

THE PROSODIC MARKING OF GIVENNESS IN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper compares the prosodic marking of repeated (given) information in English and Italian, with a view to addressing the role of cross-linguistic variation in second language acquisition. The investigation considers the prosodic marking of givenness in monolingual Neapolitan Italian (NI) and Standard Southern British English (SBE) speech, in addition to that of a native NI subject who speaks English at an advanced level (NI-EL2). New and given tokens were generated by a semi-spontaneous card game which repeated referents within noun phrases. While the SBE speakers were found to signal given information through accent distribution and duration, the NI speakers did not appear to encode givenness prosodically: accent distribution, pitch contour and duration were not found to be predictive of givenness. The NI-EL2 speaker showcased accent distribution and pitch contours typical of NI in English tokens, indicating that prosodic transfer is persistent at advanced levels.

1. Introduction

The prosodic marking of given referents (which have been previously mentioned or are expected from the discourse) is characteristic of ‘plastic languages’ such as English and Dutch (Vallduvi 1991). The most notable prosodic correlate of givenness is the absence of a pitch accent on a word which would otherwise be accented, known as deaccentuation (Ladd 1996). Contrastingly, ‘non-plastic languages’ such as Italian and Spanish, which encode information status syntactically, tend to resist the deaccentuation of given referents (Cruttenden 1993, Avasani and Vayra 2005). Cross-linguistic variability in the prosodic marking of information status is problematic in second language acquisition as speakers have been found to transfer native language (L1) prosodic strategies to second language (L2) productions (Raiser and Hiligsmann 2009). The current study presents two investigations: a comparative study of the prosodic marking of givenness in Standard Southern British English (SBE) and Neapolitan Italian (NI)¹, followed by an analysis of prosodic transfer in the English productions of a native NI speaker.

The first section addresses previous research regarding both the prosodic marking of givenness and prosodic transfer in plastic and non-plastic languages. Subsequent sections present the aforementioned investigations. Finally, results are considered in light of implications for further research.

¹ The current study investigates Standard Italian spoken with a Neapolitan accent, rather than the Neapolitan ‘dialect’ which is recognised as a distinct language (UNESCO 2000).

2. Research context

2.1. Plastic languages

In plastic languages, accent distribution functions as a ‘prosodic pointer’ to highlight new/contrastive information and render given information less salient (Avasani and Vayra 2005), as showcased in the following example:

(A) Would you like some CHOCOLATE?

(B) No thanks, I don't EAT chocolate.

In (A) ‘chocolate’ appears as a new referent, which is signalled through accentuation. Conversely, the repetition of ‘chocolate’ in (B) determines its status as given, which is marked accordingly through deaccentuation.

While a large body of research attests the link between deaccentuation and givenness in plastic languages (Terken 1984, Hirschberg 1993, Gussenhoven 2007), a small number of studies reveal conflicting results (e.g. Terken and Hirschberg 1994, Sityaev 2000). This discrepancy may be attributed to the lack of a ‘simplistic binary division’ between new and given information (Baumann 2005). For instance, considerable distance between given co-referents may cause the reintroduction of entities no longer considered given in the immediate context (Sityaev 2000). Similarly, changes in grammatical function and word order may cause accentuation related to syntactic newness, irrespective of discourse related givenness (Terken and Hirschberg 1994).

These studies highlight the need for a more articulated view of what defines ‘givenness’ in intonational analyses: newness and givenness are not dichotomous entities, but points on a scale which accounts for discourse proximity and syntactic relations. Accordingly, in Swerts et al. (2002) Dutch speakers systematically deaccented given information when co-referents were characterised by close proximity, shared syntactic function and surface expression.

2.2. Non-plastic languages

In the aforementioned study, Swerts et al. (2002) compared Italian accentuation strategies to those observed in Dutch and found that given information was not deaccented. This is in line with Ladd’s (1996) observation that non-plastic languages have a fixed accent distribution which tends not to convey information status. Consider the following quote from ex-Italian president Scalfaro.

Italian: [le inchieste] servono a mettere a POSTO cose andate fuori POSTO

English: [the investigations] serve to PUT in place things gone OUT of place

Ladd (1996)

Note that while the given referent *posto* ‘place’ is accentuated in Italian, its English counterpart is obligatorily deaccented.

It is important to note that Italian may deaccentuate given information in certain contexts, for instance, when expressed as a full noun phrase (NP) or clause (Avasani et al. 1995, Farnetani and Zmarich 1997). However, the systematic accentuation of referents which are repeated within NPs has been attested in a number of studies, indicating that NP-internal deaccentuation of givenness is generally avoided in Italian (Swerts et al 2002, Avasani and Vayra 2005).

2.3. Alternative cues

The prosodic encoding of information structure is not limited to accent distribution cross-linguistically (c.f. Nolan and Jónsdóttir 2001, Zerbian et al. 2010). In English, shorter vowel length is associated with given information (Fowler and Housum 1987), although this is perhaps predictable as a correlate of stress (Fry 1958). With regard to Italian, while Avesani (1997) found that given referents were marked with a specific pitch accent (L*), Avesani and Vayra (2005) found that neither pitch accent nor duration acted as an acoustic correlate of givenness. With specific reference to NI, contrastive/narrow focus has been associated with an L+H* pitch accent (D'Imperio 1999). However, in line with previous observations, the prosodic marking of information structure exhibits variation between full constituents and NP-internal referents: as such, phrasal constituent marking is not necessarily a predictor of NP-internal encoding. The current study is unaware of any investigation which considers accentuation strategies pertaining to NP-internal givenness in NI.

In sum, previous studies report varied results regarding the systematicity of the marking of givenness in English and whether it is marked at all in Italian. This may be attributed to differences in the definition of givenness, in addition to methodological inconsistency and regional variation. Rigorously controlled methods such as those outlined in Swerts et al. (2002) provide support for the deaccentuation of givenness in plastic languages and the lack of associated deaccentuation in non-plastic languages. Accordingly, given referents in the current investigation correspond to the discourse and syntactic criteria outlined in section 2.1. With regard to the presence of additional acoustic cues, it is possible that NI signals givenness through alternative prosodic strategies, although research on this point is for the moment inconclusive.

2.4. Prosodic transfer

The acquisition of L2 prosodic strategies has received limited attention in the literature thus far. Amongst studies which have investigated prosodic acquisition, there is a general consensus that non-target like productions persist amongst advanced learners (e.g. Grosser 1993, Raiser 2003). A further point of concurrence is the clear influence of L1 in L2 prosodic learning (e.g. Backman 1979, Jenner 1976, Lepetit 1989). The current study is unaware of any investigations which specifically address prosodic transfer in the marking of information structure for native Italians acquiring English. Nonetheless, a study of native French speakers learning Dutch (non-plastic and plastic languages respectively) revealed a high degree of prosodic transfer of L1 French accentuation strategies in L2 Dutch speech (Rasier and Hiligsmann 2009). These results indicate that the acquisition of plastic prosodic strategies is problematic for native speakers of non-plastic languages. Moreover, a number of studies highlight the role of L1 transfer in other L2 prosodic features, such as duration and PA (Lepetit 1989, Ueyama 2000).

However, defining the precise role of L1 transfer has proved somewhat elusive. A survey of prosodic acquisition across different language backgrounds (Trouvain and Gut 1997) reveals parallels such as reduced pitch range and inappropriate PA assignment, indicating that universal development patterns may play a role in L2 prosodic acquisition. Yet, as Mennen (2006) notes, isolating developmental phenomena from L1 transfer is often problematic. Non-target patterns which are not clearly derived from L1 strategies would provide support for such universals, although as yet there is no strong body of evidence to sustain such claims.

3. Motivation of the current study

The following research questions will be investigated:

1. Do SBE and NI speakers signal givenness through accent distribution? In line with Swerts et al. (2002) it is predicted that SBE and NI productions will pattern with plastic and non-plastic languages respectively: namely, that SBE subjects will deaccent given tokens whereas in NI speakers will accent both new and given tokens.

2. The second question investigates alternative acoustic correlates of givenness:

(a) Are durational differences a predictor of givenness in English and Neapolitan Italian? In line with Fowler and Housum (1987) it is predicted that vowel duration in SBE given tokens will be shorter than that of new tokens. In contrast, it is predicted that NI will exhibit no durational differences, as in Avesani and Vayra (2005).

(b) If NI tokens are accented irrespective of information status, is givenness marked through a specific pitch accent type? In line with Avesani and Vayra (2005), it is predicted that new and given tokens will exhibit no qualitative difference in pitch accent.

3. How does cross-linguistic variation between NI and SBE influence the prosodic treatment of English givenness for a native Neapolitan who speaks English as a second language? There are three potential outcomes:

(a) The speaker may implement strategies similar to those observed in native SBE speech, showcasing no prosodic transfer.

(b) The speaker may implement strategies similar to those observed in native NI speech, showcasing prosodic transfer.

(c) The speaker may exhibit strategies different to those of L1 and L2, representative of a developmental stage.

In line with Raiser and Hilgsmann (2009) and Lepetit (1989) it is predicted that the NI-EL2 speaker's English productions will be strongly characterised by transfer of NI prosodic strategies.

4. Experiment 1

This experiment addresses question 1 and 2a by comparing accent distribution and vowel duration for new and given tokens produced by native SBE and native NI speakers. Question 2b will be investigated through the comparison of new and given pitch contours.

4.1. Method Procedure

5 NI monolinguals and 5 SBE monolinguals were recorded in their homes in Naples (Italy) and Cambridge (UK). Participants were naïve as to the purposes of the experiment. Tokens were elicited in a semi-spontaneous card game in which participants were required to match colours and numbers selected by a native speaker researcher. Participants were given 5 coloured cards with different numbers on them. The researcher initiated each turn by announcing the colour and number on a card. Participants were then required to match the

card in colour or number and announce their choice. The game continued until participants had used all of their cards. Each participant played 10 rounds.

Materials

Tokens selected for analysis were the English number ‘two’ and the Italian colour *blu* ‘blue’ due to their monosyllabic structure and similar vowel qualities. Cards were manipulated in order to elicit 20 phrase-final tokens for each participant: 10 new and 10 given (table 1). Other colours and numbers served as fillers.

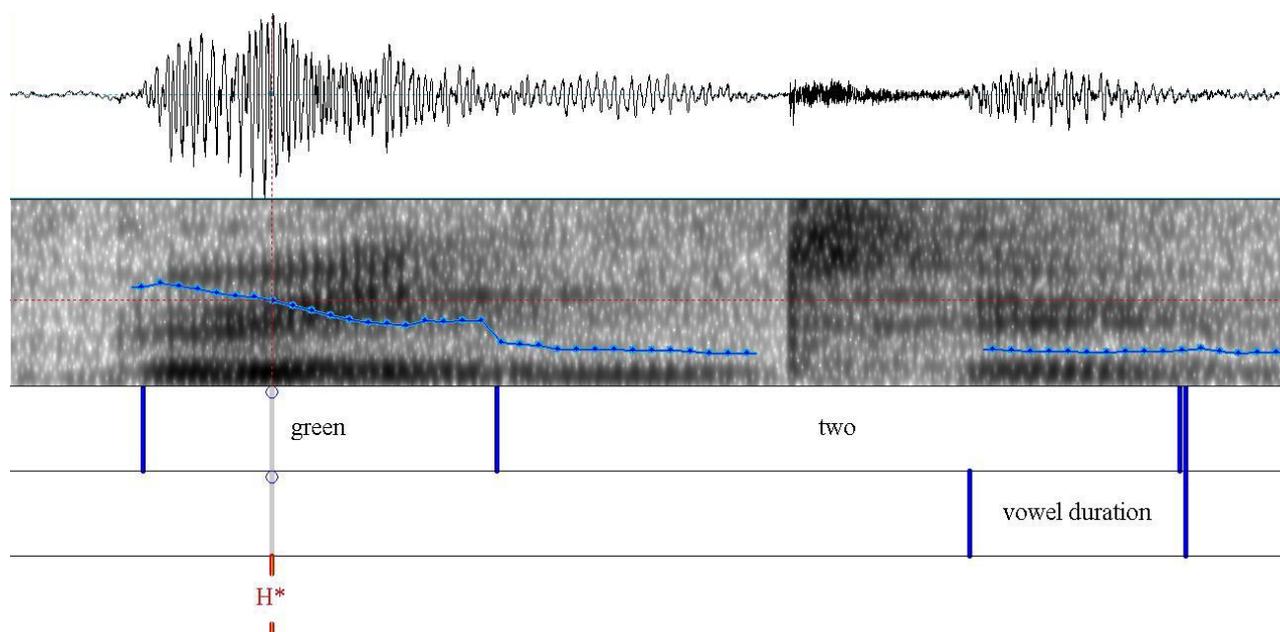
Table 1: Eliciting ‘two’ and *blu* ‘blue’ in new and given contexts

Language	Researcher	Participant	Information status
English	Green three Red two	Green two Green two	New Given
Italian	<i>Sei verde</i> ‘Six green’ <i>Due blu</i> ‘Two blue’	<i>Sei blu</i> ‘six blue’ <i>Sei blu</i>	New Given

Measurements

Tokens were recorded in mono at 16-bit resolution and re-digitized on Praat (5.3.35) at a sampling rate of 44100 HZ. Native speaker researchers listened to unlabeled tokens in order to determine accent distribution. English and Italian pitch accents were classified in accordance with the ToBI annotation system (figure 1 row 3). Vowel duration was measured by examining the waveform and spectrogram in parallel (figure 1 row 2). The English onset was classed as the beginning of F2 after the stop release in conjunction with the appearance of periodic energy in the waveform. In Italian tokens, the onset was determined as the post-lateral rapid rise in amplitude with a shift in formants in conjunction with a change in period shape in the waveform. Vowel offset was measured in all tokens as the drop in amplitude after the termination of vocal fold striations on the spectrogram.

Figure 1: Sample acoustic measurements for (green) ‘two’: duration (ms, row 2) and pitch accent (row 3).



4.2. Results

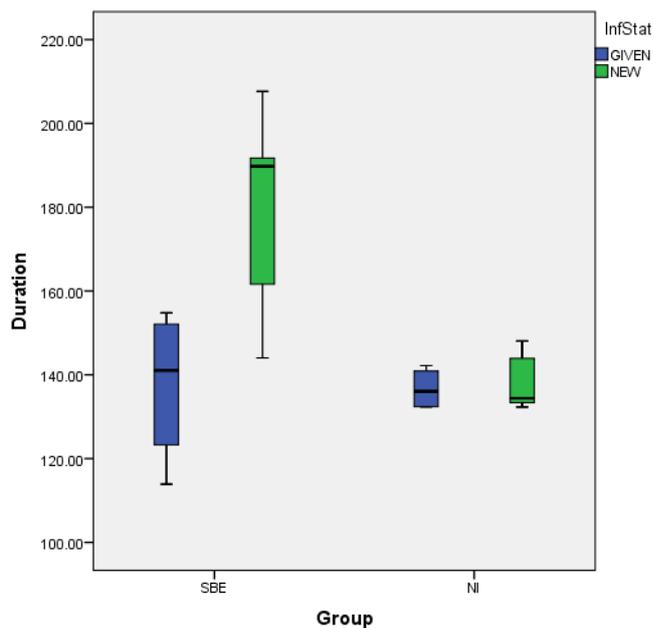
Accent distribution and duration

The percentage of accentuated tokens for new and given conditions is presented in table 2. While NI speakers accented 100% of tokens in both new and given conditions, SBE speakers accented 94% of new tokens, and only 6% of given tokens.

Table 2: Accent distribution of given and new tokens in SBE and NI productions

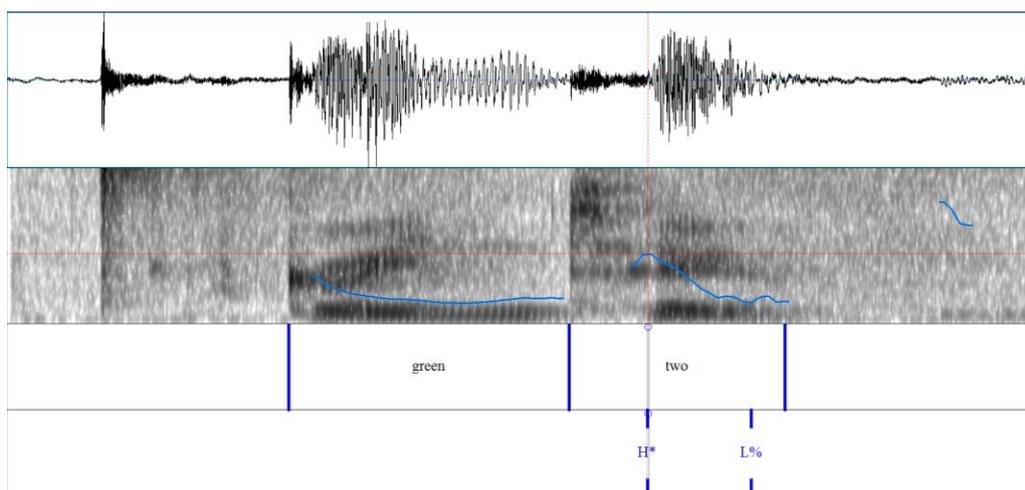
		Given	New
Accent distribution	SBE	94%	6%
	NI	100%	100%

Duration values are presented in figure 2. The NI speakers exhibited no significant durational differences between new and given tokens. For the SBE speakers, mean vowel duration of given tokens (mean = 154.911ms SD = 25.73) was markedly shorter than that of new tokens (mean = 178.961ms SD = 25.62). An independent *t*-test revealed these differences to be significant [$t(8) = 1.99, p = 0.041$ (one-tailed) $r = 0.5$]. To verify that intonation phrase-final vowel lengthening did not neutralise durational differences in Italian, vowel duration was compared in phrase initial position, (*sei* ‘six’: table 1). However, no significant difference was observed between given (mean, 137.25ms, SD = 8.7) and new tokens (mean = 136.27ms, S.D. = 6.45) [$t(6) = 0.182, p = 0.26$ (one-tailed)]. One finding which was not part of the original investigation but is nonetheless noteworthy from the above figures, is the longer vowel duration in English compared to Italian. This difference was significant for new tokens [$t(8) = 3.41, p = 0.009$ (two-tailed) $r = .7$], but neutralised by the reduced English vowel duration in the given condition. NI speech rate (210 wpm) was slightly faster than that of SBE (193 wpm).

Figure 2: Duration (ms) of given and new tokens for SBE and NI speakers

Pitch contours

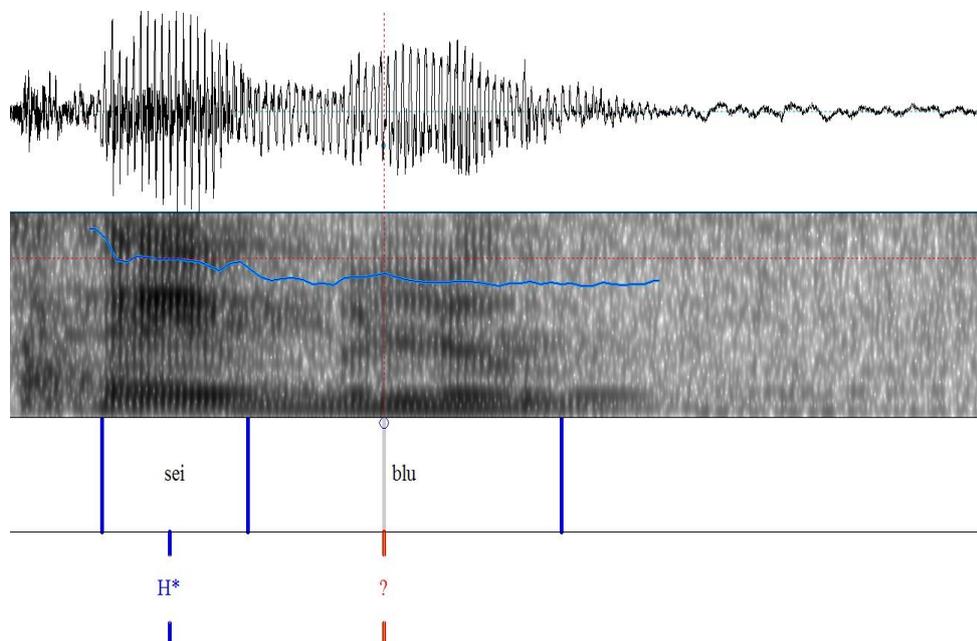
As English given tokens were not accented, their contour will not be considered further here. English new tokens were characterised by an H* followed by a low boundary tone (L%). Accents with a rising boundary tone were observed in 8/100 tones resembling 'list intonation' which may reflect the repetitive nature of the task (c.f. Swerts et al. 2002).

Figure 3: A typical realisation of English H* corresponding to new tokens.

With regard to the Italian tokens, both given and new conditions were characterised by a prominent H* on the first word *sei* 'six' and an accent of reduced prominence on the second word *blu* 'blue' (figure 4). This contour was verified against filler tokens *viola* 'purple' and *rosso* 'red' in order to control against the effect of consonantal perturbation. The peak appeared consistently across tokens, indicating that the contour is unlikely to result from perturbation related to segmental material. The majority of tokens exhibited an L% boundary

tone at the right edge of the IP typical of declarative phrases in NI (Grice et al. 2005). 5/100 tokens were marked with rising boundary tones, in line with the aforementioned list intonation in SBE monolingual productions.

Figure 4: A typical NI pitch contour for given and new tokens



4.3. Discussion

As the great majority of English tokens were accented, these results support hypothesis 1 which states that givenness is marked through deaccentuation in SBE. The small number of accented tokens may have been due to the nature of the task, where repetition caused participants to lose focus of the information status. Accordingly, these tokens appeared towards the end of the task. In line with hypothesis 2a, SBE given tokens were marked by vowel duration which was significantly shorter than that of the new tokens.

In support of hypotheses 1 and 2, NI did not exhibit prosodic marking of givenness: both new and given tokens were systematically accented and characterised by similar vowel durations. Moreover, tokens carried the same pitch accent across new and given conditions. The following section aims to classify the observed pitch contours.

Italian pitch contours

The Italian F^0 contours resemble the pitch accents reported in Swerts et al (2002), who investigated native Italian production of noun + adjective NPs similar to those in the current investigation. Although speakers accented both words in all contexts, the second accent was always less prominent and carried the same pitch accent irrespective of information status. Thus, in both Swerts et al. (2002) and the current study, NP-internal intonation curves exhibit sensitivity to phrasal position rather than information status.

The first accent in the present study corresponds to the pre-nuclear H^* typical of NI and other varieties of Italian (Grice et al. 2005). Classification of the second accent is more problematic due to a dearth of literature on Neapolitan intonational phonology. The most comprehensive work on NI to date has been carried out by D'Imperio (e.g. 1997; 1999;

2001). These studies primarily focus on pragmatic encoding such as broad, narrow and contrastive focus in addition to declarative-interrogative status. Assignment of the pitch accent based on the current inventory of NI intonational phonology is problematic considering the observed sensitivity to structural, rather than pragmatic factors. Nevertheless, previous research on NI intonational phonology provides a useful point of reference: the following section presents a brief overview of the literature related to NI pitch accents for the purpose of classifying the phrase-final pitch contour observed in the current study.

Contrastive focus

Previous research indicates that contrastive/narrow focus phrasal constituents are encoded with an L*+H accent in NI (figure 5b) (Grice et al. 2005). The current study found that such marking was not applicable to NP-internal referents as the pragmatic contrast was not encoded through pitch accent type. Moreover, the pitch contour observed did not appear to feature L* as a phonological target preceding the rise.²

*L**

Given the shallowness of the rise, it is possible that the observed excursion is not relevant to the phonology of the pitch accent, and that the pitch accent corresponds to the monotonal L* observed in Avesani (1997). However, the rise appears systematically enough to be considered a potential phonological target. Moreover, although L* is part of the Neapolitan Italian inventory, it is typically associated with pre-nuclear material.

Downstep

In NI it has been proposed that accents with reduced prominence are subject to downstep (!). The shallow pitch contour of the current study is coherent with this interpretation. Consequently, the pitch accent could correspond to !H, although this accent is generally associated with interrogative phrases (figure 5c) (Grice et al 2005). Alternatively, the contour could correspond to the !H+L* accent typical of broad focus sentences in NI (figure 5a). These accents are less prominent than the preceding pre-nuclear H* and ‘merged’ with the L% boundary tone (D’Impero 1999). Given the similarities between the !H+L* accent and that of the current study, it seems possible that the NPs were analysed as broad focus constituents. More precisely, the lack of NP-internal sensitivity to information structure may have caused the phrases to be accentuated according to the broad focus NI declarative pattern. The pitch accent observed here will be described as !H+L* for the purposes of the current study, although a more detailed analysis is left open for exploration in further research.

² A valley was observed in 18/100 cases, which was deemed too sporadic to constitute a phonological target. This effect may be a consequence of the drop in transglottal pressure characteristic of voiced plosives, although a detailed analysis of this effect is beyond the scope of this study.

Figure 5: Intonation curves in Neapolitan Italian (Adapted from D'Imperio 1999)

Declaratives

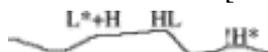
A. Broad focus

[Mamma ballava da Lalla]_F 'Mum used to dance at Lalla's'

B. Narrow focus

Mamma ballava [da Lalla]_F

C. Y/N questions

Mamma ballava [da Lalla]_F?**Duration**

One final observation regards the differences in vowel duration between SBE and NI speakers. Although comparative conditions are not ideal due to segmental variation of the preceding sounds (/b/ in NI and /t/ in SBE) the difference in vowel length observed here has potential implications for NI-EL2, which will be considered in the following section.

5. Experiment 2

This experiment addresses question 3 which explores prosodic transfer in the marking of English givenness by an NI-EL2 speaker. Accent distribution will be measured in 4 conditions: NI new/given and English L2 new/given. Deaccentuation of given tokens (in line with the native SBE speakers in experiment 1) will be taken to indicate L2 prosodic acquisition whereas accentuation of given tokens (in line with the native NI speakers in experiment 1) will point to prosodic transfer. In addition, pitch contours will be compared to English H* and NI !H+L* (experiment 1) in order to identify whether the speaker showcases English pitch accents which reflect prosodic acquisition, NI contours reflective of L1 transfer, or a pattern not directly attributable to either L1 or L2, indicative of a developmental stage.

5.1. Method**Procedure**

The NI speaker was recorded at his home in Naples. He had studied English to degree level and had lived in England for a period of 18 months, 1 year prior to the study. He continued to have regular contact with English and his pronunciation level fell within the range of C1 as specified by the Common European Framework of Reference (www.cambridgeesol.org). Procedure, materials and measurements were identical to those used in experiment 1.

5.2. Results

Accent distribution and duration

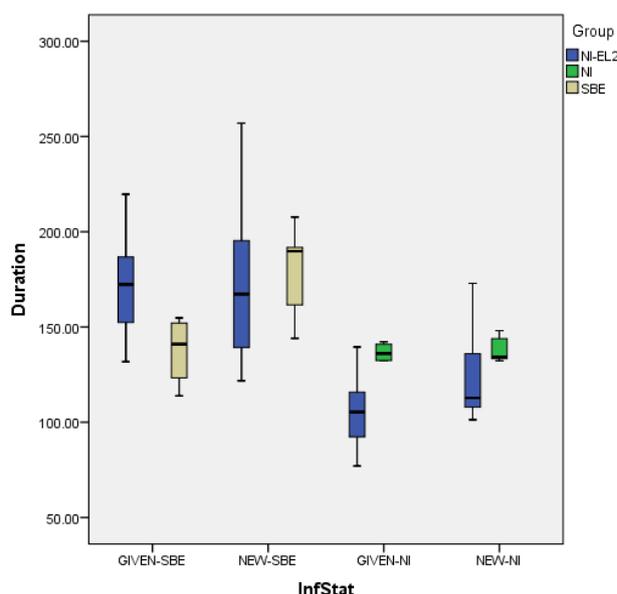
The percentage of accentuated tokens is presented in table 3 where native values from experiment 1 are reproduced for ease of comparison. All tokens were accented in each condition, in line with the native NI speakers from experiment 1.

Table 3: Accent distribution of given and new tokens for NI-EL2 in SBE and NI speech

		New		Given	
		Monolingual	NI-EL2	Monolingual	NI-EL2
Distribution	NI	100%	100%	100%	100%
	SBE	94%	100%	6%	100%

Duration values are presented in figure 5. English L2 new (mean = 173.34ms SD = 44.2) and given tokens (mean = 174.57ms SD = 27.74) were longer than NI tokens in both new (mean = 119.99ms SD = 27.6) and given conditions (mean = 112.99ms SD = 28.97). However, given tokens were not shorter than new tokens in English productions. High standard deviations were attributed to the fact that recording conditions at times rendered the speaker overly attentive to his speech, causing durational variability. NI vowel duration was shorter than monolingual NI values (experiment 1) which may be attributed to a faster speech rate (NI-EL2 = 240 wpm vs. native NI 210 wpm). Speech rate in English productions (200 wpm) was similar to native SBE values (193wpm).

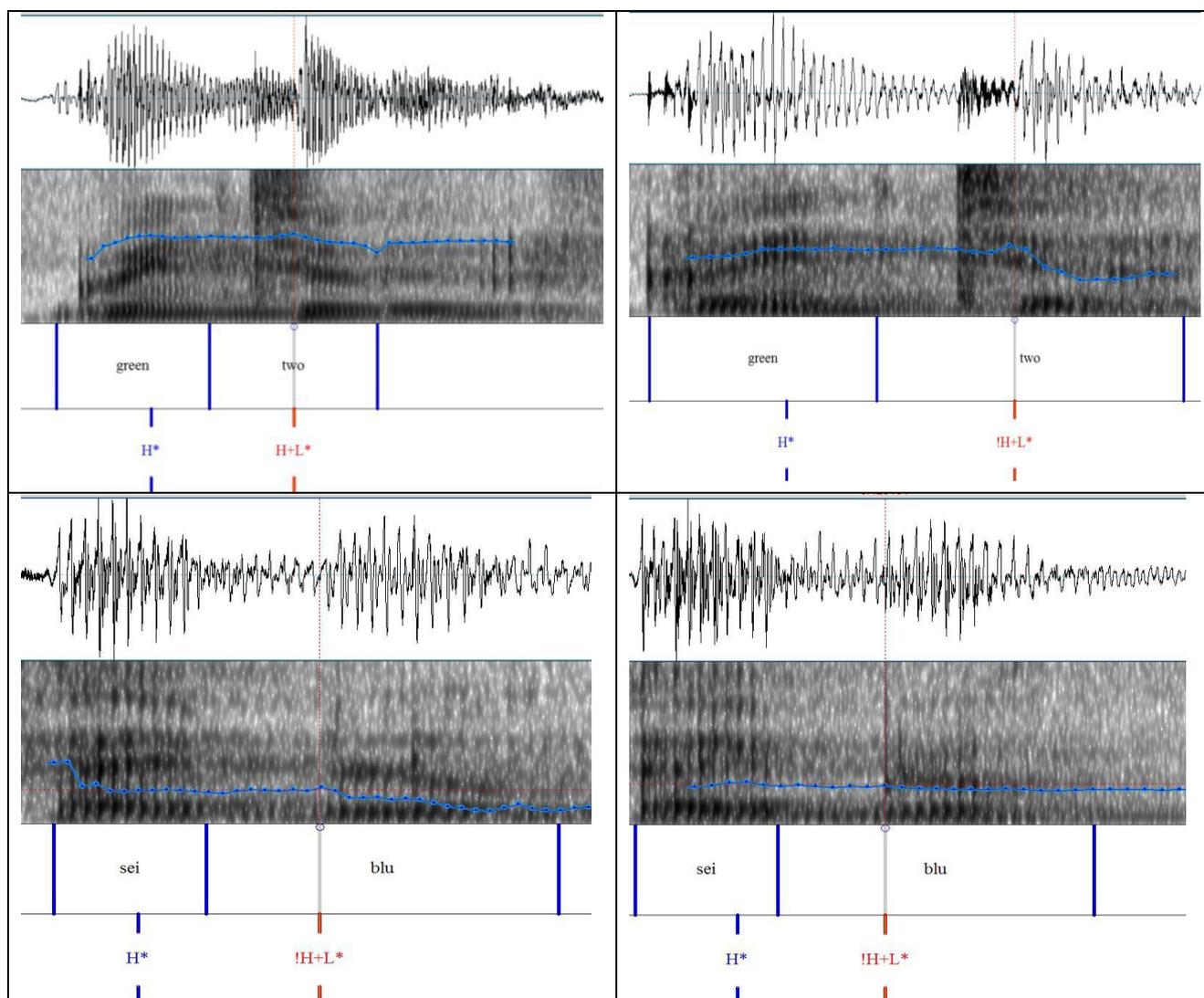
Figure 6: Duration of new and given tokens in English (GIVEN-SBE, NEW-SBE) and Neapolitan (GIVEN-NI, NEW-NI) for NI-EL2. (NI and SBE from experiment 1)



Pitch accent

The pitch contour corresponded to the !H+L* observed in NI productions in experiment 1. This contour was observed in all 4 conditions (figure 7). As in experiment 1, a rising boundary tone resembling list intonation was observed in 4/40 tokens.

Figure 7: Pitch contours in NI-EL2 tokens. Top row, from left to right: English new, English given; bottom row, from left to right: NI new, NI given.



5.3. Results and discussion

In line with hypothesis 3, the NI-EL2 speaker did not appear to have acquired SBE prosodic strategies for the marking of givenness, nor did he exhibit any prosodic patterns indicative of a developmental stage: new and given tokens were accented irrespective of information structure (in line with native NI distribution) and given vowels were not marked with a shorter duration (in contrast to the SBE speakers in experiment 1). With regard to the general durational differences between NI and SBE in experiment 1, it is worth noting that the NI-EL2 speaker produced longer vowels in English than Italian in both new and given conditions. It appears that the speaker had acquired the increased vowel length characteristic of English but not the prosodic marking of information status. However, these conclusions must remain tentative due to segmental asymmetry. With regard to pitch accent type, the speaker exhibited prosodic transfer from L1 as the H* followed by !H+L* contour resembled that of the NI monolinguals in new and given contexts.

6. General discussion and implications for further research

This study investigated the NP-internal prosodic marking of givenness in Standard Southern British English (SBE) and Neapolitan Italian (NI). In line with previous observations regarding plastic languages (Ladd 1996; Fowler and Housum 1987), given referents were deaccented and characterised by reduced vowel duration. Conversely, NI given tokens were not distinguished from new tokens in any of the prosodic conditions investigated: tokens were systematically accentuated in both conditions and duration and pitch accent type did not exhibit variation. It is possible that givenness is marked through other prosodic strategies such as pitch range or alignment, though impressionistic views of the current data do not support this notion.

The investigation also explored the nature of prosodic transfer in the marking of givenness in the English L2 productions of a native Neapolitan Italian speaker. As deviations from L1 prosodic patterns were not observed, these results do not support the notion of developmental stages in L2 prosodic acquisition. However, the current study was limited to one speaker who is not necessarily representative of other NI-EL2 learners. Moreover, as only a small selection of prosodic phenomena was examined, these findings do not preclude the existence of a developmental stage.

The observed prosodic transfer corresponds to previous findings regarding the persistence of prosodic transfer at advanced levels (Rasier 2003). It is worth noting that while the speaker exhibited acquisition of the increased English vowel duration, he did not adhere to the durational contrast associated with givenness in SBE. Thus, while the speaker may have acquired prosodic cues pertaining to phrase final lengthening, he did not appear to have acquired the pragmatically governed durational cues. Once more, sample size and segmental asymmetry render such conclusions tentative.

The prosodic transfer of the current study can be accounted for by either a simplistic transfer of L1 prosodic strategies, or by inherent difficulties in the acquisition of the prosodic marking of information structure in plastic languages. The first analysis predicts two effects: 1) speakers of plastic languages such as German and Dutch will exhibit simplistic positive transfer; 2) the acquisition of accentuation strategies will be equally problematic for native speakers of plastic languages acquiring non-plastic languages and vice versa. However, the current body of research on prosodic transfer does not substantiate these predictions. For example, over-accentuation has been identified even amongst native speakers of plastic languages acquiring other plastic languages (Grosser 1993, Wieden 1993). Moreover, Rasier and Hiligsmann (2009) found that native Dutch speakers acquiring French non-plastic strategies were more successful than native French speakers acquiring Dutch plastic strategies. Consequently, they conclude that ‘pragmatic accentuation rules are more difficult to acquire than their structurally-motivated counterparts.’

Such findings are in line with the aforementioned phrase final lengthening observed in the NI-EL2 productions. Taken together with the observed absence of the durational encoding of information structure, these findings support the notion that the acquisition of pragmatically governed prosodic strategies may be more problematic than those which are structurally motivated. This notion is in line with a recent line of research which links the observed variability in the acquisition of certain L2 features to an interaction between the interfaces (c.f. Lozano and Mendikoetxea 2009, White 2011).

Future research will consider the prosodic acquisition of native English subjects acquiring Italian with that of native Italians acquiring English, with the aim of identifying whether the patterns observed in Rasier and Hiligsmann (*ibid*) are generalizable to other plastic/non-plastic language combinations. While bi-directional studies at the prosodic level

are still relatively scarce, (but c.f. Lepetit 1989, Ueyama 2000) such studies have the potential to offer valuable insights into more general principles governing prosodic acquisition across languages.

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