

OBJECT CLITIC CLIMBING IN ADULT L2 ITALIAN: SOME EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM L1 ENGLISH AND L1 SPANISH NEAR-NATIVES*

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1. Introduction

The following study explores the mastery of Object Clitic Climbing (OCC henceforth) in adult L2 Italian by L1 English and L1 Spanish near-natives, focusing on the placement of third person singular accusative clitics. One of the main purposes of this research was to revisit the traditional theoretical approaches on causative constructions and restructuring predicates through L2 evidence at ultimate attainment, following the analyses proposed by Rizzi (1982), Burzio (1986), Guasti (1997) and Cinque (2004) over the years.

OCC is a typical property of some Romance languages which affects either auxiliary + past participle constructions or complex predicates (i.e. finite verb + infinitive constructions). It entails the cliticization of the deficient object pronoun, which is argument of the lexical predicate, on the finite verb which carries the features related to person, number and gender and which is the highest verbal form in the clause structure. Thus the order obtained is Cl-highest finite verb-non finite predicate (i.e. past participle or infinitive). In Italian, there are contexts where OCC occurs obligatorily and others where it is optionally realized, as I will discuss below.

The experimental paradigm was originally designed by Bennati & Matteini (2005) and it had already been used successfully to test advanced L2 learners of Italian with different L1s.

The investigation concerned both obligatory and optional OCC contexts, as paraphrased below in the examples in (1), (2), (3) and (4). The former included auxiliary + past participle contexts as in (1) and 'da' causative constructions¹ as in (2) (referring to the analyses on different kinds of causatives, namely 'da' and 'a' causative constructions in Italian, proposed by Kayne 1975, Burzio 1986 and Guasti 1996, 1997):

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¹ 'A' causative constructions were not present in the input of our experimental material.

- (1) a. **L'**ho suonato (il campanello)
 It(cl)-have 1st pers sg rung (the bell)
 'I have rung it (the bell)'
- b. ***Ho** suonato **lo**
 have 1st pers sg rung it(cl)
 'I have rung it (the bell)'
- (2) a. La bambina **lo** fa correggere dal maestro (il tema)
 the girl it(cl) make-s correct(inf) by the teacher (the composition)
 'The girl makes the teacher correct it (the composition)'
- b. *La bambina fa corregger**lo** dal maestro (il tema)
 the girl make-s correct(inf)-it(cl) by the teacher (the composition)
 'The girl makes the teacher correct it (the composition)'

The latter included some restructuring predicates (Rizzi, 1982), displaying either motion or modal verbs, as exemplified in (3) and (4)²:

- (3) a. Gianni **lo** va a pagare alla cassa (il caffè)
 John it(cl) go-es to buy to-the cash (the coffee)
- b. Gianni va a pagar- **lo** alla cassa (il caffè)
 John go-es to buy it(cl) to-the cash (the coffee)
 'John goes to the cash to pay for it (the coffee)'
- (4) a. Il cane **la** vuole prendere (la palla)
 the dog it(cl) want-s to catch (the ball)
- b. Il cane vuole prender- **la** (la palla)
 the dog want-s to catch it(cl) (the ball)
 'The dog wants to catch it (the ball)'

2. Some Initial Remarks

Before introducing the experimental work, some theoretical assumptions on the factors of syntactic complexity which are at stake in OCC will be taken into account.

² Aspectual verbs which are the third verb class regarded as restructuring predicates (Rizzi 1982) will not be discussed in this work.

- (7) a. [IP Maria deve [CP pulirla]]
 Mary has to clean-it(cl)
- b. [IP Maria [VP la deve pulire]]
 Mary it(cl) has to clean

In the light of these assumptions what can an experimental study on OCC in L2 Italian reveal? A study along these lines can provide useful hints on both the role of UG and access type to UG, and transfer in L2 acquisition.

As a starting observation concerning UG involvement, assuming that clitics in Italian have their dedicated functional positions, the L2 acquisition of clitics by near-natives might be relevant to debates on whether L2ers whose native language lacks clitics, such as English, can fully master functional categories that are not instantiated in their L1, hence showing full access to UG (White 1996 a.o.). Moreover, since the relevant properties of Italian clitic placement result from other properties such as mono-clausal vs. bi-clausal interpretation of structures, our data might be useful to capture whether L2 near-natives are sensitive to subtle morpho-syntactic properties in the clausal domain, distinguishing among different kinds of complex predicates.

Turning to the matter of transfer in L2 acquisition, it might be interesting to check the L2 acquisition of the Italian clitic system and placement by adult near-natives whose L1 displays a pronominal clitic system which is similar to the Italian one. For this reason L1 Spanish and L1 English near-natives were chosen to be interviewed. Are L1 Spanish speakers favored somehow given the strong similarity between L1 and L2 in this domain?

The following table sorts out the languages under investigation with respect to complement clitic system and OCC:

Table 1

languages	complement clitic system	OCC (Object Clitic Climbing)		
		auxiliary + past participle	'da' causatives	restructuring predicates
Italian	yes	obligatory	obligatory	optional
Spanish	yes	obligatory	obligatory	optional
English	no	tonic and atonic pronouns in argument position		

The examples from (8) to (11) emphasize the contrast between Italian and Spanish-like languages and English-like languages in the four investigated contexts:

Auxiliary + Past Participle

- (8) a. **L'**ho mangiato (il panino)
 b. **Lo** he comido (el bocadillo)
 It(cl)-have 1st pers sg eaten (the sandwich)
 c. I have eaten **it** (the sandwich)

'da' Causative Constructions

- (9) a. La bambina **lo** fa correggere dal maestro (il tema)
 b. La niña **se lo** hace corregir al maestro⁴
 the girl it(cl) make-s correct(inf) by the teacher (the composition)
 c. The girl makes the teacher correct **it** (the composition)

Restructuring predicates: motion verbs

- (10) a. Gianni **lo** va a comprare / va a comprar-**lo** dal salumiere (il prosciutto)
 b. Juan **se lo**⁵ va a comprar / va a comprar-**lo**⁶ a la charcuteria (el jamón)
 John it(cl) go-es to buy / go-es to buy it to the grocery (the ham)
 c. John goes to the grocery to buy **it** (some ham)

Restructuring predicates: modal verbs

- (11) a. Gianni **lo** vuole mangiare (il panino) / vuole mangiar-**lo**
 b. Juan **lo** quiere comer (el bocadillo) / quiere comer-**lo**
 John it(cl) want-s to eat (the sandwich) / want-s to eat-it(cl)
 c. John wants to eat **it** (the sandwich)

3. The OCC Experiment

The aim of the experiment was to test the level of mastery of OCC in L2 Italian both in L1 English near-natives, whose L1 lacks clitics and resorts to strong/weak pronouns in Italian

⁴ Spanish causative constructions are “a” causatives and require the clitic cluster **se lo/la**. Causative constructions with “por”, which is the Spanish counterpart of the Italian “da”, are only marginally accepted.

⁵ In Spanish OCC constructions with motion verbs the clitic cluster “**se lo**” as opposed to “**lo**” alone sounds more natural.

⁶ By contrast, when OCC does not take place in complex constructions containing a motion verb, only the clitic ‘lo’, as opposed to ‘*se lo’ is attached to the infinitival verb.

clitic-like contexts, and in L1 Spanish near-natives, where L1 and L2 are alike with respect to the complement clitic system and clitic placement.⁷

3.1. Participants and Screening Procedure

Three groups of speakers participated in the experiment: a control group consisting of eight native speakers of Italian, an L1 English experimental group consisting of eight near-natives and an L1 Spanish experimental group consisting of eight near-natives too. All subjects belonging to the experimental groups had been resident in Italy for at least 5 years and were judged as near-natives on the basis of the screening procedure adapted from White and Genesee (1996).⁸ It consisted of a score system focusing on appropriate use of morphology and syntax, clitics in particular, richness of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and overall impression of near-nativeness. The materials used for the pre-test were an adaptation of some sketches belonging to Leonini & Belletti's (2004) experimental paradigm⁹, as illustrated in the still pictures in (a) and (b) followed by some questions as in the examples from (12a) to (14a):



⁷ Even though OCC is a widespread phenomenon in Romance languages, it is worth recalling that there are some differences in the two languages under investigation. Whereas Italian and Spanish have the same pattern with auxiliary + past participle (where OCC is obligatory) and modals (where OCC is optional) as well, they also show some language specific properties in causative constructions and with respect to motion verbs, as illustrated in the examples in (8b), (9b), (10b) and (11b).

⁸ White & Genesee's (1996) screening procedure was originally created to identify near-nativeness.

⁹ Leonini & Belletti (2004) and Leonini (2005, 2006) pointed out that non near-native L2 learners mainly produce full lexical noun phrases in complement position instead of object clitics, which are extensively used by Italian native speakers.

(12a) Describe the scene.

(13a) What did the boy do with the lamp?

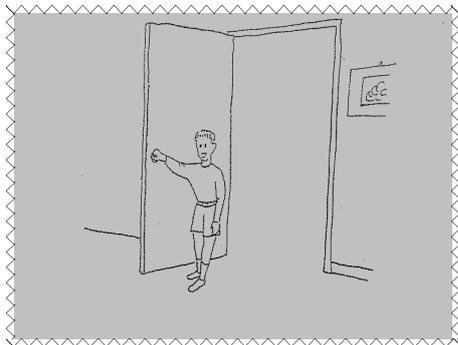
(14a) What does the boy look like?

3.2. Task

The participants had to accomplish a written elicitation task where OCC was tested in the four structural conditions which were mentioned in the introduction. Five items per condition were administered (20 experimental items in total). 20 fillers were also inserted. Subjects were tested individually and items were randomized at each run.

Each item consisted of a picture and a question about it, as exemplified in (A), (B), (C) and (D):

(A) auxiliary + past participle



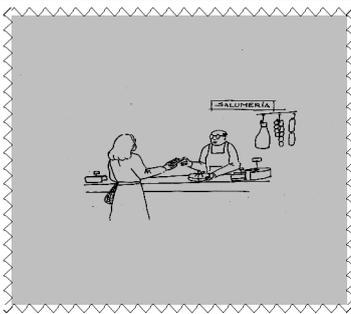
Che cosa ha fatto il bambino con la porta?
“What has the boy done with the door ?”
Nella risposta:
Sostituisci “porta” con un pronome
(In the answer replace “door” with a pronoun)

(B) ‘da’ causatives



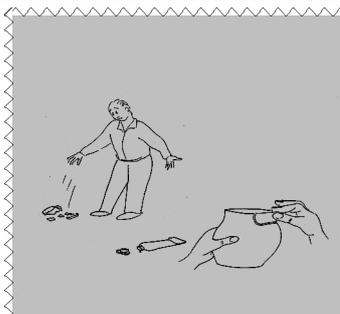
Da chi fa correggere il tema la bambina?
“Whom does the girl make correct the composition?”
Nella risposta: ripeti la costruzione “fare + verbo”
e sostituisci “tema” con un pronome
(In the answer: repeat “fare + verb” construction and replace “composition” with a pronoun)

(C) motion verbs



Dove va la nonna a comprare il prosciutto?
 “Where does Grandma go to buy some ham?”
 Nella risposta: ripeti la costruzione “andare + verbo” e sostituisci “prosciutto” con un pronome
 (In the answer: repeat “*andare* + verb” construction and replace “ham” with a pronoun)

(D) modal verbs



Che cosa deve fare Gianni con il vaso?
 “What does John have to do with the vase?”
 Nella risposta: deve essere presente il verbo “dovere”; sostituisci “vaso” con un pronome
 (In the answer: repeat *dovere* and replace “vase” with a pronoun)

The choice of a written elicitation procedure was due to the difficulty in eliciting the constructions under investigation through an oral mode. For this reason the subjects were provided with written instructions.

3.3. Data Analysis

In order to give a clear overview we present the results of each structural condition separately. The data were statistically analysed by means of the χ^2 test¹⁰.

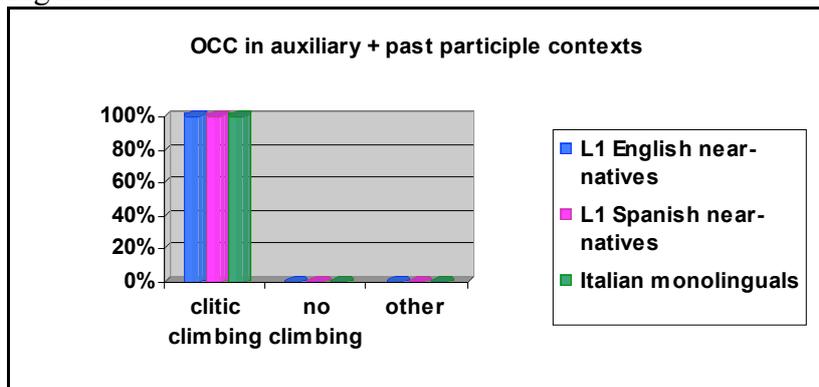
Table 2 and figure 1 include the performances of the two near-native experimental groups and the native control group with respect to the placement of accusative clitics in auxiliary + past participle contexts:

Table 2. Obligatory OCC in auxiliary + past participle contexts

	auxiliary + past participle contexts		
	clitic climbing	no climbing	other
L1 English near-natives	100% (40/40)	0% (0/40)	0% (0/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	100% (40/40)	0% (0/40)	0% (0/40)
Italian monolinguals	100% (40/40)	0% (0/40)	0% (0/40)

¹⁰ The Chi-square test (χ^2) was chosen as the most suitable non-parametric statistical procedure to compare relative frequencies of responses.

Figure 1

**Experimental sample:**

(15)a. *Che cosa ha fatto il bambino con la porta?*

“What has done the child with the door ?”

Expected answer:

b. *L’ha chiusa*

“(He) it(cl) has closed”

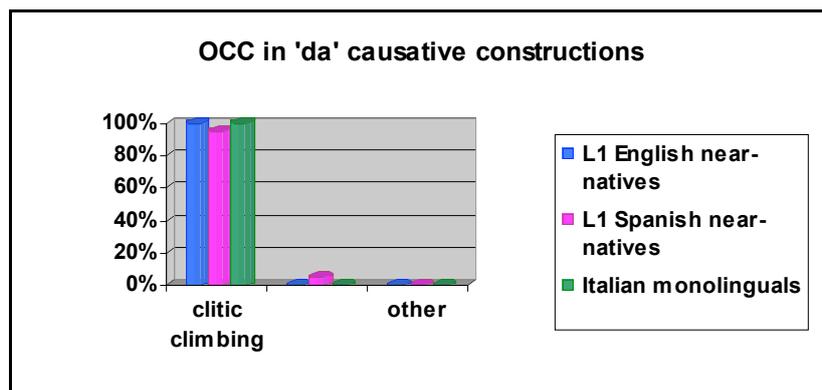
Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate a target-like performance of both L1 Spanish and L1 English near-natives with respect to OCC in auxiliary + past participle contexts. No cases of clitic misplacement occurred and the clitic was correctly produced to the left of the highest finite verb, i.e. the auxiliary.

Table 3 and Figure 2 illustrate the results with respect to obligatory OCC in ‘da’ causative constructions:

Table 3. Obligatory OCC in ‘da’ causative constructions

	‘da’ causative constructions		
	clitic climbing	no climbing	other
L1 English near-natives	100% (40/40)	0% (0/40)	0% (0/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	95% (38/40)	5% (2/40)	0% (0/40)
Italian monolinguals	100% (40/40)	0% (0/40)	0% (0/40)

Figure 2



Experimental sample:

(16) a. *Da chi fa correggere il tema la bambina?*

“Who does the girl make correct the composition?”

Expected answer:

b. *Lo fa correggere dal maestro*

“(She) it(cl) make-s correct by the teacher”

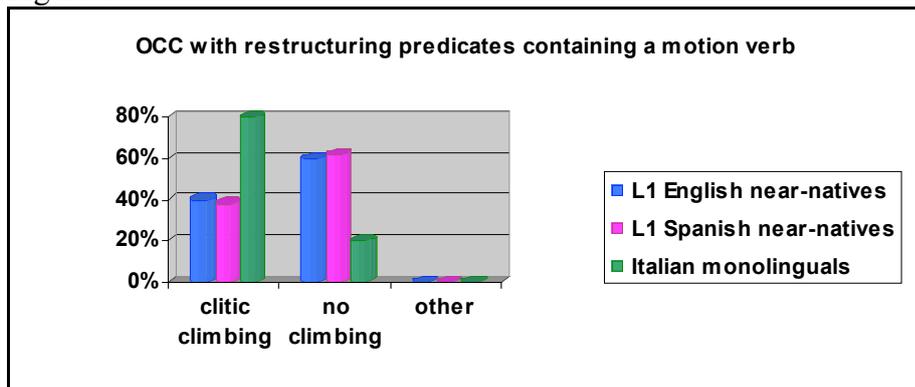
Both near-native groups showed a native-like performance. Although in the L1 Spanish group there are two cases of no climbing (5%) the difference with respect to the Italian monolinguals is not statistically significant. Again the clitic is correctly placed before the main finite verb in OCC obligatory contexts.

Table 4 and Figure 3 present the results of the three groups with respect to clitic placement in complex predicates containing a motion verb:

Table 4. Optional OCC with restructuring predicates containing a motion verb

	Restructuring predicates containing a motion verb		
	clitic climbing	no climbing	other
L1 English near-natives	40% (16/40)	60% (24/40)	0% (0/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	38% (15/40)	62% (25/40)	0% (0/40)
Italian monolinguals	80% (32/40)	20% (8/40)	0% (0/40)

Figure 3

**Experimental sample:**(17) a. *Dove va a comprare il prosciutto?*

“Where does she go to buy some ham?”

Expected answers:

b. *Lo va a comprare dal salumiere*

“(She) it(cl) go-es to buy to the grocery”

c. *Va a comprarlo dal salumiere*

“(She) go-es to buy-it(cl) to the grocery”

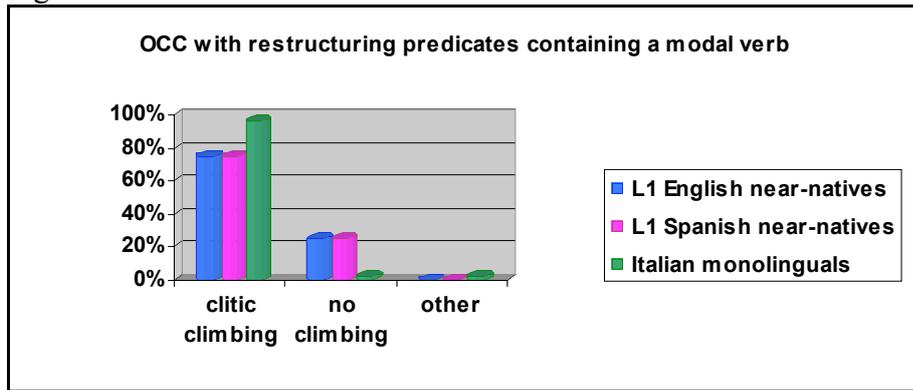
Contrary to the results obtained with obligatory OCC contexts, both L1 English and L1 Spanish near-natives tended to produce less clitic climbing with motion verb constructions, thus diverging from the Italian monolinguals. The object clitic appeared on the infinitival verb at considerable rate in the near-natives (60% and 62% for L1 English and L1 Spanish speakers respectively *vs.* 20% for the control group). The difference between the near-natives and the natives is statistically significant ($\chi^2=11.7188/13.2044$; $p=0.0006/p=0.0001$), while no difference emerged between the two near-native groups who produced almost the same OCC rates with the same verbs (40%/38% OCC *vs.* 60%/62% no clitic climbing).

Table 5 and Figure 4 show the realization of OCC with complex predicates containing modal verbs in the three groups under study:

Table 5. Optional OCC with restructuring predicates containing a modal verb

	Restructuring predicates containing a modal verb		
	clitic climbing	no climbing	other
L1 English near-natives	75% (30/40)	25% (10/40)	0% (0/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	75% (30/40)	25% (10/40)	0% (0/40)
Italian monolinguals	95% (38/40)	2.5% (1/40)	2.5% (1/40)

Figure 4

**Experimental sample:**

(18) a. *Che cosa deve fare Gianni con il vaso?*
 “What does John have to do with the vase?”

Expected answers:

b. *Lo deve incollare*
 “(He) it(cl) has to glue”

c. *Deve incollarlo*
 “(He) has to glue it(cl)”

If we compare the two optional OCC contexts involved, it is crucial noticing that both L1 English and L1 Spanish near-natives produced a significantly higher rate of OCC with complex predicates containing modal verbs than complex predicates containing motion verbs (40% vs. 75%, $\chi^2=8.6445$, $p=0.0033$ and 38% vs. 75%, $\chi^2=9.9556$, $p=0.0016$ respectively). Although the difference between the near-native groups and the control group is statistically significant with respect to modal contexts (75% and 75% in both near-native cases vs. 95% for the controls, $\chi^2=4.8039$; $p=0.0284$), it is not so remarkable as with motion verbs where the difference between both near-native groups and the natives is deeper.

4. Discussion

In this section I will discuss the data adopting the traditional theoretical approach to restructuring which is based on the dichotomy mono-clausality vs. bi-clausality (following Rizzi 1978, 1982, Burzio 1986, Guasti 1996, 1997). The main claim is that OCC is the result of a mono-clausal analysis. As a starting point I will focus on the general picture emerging in obligatory vs. optional contexts with respect to OCC in the three groups. The results are summarized in table 6:

Table 6. OCC in obligatory and optional contexts

	obligatory OCC contexts		optional OCC contexts	
	aux+past part	causatives	motion verbs	modals
L1 English near-natives	100% (40/40)	100% (40/40)	40% (16/40)	75% (30/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	100% (40/40)	95% (38/40)	38% (15/40)	75% (30/40)
Italian monolinguals	100% (40/40)	100% (40/40)	80% (32/40)	95% (38/40)

Let us first focus on obligatory OCC contexts.

Overall, the performance of both near-native groups in obligatory contexts, i.e. aux. + past participle and causatives, provides clear evidence that OCC is fully active, regardless of L1, and that the object clitic is correctly located onto the highest inflected verb (Aux, caus). No difficulties seem to emerge with causative constructions. The native-like performance shown by L1 Spanish speakers when a causative verb is involved (95% vs. 100%) is not unexpected, since Spanish requires clitic climbing with “hacer” (to make) like the Italian “fare”. By contrast, L1 English near-natives’ results are revealing since they show that they are not at a disadvantage with respect to L1 Spanish near-natives, despite the total absence of a clitic system in their L1. Both near native groups, like native Italian speakers, process causatives as single verbal units, where OCC applies obligatorily (see Guasti 1996,1997 on the processing of Italian causatives)

The L1 English near-natives’s data concerning OCC in obligatory contexts provide interesting evidence in favor of the ‘No Impairment Hypothesis’, according to which UG is operational in interlanguage grammars and functional categories which are absent in L1 can be instantiated in L2¹¹, and Full Access to UG as well. These results are consistent with recent work on this topic (see Schwartz & Sprouse 1996, Duffield, White, Bruhn-Garavito, Montrul and Prévost 2002, Leonini & Belletti 2004, Leonini 2005, 2006, Hamann & Belletti 2007).

As far as optional contexts are concerned, Italian monolinguals produced OCC to a visibly large extent in both optional OCC contexts (80% with motion verbs and 95% with modal verbs). It seems reasonable to assume that the controls’ tendency to resort to OCC in optional contexts might depend on their dialects/idiolects (as noticed in Cinque 2004 and Cardinaletti & Shlonsky 2004). Actually, all of them come from Central and Southern Italian regions where OCC is the preferred option. However, a slight difference occurred between the two predicates at stake, since OCC production is relatively higher with modals (80% vs. 95%).

¹¹ The No Impairment Hypothesis is in contrast with other views on adult L2 acquisition which claim that parameters and properties which are not instantiated in L1 can not be reset in adult L2 acquisition (Hawkins 2001, Hawkins & Franceschina 2004, Towell & Hawkins, 1994).

For what concerns the two near native groups, the OCC rates are overall inferior to the controls' ones in both optional contexts (38/40% with motion verbs and 75% with modal verbs). Contrary to the natives, the near-natives' substantial choice for the *no clitic climbing* option, especially with motion verbs (60% in L1 English near-natives and 62% in L1 Spanish near-natives), cannot be related to their geographical/dialectal varieties. Rather, it seems reasonable to attribute the difference between Italian native speakers and L2 near-natives to the accessibility to different processing structures at work. The former tend to process both motion and modal contexts as mono-clausal structures showing that a mono-clausal structure is their most readily accessible option, whereas the latter prefer bi-clausal configurations more than the controls, mainly when a restructuring predicate containing a motion verb is involved (60%). However, interestingly, in the near-natives a split emerged between restructuring predicates containing a motion verb and restructuring predicates containing a modal verb (40% vs. 75% for L1 English near-natives and 38% vs. 75% for L1 Spanish near-natives), as it occurred for the controls (80% vs. 95%). In fact, the most intriguing result concerns this analogy not only between the natives and the near-natives but especially between the two near-native groups whose L1s display different properties in the contexts under investigation. This finding provides evidence that the reason must be sought for in the different nature of the two restructuring predicates at stake.

Indeed, this fact may be analysed in the light of Cinque's (2004) work on lexical and functional predicates. Under this perspective, I will assume that while motion verbs can be utilized either as 'restructuring' or lexical verbs in Italian, modals, on the contrary, have only a functional usage. Accordingly, a mono-clausal configuration, hence OCC, is expected to be more readily accessible with modals than with motion verbs.

Even though this discrimination is expected to be manifest in Italian monolinguals, it is not so obvious that it should occur in the near-natives. Crucially, despite their L1s, both L1 English and L1 Spanish near-natives have shown to be sensitive to the intrinsic differences of the two restructuring predicates to the same extent (cf. table 6).

As far as L1 Spanish near-natives are concerned, one could *prima facie* be tempted to suggest that the tendency not to resort to OCC with motion verbs is not so unexpected given that in Spanish the climbing of clitics in this context is driven by the presence of a clitic cluster 'se lo/la' as opposed to a single clitic 'lo/la', as already noticed in the example in (10) and commented in the foot notes in 5 and 6, here repeated in (19) for clarity's sake:

- (19) a. Gianni **lo** va a comprare / va a comprar-**lo** dal salumiere (il prosciutto)
 b. Juan **se lo**¹² va a comprar / va a comprar-**lo** a la charcuteria (el jamón)
 John it(cl) go-es to buy / go-es to buy it to the grocery (the ham)

¹² In Spanish OCC constructions with motion verbs the clitic cluster "se lo" as opposed to "lo" alone sounds more natural. On the contrary complex constructions with a motion verb where OCC does not take place only the single clitic 'lo' is accepted.

- c. John goes to the grocery to buy **it** (some ham)

If we get on reasoning in this direction a possible explanation for such a result could be related to some sort of ‘selective’ L1 transfer which affects this class of verbs. Contrary to motion verbs, the tendency found with modals is not puzzling since Spanish and Italian share the same OCC optionality, as already introduced in the examples in (11), here repeated in (20):

- (20) a. Gianni **lo** vuole mangiare (il panino) / vuole mangiar-**lo**
 b. Juan **lo** quiere comer (el bocadillo) / quiere comer-**lo**
 John it(cl) want-s to eat (the sandwich) / want-s to eat-it(cl)
 c. John wants to eat **it** (the sandwich)

However, to a deeper analysis, the similar performance of both L1 Spanish and L1 English near-natives leads one to believe that the track presented above is not the correct one and that the results of the two near-native groups must be combined and seen as a whole.

A further consideration is prompted by the comparison between the results found in obligatory OCC contexts and the ones observed in optional OCC contexts.

Overall, the L2 near-natives seem to have captured the degree of structural complexity involved with each predicate-type. Indeed, the experimental groups have shown that near-native speakers are able to recognize different boundaries, namely VP complements *vs.* CP ones, as exemplified in (21), (22), (23):

- (21) [IP La bambina **lo** fa [VP correggere] dal maestro]
 the girl it(cl) make-s correct(inf) by the teacher
 (22) [IP Maria **la** deve [VP pulire]
 Mary it(cl) Has to clean(inf)
 (23) [IP Maria deve [CP pulirl**la**]
 Mary has to clean-it(cl)

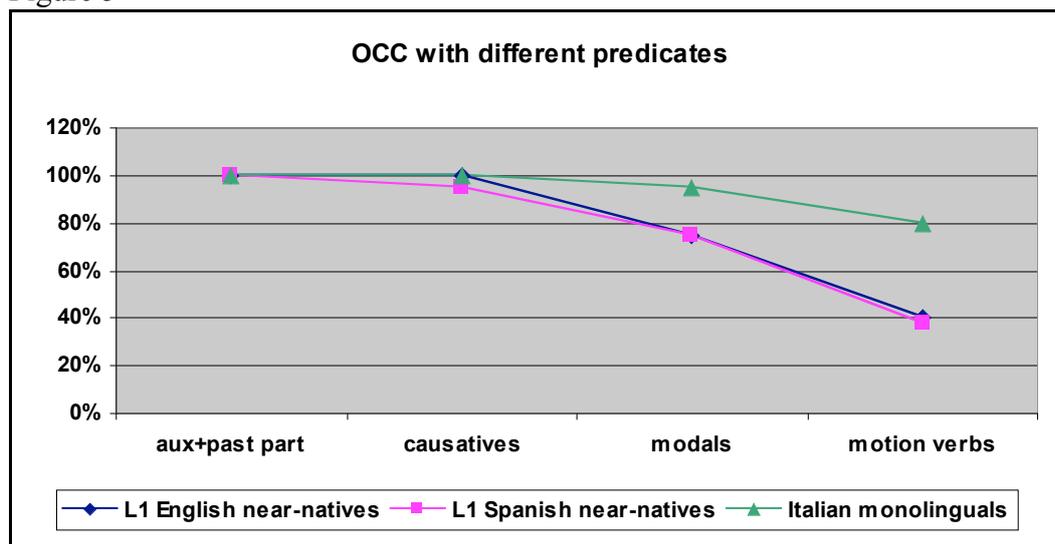
While causative verbs and motion/modal complex predicates in restructuring configurations select a VP (following Manzini 1983, Guasti 1997) like simple predicates (i.e. auxiliary + past participle constructions), as shown in (21) and (22) respectively, motion/modal predicates when restructuring does not take place select a CP as in (23).

In these terms OCC is the visible result of the choice of a mono-clausal structure.

As a final remark, the general picture with respect to the different predicates involved is quite uniform across the three groups and seems to show the same trends as shown in Figure 5, thus showing that near-native speakers can really approximate native speakers even when

subtle properties are concerned:

Figure 5



To sum up, these findings suggest the existence of a hierarchy of complexity with respect to mono-clausal processing. On the one hand, it is crucial that auxiliary + past participle constructions and causatives as well, which are to be obligatorily processed as mono-clausal structures in standard Italian, are not problematic at all for the near natives. On the other, it is intriguing that constructions displaying motion or modal verbs, where a mono-clausal processing is optional, namely where both VP and CP complements are accepted in standard Italian with differences among speakers and varieties (Cinque 2004), are treated differently from obligatory mono-clausal structures where only VP complements are licit in standard Italian. Moreover, interestingly, the near-natives, like the native controls, are able to catch the different nature of the two types of restructuring predicates at stake, showing that modals are easier to be analysed as mono-clausal predicates than motion verbs.

To sum up, even though mono-clausal structures are, generally speaking, easier to be acquired as attested by the non problematic realization of causative structures in Italian by L2 speakers with different L1s (see also Bennati & Matteini 2005)¹³, this general trend may be inverted when the predicate involved displays a lexical nature besides the functional one as in the case of motion verbs (Cinque 2004).

To speculate further on the theoretical implications emerged from the analysis of the data, in the following section I will propose a comparison between the results found with the near-natives and the findings concerning the same experimental paradigm administered to advanced L2 speakers of Italian with Spanish, English and German as L1 respectively (Bennati & Matteini 2005).

¹³ See also some interesting studies on L1 acquisition of Japanese (Murasugi, Hashimoto & Kato, 2003; Yano 2007 and references cited there) where lexical causative constructions which require a mono-clausal structure are acquired earlier than syntactic causative constructions which require a bi-clausal structure.

5. A Comparison with the Results Found by Bennati & Matteini (2005) in L2 Advanced Learners

In this section I will compare the near-natives' results with the advanced L2 learners' productions collected by Bennati & Matteini (2005). As already noticed, the experimental paradigm presented in this study was originally designed by Bennati & Matteini (2005) and was successfully administered to advanced L2 learners of Italian with different L1s, specifically to L1 Spanish, L1 German and L1 English speakers. The three L2 groups were reduced to two, since the L1 English and L1 German speakers were included in the same group because of their very similar performance (no statistically significant difference emerged between them).

The following tables and figures summarize the results per group in each structural condition, thus comparing the performance of the L2 advanced learners (from Bennati & Matteini 2005) with the near-natives' one:

Table 7. OCC in obligatory and optional contexts in L2 advanced learners

	obligatory OCC contexts			optional OCC contexts		
	aux+past part		causatives	motion verbs		modals
L1 English/German advanced speakers	97% (63/65)		63.5% (43/68)	24% (16/68)		40% (27/67)
L1 Spanish advanced speakers	100% (25/25)		88% (22/25)	28% (7/25)		24% (6/25)
Italian monolinguals	100% (40/40)		100% (40/40)	80% (32/40)		95% (38/40)

Table 8. OCC in obligatory and optional contexts in the near-natives

	obligatory OCC contexts			optional OCC contexts		
	aux+past part		causatives	motion verbs		modals
L1 English near-natives	100% (40/40)		100% (40/40)	40% (16/40)		75% (30/40)
L1 Spanish near-natives	100% (40/40)		95% (38/40)	38% (15/40)		75% (30/40)
Italian monolinguals	100% (40/40)		100% (40/40)	80% (32/40)		95% (38/40)

Figure 6. OCC in L1 Spanish speakers

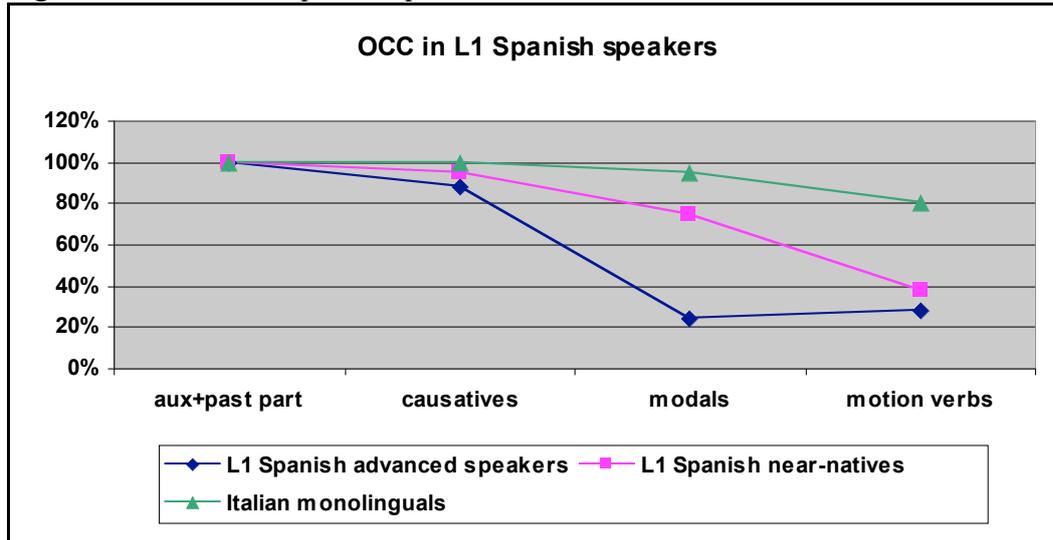
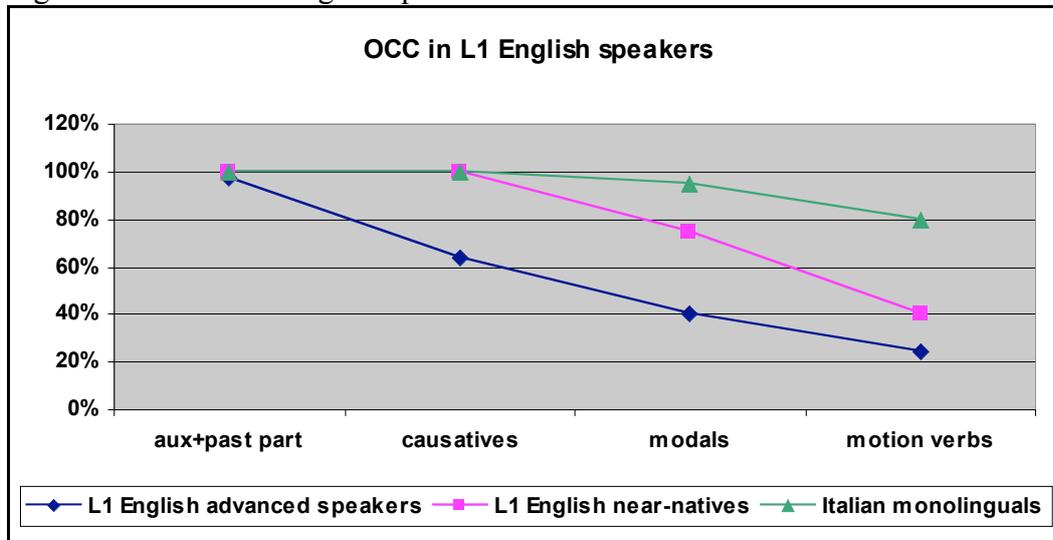


Figure 7. OCC in L1 English speakers



In a nutshell, the most noteworthy result is a general improvement in the mastering of OCC as soon as the L2 end-state is reached in both L1 Spanish and L1 English speakers.

More specifically:

- i. OCC with past participle contexts is fully mastered since stages lower than ultimate attainment, i.e. advanced.
- ii. Causatives do not cause any problems at all at ultimate attainment and are easily processed as mono-clausal structures, like auxiliary + past participle contexts. The residual uncertainties at L2 advanced stages disappear at the L2 end-state.
- iii. OCC seems to be the preferred strategy also with complex predicates containing a modal verb for the near-natives (75% in both near-native groups), while at inferior stages of L2 competence the no climbing strategy is still the predominant one (we found just 40% OCC for the L1 English/German speakers and 24% for the L1 Spanish

speakers). This fact can reasonably be attributed to an accessibility matter, namely a bi-clausal structure is easier and *less costly* than a mono-clausal one, which will be tentatively discussed as a final observation in this paragraph by combining the results obtained with modal verbs and motion verbs in the two experiments.

iv. A slight difference between the advanced groups and the near-natives can also be detected for complex predicates containing a motion verb. In this respect the occurrences where OCC is manifest are more numerous at ultimate attainment (40/38% vs. 24/28% for the L2 advanced groups), even though complex verbal constructions with a motion verb are still processed mainly as bi-clausal structures.

As a final remark, I would like to speculate on the reason why at L2 acquisition stages lower than ultimate attainment, both complex predicates containing a motion verb and complex predicates containing a modal verb are preferably analysed as bi-clausal structures by L2ers, while at ultimate attainment this trend is still consistently visible only with motion verbs. As a starting point of this analysis let us recall the different status of modal and motion verbs (Cinque 2004). Modal verbs in Italian just display a functional nature, while motion verbs have a twofold nature as functional and lexical predicates. Moreover let us recall what observed in the previous paragraph as regards i. the general trend found both in L1 and L2 acquisition which shows that mono-clausal structures are generally easier to be acquired and realized than bi-clausal ones and ii. the inverted trend which occurs when the predicate involved has either a functional or a lexical nature.

Let us first consider the results of both near-natives and advanced¹⁴ L2 speakers with respect to motion verbs. All L2ers follow the inverted trend and find it easier to produce bi-clausal structures.

Let us now consider the results of both groups with respect to modal verbs where an interesting difference between the near-native group and the advanced L2 group emerged. The fact that the L2 advanced speakers preferred the bi-clausal structure with modals which have just a functional nature as opposed to the twofold nature of motion verbs, seems to suggest that the L2 advanced speakers did not have instantiated the right formal status of modals as only functional predicates. On the contrary, the L2 near-natives could clearly distinguish between the status of modal and motion verbs.

6. Conclusions

The linguistic domain investigated in this study provides a twofold contribution:

Firstly, it shows how different theoretical analyses on complex predicates and restructuring proposed over the years can be useful to interpret and disambiguate experimental data from L2 Acquisition.

¹⁴ In both groups (near-natives and L2 advanced) no differences were made between L1 Spanish and L1 English since they behaved the same within their group.

Secondly it provides cues on the role of UG and L1 in L2 Acquisition at ultimate attainment, supporting both the UG Full Access Theory (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996) and the No Impairment Hypothesis and matching the findings of recent studies on this issue (Duffield, White, Bruhn-Garavito, Montrul and Prévost 2002, Leonini & Belletti 2004, Leonini 2005, 2006, Hamann & Belletti 2007).

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