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Learnability in the L2A of semantics*

Roumyana Slabakova
University of Iowa

The study investigates the relationship between input, UG parameter values, and the native language in the acquisition of a purely semantic property that is superficially unrelated to its syntactic trigger, The Bare Noun/Proper Name parameter. A bidirectional study of the two properties was conducted. In the English → Italian direction, the lack of one native interpretation in the target language (a contracting of the grammar) is achieved in the absence of negative evidence, in a Poverty of the Stimulus situation. In both directions, the semantic property is acquired based on input and/or positive evidence for the syntactic side of the parameter.

1. Introduction

A recent conceptual paper, Schwartz and Sprouse (2000) (see also Dekydtspotter, Sprouse and Anderson, 1997), argues that the Poverty of the Stimulus (POS) approach is the only indisputable way to prove that UG is actively engaged in second language acquisition (L2A) and that L2A and first language acquisition (L1A) are not fundamentally different. POS phenomena involve properties of the grammar where neither the L1 nor the L2 can account for the knowledge L2 learners have acquired. In other words, both the L1 grammar and the L2 input underdetermine the mental representations of the learners.

This article will continue in this vein of research but introduce an additional dimension: learnability considerations related to directionality of acquisition in subset-superset grammars. The study investigates the interaction of input, UG, and the native language in the acquisition of a purely semantic property that is superficially unrelated to its syntactic trigger, although they are unified underlyingly by the Bare Noun/Proper Name parameter (Longobardi 1991, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2005). The parameter's semantic side involves English and Italian mass or bare plural nouns (bare nouns, BNs), which have identical syntactic form and distribution, but differ in available interpretations. The syntactic property has to do with proper names (PNs), which display cross-linguistic constant meaning but variable word order. Longobardi argues that

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variation in this respect can be accounted for by a parameter that is set to one value in English and another one in Italian. In this way, the parameter is responsible for purely syntactic effects (word order) in one area of the grammar and purely semantic effects (presence or absence of an interpretation) in another area of the grammar.

2. The Data

In English, the subject bare NP has both a generic (Gen) and an existential meaning (Ex), while in Italian it has only the existential meaning. A pertinent paraphrase of the Italian sentence in (2) would be: "There are **some** white elephants that will appear at the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5". The English sentence in (1) has the same reading but also the reading "**All** white elephants (as a species) will undergo the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5."

- (1) White elephants will undergo the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5.
- (2) Elefanti di colore bianco passerano il Giudizio Universale domani alle 5.
elephants of color white undergo-FUT the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5
'White elephants will undergo the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5.'

The second semantic contrast has to do with anaphoric binding:

- (3) Large cats think very highly of themselves.
- (4) Gatti di grossa taglia hanno un'alta opinione di se stessi.
cats of large dimensions have a high opinion of self
'Large cats think very highly of themselves.'

The distributive reading of (3) says that each individual large cat has a high opinion of itself only, although they may not think highly of the species in general. The kind reading of the same sentence is that every large cat has a high opinion of all large cats as a species, although they may not have a high opinion of individuals within the species, including their personal selves. The distributive reading is available in Italian, but the kind reading is not. The two purely semantic contrasts are related to the same underlying property, or happen to be two manifestations of that property.

The word order contrast parametrically related to the semantic contrasts above is exemplified with proper names modified by adjectives. In English, such names follow the adjective (5), while in Italian the names can precede the adjective as in (6):

- (5) Ancient Rome/*Rome ancient was destroyed by the barbarians.
- (6) Roma antica/*Antica Roma fu distrutta dai barbari.
Rome ancient/ancient Rome was destroyed by barbarians
'Ancient Rome was destroyed by the barbarians.'

3. The Analysis

It is not the case that Italian BNs cannot have generic interpretation at all. Two strategies are available for a nominal expression to obtain a generic reading in natural language. The expression can either refer to kinds directly, in which case it exhibits *referential genericity*; or it can be an indefinite, a variable existentially or generically bound by an independently provided operator (called *quantificational genericity*, since the nominal expression generalizes over objects (Gerstner & Krifka 1987). Since Italian BNs are indefinites, hence subject only to quantificational genericity, they can be generic in habitual reading sentences, or in the scope of adverbs like *always* or *often*. English BNs, on the other hand, are systematically ambiguous between the quantificational interpretation and the truly referential generic interpretation.

The parameter, then, can be formulated as follows: In Italian the referential feature of the D position is strong, therefore overt head movement from N-to-D is necessary. In English, referential status can be assigned to nominals with no overt determiner. The referential feature in D is weak, hence no pre-spell-out movement to D is necessary. But what is the link to BN interpretation? Italian PNs and BNs can only refer directly (to objects and kinds, respectively) if they have an overtly filled D. For PNs, the referring strategy is satisfied either by a D filled with an article, or by N-to-D movement. For BNs, the strategy can never be satisfied, since they remain low in the structure. That is why they may be quantificationally generic in the scope of Gen type operators but never referentially generic.

In English no overt movement happens in the DP, it need not. The status of D as a variable or as a constant will be encoded only at LF. Hence, English BNs do not need to rise overtly to D to refer to kinds directly (that is, to be referentially generic). Thus, languages resort to a *unified* strategy in assigning object and kind-reference to nominal structures. However, these strategies can be parameterized across languages. Object-referring nouns may occur without a phonetically filled D iff kind-referring nouns can. Contexts in which English BNs *can* be generic but Italian BNs *cannot* include:

- episodic sentences: *White elephants raised a lot of curiosity in the past.*
- kind-level sentences: *White elephants have become extinct.*
- stative individual-level sentences: *States of large size are prosperous.*

4. Predictions for Second Language Acquisition

The referential versus quantificational genericity of BNs is not overtly taught at the advanced level of college classroom instruction. Rather, it is tacitly assumed that it need not be taught since Italian works like English (see also Chierchia, 1998). Furthermore, the input to learners of Italian is highly misleading, since there *are* generic Italian BNs, but they are only so in the scope of a generic operator or adverb.

It was impossible to ascertain the linguistic background of all the non-native participants, since they were at the college level, and they had come from various academic backgrounds. However, a survey of 6 Italian instructors at the

biggest Italian department outside Italy, the Italian Department at the University of Toronto, indicates that the semantic properties of bare nouns are never discussed explicitly in even the most advanced Italian language classes.¹ An informal interview with an English instructor at the University of Trieste (where the English learners were studying at the time of testing) revealed similar results: interpretation of bare noun phrases is not taught. The PNs word order is taught, and is abundantly present in the input to ESL and ISL learners.

The Subset Principle (Berwick, 1985; Manzini & Wexler, 1987) postulates that (L1 and L2) learners will start with the maximally restrictive subset grammar. In our second language learning situation, the Subset Principle predicts that it will be easier for Italian natives to acquire the English interpretations, because they can rely on positive evidence in the input. At the same time, it will be more difficult for the English natives learning Italian to achieve the target L2 grammar, because they will have to acquire the unavailability of one native interpretation without any positive evidence.

For the English learners of Italian, the acquisition process constitutes a contraction of the grammar, since they are learning the unavailability of a target interpretation which is available in their native grammar. Keeping learnability considerations like the Subset Principle in mind, we would predict that English → Italian is the difficult direction of acquisition. There is no positive evidence in the input as to the unavailability of the missing interpretation, and negative evidence is not reliably given to learners (see survey of Italian instructors). Our first prediction is then, that the POS will nevertheless be overcome by parametric restructuring.

Secondly, for the Italian learners of English, the acquisition process involves an extension of the grammar: they are adding one meaning that is unavailable from their L1. One would expect that the potential availability of that interpretation in the L2 input would facilitate the acquisition process. Sentences involving generic bare noun interpretations are not rare in the input, compared to existential sentences. In sum, we have predicted successful semantic acquisition in both learning directions.

5. The Study

5.1. Participants

Seventy-six Italian learners of English and 24 native English controls as well as 51 English-native learners of Italian and 28 native Italian controls participated. They were tested in Trieste, Italy; Middlebury, Vermont; and Iowa City, Iowa.

¹ A written questionnaire was distributed to more than 30 Italian instructors at the University of Toronto Italian Department. They were given examples of the Italian sentences and asked the following two questions: "1. Do you teach explicitly in your Italian classrooms what the interpretation is of Italian bare plural nouns? (I don't mean the lexical meaning of the words, but whether they refer to the species or to some individuals within the species.) 2. Do the textbooks that you use mention the interpretations of bare nouns in Italian?" Six instructors responded to the questionnaire, saying that neither they nor the textbooks ever mention these properties explicitly.

All were college students, aged between 18 and 27. All Italian native speakers had started learning English after the age of 12, mean age of first acquisition 13.5. All English native speakers had started learning Italian after the age of 12, mean age of first acquisition 14.7.

5.2. Tasks

Participants took a written Truth Value Judgment Task (Crain and McKee, 1985), and a Grammaticality Judgment task. An independent measure of proficiency, a cloze test, was also administered. It consisted of a text relating a story, in which every seventh word was taken out and replaced with a blank. There were 40 blank spaces, which the participants had to fill in with one word only.

The TVJT (Crain and McKee, 1985; Crain and Thornton, 1998) consisted of pairs of stories and test sentences (in English and Italian, resp.) Each test sentence appeared twice, once under a story supporting an existential interpretation of the nominal (*some white elephants*) and a second time under a story supporting a generic interpretation (*all white elephants*). There were eight story-sentence pairs in the Bare Noun Interpretation Condition and the same number in the Anaphoric Binding Condition. Sixteen fillers were also included. They were needed to counterbalance the sixteen True answers that were expected in the ESL test, since in English both interpretations are available.

(7) Example of a story-sentence pair in the Anaphoric Binding Condition:

Distributive reading story

Cats are strange animals. The large ones think that they are smart and handsome. At the same time, they consider all other large cats to be very ugly. Is this because they feel threatened by the members of their own species? I wonder...

Large cats have a very high opinion of themselves. True False

Kind reading story

I don't like small cats, but I adore large ones. The thing I like most about them is this: they think that every large cat in the world is smart and handsome. They just like each other very much. What a happy group of animals!

Large cats have a very high opinion of themselves. True False

The GJ task included five grammatical and five ungrammatical sentences in the Proper Name Movement Condition as the examples in (5) and (6), and another ten sentences in the N-over-AP Movement Condition (as in (8)). There were ten fillers as well, bringing up the sentences to 30.

- (8) a. A mia sorella piacciono i mirtilli freschi.
* My sister likes blueberries fresh.
- b. * Le verdi mele sono la frutta preferita di papà.
The green apples are my dad's favorite fruit.

5.3. Group Results

The cloze test was intended as a language proficiency measure. The scoring procedure used the exact match method: if a blank was filled with the exact word as in the original text, one point was given; if no word was supplied, or even if the supplied word was meaningful but not the one used in the original text, no point was given. The two advanced groups were not significantly different but the two intermediate groups were significantly different from each other ($p < .05$).

We will look at the Italian \rightarrow English direction first. Looking at the two conditions separately, it seems that the Anaphoric Binding Condition worked a bit better in both directions, allowing for stories that could support more clearly the two readings available. There are no statistical differences between the two learner groups and the controls in accuracy of performance. The distributive reading was slightly, but not significantly, preferred by all groups.

Table 1: Accuracy of interpretation in Truth Value Judgment Task in the acquisition of English (%)

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Bare Noun interpretation</i>		<i>Anaphoric Binding</i>	
	<i>Generic reading</i>	<i>Existential reading</i>	<i>Kind reading</i>	<i>Distributive reading</i>
English Natives (n=24)	91	75	80	88
Advanced (n=40)	87	48*	83	93
High Intermediate (n=36)	88	55*	83	85

The percentages marked with a star are not different from chance at $p < .05$.

In the case of the Bare Noun Interpretation Condition, the generic reading was preferred by all groups ($F(1, 93) = 104.1, p < .0001$). Recall that the existential reading is the one available in Italian and in English while the generic reading is the one only available in English. The Italian learners of English have not only acquired it, but they actually prefer it over their native interpretation. There are no significant differences between groups on the generic reading in this condition. On the existential reading, the two learner groups do not differ between themselves, but they differ significantly ($p < .0001$) from the natives.

In the English \rightarrow Italian direction, the Bare Noun Interpretation Condition, there were no statistical differences between the advanced group, the intermediate group and the controls in accuracy of performance ($F(2, 75) = 2.13, p = .13$). Importantly, all the learners and the controls were equally accurate in accepting the available interpretation and in rejecting the unavailable one ($F(1, 75) = 1.63, p = .20$). There was no interaction between accepting/rejecting the test sentence and group ($F(2, 75) = .55, p = .57$). The natives and the advanced group were different from chance in both accepting and rejecting; the intermediate group was different from chance only on the existential reading, the one they accepted, but not different from chance on the one they had to reject.

In the Anaphoric Binding Condition, the two learner groups' accuracy is not different, but they differ significantly from the natives ($F(1, 75) = 7.9, p$

=.001). Again, all the groups were equally accurate in accepting the available interpretation and in rejecting the unavailable one ($F(1,75) = 3.53, p = .064$). There was no interaction between accepting/rejecting the test sentence and group ($F(2,75) = .78, p = .46$). The intermediate group is different from chance in accepting the available interpretation, but is at chance when rejecting the unavailable one.

Table 2: Accuracy of interpretation in Truth Value Judgment Task in the acquisition of Italian (%)

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Bare Noun interpretation</i>		<i>Anaphoric Binding</i>	
	<i>#Generic reading</i>	<i>Existential reading</i>	<i>#Kind reading</i>	<i>Distributive reading</i>
Italian Natives (n=28)	67	68	72.3	88.4
Advanced (n= 24)	66	76	65	67.4
Intermediate (n=27)	59*	64	62*	65.7

The percentages marked with a star are not different from chance at $p < .05$.

Turning to accuracy on GJ in the Italian → English direction, the two learner groups and the controls are at ceiling in their knowledge that N-to-D movement and N-over-AP movement are not permitted in English. There are neither group nor condition effects in the data.

Table 3: Accuracy on Grammaticality Judgment Task in the acquisition of English (%)

<i>Groups</i>	<i>*N-to-D in proper names</i>		<i>*N-over-AP movement</i>	
	<i>Gr</i>	<i>Ungr</i>	<i>Gr</i>	<i>Ungr</i>
Controls (n=24)	97	96	100	98
Advanced (n=40)	96	96	99	100
Hi Interm (n=36)	96	98	99	99

Table 4: Accuracy on Grammaticality Judgment Task in the acquisition of Italian (%)

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N-to-D in proper names</i>		<i>N-over-AP movement</i>	
	<i>Gr</i>	<i>Ungr</i>	<i>Gr</i>	<i>Ungr</i>
Natives (n=28)	78.6	93	99	95
Advanced (n=24)	75	80	90	70.4
Intermediate (n=27)	80	71	90	66.1

Next, we look at accuracy on GJ in the English → Italian direction. On the N-to-D in proper names condition, the native speakers accepted the movement (*Roma antica*) significantly less than they rejected the ungrammatical version (**Antica Roma*). This movement is very likely subject to dialectal differences. In fact, in accepting N-to-D movement, the two learner groups are similar to the natives; however, they are a bit less likely to reject the ungrammatical variant. On N-over-AP movement, where less dialectal differences exist, the natives are at ceiling, the learners (not different from each other) are 90% accurate in accepting the movement, but a bit less likely to reject the lack of movement (which happens to be the English value of the parameter).

6. Discussion

It can safely be assumed that knowledge of the syntactic aspect of the Bare Noun/Proper Name parameter has been acquired by the biggest majority of learners. In other words, all learners know that in English overt movement of the noun over the adjective is prohibited even though their native Italian requires it. In the other direction, most learners know that in Italian overt movement of the N head is possible even though their native English prohibits it. In the rest of this section, we will assume that the syntactic knowledge involved in the parameter is in place, and see how this squares with the semantic side.

Our first prediction for the acquisition of semantics was that despite the POS learning situation, the unavailability of one native interpretation (out of two) will be acquired by the English learners of Italian. Note that there is no semantic evidence in the linguistic input, since this is a negative constraint and information about unavailability of interpretations is not provided to learners (see survey described in section 4). If any knowledge of lack of interpretation is acquired, it can solely be due to parametric restructuring: knowledge of one construction in the cluster engages the other.

The advanced English learners of Italian are able to correctly interpret Italian bare nouns. They have acquired the fact that in Italian BNs do not refer generically when there is no independent generic operator (adverbs like *always*, imperfect tense inflection, etc.). The intermediate learners as a group have not acquired this yet, but most individuals pass the cutoff point of 62.5% (for lack of space, I do not discuss individual results in any detail here). The biggest majority of individual learners have overcome the POS situation. Still, the somewhat depressed accuracy of Italian native speakers as well as Italian learners on the TVJT, especially in the Bare Noun Interpretation condition, warrants further discussion. We turn to this below.

Although the data on bare nominal interpretation in Italian has been discussed in the literature for many years, there is not much consensus. As Longobardi (2001: 339) notes, three different positions have been put forward: Casalegno (1987) considers Italian BNs to have existential interpretations only; Longobardi (1994) assumes that they can be generic, but with Individual-level predicates only; Chierchia (1998) argues that Italian BNs have both a generic and an existential interpretation, distributed essentially as in English. Furthermore, as Longobardi (2001) implies and Chierchia (1998) argues explicitly, Italian bare nouns in subject position are ungrammatical, unless they are “syntactically heavy”. The example below (Chierchia’s 23a,b) illustrates this judgment:²

- (9) a. * Bambini sono venuti da noi b. Ho preso biscotti con il mio latte.
 ‘Kids came by us.’ ‘I had cookies with my milk.’

² Chierchia’s analysis proposes to account for this contrast by assuming that a null D is projected in Italian, in order for NPs to be interpreted as arguments. This null morpheme must be licensed syntactically by being governed by a lexical head. The verb satisfies this condition, hence BN objects are fine. In subject position, however, the null D is ungoverned, that is why BN subjects are unacceptable.

Chierchia (1998: 384) further notices that “if bare NPs are made heavy, either by being co-ordinated with other NPs or by various kinds of modification, the degree of acceptability in subject position increases considerably.”³ For Chierchia as well as for Longobardi, the subject-object asymmetry is gone when heavy DPs are involved.⁴ Thus, it is obvious that BN interpretation in Italian is far from straightforward. First, there is a potential subject-object contrast with ‘light’ DPs and no contrast with ‘heavy’ ones; secondly, a bare NP cannot be interpreted in isolation: one always needs to look at the predicate and ultimately the whole sentence; thirdly, there is considerable variation between speakers and possibly dialects. All these facts amply explain why the Italian native speakers in this study were not overwhelmingly accurate, although their judgments were statistically different from chance in all cases. In this respect, it is instructive to note that the Anaphoric Binding condition produced better results, since the stories in this condition were somewhat more transparent. However, we must keep in mind that both BN interpretation and anaphoric binding depend on the same underlying property. In light of the fragility of the native judgments and the extremely subtle semantic knowledge that has to be acquired, the accuracy of the advanced learners is even more impressive.

Proponents of the pattern matching in L2A (e.g., Bley-Vroman, 1997; Neeleman and Weerman, 1997) could argue that our learners might have arrived at this successful contraction of the grammar through other means. Blocking of one form by another, for example, might be used to work out that the generic interpretation of bare nouns is missing in Italian (under the specific conditions described here). The logic is that English natives will notice that Italian definite plural NPs (*gli elefanti di colore bianco* ‘the white elephants’) are generically interpreted and they will infer that bare nouns (*elefanti di colore bianco* ‘white elephants’) need not, therefore are not, so interpreted. Let us look at some Italian examples

First, as mentioned in section 3 and illustrated in (10), Italian bare nouns lack a generic interpretation in restricted grammatical contexts only, for example, in episodic sentences. In characterizing sentences, or in sentences with habitual adverbs (11), the generic interpretation is the preferred one. We argued above that this learning situation creates even more difficulties for English learners of Italian than just having to “delearn” one native interpretation. If learners are “pattern matching”, they have to notice in what syntactic environment the pattern matches their native interpretations and where it does not. This is highly unlikely, but let us assume for the sake of the argument that learners do somehow match the pattern. There is more to consider (examples from Longobardi, 2001, his examples 6a,c, 15a, 34a).

³ Chierchia accounts for this fact by proposing that the null D of the heavy NP is licensed by the functional head of a Focus Phrase via spec agreement (p. 387).

⁴ As far as I know, the judgments proposed in the literature (Casalegno, 1987; Longobardi, 1994; Chierchia, 1998; Longobardi, 2001) have not been tested empirically on Italian native speakers. Taken as a psycholinguistic test of Italian BN interpretation, then, my study confirms both the fragility of the judgments, as well as Longobardi’s (2001) identification of the constructions in which Italian BNs cannot have a generic (universal) interpretation, while English ones can.

- (10) ***Gen/Ex**
 Elefanti di colore bianco hanno creato in passato grande curiosità
 elephants of color white have raised in past big curiosity
 ‘White colored elephants raised a lot of curiosity in the past.’
- (11) **Gen/?Ex**
 Elefanti di colore bianco hanno creato sempre in passato grande curiosità
 elephants of color white have raised always in past big curiosity
 ‘White colored elephants always raised a lot of curiosity in the past.’
- (12) ***Gen/Ex**
 Degli elefanti di colore bianco hanno creato in passato grande curiosità
 part. art. elephants of color white have raised in past big curiosity
 ‘White colored elephants raised a lot of curiosity in the past.’
- (13) **Gen**
 Gli elefanti di colore bianco hanno creato in passato grande curiosità.
 the elephants of color white have raised in past big curiosity
 ‘The white colored elephants raised a lot of curiosity in the past.’

The distribution pattern of Italian bare nouns is exactly the same as that of nouns preceded by the so called partitive article *degli*, see (12). If the definite article *gli* is used instead of a BN in the cases where the BN generic interpretation is impossible, the generic interpretation becomes available as in (13) (see more examples in Longobardi 1991). If the blocking logic leads one to claim that the definite article can preempt the generic interpretation of (10), then the same logic would lead one to argue that the partitive article should preempt the existential interpretation of (10). This, of course, is contradicted by the data. I conclude that blocking effects are not in a position to explain the experimental findings, and that the POS learning situation is overcome solely by parametric restructuring.

Let us return now to our second prediction in this study: expanding the interlanguage grammar in the Italian → English direction will be easier, for either one of two (or both) reasons: the interpretation missing in the native language is available in the L2 input; there is also syntactic evidence parametrically related to it. Results indicate that Italian learners of English at high intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency are able to correctly interpret ambiguous English bare nouns. Learner and native speaker group accuracy do not differ on the two important readings (the ones that are unavailable in Italian). However, in order to evaluate this prediction fully, we need to compare accuracy in the two directions. For the reasons I discuss above, Italian natives are less accurate than English natives in the Bare Noun Interpretation Condition, but they demonstrate superior accuracy in the Anaphoric Binding Condition. Therefore, I will only compare the Italian and English learners’ accuracy on the latter condition.

Table 5: Comparing accuracy of interpretation in Truth Value Judgment Task (%)

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Contrasts</i>	<i>Anaphoric Binding Condition</i>	
		<i>Kind reading</i>	<i>Distributive reading</i>
English Natives		80	88
Italian Natives		72.3	88.4
	Contrast E-It natives	$t(51)=1.34$ $p=.09$	$t(51)=0.14$ $p=.44$
Advanced learners of English		83	93
Advanced learners of Italian		65	67.4
	Contrast E-It advanced learners	$t(63)=3.48$ $p<.0001$	$t(63)=3.88$ $p<.0001$
High Int. learners of English		83	85
High Int. learners of Italian		62	65.7
	Contrast E-It high int. learners	$t(62)=2.52$ $p=.007$	$t(62)=2.91$ $p=.002$

Table 5 compares the accuracy of both groups on the anaphoric binding condition. On this condition, native speakers are not significantly different from each other, by t-test. There are several things to keep in mind while discussing Table 5. First, the kind reading is not available in Italian, so the percentage indicates Italian natives' and learners' accuracy in *rejecting* this interpretation, while the percentage of English natives' and learners' accuracy represents *acceptance*. Secondly, the intermediate group learning Italian is lower in proficiency than the intermediate group learning English, while the two advanced groups are comparable to each other and to native speakers.

Evidence from the syntactic side of the parameter exists in both directions, so one has to factor it out, at this point. Still, learners of Italian are significantly less accurate than learners of English (by about 20 percentage points), but on *both* readings. The significant difference is expected on the Kind reading, where learners of Italian are delearning one interpretation, while learners of English are adding one. However, the same significant difference exists between the groups on the Distributive reading as well, the one that is available in both languages and that learners are supposed to transfer from their L1. The fragility and subtlety of the Italian judgments discussed above may be a confounding factor in this comparison. The accuracy results point to the conclusion that the Italian → English direction of learning *is* the easier one of the two. However, this difference could be due to the learnability situation as well as the quality of the input, and even to a combination of the two factors.

In sum, this study looked at the L2 acquisition of “invisible” semantic properties parametrically related to visible word order differences between Italian and English. Parametric restructuring was attested in both learning directions. In the English → Italian direction, the semantic property was acquired based on positive evidence for the syntactic side of the parameter, overcoming a POS situation. The learners were also aware of the unified strategy languages use in assigning object and kind-reference to nominal

structures. These results are compatible with the parametric analysis proposed by Longobardi.

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Department of Linguistics
University of Iowa
557 EPB
Iowa City, IA, 52242
USA

Roumyana-slabakova@uiowa.edu