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LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS OF EXPLICIT INPUT ON GENERAL FEATURES OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN L2 ITALIAN

This study investigates syntactic-distributional and pragmatic features of discourse markers in FL Italian. Ten students received 14 weeks of explicit instruction (PPP framework), while another ten formed a control group. The data, 3,5 hours of transcribed asymmetrical interactions, underwent both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Results show that, longitudinally, explicit instruction significantly improves discourse marker polyfunctionality and idiosyncratic use. A smaller effect was observed on position variability, with no major differences in grammatical heterogeneity, accumulation and chaining, interchangeability or priming. These findings support the integration of explicit instruction into spoken language teaching for more effective pedagogical planning and targeted L2 instruction.

Keywords: L2 Italian, discourse markers, explicit input, Serbian-speaking learners, ITALSERB learner corpus.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (DMs), words and expressions that frequently appear in everyday speech, such as the Italian *allora* ‘well’, *e* ‘and’, *insomma* ‘in short’, *voglio dire* ‘I mean’ and numerous others, are a key component of pragmatic-discourse competence of non-native speakers. Although interest in the role of DMs in second or foreign language (L2) acquisition has increased since 2000 (Fung & Carter 2007, Polat 2011, Nigoević & Sučić 2011, Jafrancesco 2015, Ferroni 2020, Ni 2023), the research on L2 Italian has yet to generate a broader, systematic theoretical description of the general features of DMs (cfr. De Marco 2016, Mascherpa 2016, Nuzzo & Santoro 2017, De Cristofaro & Badan 2019, Ceković *in press, forthcoming*). Furthermore,

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the impact of different instructional modalities (particularly explicit versus implicit instruction) on these general features remains insufficiently explored, with only a limited number and range of studies addressing this topic (Jones & Carter 2014, Ceković 2016, *forthcoming*, De Cristofaro & Badan 2019, De Marco & Paone 2022, De Marco 2023). Within the framework of our broader research project on Italian DMs¹, this study aims at contribute specifically to this underexplored area.

From both a theoretical and empirical standpoint we explore and illustrate a set of general, syntactic-distributional and pragmatic features of DMs in L2 Italian, previously identified by Ceković (*in press*): grammatical origin, position, accumulation and chaining, interchangeability, priming, idiosyncrasy, polyfunctionality. Our primary aim is to examine the longitudinal effects of explicit instructional training by comparing the spoken production of intermediate-level learners in experimental and control groups, in order to determine weather and in which ways the explicit input influences these general features of DMs.

For the theoretical, functional framework used to describe DMs and their features in L2 Italian, we draw on Bazzanella's (1995, 2001) pragmatic description and categorization of DMs in L1 Italian, which distinguishes between their interactional functions (e. g., turn-taking, turn-filling and yielding, interrupting, attention-getting and back-channelling, controlling and confirming reception, seeking and expressing agreement, phatic function, modulation) and metatextual functions (demarcation, focalization and reformulation – including paraphrase, correction, exemplification).

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of excerpts from the ITALSERB learner corpus (*ITALiano dei SERBofoni*, Ceković-Rakonjac 2013, Janković 2024), which includes recordings of Serbian-speaking students at the intermediate level of proficiency in L2 Italian, provides data for both the experimental and control groups. These findings, viewed as reflections of the learners' ability to regulate interaction and manage discourse, aim to support the broader systematic description of DMs in second languages contexts and contribute to more effective pedagogical planning in the teaching of spoken L2 Italian and beyond.

Following these introductory observations, the next section of the paper will present its methodological foundations, providing basic information about the participants, the data collection process and the corpus on which the research is based. This is followed by the analysis section, where we will examine the target category of DMs and its seven crucial characteristics, illustrating each one with examples of use by participants from both the experimental and control groups. In the final part of the paper, we will identify the similarities and differences between the two groups

¹ The paper is based on our doctoral dissertation (Ceković 2016) on DMs in spoken L2 Italian. The findings presented here were originally delivered at the 8th International Congress of Applied linguistics Today, "Modern Approaches to Old and New Challenges – ALT8", held at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, from May 23 to 25, 2025.

regarding the use of DMs and their main features, aiming to explain such similarities and differences through the presence or absence of explicit instruction. We will also outline possible future directions for research in this field.

2. METHODOLOGY

The simple random sample used in this study consists of 20 Serbian-speaking university students in their third year of Italian language and literature studies at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, all at an intermediate level of competence. For the purposes of this research, the students were divided in two groups: one experimental group (EG) and one control group (CG), with 10 students each (S1-S10 and S11-S20).² All participants were female, with an average age of 22,3 years. They had two years of prior Italian language study (L2), English as their L3, various other languages as L4 or L5 (German, Polish, Norwegian, French, Spanish, Catalan, Russian, Greek, Japanese). Their stays in Italy ranged from 0 to 90 days and their contact with Italian (L2) occurred primarily during lessons and through media exposure.³

The instructional training, to which only EG was exposed (unlikely the CG), was conducted within the *Contemporary Italian language* course in the third year of study (5th and 6th semester), over a period of 14 weeks. The instruction consisted of providing explicit input regarding the forms and functions (Ellis 2001) of Italian DMs, as well as the opportunity to practice them in the classroom. The instructions were carried out according to the Presentation – Practice – Production (PPP) teaching framework (McCarthy & Carter 1995).

The goal of the PPP framework is to develop both declarative and procedural knowledge in learners, that is, knowledge about forms and functions (through the presentation phase), as well as the ability to apply the acquired knowledge in communication (the practice and production phases). Therefore, the main aim of the PPP framework is the development of language skills and productive use of language, i.e., language practice and production. In addition, this framework aligns with Anderson's (1982) skill acquisition model, according to which the cognitive phase, where the learner consciously makes an effort to acquire a given form and meaning (presentation) is followed by the associative phase, where declarative knowledge is transferred into procedural knowledge (practice) and, finally, by the autonomous phase, in which the learner acquires the ability to use the language spontaneously (production).

² Although small samples are typical for this kind of study, especially longitudinal ones, it is important to understand that a smaller sample inevitably limits the generalizability of the findings.

³ Six students have never been to Italy; one student stayed in Italy for 1 day and another for 90 days. The average length of stay for all the other participants was 15 and a half days. For a more detailed description of the sample, see Ceković 2016: 153-160.

The explicit input involved induction, aiming to guide students to focus their attention on forms and to formulate metalinguistic hypotheses, integrating both form and functions of DMs. The input was oriented toward the students' productive mastery of DMs, with gradually reduced teacher control and increased learner autonomy during production. The experimental participants also received corrective feedback related to DMs, most often in the form of *prompts* (elicitation and repetition, Dilāns 2010).

The materials used during the instructional training included the manual *Hai voluto la bicicletta...* by Zamora *et al.* (2006: 182-206), along with didactic material compiled by the researcher, covering a wide range of DM forms and functions. In all the materials, the identification of marker-related characteristics and functions was carried out according to Bazzanella's (1995) theoretical framework.⁴

For data collection, CILS certification tests (*Certificazione di Italiano come Lingua Straniera*, Barni *et al.* 2009) from the University for Foreigners of Siena were used. These tests consisted of tasks requiring both dialogic and monologic production, including descriptive, narrative, argumentative and expository types. The tests corresponded to the B1 target level at the end of the second year of study, when the pre-test was administrated and to the B2 target level 12 months later, at the end of the third year, when the six-week delayed post-test was conducted, following the instructional period.

When it comes to the topics from the spoken production tasks, participants were asked to respond to questions and actively engage in an exchange (dialogue) or were prompted to deliver an independent oral presentation (monologue). Students were expected to express personal preferences regarding a variety of issues and to describe a book or a provided photograph (B1-level test), as well as to talk about their personality and describe life in their hometown (B2-level test).

The data were extracted from the learner corpus ITALSERB (Ceković-Rakonjac 2013, Janković 2024)⁵ and consist of 40 audio recordings of bidirectional, asymmetrical interaction between students and teachers, totalling three hours and 20 minutes (on average, five minutes per candidate for each test). The recording were orthographically transcribed according to the conventions of the L1 Italian corpus, CLIPS (*Corpora e Lessici di Italiano Parlato e Scritto*, Savy 2005), developed by the University of Naples. It is one of the most advanced notation systems in the Italian-speaking area, enriched with annotations of linguistic, paralinguistic or extralinguistic elements and aligned with the standards of similar projects at the European level. The total number of tokens in the transcripts is 28.658, with an average of 716 tokens per transcript.

⁴ The description of the instruction is provided in full in Ceković 2016 and partially in Ceković 2018.

⁵ It is a large-scale L2 corpus (currently under revision), consisting of 25 hours of recorded spoken production by 174 students of Italian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. The corpus is suitable for both cross-sectional and longitudinal research on L2 Italian acquisition, as its structure allows insight into learners' interlanguage at different stages of acquisition.

3. ANALYSIS

Furthermore we will analyse qualitatively and quantitatively and support our findings from the corpus regarding the use of DMs in, on one hand, EG and on the other, CG of informants, on both tests (pre-test and post-test). Correlating the evidence from the corpus with seven crucial features of DMs identified in L2 Italian (Ceković *in press*) we will try to establish the similarities and differences in the use of markers in the two groups of students.

By *discourse marker*, let us first clarify, we refer to words and expressions such as the second (underlined) instance of *non so* ‘I don’t know’ used by the student in the following exchange, as opposed to the first instance in the same utterance, which, in this case, does not perform a pragmatic-discursive function.⁶

- (1) E: {<NOISE> <ehm> quale<ee> tema ha scelto}, XXXXXX, per la prima prova?
 C: per la prima <ehm> <inspiration> questa<aa> ultima
 E: <mhmh> cioè?
 C: se tu potessi scegliere un lavoro che cosa ti piacerebbe fare
 E: <ahah!> {<NOISE> qua+ / cosa cosa le piacerebbe fare?}
 C: non so ancora ma <breath> forse<ee> <tongue-click> <ehm>
 <inspiration> non so mischiare<ee> <eeh> l’italiano e la musica cioè fare qualcosa<aa> <ehm> in relazione<ee> con la
 E: <mhmh>
 C: musica
 E: <mhmh> (EG: S8, B2)

Similarly, in example (2a), the underlined expression *e così* is used with a marker function, in contrast to example (2b), where its non-pragmatic use is illustrated.

- (2a) C: <tongue-click> <eeh> sempre / non non è non è possibile andare sulla strada e non dire ciao, ciao, come va e così
 E: <mhmh> (EG: S6, B2)

⁶ In the orthographic transcription, the following symbols were used: *C*(andidato) candidate, *E*(saminatore) examiner, XXXXXX protected (anonymized) data, < > transcriber’s comments (filled pauses, short (*sp*) or long (*lp*) unfilled pauses, *back-channels*, drawing, non-verbal and non-vocal phenomena), + truncated words, _ interruption within a word, / false start, * ungrammatical forms, # inter-turn overlap, { } overlap of acoustic phenomena with text. The symbols used at the end of each example indicate whether the speaker belongs to the control group (CG) or the experimental group (EG), along with the corresponding subject number (S1-S20) and the proficiency level at which they were tested (B1 or B2).

- (2b) C: *in questo tempo sono un po' <laugh> malinconica #<E> <laugh>#*
E: #<C> <mhmh>#
C: *e così ho<oo> deciso di parlare di mia città*
E: <mhmh> (KG: S20, B2)

3.1. Grammatical origin

In our learner corpus sample DMs appear both as single words and multi-word expressions (*alla fine* ‘at the end’, *al primo posto* ‘in the first place’, *eccetera* ‘and so on’, *per/ad esempio* ‘for example’, *per me* ‘for me’, *prima di tutto* ‘first of all’), as well as entire sentences (*come si chiama* ‘what’s called’, *come si dice* ‘how do you say it’, *come posso dire?* ‘how can I say it?’, *non (lo) so* ‘I don’t know’, *non so come si dice* ‘I don’t know how to say it’, *va bene* ‘okay’, etc.).

During the analysis, we also observed that certain forms frequently occur in pairs, which raised the question of whether to present them as individual items or not. Ultimately, we opted for group representation in cases of combinations (often prosodically isolated) that appear frequently in our corpus and in those of other researchers (cfr. Jafrancesco 2015). This is primarily the case with the interjections *ah* ‘ah’ and *eh* ‘eh’ in combination with *sì* ‘yes’ or *no* ‘no’, as well as with the previously mentioned combination *non so* with *come si dice*, which was found across both groups of informants.

The analysis highlighted that, from a grammatical perspective, DMs in L2 Italian may originate from heterogeneous parts of speech, as shown in Table 1, which presents parallel data on their occurrence in both the experimental and control groups of informants (cfr. Ceković 2016: 173-179, *in press*).⁷

Although the inclusion of interjections within the functional category of DMs is debated by some authors, findings from our corpus suggest that this part of speech also can fulfil a pragmatic-discourse function. For this reason, it has been included in the Table alongside other grammatical categories.

Part of speech	Experimental group	Control group
nouns	<i>un po'</i> ‘a little’	<i>un po' / poco</i> ‘a little’, <i>un pochino</i> ‘just a tiny bit’
pronouns	<i>nient'altro</i> ‘nothing else’, <i>niente di interessante</i> ‘nothing interesting’, <i>niente di speciale</i> ‘nothing special’, <i>(qual)cos'altro</i> ‘something like that’	<i>niente di speciale</i> ‘nothing special’, <i>(qual)cos'altro</i> ‘something else’, <i>qualcosa così</i> ‘something like that’, <i>qualcosa del genere</i> ‘something of that kind’

⁷ Due to the limited scope of this paper, we are primarily able to present data from a group perspective, except in cases where individual analysis is particularly purposeful, such as in Section 3.6, which addresses idiosyncratic usage.

verbs	<i>credo</i> ‘I believe’, <i>diciamo</i> ‘let’s say’, <i>direi</i> ‘I’d say’, <i>mi sembra</i> ‘it seems to me’, <i>penso</i> ‘I think’	<i>credo</i> ‘I believe’, <i>diciamo</i> ‘let’s say’, <i>mi sembra</i> ‘it seems to me’, <i>penso</i> ‘I think’, <i>sa</i> ‘you know’
adverbs	<i>allora</i> ‘well’, <i>certo</i> ‘of course’, <i>come(?)</i> ‘how(?)’, <i>così</i> ‘like this’, <i>ecco</i> ‘let’s see’, <i>forse</i> ‘perhaps’, <i>generalmente</i> ‘generally’, <i>insomma</i> ‘in short’, <i>magari</i> ‘maybe’, <i>naturalmente</i> ‘naturally’, <i>no(n)</i> ‘no’, <i>sì</i> ‘yes’, <i>okay</i> ‘okay’, <i>poi</i> ‘then’, <i>proprio</i> ‘exactly’, <i>soprattutto</i> ‘above all’, <i>specialmente</i> ‘especially’, <i>veramente</i> ‘truly’	<i>allora</i> ‘well’, <i>certo</i> ‘of course’, <i>così</i> ‘like this’, <i>davvero</i> ‘really’, <i>ecco</i> ‘let’s see’, <i>forse</i> ‘perhaps’, <i>neanche</i> ‘not even’, <i>no(n)</i> ‘no(t)’, <i>perlopiù</i> ‘for the most part’, <i>poi</i> ‘then’, <i>probabilmente</i> ‘probably’, <i>proprio</i> ‘exactly’, <i>sì</i> ‘yes’, <i>specialmente</i> ‘especially’, <i>veramente</i> ‘truly’
conjunctions	<i>anche</i> ‘also’, <i>cioè</i> ‘that is to say’, <i>quindi</i> ‘so’	<i>anche</i> ‘also’, <i>cioè</i> ‘that is to say’, <i>dunque</i> ‘so’
interjections	<i>ah</i> ‘ah’, <i>ahah</i> ‘ahah’, <i>be’/beh</i> ‘well’, <i>eh</i> ‘eh’, <i>mah</i> ‘meh’, <i>mhmh</i> ‘mhmh’, <i>oh</i> ‘oh’	<i>ah</i> ‘ah’, <i>be’/beh</i> ‘well’, <i>boh</i> ‘I have no idea’, <i>mhmh</i> ‘mhmh’

Table 1: Grammatical heterogeneity of DMs in the informants’ speech

3.2. Position

The analysis of the corpus further indicates that Italian DMs in L2 do not have fixed positions and can be found in initial, medial and final positions within the utterance. The size of the corpus allowed us to identify individual forms that occur in all tree positions. Among those is the second most frequent marker in the entire corpus, *non (lo) so* (with *sì* being the most frequent), whose initial position is illustrated in example (3), medial position in examples (4) and (6), and final position in example (5).

- (3) C: *di solito* <ehm> *indosso*<oo> *i jeans, una maglietta, le scarpe da ginnastica*<aa> <eeh> *ma anche amo*<oo> *vestir+ vestirmi elegante*<ee> *in qualche# occasione speciale*
E: #<C> <mhmh># *per esempio?*
C: <eeh> *non lo so* *una festa*<aa>, *un compleanno*<oo> (CG: S11, B1)
- (4) E: *come fa a conciliare il desiderio di avere cose belle e costose dall’altro lato?*
C: *mah* *quando*<oo> *non so* <eeh> *forse* *quando rispa_rmio* (EG: S10, B2)

- (5) *E: e secondo te, è meglio essere ottimista o pessimista?*
C: <ehm> boh <eeh> forse <eeh> e+ e+ essere pessimista perchè non puoi <eeh> essere deluso <laugh> quando <ehm> vedi la <eeh> realtà delle <sp> delle situazioni che ti succedono, {[whispering] non so} #<E> <ehm>#
E: #<C> <unclear># <ehm> facciamo <unclear> questa domanda, e<ee> qual è il tipo di persona con cui vai più d'accordo? (CG: S18, B2)

Certain categories of DMs, however, show a preference for specific locations: for instance, turn-taking markers tend to occur in initial position (*mah* in the previous example (4) and *boh* in (5)), as do reception (*eh sì* in one of the following examples, (7)) and agreement markers (*sì* in (9) and, along with *certo*, in (10)). Fillers (*non lo so* in (6)), exemplification (*per esempio* in (7)) and paraphrase indicators (*insomma* in (19)) typically occur in medial position. Finally, demarcation markers that simultaneously serve the yield the turn often appear in final position (*eccetera* in (6)).

- (6) *C: è interessante quando<oo> <eeh> lavorando puoi <eeh> stringere le nuove amicizie, i nuovi contatti <ehm> <tongue-click> non lo so <eeh> adattarsi ai<i> a a un'altra clim<mm>a, <ehm> l'altri abitudini, eccetera*
E: quali lingue hai scelto di studiare in questa<aa> facoltà? (CG: S12, B2)

Nevertheless, we also observed instances of forms that, deviating from their usual collocation, occupy other positions, as is the case, for example, with final *penso* in (7), *mi sembra* in (8) or *ecco* in (21). This occurs exclusively with participants from the EG (S3 and S4), most notably with S4, in the post-test.

- (7) *C: se l'anno scorso abbiamo comprato per esempio due paia di<i> scarpe quest'anno magari non ci servono <laugh> anche due paia, penso*
E: per evitare di fare uno shopping noioso dice <eh>?
C: <eh> sì (EG: S4, B2)

- (8) *E: seconda immagine?*
C: sì
E: va bene
C: <eeh> <unclear> <eeh> questa gen+ gente sta <eeh> aspettando autobus o
E: <mhmh>
C: tram <eeh> alcuni s+ stanno siedendo alcuni <eeh> s+ stanno in piedi
E: <mhmh>
C: a piedi <eeh> <eeh> questo ques+ quest'uomo è<ee> nervoso mi sembra
E: <mhmh>
C: perché ha le <eeh> le le dita in in boc_ca
E:<mhmh> (EG: S3, B1)

3.3. Accumulation and chaining

Closely related to the described phenomenon is the possibility of accumulation (arranging forms with different functions) and chaining (linking forms with the same or similar functions), which characterize markers in L2. The instances of accumulation identified in the corpus primarily involve sequences in which some of the markers serve a modulatory function: as in example (9), where *non lo so* functions as modulation device, while *e così* serves as demarcation and turn-taking marker.

- (9) C: *lo ha perso* <sp> *quando era* <eeh> *settimo o sesto mese*
 E: #<C> <ah!> *okay* # *okay*
 C: #<E> *non lo so* # *e così* <laugh>
 E: *e così*
 C: *ahah* [whispering]
 E: *è un po' triste questo* #<C> *libro*#, *vero?*
 C: #<E> *sì* #
 E: *va bene, grazie* (EG: S10, B1)

In addition, we identified several examples of “chaining” that concern expressing (dis)agreement, such as *sì, sì, certo* in (10) or *no, sì, sì, no*, as well as modulation (with turn-taking) through the use of specific forms, such as *non so, forse* (4) or *boh, forse* (5).

- (10) E: *le piace passare il tempo* #<C> *libero* #
 C: #<E> <cough> #
 E: *con altre perso* <oo> *ne?*
 C: *sì, sì, certo* <eeh> <ehm> *i miei amici sono* <eeh> <laugh> *persone molto interessante* <ee> <eeh> *è mai* <eeh> / *non è mai* <eeh> *noioso stare con* #<E> *loro* #
 E: #<C> *con loro* # (CG: S18, B1)

We also recorded certain examples of the repetition of the same marker form across both groups of informants. This repetition is associated with markers of agreement or disagreement, such as *sì, sì, sì* or *no, no*, and serves to create an effect of intensification, reinforced in example (11) by the use of the marker *per niente*.

- (11) C: <inspiration> <eeh> #<E> <breath> #
 E: #<C> *lei porta* # *anche le gonne, le gonne sportive*
 C: {<laugh> *no, no*}
 E: {<laugh> #<C> *no, non le* #}
 C: {<laugh> #<E> *no, non mi* # *piacciono per niente*} (CG: S17, B1)

However, repetition does not only occur in its immediate form but also in intermediate repetition, where specific material (markers) is inserted. For example, in (12), *eh sì* serves as modulation device with agreement, followed by *un po'* for modulation and then a repeated *sì*, which expresses agreement. It is important to note that, regarding repetition, the corpus also includes instances such as the interjections *ahah* in (9) or *mhmh* (16), which result from the reduplication of the basic forms *ah* or *mh*.

- (12) E: *e<ee> <ehm> e questo crea stress?*
 C: *#<E> <eh> sì un po' # sì*
 E: *#<C> <laugh> # <ehm>* (EG: S4, B2)

3.4. Interchangeability

Regarding interchangeability, the feature whereby markers can be mutually substituted when performing the same function, it is interesting to note that in the case of such forms, for instance, demarcation markers that also often function as turn-yielding signals, like *eccetera* (6) and *(e) così via* (13), we observed a tendency across both groups for individual informants to consistently use only one of the two available forms, effectively excluding the other. Supporting this observation is the use of the form *eccetera* by informants from the EG, namely S2 and S9 (in the pre-test), S1 and S2 (in the post-test). Similarly, in the CG, *eccetera* was used by S13, S14, S16 (in the pre-test) and by S12, S17, S20 (in the post-test). Notably absent from these lists are informant S10 from the EG and S18 from the CG, the only students from both groups who used the DM *(e) così via* and only in the post-test.

Such is the case in the exchange that follows, where the selected topic for speech production is stated in full at the beginning of the transcript and then partially repeated by the student, who signals its incompleteness precisely through the use of this marker, as well as, judging by all indicators, her readiness to yield the turn to the interlocutor.

- (13) SE l'argomento: *andare in giro per negozi, provarsi abiti e scarpe: è un'attività che ti rilassa e ti diverte o è un dovere necessario? (Prova n.1) D*
 E: *bene, XXXXXX, sentiamo qual è<ee> <eeh> il primo tema che #<C> ha scelto <unclear>#?*
 C: *#<E> <ehm> mi è# sembrato<oo> più interessante il tema andare in giro per negozi*
 E: *<ah!>*
 C: *e così via*
 E: *ecco*
 C: *<eeh> perchè<ee> <eeh> vivo qui a Belgrado e mi piace andare e {<NOISE> vedere le cose che si vendono} nei negozi de<ee>+ dell'abbigliamento* (EG: S10, B2)

In addition to those already mentioned, the forms used for exemplification, such as *per esempio* in (7) and *ad esempio* in the following example, are also interchangeable in our corpus data.

- (14) C: [...] *e poi non ci sono molte e* <eeh> *opportunità per loro* <eeh> *ad esempio*
a Mallorca [foreign word] *vivono dal turismo* (CG: S12, B2)

3.5. Priming

Priming is manifested as a cause-and-effect reaction in which the use of a certain form by the speaker serves as a *trigger* for the interlocutor to subsequently use the same form. Examples of this phenomenon, characteristic of dialogic exchange, such as in (15), where the primed *e poi* used by the student coincides with the overlapping of the final part of the teacher's turn, can be found in both groups of informants. However, it appears in only a small number of cases: 3 in the EG and 5 in the CG.

- (15) E: *va bene, e poi* dopo #<C> *cosa succede una volta?*#
C: #<E> *e, e poi*# *non so come*<ee> <eeh> *ad un momento mi sento stanchis-*
sima<aa> (CG: S16, B2)

Similarly, in the following example (16), the back-channel *mhmh*, used by the student to signal attentive listening to the examiner while refraining from taking the floor, can be interpreted as the result of priming. Conversely, due to the spontaneity of the interaction, as seen in the previously cited corpus example (9), it may also happen that the student, in the role of speaker, uses the marker *e così*, thereby causing the priming of the same form in the interlocutor, the teacher.

- (16) E: <mhmh> *okay, adesso passiamo alla prova numero due*
C: <mhmh>
E: *di che cosa vorrebbe parlare?*
C: <ehm> *il mio passatempo* #<E> *preferito*#
E: #<C> *bene*# *sentiamo* (CG: S11, B1)

3.6. Idiosyncrasy

When it comes to repetition, even a superficial look at our data in the initial phases of corpus analysis indicated the existence of the idiolectal preferences in the use of DMs by the informants. The student's tendency to use certain forms more frequently, often as specific verbal tic, primarily functioning as discourse fillers, supports the idiosyncratic nature of DMs in L2. We found numerous instances of such usage in our corpus, as illustrated in the following example, which contains three such forms: *forse*, as well as *non (lo) so* and *come si dice*, expressions that also reflect the student's need to explicitly request metalinguistic support.

- (17) *C: mi piace spendere i soldi, non lo so <sp> forse ai libri o<oo> <sp> non lo so <eeh> mi piace <ehm> <eeh> {[whispering] come si dice<ee>} <ehm> <sp> <ehm> avere un<nn> <eeh> grande <eeh> <sp> <breath> <eeh> un grande <eeh> {[whispering] come si dice} <sp> mi / <eeh> avere abbastanza soldi per comprare una cosa, non lo so, come <inspiration> una Ti-Vu o forse<ee> kompjuter [foreign word] o forse queste cose che sono di<ii> <eeh> di più valore <eeh> non le cose<ee> non lo so ordinari <breath> <lp> e<ee> e<ee> {[whispering] cosa potrei dire} <laugh> <eeh> <lp> {[whispering] non so}*
(EG: S9, B2)

Among the informants from the EG, a clear preference for the use of the most frequent marker *sì* is shown by students S8 and S2. Other students stand out based on the frequency of specific forms: S9, who frequently uses the marker *forse*, especially in the post-test, along with other forms illustrated in the previous example (17); or S4, who particularly often uses multiple markers, such as *eh sì* (7) and (12), *non (lo) so*, *diciamo*, *ecco* in (21) and (22).

In the CG, preferences for the frequent use of the DM *sì* were also observed, particularly in students S15 and S16, as well as in S19, who also uses a large number of other forms, such as *non (lo) so* and *non (lo) so cosa dire* or *anche*. Similarly, student S20, in addition to the aforementioned forms, such as *anche* and *sì* in (18), also frequently uses the DMs *diciamo* and *forse*.

- (18) *E: si ricorda di un sogno, per esempio, quando era bambina?*
C: <eeh> #<E> sì<ii>#
E: #<C> cosa# sognava di diventare?
C: anche questo che {<laugh> sono anche oggi}
E: modella? <laugh>
C: sì, modella #<E> <laugh> <unclear>#
E: #<C> <ahah> bene#
(CG: S20, B1)

However, it can be noted that the effect of idiosyncrasy is more pronounced in post-test results of the EG informants, as the most frequent use of certain forms comes precisely from the students in this group: *sì* appears 29 times in S8, 26 times in S2 and *forse* 19 times in S9. In contrast, in the CG, the most frequent form is also *sì*, but it was used “only” 18 times by S16, 15 times by S15 and 12 times by both S19 and S20.

3.7. Polyfunctionality

Polyfunctionality is manifested through the ability of DMs to simultaneously perform a wide range of pragmatic functions in interaction. In this sense, it is possible to distinguish two types of multifunctionality of DMs in Italian as an L2, not only as an L1 (Bazzanella 1995):

- *syntagmatic polyfunctionality*, which is realized on the syntagmatic level and refers to the fact that a single form, in a given context, can simultaneously be assigned multiple functions;
- *paradigmatic polyfunctionality*, realized on the paradigmatic level, whereby the same form, in different contexts, can perform several different functions.

Thus, the DM *insomma* is syntagmatically polyfunctional, as in the following example from the production of a subject from the EG, where it can simultaneously be assigned the functions of paraphrasing and demarcation:

- (19) C: <eeh> mi piace ascoltare la musica italia<aa>na, leggere i libri #<E>
<eeh>#
E: #<C> <mhmh>#
C: parlare con<nn> mia sorella <eeh> uscire con gli amici in discoteca<aa>
<sp> insomma divertirmi
E: <mhmh> ok, grazie (EG: S1, B1)

A similar case, with a participant from the CG, involves the use of the marker *è tutto*, which in the following example can simultaneously be considered as performing both the function of demarcation and yielding the floor:

- (20) C: <eeh> in questi giorni non ho <laugh> molto passatempo<oo> perché devo studiare, ma quando lo ho <ehm> amo passeggiare con gli amici<i> <ehm> <tongue-click> di solito<oo> vado a casa perché non vivo a Belgrado e<ee> lì<i> <eeh> <eeh> ho molti amici che<ee> di solito andiamo <eeh> un caffè, chiacchieriamo, <ehm> amo anche leggere un libro<oo> o guardare film, amo molto la musica, <inspiration> <ehm> <tongue-click> <lp> <breath> non so <laugh> <sp> è tutto<oo> <laugh> <ehm> <NOISE> <lp> <tongue-click> amo ballare<ee> e<ee> alla sera forse<ee> vado con gli amici a un *clu[u]_b, una discoteca<aa> <eeh>
E: okay, grazie (CG: S11, B1)

At both levels, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, the DM *ecco* is, for instance, polyfunctional in the corpus. In example (21), it can simultaneously be assigned the functions of yielding the floor and demarcation, while in (22), this marker is used twice by the same participant for the purpose of focalization.

- (21) C: [...] e l'anno scorso ho speso tanti soldi per i regali e <sp> però <sp> non ho rimpianto quello che ho fatto, ecco [whispering]
E: bene, grazie (EG: S4, B2)

- (22) E: <tongue-click> <ehm> *ci sono psicologi che si sono occupati della malattia da shopping, curano depressione, la tristezza, sei d'accordo?*
 C: <eeh> *io ho una {<laugh> malattia di shopping} ecco ho <sp> come tutte le donne io s+ cerco / per per esempio se ho un se ho un problema io cerco di risolverlo con lo shopping <laugh> ecco io sono d'accordo con gli psicologi e<ee>*
 E: *e funziona?*
 C: <ehm> *sì, un po'* (EG: S4, B2)

The most functionally variable DM in the corpus is *non (lo) so*, which serves for taking, filling or yielding the turn, as well as for modulation, demarcation and exemplification. It appears to the same extent in both groups of participants and on both tests. Other polyfunctional forms identified in the corpus and produced by the two student groups include the following: *(eh) sì, così, diciamo, no, ecco* (each with at least three functions), as well as the following (with at least two functions): *allora, anche, beh, certo, cioè, come, dunque, eccetera, eh, mah*, and various others.

Our previous study (Ceković *forthcoming*), conducted on the same corpus and participants, and focused on the effect of explicit instruction specifically on polyfunctionality, confirmed that instruction had a positive impact on the multifunctionality of DMs in L2 Italian. Both individually and at the group level, the EG outperformed the CG on the post-test, among other things, in terms of a broader range of marker functionality and a higher number of the most functionally variable forms, which were found precisely in the production of participants from this group.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings obtained through the described longitudinal corpus-based research confirmed, first, that the category of discourse markers is grammatically heterogeneous, in both groups of observed informants and across both tests.

Regarding positional characteristics, the corpus revealed variability in DM positions, but no significant differences were found that could be attributed to either the experimental group or the control group on either test. An exception includes a few forms (*penso, mi sembra, ecco*), which, in addition to their usual positions, also appeared in a new, final position, exclusively among informants from the EG, particularly with student S4 and on the post-test.

As for the possibility of DM accumulation and chaining, no specific differences were found between the EG and CG.

Furthermore, regarding interchangeability, using the example of *eccetera* and *(e) così via*, a preference for only one of the two interchangeable forms was identified in several members of both groups. Still, this may be considered a matter of individual strategy rather than a group effect. Interestingly, only one participant from each

group showed the need to use the marker (*e*) *così via*, and both did so in the post-test. Therefore, we can conclude that the results of the EG and CG do not differ in terms of this marker feature.

Similarly, the conclusion drawn from the corpus analysis regarding the priming feature of markers is that there are no significant differences between the two observed groups.

Finally, the idiosyncratic use of DMs was identified in both groups of students. The observed similarity lies in the use of *sì* as the most frequent form among members of both groups. As for the differences, it can be concluded that the effect of idiosyncrasy is more pronounced in the post-test of the EG, given that the most frequent use of certain forms (*sì, forse*) stems precisely from students in this group.

Therefore, we may conclude, on the one hand, that explicit instruction had no longitudinal effect on most of the general features of DMs identified. On the other hand, we may also conclude that explicit instructional training had a positive impact, most notably on two key features of DMs – idiosyncrasy (as revealed in this study) and polyfunctionality (as established in Ceković *forthcoming* and confirmed here), and to a lesser extent – on slightly more variable DM positions. The findings regarding the more pronounced idiosyncrasy and polyfunctionality of DMs in the EG attributed, based on our results, to the effect of explicit instruction, are potentially applicable in didactics, serving as a tool for more effective selection and definition of specific objectives in L2 teaching.

Future research steps could involve verifying the conclusions of this study through the lens of the missing A and C levels of learner competence, in an effort to contribute to a more comprehensive and systematized approach to these discourse elements in the didactics of Italian as well as other foreign languages.

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**LONGITUDINALNI EFEKTI EKSPPLICITNOG INPUTA NA
OPŠTE ODLIKE DISKURSNIH MARKERA U L2 ITALIJANSKOM**

Rezime

U radu se opserviraju longitudinalni efekti eksplicitnih instrukcija na sintaksičko-distributivne i pragmatičke odlike diskursnih markera u italijanskom kao stranom jeziku. Ispitivani uzorak čini 10 studenata iz eksperimentalne grupe, podvrgnute eksplicitnom instrukcionom treningu s fokusom na forme i funkcije prema okviru Prezentacija – Praksa – Produkcija u trajanju od 14 nedelja, i 10 ispitnika iz kontrolne grupe, lišene takvih instrukcija. Korpus je sačinjen od približno 3 i po sata transkribovanih asimetričnih interakcija, ekstrahovanih iz ITALSERB učeničkog korpusa srbofonih studenata italijanistike. Rezultati kvalitativno-kvantitativne analize korpusa, s jedne strane, ukazuju da se longitudinalni efekti eksplicitnih instrukcija u najvećoj meri odražavaju na polifunkcionalnost i idiosinkratičnost markera, u manjoj meri i na varijabilnost kolokacije. S druge strane, ukazuju i u pogledu njihove gramatičke heterogenosti, kumuliranja i ulančavanja, međurazmenjivosti i primovanja nema razlika između ispitivanih grupa studenata. Rezultati su primenljivi u didaktici razgovornog jezika u vidu sredstva za efikasniji odabir i definisanje specifičnih ciljeva u nastavi ne samo italijanskog već i ostalih stranih jezika.

Ključne reči: italijanski L2, diskursni markeri, eksplicitni input, srbofoni studenti, ITALSERB učenički korpus.