
The term "near-native" may confound two very different situations:

incompleteness of L2 grammars: absence in the near-native grammar of a property required by the native grammar

--> this predicts random, inconsistent, indeterminate judgements

cut to the chase: this is what English speakers produce in restructuring contexts (see below) with unaccusative verbs in Italian

sensitive to semantic but not syntactic aspects of unaccusativity (L1 influence)

divergence of L2 grammars: near-native grammar contains representations of L2 properties that are different from the native representations

--> this predicts determinate judgements that differ systematically from native judgements

cut to the chase: this is what French speakers produce in restructuring contexts (see below) with unaccusative verbs in Italian

sensitive to both semantic and syntactic aspects of unaccusativity (indirect typological/historical influence)

"paired unaccusatives": unaccusative verbs with either transitive (e.g. ‘melt’) or unergative (e.g. correre ‘run’ in Italian) counterparts

Review: some simple syntactic tests for unaccusativity in Italian

1) selection of auxiliary *essere* ‘be’ in "passato prossimo" past tense

Mario e/*ha andato a casa
is/has gone to house
‘Mario went home.’

NOTE: In French, while some unaccusative verbs take *etre*, ‘be’, as auxiliary in the passe compose past tense, most take *avoir*, ‘have’; in Old French, however, more of the unaccusative verbs took *etre* in the passe compose

2) *ne*-cliticization

Mario ha letto molte lettere Mario ne ha letto molte
has read many letters of=them has read many
Mario read a lot of letters.'  ‘Mario has read a lot of them.’

Sono arrivate molte lettere.  Ne sono arrivate molte.
‘A lot of letters arrived.’  ‘A lot of them arrived.’

Hanno lavorato molte persone.  Ne hanno lavorato molte.
‘A lot of people worked.’  ‘A lot of them worked.’

NOTE: In French, unaccusative verbs do not exhibit the same consistency with the French equivalent *en*

3) postverbal subjects (see example immediately above)

4) auxiliary usage in restructuring constructions with and without "clitic climbing"

a) *dovere*, ‘have to’, takes *avere*, ‘have’, as its auxiliary in the passato prossimo past tense

Maria ha dovuto.
       has had=to
       ‘Maria had to.’

b) in "restructuring" constructions, in which an unaccusative verb is embedded under another verb, the superordinate verb may optionally take the *essere* auxiliary typical of unaccusative verbs in the passato prossimo past tense, EVEN IF the superordinate verb itself ordinarily requires an *avere* auxiliary in the passato prossimo; note that this also triggers gender agreement on the superordinate past participle

Maria ha dovuto / e dovuta andare a casa
       has had=to  is had=to go  to house
       ‘Maria had to go home.’

c) a "clitic" element (a pro-form such as a pronoun) may attach to the embedded unaccusative verb; the superordinate verb may still optionally take the *essere* auxiliary in the passato prossimo

Maria ha dovuto / e dovuta andarcì.
       has had=to  is had=to go+there
       ‘Maria had to go there.’

d) the clitic may also attach to the superordinate verb phrase, called "clitic climbing"; if it does, then the superordinate verb must obligatorily take *essere* in the passato prossimo

Maria ci *ha dovuto / e dovuta andare.
       there  has had=to  is had=to go
       ‘Maria had to go there.’

NOTE: While French does not allow restructuring, clitic climbing, or
auxiliary changes when unaccusative verbs are embedded under other verbs, it did so up to the 17th century

Experiment

Subjects: (ages 23-46)
24 English near-native speakers (NNS)
20 French near-native speakers (NNS)

age of exposure: 15+ (18-27)
average length of exposure: 9 (5-15)

36 control native speakers (NS) in Edinburgh

Criteria for inclusion: native-like performance from the point of view of fluency and accuracy (although phonological accuracy was not taken into account)

Procedure

magnitude estimation - every sentence rated relative to the initial sentence

Design and Materials

48 sentences and unspecified filler
2 versions of each sentence type with different lexical items (both of equivalent length and using high-frequency words)

Results

Semantic (unaccusative hierarchy)

main effect of verb category
no interaction with native language

--> subjects sensitive to same lexical-semantic distinctions, regardless of L1

significant differences: change of location vs. paired unergative
(*ha venuto vs. *ha corso a casa)

change of location vs. paired transitive
(*ha venuto vs. *ha aumentato)

interaction of auxiliary type x L1

--> subjects do not distinguish between *essere* and *avere* in the same way across languages

interaction of auxiliary type x verb category

--> the distinction between *essere* and *avere* auxiliaries is a function of the position of the unaccusative verb along the hierarchy


significant differences: all pairwise comparisons except "*ha corso a casa"
in native speakers

change of location vs. continuation of condition
(*ha venuto vs. *ha rimasto)
in near-native speakers (i.e. two highest
categories)

Syntactic (restructuring constructions)

Figure 3

main effect of L1
main effect of syntactic category (restructured vs. unrestructured)
interaction of syntactic category x L1

significant differences: *essere* vs. *avere*
(French native speakers only)

Italian vs. English native speakers
(*non ha potuto venire* only)
(*non e potuto venire* p < .06)

Figure 4

main effect of L1
main effect of syntactic category (restructured vs. unrestructured)
interaction of syntactic category x L1

significant differences: *essere* vs. *avere*
(French native speakers only)

French vs. Italian/English native speakers
(*non e potuto andarci* only)

English vs. Italian native speakers
(*non ha potuto andarci* only)
(*non e potuto andarci* "just misses" significance)

Figure 2

main effect of syntactic category (restructured vs. unrestructured)
interaction of syntactic category x L1

significant differences: *essere* vs. *avere*
(French and Italian native speakers only)

Summary

1) English native speakers give indeterminate judgements in all three
restructuring contexts
2) Italian native speakers show obligatory *essere* with clitic climbing and optional *essere* under restructuring with no clitic climbing

3) French native speakers allow *essere* only with clitic climbing

Conclusions

1) There are subtle native vs. near-native differences

2) Positive evidence is not sufficient for acquisition
   a) relevance and salience of positive evidence is a matter of degree
   b) some learners are in a better position to notice the relevance of positive evidence (apparently based on their L1)

3) Both French and English near-native speakers show mastery of the relevant lexical-semantic distinctions regarding unaccusativity

4) As for the structural distinctions regarding unaccusativity in Italian,
   a) English native speakers are indeterminate in their judgements (and therefore show an "incomplete" grammar)
   b) French native speakers differ in their judgements from Italian native speakers (and therefore show a "divergent" grammar)

5) This cannot be straight L1 transfer
   a) The French native speakers do not overgeneralize *avere* to clitic climbing contexts (as would be the case in French with *avoir*); instead they show a creepy diachronic "sensitivity" to the typology and history of French
   b) The English native speakers do not overgeneralize *avere* at all (they are simply unsure)