant group.

Participants of both studies completed a Story Retelling Task and a Picture Description Task: in particular, participants of the second study took the adult version of the Picture Description Task, which made use of different characters and some different verbs. For the first task, participants were provided with coloured pictures retrieved from *Little Red Riding Hood* and were asked to retell the tale. As for the Picture Description Task, participants were shown 28 pictures like Figure 12, representing people performing an action with animate or inanimate objects. For the story retelling task, the results of the first study showed that the three groups were statistically different from each other: the rate of DOM omission for simultaneous and sequential was equal to 38% and 37% respectively, while that of monolingual Spanish speakers was equal to 6,5%.

Figure 12. Examples of the Picture Description Task (child version)[31]



There was great individual variability among the children, but it was shown that those exposed to more Spanish were more accurate than those exposed to both Spanish and English. The results of the same task by the participants of the second study were consistent with previous studies, showing that, on average, the rate omission of DOM in heritage speakers is equal to 20% and that of adult immigrants to 12%. The simultaneous and sequential adult heritage speakers did not differ from each other (and, so, behave differently from the children of the first study) and were statistically different from the two native speaker groups. Interestingly, the mean accuracy of the group of adult immigrants did not significantly differ both from that of the heritage speakers and that of native speaker groups. Also in this case, it was found a great individual variation within the heritage speakers and the adult immigrants. As far as the Picture Description Task is concerned, the results of the first study showed that native speakers were statistically more accurate than the two groups of bilingual children, that show low percentages of accuracy (42% for the simultaneous bilinguals and 40% for the sequential bilinguals).

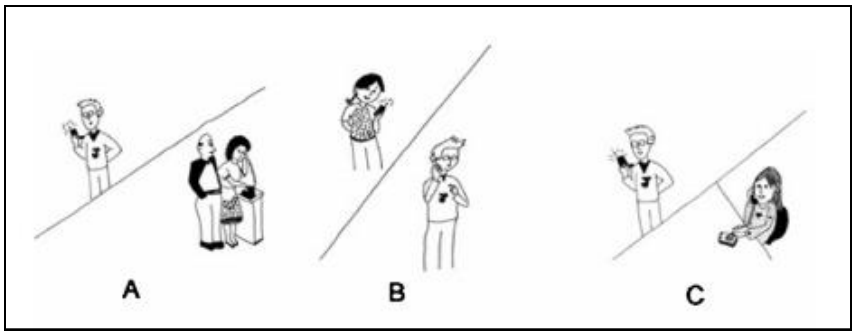
As for the second study, in the Story Retelling Task, the simultaneous bilinguals, the sequential bilinguals, and the adult immigrants did not differ from each other, but the heritage speakers were statistically more inaccurate than the two native speaker groups. On the contrary, the adult immigrants' performance was not different from that of the younger native speakers but differed from that of the other group of native speakers. Given the high variability in the oral tasks, heritage speakers of the second study were divided in those who omitted DOM (omitters) and those who never omitted DOM (non-omitters), and it emerged that non-omitters used Spanish more frequently at home with parents and other relatives than non-omitters. In general, the five bilingual groups of the two studies displayed significant omission of DOM with [+animate] direct objects in oral production, suggesting that DOM in

[31] (Montrul & Sánchez-Walker, 2013: p.115)

Spanish is subject to attrition in adults and to attrition and/or incomplete acquisition in children exposed both to Spanish and English. On the one hand, the hypothesis on the difference between simultaneous and sequential bilinguals was confirmed neither in the children nor in the adult heritage speakers, demonstrating that age of onset of bilingualism does not matter; on the other, as far as the adult immigrants are concerned, they also showed a significant rate of omission of DOM with animate objects, showing that both quantity and quality of input matter for mastering DOM in child and adult bilinguals.

The study just presented (Montrul and Sánchez-Walker, 2013) and another study conducted by Montrul in 2014 belong to a larger project whose aim was to investigate whether quantity and quality of input, in addition to transfer from English, might contribute to incomplete knowledge of DOM in heritage speakers of Spanish. The participants were the same for the two studies and were administered different tasks according to the study taken into consideration. In the case of Montrul (2014), participants completed an elicited written production and an auditory and written comprehension. In the elicited written production, participants were given a noun, a verb in the infinitive, and another noun and were requested to write a complete sentence with the given words adding all the grammatical elements they considered necessary. Among the targeted sentences, there were five eliciting transitive verbs with animate objects, like *estudiante/visitar/profesora* (student/visit/teacher.F). The written and auditory comprehension task consists of a picture-sentence matching task, including 10 verbs with direct objects (like *invitar,* ‘‘invite’’) and 10 verbs with indirect objects (like *escribir,* ‘‘write”).

Figure 13. Sample picture and sentences used in the aural/written comprehension task. Accusative condition.[32]



Participants saw three pictures, like those in Figure 13 and heard/read one sentence at a time. For Figure 13, the three sentences were:

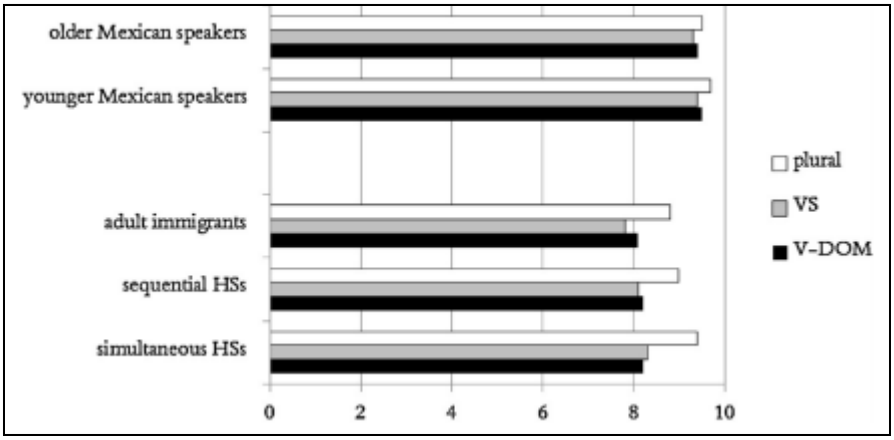
[32] (Montrul, 2014: p.186)

- *Llamó a Juan* (He/she called to-DOM Juan), a V-DOM sentence which corresponded to image C.
- *Llamaron a Juan* (they called to-DOM John), a plural V-DOM sentence, corresponding to image A.
- *Llamó Juan* (John called), a V-S sentence which corresponded to image B.

They had to indicate which picture matched the sentence, by pressing the A, B or C on the keyboard. Montrul predicted that, for the oral/written comprehension task, if heritage speakers had not orally perceived the *a* or identified it with the DOM marker, they would have been more accurate on V-S sentences than on V-DOM ones. But if heritage speakers also had had difficulties with V-S sentences, then they also would have been equally inaccurate in V-DOM and V-S sentences. In general, participants were expected to perform better in plural sentences because the marker can be perceived more easily. «If heritage speakers are more accurate perceiving the [a] with indirect objects than with direct objects, this response pattern will tell us that acoustic salience is not the main factor affecting potential omission of the DOM marker, and that the structural difference between direct and indirect objects is crucial as well» (Montrul, 2014: p.187).

The results of the written production showed that the simultaneous bilinguals, the sequential bilinguals, and the adult immigrants performed similarly both with animate and inanimate objects and their performance with animate objects was significantly less accurate than that shown by the two groups of Mexican speakers. The two Mexican groups did not differ from each other and neither did the other three groups from the US. The results of the oral and written versions of the comprehension task showed that all groups were quite accurate at comprehending sentences with animate objects and indirect objects, with preverbal null or overt postverbal subjects, but the three US groups were more accurate on sentences with indirect objects than on sentences with direct objects, showing that *a* was not so problematic when it was a dative case. The results on sentences with direct objects are shown in Figure 14. The three groups were more accurate with plural sentences than with V-S and V-DOM sentences, and accuracy on V-DOM and V-S sentences did not differ for these three groups, confirming the predictions and suggesting that in some cases the bilinguals did not interpret the meaning of the DOM marker as an object marker.

Figure 14. Comprehension task: mean accuracy on sentences with direct objects.[33]



To summarize, the results of the two tasks confirmed the trends documented with oral production in Montrul and Sánchez-Walker (2013), showing that DOM undergoes incomplete acquisition in the second-generation heritage speakers and attrition in some speakers of the first generation of immigrants (in particular, those with longer residence in the United States) due to contact with the major language, English.

Differently from the studies conducted by Montrul (2004, 2009, 2013, 20014), Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis (2011) explored a field hardly investigated before, namely bilingualism of Spanish migrants in the UK. This study investigated the performance of school-aged simultaneous British English-Spanish bilinguals (mean age of 12.5) brought up in the United Kingdom. 44 English-Spanish bilingual children coming from families of Spanish migrants and 10 monolingual Spanish children participated in this study. The two authors questioned whether there was a significant difference between the two groups in their linguistic performance of Spanish DOM, predicting to find a significant difference between the two groups. After having completed a standardized Spanish proficiency level, the British bilingual children were administered an ethnolinguistic questionnaire about the languages spoken at home and at school. Their hypothesis was that the languages spoken at home and at school could play a significant part in modelling bilinguals' linguistic performance. In other words, the prediction was that the children whose dominant language was Spanish should perform more accurately than those whose dominant language was English. In order to test this hypothesis, the two groups completed a competition task consisting of 42 experimental sentences belonging to the following 6 conditions. In addition to these 6 categories, it was added another condition, condition 7, containing control items not involving *a.*

[33] (Montrul, 2014: p.190)

Condition	**N. item**	**+DOM/ -DOM**
1. + animate, + specific	6	+DOM
2. -animate, +/- specific	6	-DOM
3. + animate, - specific	6	-DOM
4. stative/activity verb, +human subject	6	+DOM
5. stative/activity verb, -human subject	6	-DOM
6. accomplishment/achievement verb, +/−human subject	12	+DOM

The participants were presented a sentence like (38) and they were asked to either fill in the gaps with one word or leave the gaps empty. In this case, the insertion of the accusative *a* was mandatory because the direct object is [+animate] and receives a wide scope interpretation.

(38) Juan persigue ____ los presos que se han fugado de la cárcel
John chases ____ the prisoners that have escaped from the prison

The results showed that, in general, despite being the bilingual children less accurate than monolinguals, the two groups showed a similar pattern of performance. They both were more accurate in the control items with respect to all experimental conditions. Their performance was more accurate in conditions 1, 2, and 6 and less accurate in conditions 3, 4, and 5. The author wanted also to see how many participants performed above chance level and they found out that the performance of the bilingual children was below chance in condition 3, 4 and 5. In order to investigate a possible relationship between the amount of input the bilingual children received in Spanish and English and their accuracy in the use of Spanish DOM, Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis conducted correlations between the language input at home, school, and the performance of the children in all six experimental conditions. The results of the correlations showed that there was no correlation between the performance of the children and the language input at home and at school. In conclusion, British English-Spanish bilingual children were less accurate than monolinguals, but both groups showed a low performance, indicating their difficulty in acquiring structures involving the syntax-semantics interface. Moreover, the low performance in monolingual children can be explained by the fact that the use of the Spanish DOM in some conditions is part of a formal register that is acquired later. Furthermore, the hypothesis on the linguistic external factors was not

confirmed. The linguistic performance of the bilingual children was not affected by the dominant language/s spoken at home and at school: in fact, both bilingual children with very little Spanish input at home and children from families where only English is used showed a similar performance with respect to bilingual children with Spanish as the home language.

3.2 Spanish as an L2 (L1 English)

Unlike Spanish, English does not mark DOM, a morphosyntactic phenomenon which involves the syntax/semantics interface. Recent studies on L2 acquisition have shown that structures involving the interfaces (syntax/pragmatics and syntax/semantics) are more difficult to acquire and are more likely to undergo a process of attrition and incomplete acquisition than those involving only narrow syntax (Sorace, 2011). The following studies conducted by Guijarro-Fuentes (2012), with the collaboration of Marinis (2007) aimed to confirm or reject this conclusion by investigating the acquisition of the Spanish accusative *a* by English L2 learners of Spanish. Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis (2007) questioned whether English learners differentiated from the Spanish control group in the distribution of the Spanish DOM. In particular, they wanted to investigate whether proficiency affected the learners' accuracy in their judgements. 33 English learners of Spanish and 14 Spanish controls took part in this study and completed a standardized Spanish proficiency test, which divided the English speakers into three proficiency levels: advanced, high-intermediate, and low-intermediate. Then, they completed an Acceptability Judgment task, consisting of 42 items which belonged to the same six conditions illustrated in §3.1. There were two versions of each experimental item, one acceptable and one not acceptable. The two different versions were distributed in two different lists and each participant was given only one version of each experimental item. In order to judge the acceptability of the sentences, they could both rate it on scale from 1 to 4 (1 = sounds very bad and 4 = sounds very good) or select the option "I don't know". If it is true that L2 learners have difficulties acquiring phenomena at the syntax/semantics interface, the authors predicted that English learners of Spanish would have performed significantly worse than native speakers , and their performance would have been at chance level. If the experimental groups were able to acquire constructions involving the syntax/semantics interface, the prediction was that advanced learners would have performed significantly better than learners at the intermediate levels. The results showed a significant difference between the control group and the three L2 groups in all the conditions except for condition 2, while the L2 groups did not differ from each other. In condition 2, L1 controls are significantly different

from all L2 groups but, interestingly, at the same time, the advanced L2 English learners also performed significantly better than the high and low intermediate groups. In general, the English speakers performed at chance level in all experimental conditions and the level of proficiency did not affect their accuracy, with the exception of condition 2, where there was an effect of proficiency. Splitting the analysis according to the scores attributed to each condition for acceptable and not acceptable sentences, the result showed that native speakers and English advanced learners of Spanish gave different scores in acceptable and not acceptable sentences, but high and low intermediate learners did not, giving similar ratings to acceptable and not acceptable sentences. In this case, in the L2 learners there was an effect of proficiency because advanced learners of Spanish, like Spanish controls, gave a significantly different rating to acceptable and not acceptable sentences, differently from learners at the high and low intermediate levels, who showed not to be sensitive to the Spanish distribution of DOM. Overall, the results from this study confirmed the hypothesis according to which L2 learners have difficulties with structures involving interfaces.

Using the same methodologies and materials and dividing the participants in the same way as the studies above mentioned (Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis, 2007, 2011), Guijarro-Fuentes (2012) conducted a study to examine the acquisition of interpretable features associated with the Spanish *a* in English L2 learners of Spanish. from a different perspective, that is basing on the *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere 2008, 2009). In fact, Spanish DOM involves a cluster of semantic and interpretable features, which resulted under-determined by input, and one of the aims of the author is to investigate whether these features are subject to reassembly in the grammar of L2 adults. Guijarro-Fuentes (2012) questioned whether there was a significant difference in the use and acceptability of *a* on the one hand between English learners of Spanish as an L2 and the native speakers and, on the other, among the L2 learners according to their proficiency levels. He also questioned whether there was any evidence of L2 learners having managed to reassemble the new features and, if so, if there were differences between proficiency levels regarding the experimental conditions of the test. Since the features involved in the distribution of Spanish *a* (i.e. animacy, specificity, telicity and so on) are also present in English, Guijarro-Fuentes (2012) hypothesised that L2 English learners of Spanish will acquire *a* in Spanish. It is true that English presents the same interpretable features involved *a* in Spanish, but it is also true that they are represented and distributed differently in the two languages and that English speakers will have to redeploy them. For this reason, the process is not that easy, and the author predicted that English speakers would find

more difficulties with conditions that require the speakers to conjoin different features, like those of the predicate and that of the subject. In order to test these hypotheses, 49 English learners of Spanish and 16 Spanish native speaker controls participated in this study and completed a standardized Spanish proficiency test, which divided the experimental group into three proficiency levels (advanced, high intermediate, and low intermediate) and then the same sentence Completion Task and Acceptability Judgement Task administered in Guijarro-Fuentes and Marinis (2007, 2011). The 48 items of the Completion task and the 42 experimental items of the Acceptability Judgement Task were the same of the studies already mentioned and belonged to the six conditions in 3.1.5. Another aspect that distinguishes this study from the others is the more detailed statistical analysis used to analyse the results. The results of the Completion Task showed a main effect of Group, Conditions and a significant interaction between Group and Sentence, showing differences in the performance of the groups in the experimental conditions. Apart from the control condition, condition 7, the most accurate condition for the three English groups was Condition 2 (-animate + specific), while the least accurate was Condition 4 (+ stative/activity predicate, +human subject). In general, native speakers performed significantly better than advanced, high intermediate, and low intermediate learners in all experimental conditions. The results of the Acceptability Judgement Task showed that, on the one hand, native speakers performed significantly better than all learner groups in all conditions; on the other, advanced learners performed better than high intermediate learners Condition 2 and better than low intermediate learners in Condition 5. Interestingly, in Conditions 2, 3 and 4, the low intermediate learners performed better than the high intermediate learners.

In conclusion, in both tasks, English learners of L2 Spanish performed differently from native speakers, who showed to have a solid knowledge of all experimental conditions, demonstrating that English learners of Spanish as an L2 show incomplete acquisition of Spanish DOM even at the advanced proficiency level. In fact, proficiency of the L2 learners did not affect their accuracy in the six experimental conditions that required access to more than one semantic feature. The number of features involved in this phenomenon affect the acquisition *a*: «the more the features are clustered in the mapping of form to meaning in relation to DOM, the harder the acquisition task seems to be» (Guijarro-Fuentes, 2012: p. 714). This is confirmed by the fact that all groups of L2 English learners showed higher levels of accuracy in the condition involving one feature [±animate] and in the three groups, in the Completion Task, there were not significant differences between this condition and control

condition (C7). This can be explained by the possible transfer from their L1, English, and also by the fact that some interpretable features may be more difficult to be redeployed than others and that speakers might have been exposed to unnaturalistic input lacking some DOM features. So, on the one hand, interpretable features seem to be acquirable; on the other hand, it has been shown that some of these features are more difficult than others and could cause incomplete acquisition.

3.3 Spanish DOM by Turkish speakers

In 2015, Montrul and Gürel conducted a study investigating the acquisition of DOM in Spanish by native speakers of Turkish. As the previous sections have shown, there are several studies on DOM in Spanish as an L2, especially by speakers whose L1 does not show this phenomenon. Instead, no study had ever investigated the acquisition of this Spanish property by speakers whose L1 instantiates and exemplifies DOM, like Turkish. In Turkish, the driving feature for the presence or absence of DOM is definiteness: only specific/definite DOs appear with the accusative case marker –(y)I. As a consequence, all definite NPs such as names, pronouns, and demonstrative NPs are obligatorily marked irrespective of animacy. Figure 15 graphically represents the differences in the way Spanish and Turkish instantiate DOM.

Figure 15. Feature specification of Spanish and Turkish DOM[34]

DOM	Morpholexical form	Formal features
Spanish	*a*	+animate, +specific/definite
Turkish	*–(y)I*	+specific/definite

The authors assumed the *Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis* (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996) and the *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere 2008, 2009), according to which speakers' L1 has a strong influence in the initial stages of L2 acquisition. They predicted that, on the one hand, Turkish speakers would have found no difficulties in marking Spanish definite and specific DOs with the *a* on the other hand, since they had to reconfigure Turkish features by adding a new feature, animacy, it was possible that speakers at the initial stages of their language acquisition would have tended to produce and accept [-animate] and [+specific] DOs marked with *a*. 32 Turkish speakers learning Spanish were administered a written proficiency test in Spanish and, according to the score obtained, they were divided into two level groups: low intermediate and intermediate. They completed a written production, a

[34] (Montrul, 2015: p.288)

written comprehension, and a bimodal acceptability judgment task and their performance was compared to those of a control group, consisting of 20 Mexican native speakers of Spanish.

In general, the results were positive. It seemed that Turkish speakers, regardless of the proficiency in Spanish, were aware of the fact that in Spanish the insertion of *a* is required with [+animate] and [+definite] DOs, having correctly added the feature [+animate] for instantiating Spanish DOM. Specifically dealing with the bimodal acceptability judgment task, the speakers tended to correctly reject ungrammatical sentences with unmarked [+animate] and [+definite] DOs. However, at the same time, a few participants accepted ungrammatical sentences with DOM-marked [-animate] objects. This supported Montrul and Gürel's prediction: some Turkish speakers, above all some of those belonging to the low intermediate group, were still influenced by features of their L1, Turkish, and had difficulties in properly reassembling the features associated with Spanish DOM. Despite this, the authors' study can be defined as unique and came to the conclusion that «speakers of DOM languages are quite successful at acquiring DOM in a second or third language even when there is some language-specific variation in the expression of DOM in the two languages» (Montrul & Gürel, 2015: p.304).

3.4 Research question and predictions

So far, the literature on the use and acquisition of Spanish DOM is wide and has considered a variety of speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Despite this, no study has ever dealt with the use and production of DOM in Spanish as an L3 by speakers whose L1 is Italian or a variety of Italian and that is the main aim of this study. For the purposes of this study, the participants were divided into four subgroups, according to two variables:

- The geographic region of birth and residence (Northern and Central-Southern regions).
- Their Spanish proficiency level (Intermediate and Advanced).

Apart from the investigation on Italian students, what is new in this study is the exploration of a scenario hardly investigated before, namely how the knowledge of a linguistic variety (dialect) or a regional Italian may influence and, consequently, help the speakers acquire a third language. As shown in the previous chapter, the distribution of DOM in Central-Southern varieties is very similar to that of Spanish. From the linguistic and the geographical background questionnaire completed by the speakers, it resulted that all experimental participants' L1 is Italian (or, better, the regional Italian of their geographical area) and some

of them have attested to regularly use and speak their local dialect, which represents their L2. The first and main research question that this study addresses is: can a linguistic variety influence the acquisition of an L3 or Ln? In particular, is it possible that the knowledge of a Central-Southern dialect or regional Italian will help these Italian learners of Spanish acquire the distribution of DOM in Spanish? However, determining the source of possible transfer in Spanish acquisition as an L3/Ln is not an easy matter for two reasons. The first one is a temporary reason. In Italy, the study of English is compulsory from primary school (from the age of 5-6 years) in almost all Italian schools, and Spanish can be optionally chosen as a second foreign language at middle school, at high school, and of course at university. This to say that, hypothesizing that Italian is a participant's L1 and the local variety the L2, English should be considered as the L3 (or the L2, for those participants who do not speak a local dialect) and Spanish as an L3 or additional language (Ln). The second reason is that both the L1 and the L2 (or L3) may be potential transfer sources in the Spanish acquisition process. Westergaard's *Linguistic Proximity Model* (2019) is one of the most recent hypotheses about L3/Ln acquisition, attempting to account for any stage of L3 acquisition, regardless of the linguistic level of the learner. Westergaard explains that L3 learners have access to all previously acquired languages during all stages of L3/Ln acquisition and that linguistic transfer can occur either from one or from all the previously acquired languages. However, the name of the model suggests that it is more likely for a linguistically proximal language to the L3 to be the major or, perhaps, the only source of transfer. In the case of the Italian participants, the most proximal languages to Spanish are their regional Italians or local varieties and not English. While Schwartz and Sprouse's proposal (1996) hypothesizes a Full Transfer of the L1, for Westergaard's Linguistic Proximity Model, «crosslinguistic influence (CLI) is argued to take place property-by-property and occurs when a linguistic property present in the L3/Ln input is similar to linguistic properties of L1 or L2, or both» (2019, p.14). In the case of this study, as far as the Central-Southern speakers are concerned, their L1 (a Central-Southern regional Italian) and their L2 (the local dialect for most of them) both present a linguistic property quite identical to that from Spanish: Differential Object Marking. Instead, as far as the Northern speakers are concerned, according to this model, they will have to wait for the parser to syntactically parse the input and to build the new L3 grammar, a process that requires a longer time In addition to this consideration, it is possible to propose an adaptation of Lardiere's *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere, 2008, 2009) to an L3/Ln acquisition situation and to the Northern Italian speakers, whose regional Italians and/or local varieties lack DOM. Assuming that all the interpretable features involved in the

distribution of Spanish DOM already exist in the regional Italian or in the local variety of the Northern Italian speakers, according to these adaptation, these features need to be redeployed, reconfigured, and remapped to capture the distribution of this phenomenon in Spanish, their L3/Ln. The lack of DOM in these speakers' L1 and L2 makes this redeployment and reassembling process more problematic, and consequently, this grammatical restructuring may take longer. The prediction is that Central-Southern speakers will easily transfer this linguistic property from the L1 or the L2 (the local dialect) into their acquisition of Spanish and that, despite their equivalent proficiency level, we will find significant differences between these learners and those from the Northern parts of Italy with respect to this particular feature.

The second research question that this study addresses concerns the comparison between control and experimental groups: does the performance of the Italian learners of Spanish differ from that of the control group? If so, in which measure? The scores obtained in the proficiency Spanish test by the Italian speakers are generally quite high, but these were very useful to divide the learners into Advanced and Intermediate in any case. Can Italian learners' proficiency in Spanish predict their performance? The prediction is that the performance of Advanced Italian learners of Spanish will be very similar to that of the Control group and, therefore, the two performances will not be significantly different one from the other.

To summarize, the research questions that characterize this study are the following:

1. Can knowledge of a Central-Southern Italian variety influence the acquisition of a third language? In particular, is it possible that these varieties will facilitate the acquisition of the distribution of DOM in Spanish as an L3?
2. Does the Italian learners' performance differ from that of the control groups? If so, in which measure? Having divided the experimental groups according to their proficiency, will the Advanced groups' performance be more similar to that of the Control group?

For each research questions, the following predictions have been proposed:

1. Following Lardiere's *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere, 2008, 2009) and Westergaard's *Linguistic Proximity Model* (2019), the Central-Southern speakers will easily transfer the linguistic property of DOM from their L1 and/or the L2 (the local dialect) into the Spanish acquisition process. As a consequence, at the same

proficiency level of Spanish, we expect to find significant differences between these learners and those from the Northern parts of Italy with respect to their use of DOM.

2. Advanced participants are predicted to perform similarly to the Control group and their performances are not hypothesised to be significant different one from the other.

Chapter 4: The experiment: participants, materials, and results

4.1 Introduction

The present study aims to investigate the use and production of Spanish DOM by Italian university speakers through the administration of two tasks: a grammaticality judgment task and an elicited production task of DOM. The tasks were taken from previous studies (Perpiñán, 2018) and modified according to the specific purposes of this study. The modification and the research of the participants started in September 2020 and in October 2020 the administration of the tasks gradually took place. Later on, in January 2021, the research of the control groups and, consequently, the administration of the tasks started, and it ended two months after. The participants and the control group are introduced in section 4.2. In section 4.3, the general procedure applied for all the tests administered in the present study is presented. In 4.4 the linguistic materials are presented: a linguistic background questionnaire, a reduced standardized proficiency test of Spanish and the two experimental tasks previously mentioned. Finally, 4.5 the results of the questionnaire and the tasks.

4.2 Participants

60 Italian speakers, between the ages of 18-44 (M (23.6), SD (4.07)) and 30 speakers of Spanish between the ages of 22-55 (M (30.9), SD (9.3)) participated in the study. The participants of control group came from two different countries: Spain and Colombia, while the Italian participants came from different Italian regions and, at testing, they were all university students who had been learning Spanish as an L3/Ln for a period between 1-15 year(s) (M (7.06), SD (2.7)). All participants completed a linguistic and geographical background questionnaire and a reduced standardized proficiency test of Spanish. The questionnaire was administered in order to gather information about the geographical region of birth and residence and the L1 of participants, as well as about the languages spoken at home. We also gathered information about Italian speakers' period of Spanish learning. For the purposes of this study, the 60 Italian learners of Spanish were divided into four little groups, according to two factors:

- The geographic region of birth and residence (Northern and Central-Southern regions).
- Their Spanish level.

Table 2 graphically represent how the 90 participants of this study are divided.

Table 2. Participants of the study

Number	**Group**
15	Central-Southern Intermediate
15	Central-Southern Advanced
15	Northern Intermediate
15	Northern Advanced
15	Spanish
15	Colombian

All the detailed information about the participants are collected in Appendix A.

4.3 Procedure

Due to the COVID-19 sanitary emergency and to the fact that the participants came from different parts of Italy, the administration was online. The tasks were administered in two different moments. The background linguistic and geographical questionnaire, the Spanish proficiency test, and the grammaticality judgement task were assembled together in an online survey and the link was sent to the participant, who had to complete it in all of its parts. Only the participants who had completed the whole survey and that respected particular parameters could take part in the second part of the study, namely the oral elicited production task of DOM. In this case, the administration took place employing online video-communication programs, such as Zoom and Google Meet.

Once the meeting started:

- I tried to create a good atmosphere, making the subject feel comfortable.
- I asked all the participants if I could record the calling, assuring them that it was only aimed to give me the possibility to listen to the recordings and to transcribe exactly their answers.
- I shared the PowerPoints with the items, and I made a brief introduction the task.

- I showed them two examples, in order for the participants to familiarize with the task and to give them the possibility to ask questions whether something was not clear enough.
- Since there were no time constraints, I did not interrupt either give suggestions to the participant. I only asked them to repeat their answers whether internet connection problems occurred.

4.4 Materials

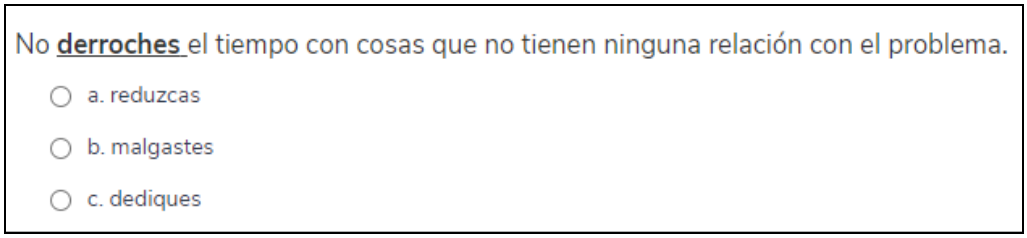
4.4.1 Linguistic and geographical background questionnaire

As already shown in §4.2, the participants completed a linguistic and geographical background questionnaire through Survey Gizmo, a web-based survey program. It consisted of 9 questions regarding their gender, age, their L1 and the languages spoken at home, their place of birth and residence, their language preference, and the extent of their Spanish learning period.

4.4.2 Reduced standardized Spanish proficiency test

Soon after the linguistic and geographic background questionnaire, the participants completed a reduced standardized Spanish proficiency test (*Diploma Español de Lengua Extranjera – DELE*). It was administered through the same web platform and consisted of two sections: a vocabulary section and a grammar section.

Figure 16. Trial n.1 of vocabulary section[35]

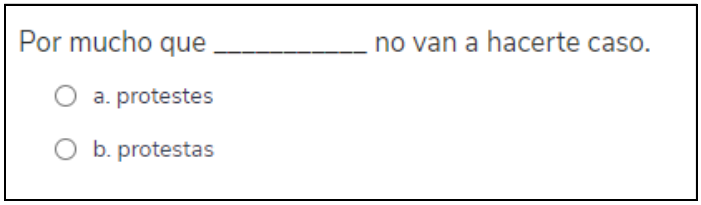


In the vocabulary section, participants were presented with 10 sentences in which a noun, verb, adjective, or expression in bold is underlined and they were asked to choose

[35] "Do not **waste** your time on things that have nothing to do with the problem: a. reduce, b. waste, c. dedicate" (my translation).

the answer whose meaning is the nearest to that of the underlined word or expression among three possible options, like Figure 16 shows.

Figure 17. Trial n.2 of the grammar section[36]



The grammar section consisted of 15 sentences with a gap, like Figure 17 shows. Participants were asked to complete the sentence with one of the two or four options following the sentence. The items of this section concerned different grammatical rules, such as verb tense and mood or the use of prepositions, articles, por and para, and clitics. There was no time limit for all the written parts.

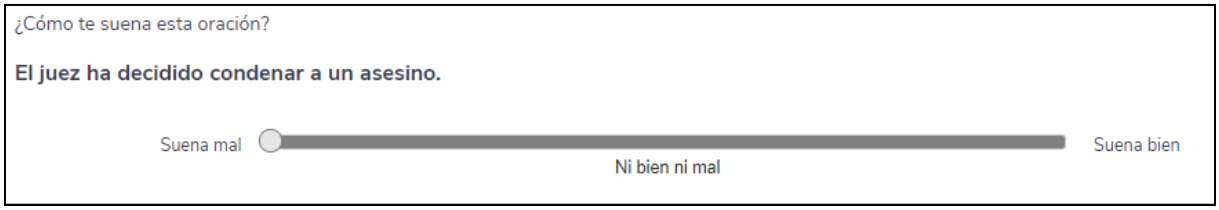
4.4.3 Grammaticality Judgment Task

The Grammaticality Judgment Task was the first experimental test administered to the participants and was also the last part of the written online part on Survey Gizmo, following the linguistic and geographical background questionnaire and the Standardized Spanish proficiency test. The task consists of a total of 64 items, testing different linguistic constructions. There are 24 experimental items on DOM and 40 control items. The sentences lack of a context and participants were instructed to carefully read them and give them a score on a scale between 0 and 100, where 0 means that the sentence sounded bad and 100 means that the sentence sounded good, as Figure 18 shows.

The 24 experimental items belong to 6 different conditions, so there are 4 items per condition. The experimental items are given by the combination of different features and factors associated to the direct objects, such as presence or absence of animacy (Anim vs Inanim), presence or absence of definiteness (Def and Indef), and the presence or absence of *a* (DOM vs NoDOM).

[36] "No matter how much ___, they will not listen to you: a. protest.SUBJ.2ps, b. protest.IND.2ps" (my translation)

Figure 18. Sample of experimental item in the condition DOMAnimIndef[37]



The six conditions are presented in the following table.

CONDITIONS	**SAMPLE OF ITEM**
1. DOMAnimDef	Los vecinos de arriba espían a los otros vecinos. (The upstairs neighbours spy to-DOM the other neighbours)
2. *NoDOMAnimDef	La profesora castiga los estudiantes malos. (The teacher.F punishes the bad students.M)
3. DOMAnimIndef	El juez ha decidido condenar a un asesino. (The judge has decided to sentence to-DOM a murderer)
4. NoDOMAnimIndef	La policía ha visto un ladrón robando. (The police have seen a thief stealing).
5. *DOMInanimDef	Me gusta ver a la televisión con mi familia. (I like watching to-DOM television with my family).
6. NoDOMInanimDef	El niño señala el juego en la tienda de juegos. (The child.M points to the game in the play store).

The sentences are paired in every two conditions, for a total of 12 pairs of sentences, and the only aspect that differentiates them is the presence or absence of *a* (DOM vs NoDOM). They are paired in conditions 1 and 2 (*los vecinos de arriba espían **a** los otros vecinos*/ *los vecinos de arriba espían _los otros vecinos*), in conditions 3 and 4 (*el juez ha decidido condenar **a** un asesino*/ *el juez ha decidido condenar _ un asesino*), and in conditions 5 and 6 (*el niño señala **a**l juego en la tienda de juegos*/ *el niño señala _ el juego en la tienda de juegos*). It is important to underline the fact that with animate and

[37] "How does this sentence sound to you? The the judge has decided to convict to-DOM a murderer. It sounds bad- it sounds neither good or bad- it sounds good".

indefinite DOs, both the insertion and the omission of *a* is valid. For this reason, we cannot talk about grammaticality or agrammaticality in conditions 3 and 4. So, both sentences "*la policía ha visto a un ladrón robando"* (the police have seen to-DOM a thief stealing) and "*la policía ha visto _ un ladrón robando"* (the police have seen a thief stealing) are perfectly grammatical and valid. The subjects of the experimental items are all singular except for a pair of sentences belonging to the first two conditions whose subjects are plural: *los vecinos de arriba espían a/- los otros vecinos* (the upstairs neighbours spy to-DOM/- the other neighbours). The objects are all singular like subjects, with the exception of two pairs of sentences, both from the condition 1. As for verbs, seven pairs of sentences present a verb in the present simple tense, while the other five pairs contain a verb in the present perfect tense. The experimental items were equally distributed in five different pages of Survey Gizmo so as the participant did not find the same pair of sentences (with diverge only for the presence or absence of DOM) in the same page. The complete list of items can be found in the Appendix B.

4.4.4 Oral elicited production task

The oral elicited production task consists of 32 scenarios in which a picture was both preceded by a question (in Spanish) on the picture itself and followed by a lilac box containing a transitive verb in the infinite form and a DP preceded by an article or a possessive. After having shown the slide to the participants and read the question out loud, they were asked to answer the question using the words in the box. Among the 32 contexts, 16 were experimental and elicited a sentence with or without DOM. The 16 target contexts belonged to 4 different conditions, given by the combination of two features associated to the direct object: presence or absence of definiteness (Def vs Indef) and presence or absence of animacy (Anim VS Inanim). There are 4 target sentences per target conditions, which are shown below.

TARGET CONDITIONS	**SAMPLE OF TARGET ITEM**
1. AnimDef	Los periodistas escuchan a la presidenta de Alemania. (The journalists listen to to-DOM the president.F of Germany).
2. AnimIndef	La policía está persiguiendo a/- un ladrón. (Police are chasing to-DOM/- a thief).
3. *InanimDef	La chica está mirando la nube (The girl is looking at the cloud).

4. *InanimIndef	El niño abraza un peluche. (The child.M hugs a teddy).

Figure 19. Context eliciting DOM with a definite and animate direct object[38]

Contexts belonging to condition 1 presented definite and animate direct objects (*la doctora*, the doctor.F) and favoured the presence of DOM (Figure 19). The target sentence to the context represented in Figure 19 is *(este señor) espera/está esperando a la doctora* ((the man) waits/is waiting for to-DOM the doctor.F). On the contrary, contexts belonging to conditions 3 and 4 presented inanimate and definite (condition 3) or indefinite (condition 4) direct objects and, for this reason, did not favour the presence of DOM. Figure 20 represents a context belonging to condition 3 and the target response is (*el hombre calvo*) *está buscando/busca sus monedas* ((the bald man) is searching for his coins). Contexts that belong to condition 2 are quite particular. An example of contexts of this kind is represented in Figure 21 and represents an indefinite and animate direct object. What has been said in §4.4.3 about conditions DOMAnimIndef and NoDOMAnimIndef is also valid for sentences in this condition: both the omission and the insertion of *a* is possible with animate and indefinite DOs. For this reason, both sentences *(la policía) está persiguendo/persigue un ladrón* ((the police) are chasing/chase a thief) and *(la policía) está persiguendo/persigue a un ladrón* ((the police) are chasing/chase a thief) are grammatical.

[38] "What does the man do? TO WAIT – THE DOCTOR.F"

Figure 20. Context eliciting no DOM with a definite and inanimate direct object[39]

Figure 21. Context eliciting no DOM with a definite and inanimate direct object[40]

The complete list of items can be found in the Appendix B.

[39] "What is the bald man doing? TO SEARCH FOR – HIS COINS"
[40] "What are the police doing? TO CHASE – A THIEF"

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Linguistic and geographical background questionnaire

The answers to the linguistic and geographical background questionnaire showed that the majority of the Italian learners of Spanish are female (55 females and only 5 males), while in the control groups there are 7 males, 22 females, and one speaker who does not identify themselves in a particular gender.

From a geographical point of view, the participants were asked to indicate their city of birth and that of residence. Talking about experimental groups, it resulted that, sometimes, the city of birth are different from that of residence, but both are situated in the same area of the same region. The answers to the questionnaire showed that the Italian speakers come from 13 different Italian regions. As Table 3 shows, the regions have been divided into two parts, according to the linguistic varieties used and spoken in those regions. The Northern region from where most of the participants come is Veneto, while it is Campania the Central-Southern region of origin of the majority of participants who took part in this study.

Table 3. Regions of birth and residence and the number of Italian participants for each region

Linguistic varieties	**Italian region of birth/residence**	**Number of participants**
Northern (and Tuscan) varieties	Liguria	2
	Piemonte	3
	Lombardia	6
	Veneto	11
	Emilia-Romagna	5
	Toscana	3
Central- Southern varieties	Marche	1
	Abruzzo	2
	Molise	1
	Campania	14
	Basilicata	1
	Puglia	9
	Sicilia	2

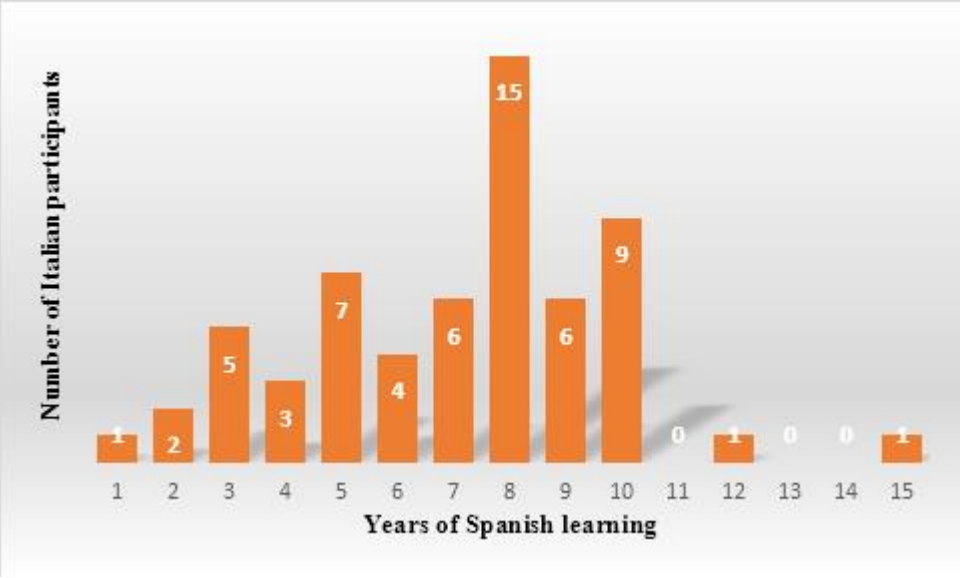
From a linguistic point of view, it emerged that all the experimental groups have Italian as L1 (what we have called the regional Italian) and that Italian is the most spoken language at home. Quantitatively speaking:

- 43 participants speak only Italian at home: 21 speakers come from a Central-Southern Italian region and 22 from a Northern one.
- 12 participants use both Italian and the local dialect at home: 7 belonging to the Central-Southern group and 5 from the Northern one.
- 2 participants speak both Italian and, sometimes, their parents' L1 (Bulgarian and Portuguese).
- 3 speakers attested to speak only their local dialect with their parents at home. In particular, two speakers are from the Northern group and one is from the Central-Southern group.

As far as the native speakers of Spanish are concerned, they all are monolinguals, except for S74, who is Spanish- Basque bilingual, and they all speak Spanish at home. In addition to Spanish, S73 and S75 speak respectively French and Basque at home.

As far as Italian participants' period of Spanish learning is concerned, at the time of the questionnaire administration, the participants had been learning Spanish as an L3/Ln for a period between 1-15 year(s) (M (7.06), SD (2.7)). More specifically, the most part of them, as Figure 22 shows, had been learning Spanish for a period between 5-10 years.

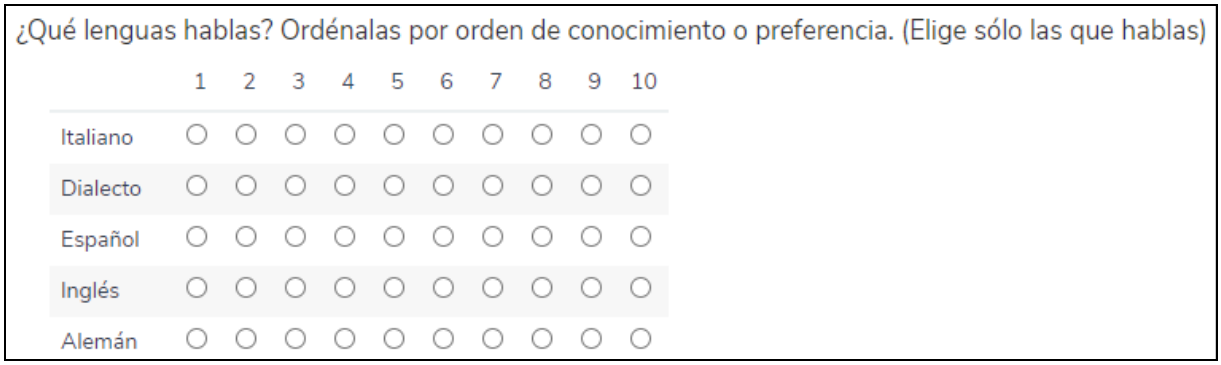
Figure 22. Division of Italian participants according to their period of Spanish-learning



We also asked them to classify all the languages that they spoke, included their local dialect, according to their preference and knowledge of them. They could classify them using the values from 1 to 10 next to each language, like Figure 23 shows. In particular, our aim was to understand how they would have classified the local dialect. Due to the

possible ambiguity of the question, it has been difficult to analyse the answers of the participants. Some of them correctly classified the languages, giving the value 1 to their favourite language or the language that they knew better and so on; others, on the contrary, gave a value from 1 to 10 to each language, not following a classification. 16 speakers, 7 belonging to the Central-Southern group and 9 from the Northern group, did not neither insert the local dialect in the classification nor give a value to it.

Figure 23. First part of the penultimate question of the linguistic and geographical questionnaire



The fact these speakers did not insert their local variety in the classification does not directly mean that they do not know it. For example, despite being the only case, S17 gave no value to her dialect but she reported it to be the only variety spoken at home. The answers to the question show that:

- 10 speakers (6 from the Central-Southern group and 4 from the Northern one) gave a value between 7 and 10 (max=10) to their local variety and other 15 (9 Central-Southern speakers and 6 Northern speakers) inserted their local variety between the first and the third position of the classification (13 speaker out 15 inserted it in the second position).
- 5 speakers (2 from the Central-Southern group and 3 from the Northern group) gave a value between 3 and 6 to their dialect and 6 speakers inserted it in the fourth and fifth position (2 Central-Southern learners and 4 Northern ones).
- 8 speakers, 4 from each geographical group, inserted their local variety in the last position of the classification.

Trying to generalise these results, on the one hand 25 speakers (15 Central-Southern and 10 Northern leaners) reported their local dialect to be one of their favourite languages or reported to have a good knowledge of it. Amongst them, 8 speakers speak Italian and the local variety at home and one speaker uses only dialect. On the other, 11

Italian leaners of Spanish (4 belonging to the Central-Southern group and 7 to the Northern group) differently rated their local dialect, inserting it at the bottom of the language classification or assigning it a low value. Amongst these last speakers, 3 reported to speak both Italian and their dialect at home. Finally, 16 speakers (7 belonging to the Central-Southern group and 9 from the Northern group) did not insert their dialect into the list of languages that they know (although one of them reported to use only her dialect at home) and 8 speakers inserted their local variety in the last position, and amongst them two speakers respectively use both Italian and dialect and only dialect at home.

4.5.2 Reduced Standardized Spanish proficiency test

The results from the reduced standardized proficiency test were converted into accuracy percentages and allowed to divide the Italian learners of Spanish into two proficiency groups. the cut-off point of ¾ (75%) was chosen in order to divide the participants in two different proficiency groups. the learners whose score was included in a range between 50-75 were considered intermediate learners, while those showing a score between 76-100 were considered advanced speakers of Spanish.

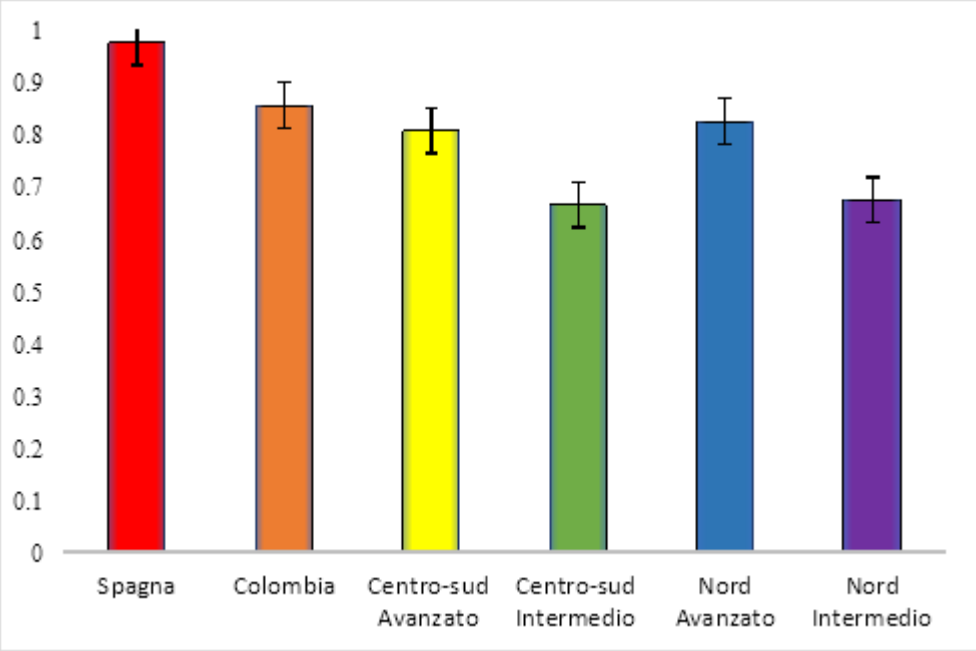
Table 4. Mean scores in the Spanish proficiency test

Group		**Proficiency scores (max=100)**		
		Mean	**SD**	**Range**
15	Central-Southern Intermediate	67%	4.7	56-72
15	Central-Southern Advanced	81%	4.7	76-88
15	Northern Intermediate	67%	4.8	56-72
15	Northern Advanced	81%	4.7	76-92
15	Spain	97%	3.9	88-100
16	Colombia	85%	6.5	72-96

The means, SD, and ranges of the proficiency scores for each group are shown in Table 4. As can be seen from Table 4 and Figure 24, native speakers performed better than the experimental groups, as expected, but it is the group Spain who performed at ceiling, with a mean accuracy of 97%. Taken together the results of all the groups, a one-way ANOVA showed a main effect of group ($F(5,89)= 77,15$, $p<0.001$). A post-hoc

analysis, conducted using the Bonferroni test, has shown that the Spanish group significantly differs from all the other groups ($p<0.001$). Furthermore, while there is not a significant difference between the Colombian group and the Advanced experimental groups ($p=0.212$ for the Central-Southern group and $p=1.0$ for the Northern one), there is a significant difference between the Colombian group and the Intermediate experimental groups ($p<0.001$).

Figure 24. Mean proficiency scores in the Reduced Standardized Proficiency test of Spanish



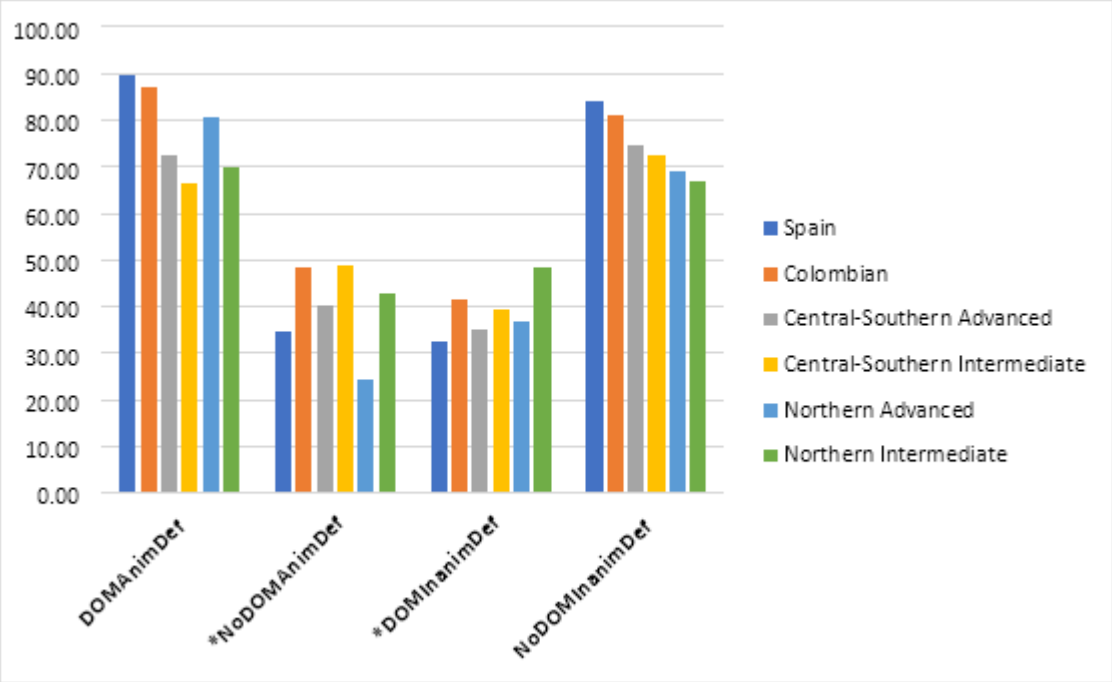
Focusing only on the four experimental group, a one-way ANOVA has individuated a significant difference between the four Italian groups ($F(3,61) = 48.83$, $p <0 .001$). A post-hoc analysis, conducted using the Bonferroni test, has shown that there is a significant difference between the Advanced groups and the Intermediate groups ($p<0.001$). Instead, there is no significant difference between the Intermediate Central-Southern group and the Intermediate Northern group ($p=0.967$) and between the Advanced Central-Southern group and the Advanced Northern group ($p=0.788$).

4.5.3 Grammaticality Judgement Task

In the experimental items, three variables were manipulated: the absence/presence of *a* (DOM vs NoDOM) and the [± animacy] and [±definiteness] of the direct object. The between-subjects variable was the factors Place, namely the groups who took part in the

study (Spain, Colombian, Central-Southern Advanced, Central-Southern Intermediate, Northern Advanced, and Northern Intermediate). The average ratings by condition and groups are presented in Figure 25 and 26 and in Table 5. We decided to split the graph both for space reasons and for reasons linked to the analyses carried out. In fact, we decided to conduct two kinds of analyses, investigating on the one hand a possible effect of animacy in conditions DOMAnimDef, NoDOMAnimDef, DOMInanimDef, and NoDOMAnimDef and, on the other hand, a possible significant effect of definiteness in conditions DOMAnimDef, NoDOMAnimDef, DOMAnimIndef, and NoDOMAnimIndef.

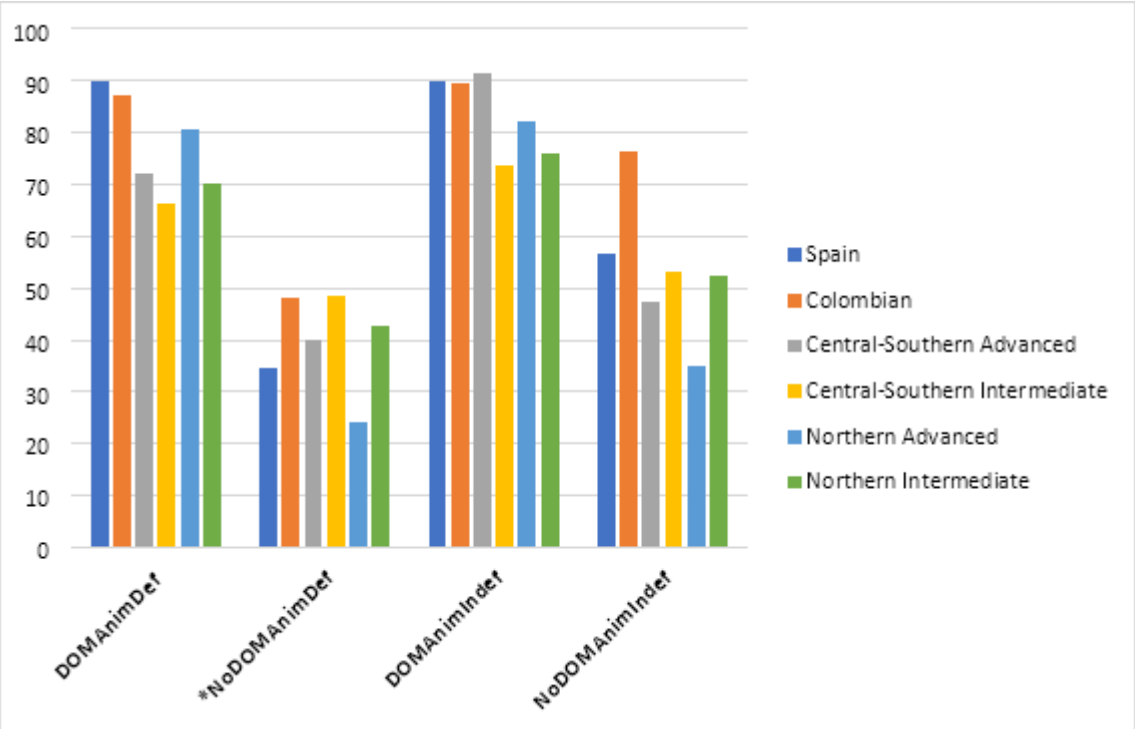
Figure 25. Mean acceptability ratings in definite animate and inanimate conditions in the GJT



As for animacy (Figure 25), a repeated measures ANOVA with factors Place (Spain, Colombian, Central-Southern Advanced, Central-Southern Intermediate, Northern Advanced, and Northern Intermediate) as between-subjects variable, and Animacy (Animate, Inanimate) and the presence of absence of DOM (DOM, NoDOM) as within-subjects variable, showed a significant interaction between Animacy and DOM ($F(1,84) = 198.467$, $p<.001$) and between Animacy, DOM, and Place ($F(5, 84) = 3.199$, $p=0.01$), but no significant effects of animacy ($F(1, 84) = 1.189$, $p=0.28$), DOM ($F(1, 84) = 0.235$, $p= 0.629$), and Place ($F(5, 84) = 1.149$, $p= 0.34$). To determine the source of the

interactions, we conducted post-hoc Bonferroni tests. They showed that the number of *a* in condition DOMAnimDef (mean 77%) is significantly higher than in condition NoDOMAnimDef (p>.001) and DOMInanimDef (p<.001), 39% for both conditions, and that the quantity of *a* in condition DOMInanimDef is significantly lower than in condition NoDOMInanimDef (p<.001), approximately 64%. This shows that all participants are aware of the fact that DOM is not allowed with [-animate] direct objects and that the absence of DOM with [+animate] and [+definite] is ungrammatical. What post-hoc Bonferroni tests also showed is that, in the four conditions (DOMAnimDef, NoDOMAnimDef, DOMInanimDef, and NoDOMInanimDef), there are no significant differences among the participants in each condition (p= 1.0). Consequently, in condition DOMInanimDef, there is not a significant difference between the Spain and the Colombian control group in the average acceptability rating (41% for Colombian and 32% for the Spain group), showing that, overall, the Colombian group did not consider this condition as acceptable. In the same way, the same group accepted condition NoDOMInanimDef (average rating 81%).

Figure 26. Mean acceptability ratings in the four animate conditions in GJT



As for as the second analysis on definiteness is concerned (Figure 26), a repeated measures ANOVA with factors Place (Spain, Colombian, Central-Southern Advanced,

Central-Southern Intermediate, Northern Advanced, and Northern Intermediate) as between-subjects variable, and Definiteness (Def, Indef) and the presence of absence of DOM (DOM, NoDOM) as within-subjects variable, showed a significant effect of definiteness ($F(1, 84) = 41.43$, $p<.001$), DOM ($F(1, 84) = 136.62$, $p<.001$), Place ($F(5, 84) = 4.316$, $p=0.002$) and three significant interactions: between DOM and Place ($F(5, 84) = 3.123$, $p=0.01$), between Definiteness and DOM ($F(1, 84)$, $= 7.08$, $p=0.009$), and between Definiteness, DOM, and Place ($F(1, 84) = 4.062$, $p= 0.002$).

Table 5. Mean acceptability ratings and SD in all conditions

CONDITIONS	PLACE	Mean	SD
DOMAnimIndef	Central-Southern Advanced	91.33	11.14
	Central-Southern Intermediate	73.76	18.38
	Colombian	89.70	11.24
	Northern Advanced	82.36	18.04
	Northern Intermediate	75.86	19.43
	Spain	89.98	13.51
	Mean	**83,83**	
NoDOMAnimIndef	Central-Southern Advanced	47.48	25.67
	Central-Southern Intermediate	53.33	31.84
	Colombian	76.31	19.70
	Northern Advanced	35.18	20.80
	Northern Intermediate	52.43	26.17
	Spain	56.58	24.65
	Mean	**53,55**	
DOMAnimDef	Central-Southern Advanced	72.28	17.84
	Central-Southern Intermediate	66.36	20.08
	Colombian	87.20	18.87
	Northern Advanced	80.70	21.56
	Northern Intermediate	70.12	18.85
	Spain	89.86	8.976
	Mean	**77,75**	
NoDOMAnimDef	Central-Southern Advanced	40.13	20.71
	Central-Southern Intermediate	48.73	20.04
	Colombian	48.32	28.02
	Northern Advanced	24.18	21.84
	Northern Intermediate	42.63	25.73
	Spain	34.77	32.24
	Mean	**39,79**	
DOMInanimDef	Central-Southern Advanced	35.01	27.82
	Central-Southern Intermediate	39.41	27.94
	Colombian	41.57	31.97
	Northern Advanced	36.90	25.25

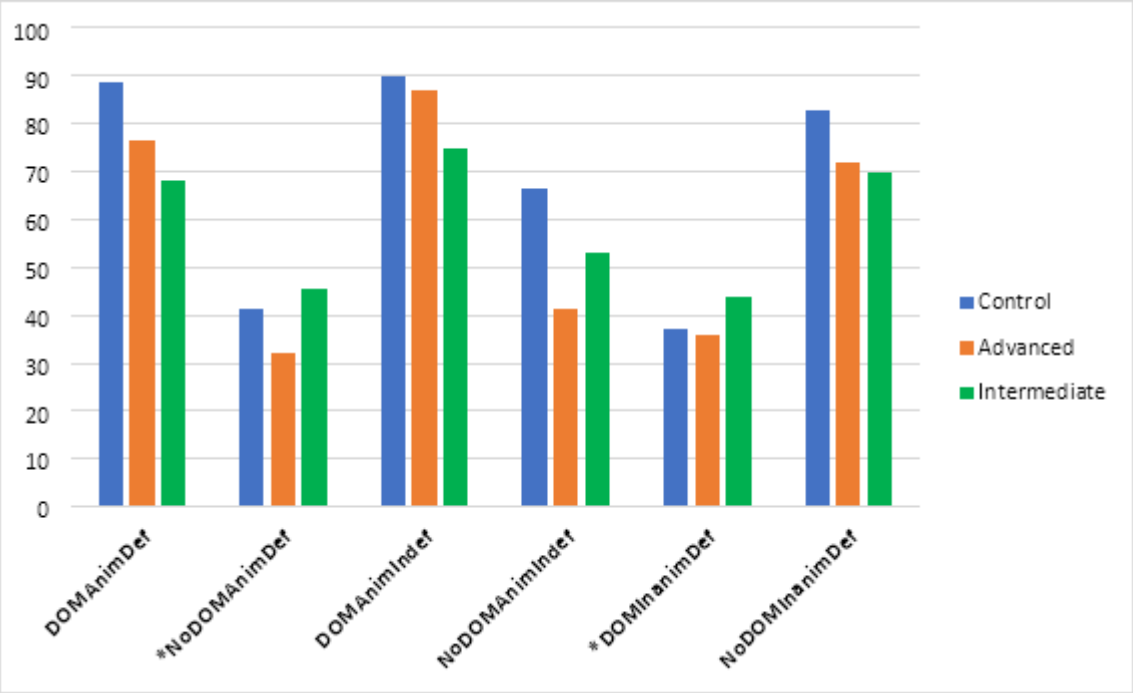
	Northern Intermediate	48.59		29.52		
	Spain	32.73		26.10		
	Mean	**39**				
NoDOMInanimDef	Central-Southern Advanced	74.82		16.16		
	Central-Southern Intermediate	72.52		19.90		
	Colombian	81.27		23.45		
	Northern Advanced	69.27		23.23		
	Northern Intermediate	66.98		22.93		
	Spain	84.05		21.59		
	Mean	**74,81**				

Post-hoc Bonferroni tests showed that, as for between-subject factors Place, the Central-Southern Intermediate group behaves in a significantly different way from the Colombian group (p= 0.035) and the Colombian group, in turn, is significantly different from the Northern Advanced (p=0.001) and Intermediate (p=0.003). The post-hoc analysis also showed that the average ratings given to condition DOMAnimDef are significantly higher compared to condition NoDOMAnimDef and NoDOMAnimIndef (p<.001) but are significantly lower than the ratings given to condition DOMAnimIndef (p=0.02). So, interestingly, the condition DOMAnimIndef resulted more acceptable than the condition DOMAnimDef (83% vs 77%). Furthermore, condition DOMAnimIndef is significantly different from the same condition without DOM (p<.001). No significant different was found in condition DOMAnimIndef among the six groups (p=1.0), but in condition NoDOMAnimIndef, the group of Colombian gave significantly higher rates with respect to the Northern Advanced group (p<.001). What is interesting is that, comparing the two conditions with [+animate] and [-definite] direct objects, the condition DOMAnimIndef obtained significantly higher acceptability rate if compared to the same condition without DOM (p<.001). In particular, three groups gave significantly higher rates in condition with DOM than in the condition without DOM (Spain, p=0.01, Central-Southern Advanced and Northern Advanced, p<.001). On the contrary, the group of Central-Southern and Northern Intermediate and the Colombian group did not give significantly different rates in the two conditions (p=1.0). However, quantitively speaking, these groups gave higher rates to condition DOMAnimIndef than in the same condition without DOM. This means that, numerically speaking, all participants considered the presence of DOM with [+animate] and [-definite] direct objects more acceptable than its absence, even if the Colombian group gave quite high

rates to both conditions (90% of mean acceptability for the condition with DOM and 76% for the condition without DOM).

We also decided to carry out the same two analyses above mentioned but with a different between-subjects variable, namely factor Level, investigating a possible significant effect of definiteness and animacy comparing Advanced, Intermediate, and Control groups. The average ratings by condition and levels are presented in Figure 27 and in Table 6. Comparing conditions DOMAnimDef, NoDOMAnimDef, DOMInanimDef, and NoDOMAnimDef, as far as animacy is concerned, a repeated measures ANOVA with factors Level (Advanced, Intermediate, and Control) as between-subjects variable, and Animacy (Animate, Inanimate) and the presence of absence of DOM (DOM, NoDOM) as within-subjects variable, only showed an interaction between Animacy and DOM ($F(1, 87)= 197,78$, $p<.001$) and between Animacy, DOM, and Level ($F(2,87)= 6.32$, $p=0.003$).

Figure 27. Mean acceptability ratings in all conditions by Control, Advanced, and Intermediate groups



To determine the source of the interactions, we conducted post-hoc Bonferroni tests, that only showed that the mean acceptability rates in condition DOMAnimDef is significantly higher (77%) than in condition NoDOMAnimDef (39%), ($p<.001$) and in condition DOMInanimDef (39%), ($p<.001$). Control group gave significantly higher

rates of acceptability in condition DOMAnimDef with respect to the Intermediate group (p=0.03). The average rating was 88% for the Control group and 68% for the Intermediate group. Comparing conditions DOMAnimDef, NoDOMAnimDef, DOMAnimIndef, and NoDOMAnimIndef, as far as definiteness is concerned, a repeated measures ANOVA with factors Level (Advanced, Intermediate, and Control) as between-subjects variable, and Definiteness (Def, Indef) and the presence of absence of DOM (DOM, NoDOM) as within-subjects variable, showed a significant effect of Definiteness ($F(1, 87)= 41{,}72$, $p<.001$), DOM ($F(1, 87)= 132.82$, $p<.001$), and Level ($F(2, 87)= 8.165$, $p<.001$). It also showed some significant interactions between DOM and Level ($F(2, 87)=4.92$, $p=0.009$), between DOM and Definiteness ($F(1, 87)= 6.91$, $p=0.01$), and between DOM, Definiteness, and Level ($F(2, 87)= 7.46$, $p<.001$). Post-hoc Bonferroni tests were carried out and showed that, as for Level factor, the control group is significantly different from the Advanced ($p=0.001$) and the Intermediate group ($p=0.003$), but there is no significant difference between the two experimental groups. Furthermore, the average rating for condition DOMAnimIndef (83%) is significantly higher if compared to condition DOMAnimDef ($p=0.005$) and to condition NoDOMAnimIndef (53%) ($p<.001$). Finally, as for the significant interaction between Level, DOM, and Definiteness, post-hoc Bonferroni tests showed that in condition DOMAnimDef the Control group performed significantly better than the Intermediate group ($p=0.002$) and in condition NoDOMAnimIndef, the Advanced group (41%) gave significantly lower acceptability rates with respect to the Control group (66%), ($p<.001$), that finds the condition more acceptable.

Table 6. Mean acceptability ratings and SD in control and experimental group in all conditions

CONDITIONS	GROUP	Mean	SD
DOMAnimIndef	Advanced	86.850	15.428
	Control	89.842	12.217
	Intermediate	74.817	18.615
	Mean	**84**	
NoDOMAnimIndef	Advanced	41.333	23.799
	Control	66.450	24.117
	Intermediate	52.883	28.646
	Mean	**53.3**	
DOMAnimDef	Advanced	76.492	19.898
	Control	88.533	14.588
	Intermediate	68.242	19.232
	Mean	**77.6**	

NoDOMAnimDef	Advanced	32.158	22.434		
	Control	41.542	30.467		
	Intermediate	45.683	22.876		
	Mean	**40**			
DOMInanimDef	Advanced	35.955	26.126		
	Control	37.147	29.024		
	Intermediate	44.003	28.620		
	Mean	**39**			
NoDOMInanimDef	Advanced	72.042	19.864		
	Control	82.658	22.193		
	Intermediate	69.750	21.282		
	Mean	**75**			

4.5.4 Oral elicited production task

The Oral production task, as shown in §4.4.4, presented [± animate] and [±definite] direct object contexts and participants could produce or omit *a* immediately before the direct object. The elicited sentences were analysed according to the four conditions given by the manipulation of the factors above mentioned. The percentages of structures produced for each condition were calculated by token and participant and then averaged by condition and group. Table 7 shows the percentages of production/omission of DOM according to the semantic features of the DO and the group of participants and Figure 28 graphically shows the percentages of DOM production in the four conditions according to the six groups of participants.

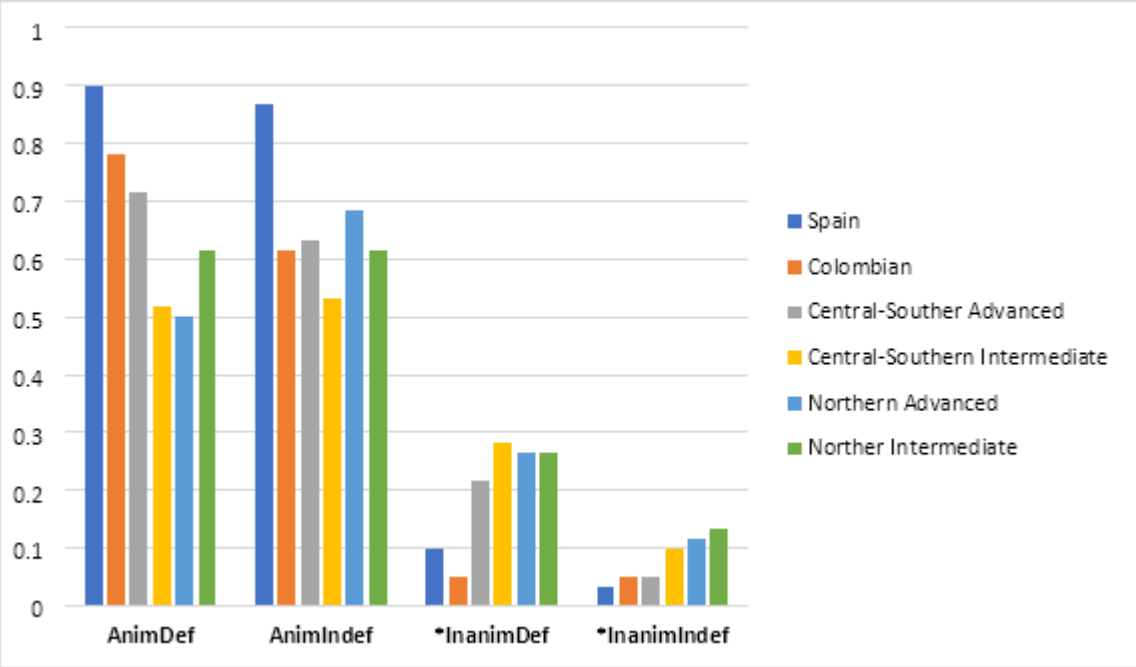
Table 7. Percentages and counts of absence/presence of DOM by group and condition.

	Definite		**Indefinite**	
	DOM	*NoDOM	DOM	NoDOM
Animate				
Spain	90% (54/60)	10% (6/60)	87% (52/60)	13% (8/60)
Colombian	78% (47/60)	22% (13/60)	62% (37/60)	38% (23/60)
Central-Southern Advanced	72% (43/60)	28% (17/60)	63% (38/60)	37% (22/60)
Central-Southern Intermediate	52% (31/60)	48% (29/60)	53% (32/60)	47% (28/60)
Northern Advanced	50% (30/60)	50% (30/60)	68% (41/60)	32% (19/60)
Northern Intermediate	62% (37/60)	38% (23/60)	62% (37/60)	38% (23/60)
Mean	**67%**	**33%**	**66%**	**34%**
	***DOM**	**NoDOM**	***DOM**	**NoDO**

					M
Inanimate					
Spain		10% (6/60)	90% (54/60)	3% (2/60)	97% (58/60)
Colombian		5% (3/60)	95% (57/60)	5% (3/60)	95% (57/60)
Central-Southern Advanced		22% (13/60)	78% (47/60)	5% (3/60)	95% (57/60)
Central-Southern Intermediate		28% (17/60)	72% (43/60)	10% (6/60)	90% (54/60)
Northern Advanced		27% (16/60)	73% (44/60)	12% (7/60)	88% (53/60)
Northern Intermediate		27% (16/60)	73% (44/60)	13% (8/60)	87% (52/60)
Mean		**20%**	**80%**	**8%**	**92%**

In order to investigate the relation between animacy, definiteness, and presence/omission of DOM, data were submitted to a Chi-square test. The results were significant only in four conditions: AnimDef with DOM ($x^2(5) = 10.992$, $p=0.05$), AnimDef without DOM ($x^2(5) = 22.542$, $p<.001$), AnimIndef without DOM ($x^x(5) = 11.195$, $p= 0.05$), and InanimDef with DOM ($x^2(5) = 14.775$, $p=0.01$). More detailed analyses were carried out, comparing each possible couple of participants in each condition and resubmitting the data to other Chi-square tests. The results showed that in condition AnimDef with DOM, the Spain group produced a significantly higher number of DOM sentences with [+animate] and [+definite] direct objects than the Central-Southern Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 6.224$, $p<.001$) and from the Northern Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 6.857$, $p= 0.009$). As for the Colombian group, it significantly differs from Northern Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 3.753$, $p=0.05$). As for the rates of DOM omission in the same condition, it resulted that the Spain group omitted DOM significantly less than all experimental groups (Central-Southern Advanced, $p= 0.02$; Central-Southern Intermediate, $p<0.001$; Northern Advanced, $p<0.001$ and Northern Intermediate, $p= 0.002$). In quite the same way, the rates of DOM omission of the Colombian group is significantly lower with respect to the Central-Southern Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 6.095$, $p= 0.01$) and Northern Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 6.721$, $p= 0.01$).

Figure 28. Average of DOM presence by group and condition



In condition with [+animate] and [-definite] direct objects, it is the group from Spain that produced the highest number of sentences with DOM and they produced a significantly higher number of sentences with DOM in this condition if compared to the Central-Southern Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 4.762$, p= 0.03). With respect to the rates of DOM omission in the same condition, the group of Spain omitted DOM significantly more than all the other groups (Colombian, p=0.007; Central-Southern Advanced, p=0.01; Central-Southern Intermediate, p<.001; Northern Advanced, p=0.03 and Northern Intermediate, p= 0.007). Finally, in condition InanimDef with DOM the two control groups produced significantly less sentences with DOM with respect to the Central-Southern Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 5.261$, p= 0.02 for Spain and $x^2(1) = 9.800$, p= 0.002 for Colombian), the Northern Advanced group (($x^2(1) = 4.545$, p= 0.03 for Spain and $x^2(1) = 8.895$, p= 0.003 for Colombian), and the Northern Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 4.545$, p= 0.03 for Spain and $x^2(1) = 8.895$, p= 0.003 for Colombian). Moreover, the Colombian group significantly differs from the Central-Southern Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 6.250$, p= 0.01), producing a significantly lower number of DOM sentences with inanimate and definite DOs. This means that the Colombian group behaves exactly like the Spain group, omitting the DOM with [-animate] and [+/-definite] DOs and, therefore, producing grammatical sentences.

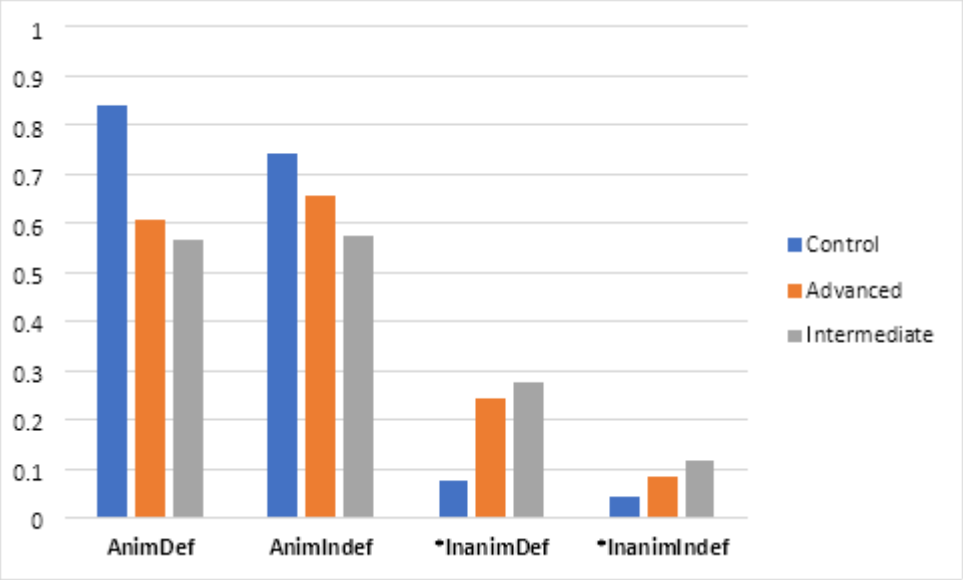
As in the Grammaticality Judgment Task, we decided to carry out an analysis to investigate the relation between animacy, definiteness, and presence/omission of DOM comparing the proficiency Spanish level of the participants (Control vs Advanced and Intermediate). Table 8 shows the percentages of production/omission of DOM according to the semantic features of the DO and the proficiency of participants. Figure 29 graphically shows the percentages of DOM production in the four conditions, always according to the proficiency of the participants. Even in this case, data were submitted to a Chi-square test, and the results showed a significant difference in conditions AnimDef with DOM ($x^2(2) = 7.843$, $p= 0.02$) and without DOM ($x^2(2) = 16.085$, $p<.001$), and in condition InanimDef with DOM ($x^2(2) = 13.972$, $p<.001$). More detailed analyses were conducted, comparing each level group with the other in each condition and resubmitting the data to other Chi-square tests. The results showed that, both in condition AnimDef with and without DOM, the Control group is significantly different from the Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 4.506$, $p=0.03$ for the condition with DOM and $x^2(1) = 11.879$, $p<.001$ for the condition without DOM) and from the Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 6.444$, $p=0.01$ for the condition with DOM and $x^2(1) = 15.338$, $p<0.01$ for the condition without DOM).

Table 8. Percentages and counts of absence/presence of DOM by level and condition

	Def		**Indef**	
	DOM	*NoDOM	DOM	NoDOM
Animate				
Control	84% (101/120)	16% (19/120)	74% (89/120)	26% (31/120)
Advanced	61% (73/120)	39% (47/120)	77,5% (93/120)	34% (41/120)
Intermediate	57% (68/120)	43% (52/120)	58% (69/120)	42% (51/120)
	***DOM**	**NoDOM**	***DOM**	**NoDOM**
Inanimate				
Control	7,5% (9/120)	92,5% (111/120)	4% (5/120)	96% (115/120)
Advanced	24% (29/120)	76% (91/120)	8% (10/120)	92% (110/120)
Intermediate	28% (33/120)	72% (87/120)	12% (14/120)	88% (106/120)

The Control group produced a significantly higher number of sentences with DOM with [+animate] and [+definite] DOs if compared to the other groups. With respect to condition AnimIndef, the Control group omitted the insertion of DOM significantly more than the Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 4.878$, p= 0.03).

Figure 29. Percentages of DOM production in the four condition according to the Control, Advanced, and Intermediate groups.



Even in condition InanimDef with DOM, the Control group behaves in a significantly different way from the Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 10.526$, p=0.001) and from the Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 13.714$, p=<.001). It means that Advanced and Intermediate groups produced a significantly higher number of ungrammatical sentences with DOM immediately before a [-animate] and [+definite] DO. Finally, even if the general analysis did no show significant results in condition InanimIndef with DOM ($x^2(1) = 4.207$, p= 0.122), comparing each level in each condition showed a significant difference between Control group and Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 4.263$, p= 0.04), the latter behaving exactly like the same condition with [+definite] DO.

Discussion

This study was set up to investigate the acquisition of Spanish DOM by speakers whose L1 is Italian or, better, the regional Italian of their geographical area. Overall, the results of the two tasks showed that all Italian participants know how to use Spanish DOM, accepting grammatical sentences, rejecting the agrammatical ones, and producing DOM sentences in conditions where it is accepted. The results of the Grammaticality Judgment Task showed that all Italian participants accepted as grammatical sentences belonging to condition DOMAnimDef (mean acceptability rating 72%) like *Los vecinos de arriba espían **a** los otros vecinos* (the upstairs neighbours spy to-DOM the other neighbors) and to condition NoDOMInanimDef (mean acceptability rating 71%), like *El niño señala el juego en la tienda de juegos* (the child.M points to the game in the play store). In the same way, all participants rejected ungrammatical sentences belonging to condition NoDOMAnimDef (average acceptability rate 39%) like *La policía ha visto el ladrón robando* (the police have seen the thief stealing) and to condition DOMInanimDef (mean acceptability rating 40%), like *El perro muerde a la galleta del niño* (the dog bites to-DOM the child's cookie). No significant differences were found across participants in these four conditions and the high acceptability rates given to grammatical sentences and the low rates given to ungrammatical sentences show that all participants possess a solid knowledge of the distribution of Spanish DOM in these four conditions. Quantitatively speaking, it is the control group from Spain to show the most accurate performance, giving the highest rates to grammatical sentences belonging to condition DOMAnimDef (90%) and condition NoDOMInanimDef (84%) and the lowest rates to ungrammatical sentences from condition DOMInanimDef (33%). The group giving the lowest rate to ungrammatical sentences from condition NoDOMAnimDef is the Northern Advanced group (mean acceptability rating 24%, while the Spain group's average rating is 34%). As shown in §4.4.2, the sentences presenting a [+animate] and [-definite] direct object are difficult to analyse because they can optionally present or not *a*. In the Grammaticality Judgment Task, overall, all participants, included the control groups, widely accepted this condition, giving an average acceptability value equal to 84% and no significant differences were found across participants. Numerically speaking, the control groups and the Central-Southern Advanced group are the ones to have given the highest rates to this condition (approximately 90%). It can be observed that the rates given to condition

DOMAnimDef are significantly lower than those given to condition DOMAnimIndef (p=0.02), showing that all participants, included the control groups, accepted more DOM sentences with [+animate] and [-definite] DOs than sentences with [+animate] and [+definite] objects. Also focusing on Italian learners of Spanish, their mean acceptability rating in condition DOMAnimDef (72%) is lower with respect to that in condition DOMAnimIndef (81%). As for sentences from condition NoDOMAnimIndef like *El conductor de autobús ha olvidado una niña hoy* (the bus driver has forgotten a girl today), they are perceived as less acceptable than the same condition with DOM (average meaning of 54% for all participants and of 47% for Italian participants) Statistically speaking, the acceptability ratings given to condition DOMAnimIndef are significantly higher than those attributed to the same condition without DOM (p<.001). These results are in line with those shown in Montrul and Gürel (2015). Both Turkish and Spanish participants completed a bimodal acceptability judgment task, that presented both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences marked or not marked with *a*. The authors included sentences with [±animate] and [±definite] direct objects, manipulated by the presence and omission of *a*. An example of [+animate] and [-definite] sentence with DOM was *Mi abuelo conoció a unos pintores* (my grandfather knew to-DOM some painters). The results showed that all participants (Spanish native speakers and Turkish intermediate and low intermediate speakers) accepted sentences both in condition AnimDef and AnimIndef and rejected sentences belonging to condition NoDOMAnimDef. What is clear is that our participants clearly prefer to mark all [+animate] DOs, independently of their definiteness. The Colombian group in our study is the group that gave the highest rates of acceptability in condition NoDOMAnimIndef (average rating of 76%), followed by the Spain group, with an average rate of 56%. What is interesting is the fact that the native speakers of Spanish in Montrul and Gürel (2015) came from Mexico, and it was the group that gave the highest rates of acceptability in condition NoDOMAnimIndef (3.9 out 4). Despite the absence of specific studies conducted on these aspects and aware not to draw hasty conclusions, it can be inferred that the Latin American participants of our study and of Montrul and Gürel (2015) seem to be giving more relevance to the indefiniteness of animate DOs since they widely accepted both sentences with animate and indefinite DOs with DOM (mean acceptability rating of 90%) or without DOM (mean acceptability rating of 76%). On the contrary, our participants from Spain seem to focus on the animacy of the DOs and require the DOM regardless of their definiteness. Indeed, the mean acceptability

ratings for DOM sentences with animate and definite and indefinite DOs is the same, 90%, while the average rating for sentences with animate and indefinite DOs without DOM is equal to 56%.

As far as the oral elicited production is concerned, overall, the results are in line with those of the Grammaticality Judgment Task. Generally speaking, it emerged that Italian participants seem to be aware of the fact that, if the direct object is inanimate, regardless of the presence or absence of definiteness, DOM is not required, omitting it in sentences belonging to condition InanimDef and InanimIndef (the percentages of DOM omission is equal to 74% for condition InanimDef and to 90% for condition InanimIndef). On the one hand, the number of sentences with DOM produced by Italian participants in conditions with inanimate direct objects is very similar (on average, these participants produced less than 30% of DOM sentences in the two conditions), with no significant differences across all participants, with the exception of condition InanimDef, where the control group from Colombia significantly differs from all the experimental groups and so does the Spain group, except for the group of Central-Southern Advanced. So, overall, the two control groups produced significantly fewer sentences with DOM with inanimate and definite DOs if compared to the other experimental groups. On the other hand, the performance with sentences in condition AnimDef is quite unexpected. On average, the Italian groups produced 59% of DOM sentences with animate and definite DOs. In particular, while the Central-Southern Advanced group produced 72% and the Northern-Intermediate group 62% of DOM sentences with animate and definite DOs, the groups Central-Southern Intermediate group and Northern Advanced group produced about 50% of DOM sentences in this condition, omitting it for 50% of cases. In fact, there is a significant difference in the number of DOM sentences produced by the control groups (90% by Spain and 85% by Colombian), that produced the highest number of DOM sentences in this condition. A comparison between these results with the acceptability ratings given to sentences in condition DOMAnimDef and NoDOMAnimDef by the two groups (Central-Southern Intermediate and Northern Advanced) shows an asymmetry between the GJT and the Oral production task. Indeed, the two groups largely accepted as grammatical DOM sentences with animate and definite DOs (average rating of 82% for Northern Advanced and of 73% for the Central-Southern Intermediate) and tended to reject the same sentences without DOM (mean acceptability rate of 35% Northern Advanced and of 53% Central-Southern Intermediate). One reason may be the way of administration of

the two tasks. During a written acceptability task, the participant has more time to think about the sentence and the structures involved in it and can also change the rating if, at any moment during the task, he/she changes his/her mind. On the contrary, during the oral production task, the immediate nature of the task and the presence of another person (the experimenter) may affect and influence the performance of the participant that, having much less time to think about the sentence, is more likely to give an instinct answer that really reflects their linguistic competence. For these reasons, we support the idea that a production task is more reliable than an acceptability one since it better reflects the real linguistic competence of participants. As for sentences produced in contexts with animate and indefinite DOs, on average, the Italian participants produced 62% of DOM sentences with animate and indefinite DOs, almost the same amount of DOM sentences produced with animate and definite DOs (59%). It can be inferred that Italian participants prefer to mark all [+animate] DOs, independently of their definiteness. This tendency is more accentuated in the acceptability task than in the production one. In fact, Italian participants showed an average acceptability rate of 80% in DOM sentences with animate and indefinite DOs, while they produced 62% of DOM sentences with animate and indefinite DOs. So, making a comparison between the two tasks, overall, it can be concluded that all Italian participants show a quite solid knowledge of the distribution of Spanish DOM. They tended to accept animate and definite DOs with DOM and inanimate and definite DOs without DOM. They also tended to reject DOM sentences with inanimate and definite DOs and sentences with animate and definite DOs without DOM. In quite the same way, their tendency was to avoid producing DOM sentences when the direct object was inanimate and to produce them in presence of animate direct objects, showing to be sensitive to the animacy feature of the object. As for conditions with animate and indefinite objects, participants tended to widely accept the presence of DOM (more than its insertion in the same condition with definite DOs) and to consider less acceptable the same condition without DOM. In the same way, Italian participants produced 62% of DOM sentences in this condition.

Spanish DOM is a very variable phenomenon, that changes from geographical area to geographical area and that is characterized by a great deal of apparent fuzziness (Aissen, 2003). Our choice to divide the Italian learners of Spanish according to their geographical area of birth and residence (Northern and Central-Southern Italy) is not random but is dictated by the presence of the morphosyntactic phenomenon of DOM in

the Central-Southern regional Italians and local varieties. These Italian varieties present DOM that, despite its variation across the Central-Southern parts of Italy, is regulated by the same fixed factors as in Spanish, like the animacy and referentiality of the direct objects (D'Achille, 2010; Rohlfs, 1969, 1971). We hypothesised that our Italian participants' L1 is the regional Italian of their geographical area. Regional Italian, as Loporcaro (2009) explained, are intermediate varieties between Standard Italian and local dialects which are spoken in a specific geographical area and which are influenced by some phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical elements of the local dialect. Central-Southern regional Italians and local dialects both present DOM but not all participants speak and use their local dialects as L2: in fact, only 8 Central-Southern participants out of 30 attested to use either both Italian and their local variety or only their local dialect at home with their parents. However, these participants were chosen for the study because they are exposed, if not directly to the dialect, to the regional Italian, which presents DOM. On the contrary, Northern regional Italians and local varieties do not display DOM, despite some rare exceptions that were not considered in this study. What is more, the teaching of English in Italy is compulsory from the primary school to the high school. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that English is used and learnt as an L2 by participants who do not speak their local variety as L2, and as an L3 by those who do. Consequently, Spanish becomes our participants' L3 or additional language (Ln). Due to the similarities in the DOM distribution in Central-Southern varieties and Spanish, we questioned whether knowledge of a Central-Southern Italian variety could affect the acquisition of Spanish as an L3 and facilitate the acquisition of the distribution of DOM in Spanish by Central-Southern participants. It is clear that determining the source of possible transfer in Spanish acquisition as an L3/Ln is not an easy task. For this reason, to answer our first research question, we assumed Westergaard's *Linguistic Proximity Model* (2019) that perfectly suits our study, first because it accounts for any stage of L3/Ln acquisition and our participants were divided into Advanced and Intermediate groups, and then because it explains that L3/Ln learners have access to all previously acquired languages and that linguistic transfer can occur either from one or from all the previously acquired languages that are linguistically proximal language to the L3, Spanish, namely their regional Italians or local varieties and not English. As for linguistic transfer, Westergaard explains that it occurred property-by-property only if a particular property is present in the L3/Ln and in the L1 and/or L2. Since Central-Southern varieties present DOM, as well as Spanish,

we predicted that Central-Southern speakers will easily transfer this linguistic property from the L1 or the L2 (the local dialect) into their acquisition of Spanish as L3/Ln and that proficiency-matched Central-Southern learners will significantly be more accurate in the use of DOM with respect to the Northern participants, whose regional Italians and/or local varieties lack DOM. The results of both tasks did not confirm this prediction. In fact, no significant differences were found across participants in each condition, with the exception of condition NoDOMAnimIndef, where the control group of Colombian gave significantly higher rates with respect to the Northern Advanced group ($p<.001$). As far as the oral production task is concerned, groups behaved differently in each condition, but no statistical differences were found between Central-Southern Advanced and Northern Advanced groups and between Central-Southern Intermediate and Northern Intermediate groups. Numerically speaking, there are some conditions where Central-Southern Advanced speakers performed more accurately than Northern Advanced participants, like in the production of DOM sentences with [+animate] and [+definite] DOs, where Central-Southern Advanced produced 72% of DOM sentences with respect to the 50% of the Northern Advanced ones. What was unexpected, on the contrary, was that the Northern Advanced group gave the lowest rate to ungrammatical sentences with definite and animate DOs without DOM (mean acceptability rating 24%), even performing better than the Spain group, with an average rating of 34%. Apart from this, generally and statistically speaking, the lack of significant differences in the experimental groups cannot support our first hypothesis. To sum up, on the one hand, our results did not confirm this first prediction, suggesting that the effects of the knowledge of a local variety cannot be perceived at intermediate and advanced stages of L3 acquisition. On the other hand, these results demonstrated that, overall, all Italian experimental groups have shown to possess a solid knowledge of Spanish DOM distribution.

In addition to the four experimental groups, 30 native speakers of Spanish took part in this study, half from Spain and half from Colombia. Having divided our Italian learners of Spanish into Advanced and Intermediate, we questioned whether the experimental groups' proficiency in Spanish could predict their performance. The prediction was that the performance of Advanced Italian learners of Spanish would have been very similar to that of the Control group, showing that L3 learners were able to fully acquire and reassemble L3 features involved in Spanish DOM distribution. Therefore, the two performances were predicted not to be significantly different one from the other. The

results do not confirm the prediction as far as Oral production task is concerned but confirmed it if we consider the results from the Grammaticality Judgment Task. In fact, in production, there are two conditions out of four where the performance of the Control group is significantly more accurate than that of the Advanced group. In condition AnimDef, for example, the Control group produced a significantly higher number of DOM sentences than the Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 4.506$, p=0.03) and also from the Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 6.444$, p=0.01), while in condition InanimDef, the Control group produced a significantly lower amount of DOM sentence with respect to the Advanced group ($x^2(1) = 10.526$, p=0.001) and from the Intermediate group ($x^2(1) = 13.714$, p=<.001). Quantitively speaking, also in condition InanimIndef the Control group produced a lower number of DOM sentences (4%) with respect to the Advanced (8%) and Intermediate group (12%), even if the differences are not important. On the contrary, in all conditions of the Grammaticality Judgement Task, there were no significant differences between Advanced and Control group. This may confirm our prediction, if it was not that in the same conditions there were no significant differences between the Control group and the Intermediate group neither (except for condition DOMAnimDef in the GJT, where the Control group gave statistically higher rates of acceptability than the Intermediate group (p=0.02) and in condition InanimIndef of the oral production task, where the Intermediate group produced a significantly higher number of DOM sentences with respect to the Control group ($x^2(1) = 4.263$, p= 0.04)). To sum up, given the significant differences between Control and Advanced group in production and since we rely more on the oral production task for the reasons explained above, the second hypothesis cannot be considered confirmed. The Advanced group, putting the results together, showed to possess quite a good knowledge of Spanish DOM, in particular in giving grammaticality judgements. However, their performance changes in production. If we compare conditions with animate and definite DOs, while in GJT they generally accepted the presence of DOM (average rating of 76%), in production they produced only 61% of DOM sentences with animate and definite DOs. With inanimate and definite DOs, they produced only 24% of DOM sentences, while they gave an average rate of 35% to DOM sentences in this condition. Probably, a confrontation between Advanced, Intermediate, and Low Intermediate participants in two different tasks like a production and a grammaticality judgment task, would have showed more interesting findings and we hope that future research can also involve beginner learners. Unfortunately, the lack of studies on the acquisition of Spanish DOM

by Italian speakers makes comparison and a generalization of the results obtained in this study impossible and we hope that the research in this interesting field will continue, in particular involving new groups of Italian speakers as already mentioned.

The present study presents a series of limitations. First of all, the lack of a task aiming to investigate the real presence of DOM in our Central-Southern participants' regional Italians or the possible influence from their local varieties into their regional Italian for those participants who have reported to know and use their local dialect. In fact, we hypothesised the presence of this phenomenon in their regional Italians but without any certainties. Always talking about participants, the geographical area taken into consideration is too big. The Central-Southern Italy comprises a lot of regions and DOM has not been studied in all of them yet. So, future research should focus on a particular geographical area or, better, on a single city, where DOM has just been studied and analysed, like Bari (Andriani, 2016) or Naples (Fiorentino, 2003). The last limitation was the way of administering the Standardised proficiency test of Spanish and the Grammaticality Judgment Task. Due to the COVID-19 sanitary emergency and to the fact that the participants came from different parts of Italy, the administration was online, and we could not be physically there to control the situation. For this reason, participants had the possibility to check the meaning of some words or some grammatical structures present in the proficiency test and, for this reason, it is possible that their scores do not correspond to their real level of Spanish. This could be one reason why we did not manage to find more beginning learners to insert in a Low intermediate group. In the same way, during the Grammaticality Judgment Task, they had the possibility to go and check whether *a* is required in a certain condition or not. We hope that the limits of the present study could help researchers to avoid them in the conduction of future studies on this topic.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the use and production of Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish as an L3/Ln by 60 Italian university speakers. They came from two different geographical areas, Northern and Central-Southern Italy, and they were divided according to their Spanish proficiency level: Advanced and Intermediate. The distribution of *a* in Spanish relates to different syntactic and semantic factors, like the animacy and the referentiality of the direct objects, and its distribution is very similar to that of Central-Southern regional Italians or local dialects. In addition to the Italian learners of Spanish, 30 native speakers of Spanish from Spain and Colombia took part in this study and all participants completed a Grammaticality Judgment task and an Oral production task. Following Westergaard's *Linguistic Proximity Model* (2019), we predicted a transfer from Central-Southern participants' L1 (their regional Italians) and L2 (only if represented by their local variety) to Spanish with respect to the DOM phenomenon, hypothesising to find significant differences between proficiency-matched Central-Southern and Northern speakers with respect to Spanish DOM. The results from the two tasks showed that, overall, all Italian participants had a good understanding of this structure and the features involved in its distribution, but no significant differences were found across them, and this did not confirm our hypothesis. Even the level of proficiency of the L3/Ln learners did not affect their accuracy. Indeed, no significant differences were found between Advanced and Intermediate speakers in both tasks, but in some conditions, the Intermediate speakers behaved differently from the Control group.

References

Aissen, J. (2003). Differential Object Marking: Iconicity vs. Economy. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory, 21*(3): 435-483.

Alarcos L., E. (1994). *Gramática de la lengua española.* Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

Andriani, L. (2016). Semantic and Syntactic Properties of the Prepositional Accusative in Barese. *Linguistica Atlantica, 34*(2).

Berretta, M. (1989). Sulla presenza dell'accusativo preposizionale in italiano settentrionale: Note tipologiche. *Vox Romanica,* 48(13).

Berretta, M. (1990). «E a me chi mi consola?». Sull'accusativo preposizionale in italiano in *ltaliano e Oltre* 5 (1990) / 1: 31-35.

Berretta, M. (1991). Note sulla sintassi dell'accusativo preposizionale in italiano. *Lingüística (Ljubljana),* 31(1): 211-232.

Berruto, G. (2012). *Sociolinguistica dell'italiano contemporaneo* (2nd ed.). Roma: Carocci.

Bettoni, C. (2001). *Imparare un'altra lingua: lezioni di linguistica applicata.* Roma GLF: Editori Laterza.

Bley-Vroman, R. (1990). The logical problem of foreign language learning. *Linguistic Analysis*, 20(12): 3-49.

Bley-Vroman, R. (2009). The evolving context of the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(2): 175-198.

Bossong, G. (1991). Differential Object Marking in Romance and Beyond, in Wanner D. and Kibbee, D. (eds.), *New Analyses in Romance Linguistics: Selected Papers from the XVIII Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages, Urbana Champaign, April 7–9, 1988*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 143–170.

Brugè, L. and Brugger, G. (1996). *On the accusative a in Spanish*. Probus, 8(1): 1-52.

Chomsky, N. (2005). Three factors in Language Design. *Linguistic Inquiry,* 36 (1): 1 22.

D'Achille, P. (2010). *L'italiano contemporaneo* (3rd ed.). Bologna: Il Mulino.

Epstein, S. D., Flynn, S. and Martohardjono, G. (1996*).* Second Language Acquisition: Theoretical and Experimental Issues in Contemporary Research. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 19(4): 677–714.

Farahani, A.A.K., Mehrad, A.G. and Ahgar, M.R. (2014). Access to Universal Grammar in Second Language Acquisition. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 136: 298-301.

Fiorentino, G. (2003). Prepositional objects in Neapolitan. *Transitivity in Romance Languages*: 117-151

Foley, C. and Flynn, S. (2012). The role of the native language. *The Cambridge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 97-113). Cambridge University Press.

Grassi, C., Sobrero, A.A., and Telmon, T. (2007). *Fondamenti di dialettologia italiana* (7th ed.). Roma [etc]: GLF Editori Laterza.

Guardiano, C. (2010). L'oggetto diretto preposizionale in siciliano. Una breve rassegna e qualche domanda, *in Quaderni di lavoro ASIt* n.11: 83-101

Guasti, M. (2002). *Language acquisition: the growth of grammar*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT press. (Chapter 1).

Guijarro-Fuentes, P. (2012). The acquisition of interpretable features in L2 Spanish: personal a. *Bilingualism: Language and cognition* 15 (4): 701-720.

Guijarro-Fuentes, P. and Marinis, T. (2007). *Acquiring the syntax/semantic interface in L2 Spanish: The personal preposition 'a*'. In L. Roberts, A. Gürel, S. Tatar, and L. Marti (Eds.), Eurosla Yearbook 7 (pp. 67–87). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Guijarro-Fuentes, P., and Marinis, T. (2011). Acquiring Spanish by British English/Spanish bilingual children. *Studies in bilingualism* 42, 227-248.

Hawkins, R. and Casillas, G. (2008). Explaining Frequency of Verb Morphology in Early L2 Speech. *Lingua*, 118(4): 595–612.

Haznedar, B. (1997). L2 Acquisition by a Turkish-Speaking Child: Evidence for L1 Influence. In E. Hughes, M. Hughes, & A. Greenhill (eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*, Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, pp. 257–268.

Hualde, J., O'Rourke, E. and Olarrea, A. (2012). *The handbook of Hispanic linguistics* (Chapter 15). Malden Wiley Blackwell.

Jaeggli, O. (1982). *Topics in Romance Syntax.* Dordrecht: Foris.

Lardiere, D. (2008). Feature-Assembly in Second LanguageAcquisition. In J. Liceras, H. Zobl, & H. Goodluck (Eds.), *The Role of Formal Features in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 106-140). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lardiere, D. (2009). Some Thoughts on the Contrastive Analysis of Features in Second Language Acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 25(2), 173–227.

Ledgeway, A., Schifano, N., and Silvestri, G. (2019). *Differential Object Marking and the properties of D in the dialects of the extreme south of Italy*. Glossa, 4(1): 1 24.

Longobardi, G. (1991). "Proper names and the theory of N-movement in syntax and Logical Form". *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics 9*. (published in 1994 in *Linguistic Inquiry 25,4* pp. 609-665).

Loporcaro, M. (2009). *Profilo linguistico dei dialetti italiani*. Roma, Bari: Laterza.

Martín, J. (1999): The Syntax and Semantics of Spanish Accusative a. In: Gutiérrez Rexach, Javier; Martínez-Gil, Fernando (eds.). *Advances in Hispanic Linguistics, vol. 2* (pp. 469-485). Sommerville: Cascadilla Press.

Montrul, S. (2004). Subject and object expression in Spanish heritage speakers: A case of morphosyntactic convergence. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 7(2): 125–142.

Montrul, S. (2014) Structural changes in Spanish in the United States: Differential object marking in Spanish heritage speakers across generations. *Lingua 151*: 177-196.

Montrul, S. and Bowles, M. (2009). Back to basics: Differential object marking under incomplete acquisition in Spanish heritage speakers. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition,* 12(3): 363-383.

Montrul, S. and Sánchez-Walker, N. (2013). Differential object marking in child and adult Spanish heritage speakers. *Language Acquisition*, 20: 1–24.

Montrul, S. and Gürel, A. (2015). The acquisition of differential object marking in Spanish by Turkish speakers. In Judy, T., Perpiñán, S. (Eds.), *The Acquisition of Spanish in Understudied Language Pairings* (pp. 281-307). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Neuburger, K., and Stark, E. (2014). Differential Object Marking in Corsican: Regularities and triggering factors. *Linguistics*, 52(2): 365-389.

Peña, M., Maki, A., Kovacić, D., Dehaene-Lambertz, G., Koizumi, H., Bouquet, F., and Mehler, J. (2003). Sounds and silence: an optical topography study of language recognition at birth. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 100(20): 11702–11705.

Perpiñán, S. (2018). On Convergence, Ongoing Language Change, and Crosslinguistic Influence in Direct Object Expression in Catalan–Spanish Bilingualism. *Languages*, 3(2):14.

Pliatsikas, C. and Marinis, T. (2013). Processing empty categories in a second language: When naturalistic exposure fills the (intermediate) gap. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 16, 167–182.

Rashidah, A. (2020). Second Language Acquisition of Quantifiers by Arabic Speakers of English: Feature Reassembly Approach. *Arab World English Journal, 11*(1), 376-388.

Renzi, L. (1988) (edited by), *Grande grammatica italiana di consultazione*, Vol.1: *La frase. I sintagmi nominale e preposizionale,* Bologna (il Mulino), pp. 129-162.

Rohlfs, G. (1969). *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti*, vol. III. Sintassi e formazione delle parole. Torino: Einaudi.

Rohlfs, G. (1971). Autour de l'accusatif prépositionnel dans les langues romanes: Concordances et discordances. *Revue De Linguistique Romane*, 35(139-140), 312.

Rothman, J., & Slabakova, R. (2017). The generative approach to SLA and its place in modern second language studies. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 40 (2), 417-422.

Rothman, J., Amaro, J., and De Bot, K. (2012). Third language acquisition. *The Cambridge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 372-393). Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, B. and Sprouse, R. (1996). L2 cognitive states and the Full Transfer/Full Access model. *Second Language Research*, 12(1): 40-72.

Schwartz, B. D. and Sprouse, R. (2013). Generative approaches and the Poverty of the Stimulus. In J. Herschensohn and M. Young-Scholten (eds), *The Cambridge handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 137–158). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Slabakova, R., Leal, T., Dudley, A., & Stack, M. (2020). *Generative Second Language acquisition* (Element in Second Language Acquisition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sorace, A (2011). Pinning down the concept of interface in bilingualism. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* 1: 1–33.

Tigău, A., M. (2012). The Accusative morpheme -(Y)I in Turkish and differential object marking in Romanian. *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, XIV (2): 57 76.

von Heusinger, K., and Kaiser, G. (2003). The interaction of animacy, definiteness and specificity in Spanish, in *Proceedings of the Workshop on Semantic and Syntactic Aspects of Specificity in Romance Languages*, eds K. von Heusinger and G. Kaiser (Konstanz): 41–66.

von Heusinger, K., and Kaiser, G. (2005). The evolution of differential object marking in Spanish. In Elisabeth Stark, Klaus von Heusinger & Georg Kaiser (eds.),

Specificity and the evolution/emergence of nominal determination systems in Romance: Selected papers from the international workshop NEREUS II, Oct. 2004 in Berlin, 33–69. Konstanz: University of Konstanz.

von Heusinger, K., and Kaiser, G. (2007). Differential object marking and the lexical semantics of verbs in Spanish. In Georg Kaiser & Manuel Leonetti (eds.), *Proceedings of the workshop "Definiteness, specificity and animacy in Ibero Romance languages",* 85 (110). Konstanz: University of Konstanz.

von Heusinger, K., and Kaiser, G. (2011). Affectedness and Differential Object Marking in Spanish. *Morphology*, 21(3), 593-617.

Westergaard, M. (2019). Microvariation in multilingual situations: The importance of property-by property acquisition. *Second Language Research*.

Website

https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/accusativo-preposizionale_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/#:~:text=L'accusativo%20preposizionale%20 17.04.20

APPENDIX A

	Group	Spanish Level	Age	Gender	Place of birth	L1	Years of Spanish	Language(s) spoken at home
S1	North	Advanced	20	F	Veneto	IT	5	IT
S2	North	Advanced	20	F	Veneto	IT	8	IT
S3	North	Advanced	23	F	Tuscany (Arezzo)	IT	5	IT
S4	North	Advanced	23	F	Veneto	IT	9	IT + DIA
S5	North	Advanced	21	F	Veneto	IT	8	IT
S6	North	Advanced	34	F	Veneto	IT	3	IT
S7	North	Advanced	23	F	Tuscany (Siena)	IT	12	IT
S8	North	Advanced	33	F	Veneto	IT	3	DIA
S9	North	Advanced	20	F	Emilia-Romagna	IT	10	IT
S10	North	Advanced	21	F	Veneto	IT	8	IT
S11	North	Advanced	20	F	Lombardy	IT	7	IT
S12	North	Advanced	25	F	Lombardy	IT	3	IT + DIA
S13	North	Advanced	25	F	Emilia-Romagna	IT	10	IT
S14	North	Advanced	24	F	Veneto	IT	6	IT
S15	North	Advanced	24	M	Piemonte	IT	8	IT
S16	North	Intermed.	24	F	Emilia-Romagna	IT	3	IT + DIA
S17	North	Intermed.	28	F	Veneto	IT	5	DIA
S18	North	Intermed.	26	F	Veneto	IT	10	IT + POR
S19	North	Intermed.	22	F	Emilia-Romagna	IT	6	IT
S20	North	Intermed.	23	F	Tuscany	IT	8	IT
S21	North	Intermed.	26	F	Piemonte	IT	10	IT
S22	North	Intermed.	44	F	Liguria	IT	3	IT
S23	North	Intermed.	20	F	Lombardy	IT	2	IT
S24	North	Intermed.	23	F	Lombardy	IT	9	IT + DIA
S25	North	Intermed.	24	F	Lombardy	IT	10	IT
S26	North	Intermed.	22	F	Veneto	IT	10	IT
S27	North	Intermed.	23	F	Emilia-Romagna	IT	4	IT
S28	North	Intermed.	22	M	Liguria	IT	6	IT
S29	North	Intermed.	26	F	Lombardy	IT	8	IT
S30	North	Intermed.	18	F	Piemonte	IT	5	IT + DIA
S31	C.South	Advanced	21	F	Campania	IT	8	IT + DIA
S32	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Basilicata	IT	8	IT
S33	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Apulia	IT	7	IT
S34	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Apulia	IT	4	IT
S35	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Apulia	IT	8	IT + DIA
S36	C.South	Advanced	21	F	Apulia	IT	7	IT
S37	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Apulia	IT	9	IT
S38	C.South	Advanced	22	M	Molise	IT	5	IT
S39	C.South	Advanced	20	F	Campania	IT	2	IT + DIA
S40	C.South	Advanced	23	F	Campania	IT	8	IT

S41	C.South	Advanced	27	F	Campania	IT	8	IT
S42	C.South	Advanced	19	F	Sicily	IT	7	IT
S43	C.South	Advanced	27	F	Marche	IT	15	DIA
S44	C.South	Advanced	28	F	Campania	IT	10	ITA + DIA
S45	C.South	Advanced	27	F	Abruzzo	IT	9	ITA + DIA
S46	C.South	Intermed.	23	F	Campania	IT	7	ITA + DIA
S47	C.South	Intermed.	24	F	Apulia	IT	9	ITA
S48	C.South	Intermed.	21	M	Campania	IT	1	ITA + BUL
S49	C.South	Intermed.	20	F	Apulia	IT	8	ITA
S50	C.South	Intermed.	27	F	Campania	IT	10	ITA
S51	C.South	Intermed.	20	F	Campania	IT	6	ITA
S52	C.South	Intermed.	23	F	Apulia	IT	8	ITA
S53	C.South	Intermed.	23	F	Sicily	IT	8	ITA
S54	C.South	Intermed.	24	F	Campania	IT	8	ITA
S55	C.South	Intermed.	28	F	Campania	IT	10	ITA
S56	C.South	Intermed.	19	F	Campania	IT	5	ITA
S57	C.South	Intermed.	22	F	Campania	IT	4	ITA
S58	C.South	Intermed.	24	F	Campania	IT	5	ITA
S59	C.South	Intermed.	22	M	Apulia	IT	9	ITA + DIA
S60	C.South	Intermed.	21	F	Abruzzo	IT	7	ITA

	Group	**Age**	**Gender**	**L1**	**Language(s) spoken at home**
S60	Spain	24	F	SPA	SPA
S61	Spain	24	M	SPA	SPA
S62	Spain	23	M	SPA	SPA
S63	Spain	30	M	SPA	SPA
S64	Spain	25	F	SPA	SPA
S65	Spain	22	F	SPA	SPA
S66	Spain	24	F	SPA	SPA
S67	Spain	35	F	SPA	SPA
S68	Spain	26	F	SPA	SPA
S69	Spain	23	M	SPA	SPA
S70	Spain	23	F	SPA	SPA
S71	Spain	40	F	SPA	SPA
S72	Spain	35	O	SPA	SPA
S73	Spain	24	F	SPA	SPA + FRE
S74	Spain	24	F	SPA + BAS	SPA
S75	Spain	24	F	SPA	SPA + BAS
S76	Colombia	23	F	SPA	SPA
S77	Colombia	33	F	SPA	SPA
S78	Colombia	24	M	SPA	SPA
S79	Colombia	35	M	SPA	SPA
S80	Colombia	24	F	SPA	SPA
S81	Colombia	23	F	SPA	SPA
S82	Colombia	28	F	SPA	SPA
S83	Colombia	31	F	SPA	SPA
S84	Colombia	29	F	SPA	SPA
S85	Colombia	33	M	SPA	SPA
S86	Colombia	47	F	SPA	SPA

S87	Colombia	47	F	SPA	SPA
S88	Colombia	55	F	SPA	SPA
S89	Colombia	48	F	SPA	SPA
S90	Colombia	46	F	SPA	SPA

APPENDIX B

List of 24 experimental items of the Grammaticality Judgment Task

ITEMS			CONDITIONS
1	La maestra pasea a la niña cada día.	The teacher.F takes to-DOM the child.F for a walk everyday	DOMAnimDef
2	Los vecinos de arriba espían a los otros vecinos.	The upstairs neighbors spy to-DOM the other neighbors	DOMAnimDef
3	La profesora castiga a los estudiantes malos.	The teacher.F punishes to-DOM the bad students.M	DOMAnimDef
4	La policía ha visto al ladrón robando.	The police have seen to-DOM the thief stealing.	DOMAnimDef
5	La maestra pasea la niña cada día.	The teacher.F takes the child.F for a walk everyday	*NoDOMAnimDef
6	Los vecinos de arriba espían los otros vecinos.	The upstairs neighbors spy the other neighbors	*NoDOMAnimDef
7	La profesora castiga los estudiantes malos.	The teacher.F punishes the bad students.M	*NoDOMAnimDef
8	La policía ha visto el ladrón robando.	The police have seen the thief stealing.	*NoDOMAnimDef
9	El conductor de autobús ha recogido a una niña hoy.	The bus driver has picked up to-DOM a girl today.	DOMAnimIndef
10	El juez ha decidido condenar a un asesino.	The judge has decided to sentence to-DOM a murderer.	DOMAnimIndef
11	El director ha contratado a una actriz desconocida para su película.	The director has hired to-DOM an unknown actress for his film.	DOMAnimIndef
12	La policía ha visto a un ladrón robando.	The police have seen to-DOM a thief stealing.	DOMAnimIndef
13	El conductor de autobús ha regogido una niña hoy.	The bus driver has picked up a girl today.	NoDOMAnimIndef
14	El juez ha decidido condenar un asesino.	The judge has decided to sentence a murderer.	NoDOMAnimIndef
15	El director ha contratado una actriz desconocida para su película.	The director has hired an unknown actress for his film	NoDOMAnimIndef
16	La policía ha visto un ladrón robando.	The police have seen a thief stealing.	NoDOMAnimIndef
17	Me gusta ver a la televisión con mi	I like watching to-DOM television with my family.	*DOMInanimDef

	familia.		
18	El niño señala al juego en la tienda de juegos.	The child.M points to to-DOM the game in the play store.	*DOMInanimDef
19	El perro muerde a la galleta del niño.	The dog bites to-DOM the child's cookie.	*DOMInanimDef
20	El hombre empuja al coche en la calle mayor.	The man pushes to-DOM the car on the main street.	*DOMInanimDef
21	Me gusta ver la televisión con mi familia.	I like watching television with my family.	NoDOMInanimDef
22	El niño señala el juego en la tienda de juegos.	The child.M points to the game in the play store.	NoDOMInanimDef
23	El perro muerde la galleta del niño.	The dog bites the child's cookie.	NoDOMInanimDef
24	El hombre empuja el coche en la calle mayor.	The man pushes the car on the main street	NoDOMInanimDef

List of 16 experimental target items of the Elicited Production Task of DOM

TARGET ITEMS			**CONDITIONS**
1	La chica rubia carga a su mejor amiga	The blonde girl carries to-DOM her best friend	AnimDef
2	Los periodistas escuchan a la presidenta de Alemania	The journalists listen to to-DOM the president.F of Germany	AnimDef
3	Este señor espera a la doctora	This man is waiting for to-DOM the doctor.F	AnimDef
4	La mujer mima a la hija pequeña	The woman pampers to-DOM the little daughter	AnimDef
5	La policía está persiguiendo a/- un ladrón	Police are chasing to-DOM/- a thief	AnimIndef
6	El hombre sentado ha entrevistado a/- un chico delgado y alto	The seated man has interviewed to-DOM/- a slim and tall boy	AnimIndef
7	La enfermera ha visitado a/- un paciente alegre	The nurse has visited to-DOM/- a cheerful patient	AnimIndef
8	Ralph está saludando a/- una compañera	Ralph is saying hello to-DOM a school mate	AnimIndef
9	La chica está mirando la nube	The girl is looking at the cloud	InanimDef
10	El hombre está buscando sus monedas	The man is looking for his coins	InanimDef
11	El deportista está besando su medalla	The athlete is kissing his medal	InanimDef
12	El zorro huele la flor amarilla	The fox smells the	InanimDef

		yellow flower	
13	El niño abraza un peluche	The child.M hugs a teddy	InanimIndef
14	El mono pinta un cuadro	The monkey paints a picture	InanimIndef
15	El hombre lava un coche blanco	The man washes a white car	InanimIndef
16	La mujer ha tocado una camiseta	The woman has touched a t-shirt	InanimIndef