

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF *INTERITA*: REEXPLORING A SWEDISH LEARNER CORPUS OF ITALIAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article³, we present the corpus *Interita*, a corpus of Italian spoken language compiled with data from recordings of university students in Sweden. After describing the contextual background and the corpus, we briefly review the most relevant studies that have been carried out based on it, and successively we present a recently conducted original small-scale longitudinal study based on data from the corpus in more depth. In this part of the article (i.e., Section 4), data from three university students of Italian as additional language are analysed focussing on the development of verb morphology and on cross-linguistic influences in their production. Finally, we conclude by discussing some possibilities and limitations of the corpus sketching out how we envision *Interita* to be used in the future.

The corpus is based on transcriptions of recordings with students of Italian at different study levels, and of a group of Italian Erasmus students, all registered at Stockholm University. For the sake of contextualization, we will sketch out how the studies of Italian are organized at Stockholm University, before describing the corpus. Italian language education is offered in courses comprising five semesters (150 credits) and it is possible to take a three-year bachelor's degree or a degree of master (one year), in combination with other studies⁴. Courses for beginners, which require no previous knowledge of the language, are also available. These six levels, from beginners' to master's level are illustrated in Figure 1 (Bardel *et al.*, 2024).

The courses at the different study levels shown in Figure 1 are all offered in both fall and spring semesters. Besides, students can also take the beginner course as a summer course, which has turned out an extremely popular choice.

As for the number of registered students of Italian at Stockholm University, some figures from 2023 may serve as example: In the fall semester of 2023, there were 282 registered students. Forty-five percent of them studied at the beginner course. In the same year, 1251 students applied for the summer course for beginners, out of which 120 were accepted.

At the time of the data collection for *Interita*, the requirements for admission to university studies of Italian included previous studies at upper secondary level of Swedish and English. For the course *Italian 1*, previous studies of Italian were also required and a proficiency level approximately corresponding to the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR,

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⁴ There is also a postgraduate level leading to a Doctoral degree.

Council of Europe, 2001). There is no explicit formulation of any correspondence between the different study levels at Stockholm University and the levels of the CEFR in any official course descriptions.

Figure 1. *Study levels of Italian at Stockholm University*



The students at the different study levels presented in Figure 1 constituted an interesting group of learners to be part of a corpus of oral language production and interaction, considering the possibility to observe and analyse their interlanguage development over time or the attained proficiency at different study levels. Furthermore, their plurilingual backgrounds were deemed to be of particular interest. Most of them had Swedish as their first language (L1), although some other L1s were also represented in the group, all had English as first foreign language, and almost everyone had studied at least one other foreign language before starting with Italian. As a matter of fact, one of the main aims of *InterIta* in its conceptual phase was to provide empirical data to enable the study of influences from previously acquired languages in the acquisition of Italian as a third or subsequent language, as opposed to a second language (Williams, Hammarberg, 1998). Given that all the recorded learners mastered Swedish and English, and the great majority had also studied at least one other foreign language in compulsory school (almost always German, French or Spanish), the corpus presents a typical case of L3 learning and use in Sweden⁵.

2. THE *INTERITA* CORPUS

The *InterIta* corpus is a spoken learner corpus of Italian compiled at Stockholm University during the years 2001-2015 (see also e.g., Bardel, Gudmundson, 2008; Bardel, Gudmundson, Lindqvist, 2012; Gudmundson, 2012; Bardel, Gudmundson, 2018; Bardel

⁵ As often, the label L3 is obviously used here in *sensu lato*. The term is not undisputed and, as mentioned, some of the learners in the *InterIta* corpus stated that they had another mother tongue in addition to Swedish, and a few that they had Swedish as L2. Furthermore, some had also added more foreign languages at upper secondary level or during previous university studies.

et al., 2024, for previous descriptions of the corpus). The creation of the corpus was realized with the funding of a series of projects from two major Swedish foundations: The Swedish Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) and Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (*Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*). The initiative was motivated by the lack of acquisitional and pedagogical studies on Italian as a second language (L2) in Sweden in the early 2000s and inspired by similar initiatives such as the *InterFra* corpus (Bartning, Schlyter, 2004; Bardel, Gudmundson, Lindqvist, 2012; Bardel, Gudmundson, 2018) and the Pavia Project (Giacalone Ramat, 2003), where oral production data retrieved from language learners were gathered in similar ways. Generally, the field of learner corpus research has developed significantly since the beginning of the century, considering technology, accessibility and ethical considerations, just to mention some fundamental aspects of oral language corpus designs (see e.g., Meunier, 2020)⁶. Nevertheless, the *InterIta* corpus is still useful and potentially expandible⁷.

The corpus, which has been increased over the years, consists today of 155 transcriptions of recordings conducted with 62 university students of Italian in Sweden as well as 30 similar recordings with 10 native speakers of Italian, mainly Erasmus students at Stockholm University, coming from different regions in Italy. The data were gathered among volunteering students and were subsequently pseudonymized. In a first phase, participants were recruited at the course *Italian 1* (Figure 1) and onwards along with the Erasmus students from Italy. In a second phase (2014-15), students at the propaedeutic beginner course were included in the corpus. Only one beginner had been recorded earlier, namely Katarina, who will be described below (Bardel, 2005; Bardel, Lindqvist, 2007). The learners were categorized into three proficiency levels: beginners, intermediate learners, and advanced learners. This is a rough categorization based on the course level they were studying at by the time of the first recording (see Gudmundson, 2012, for an alternative categorization based on *vocd*, a measure of lexical richness).

To date, the corpus includes 60 recordings of 20 beginners (recorded longitudinally over one semester), 69 recordings of 22 intermediate learners (varying from 1 to 6 recordings with each participant) and 26 recordings of 20 advanced learners. During the recordings, the participants engaged in individual interviews and retelling tasks (short cartoons and comic strips), the advanced learners also in dyadic tasks and multiparty group discussions and tasks. The interview questions and the retelling tasks were adapted or directly reproduced from the *InterFra* corpus elicitation material. The topics of the interview questions regard mainly the personal domain, family, studies, work experience, hobbies, stays in Italy, future plans, hypothetical reasoning etc. They also engaged in discussions about learning Italian, their perception of Italy and the differences between Italy and Sweden etc. The interview guides used for the *InterIta* corpus are available in the IRIS database (Bardel, 2014). The length of the recordings varies between 15-50 minutes, the longest being those conducted with the most advanced learners. The group discussions are structured around given topics to be discussed and last circa 25-30 minutes. The majority of the recording sessions took place in a professional studio at Stockholm university.

As explained above, the corpus is composed of a mix of cross-sectional and longitudinal data. Some of the participants have been recorded only once, and others up to six times over several semesters.

The recordings and transcriptions are stored together with metadata describing age, gender etc. (Paquot *et al.*, 2024). The example in Table 1 summarizes the most central

⁶ Cfr. <https://www.uclouvain.be/en/research-institutes/ilc/cecl/learner-corpora-around-the-world>. For a compilation of another learner corpus of spoken Italian, see Gallina (2010).

⁷ Currently, the *InterIta* corpus is not publicly available.

information gathered from the students through sociolinguistic questionnaires.

Table 1. *Example of metadata, extract from an intermediate level informant*

Pseudo-nym	Age	Ge.	L1		L2					Recording	
Johanna	18	f Swe	a	b	a	b	c	d	e	n	Date
	18		Swe	Hun	Eng	Fra	Heb	-	-	1	1.10 2001
	19									2	28.11 2001
	19									3	7.2 2002
	19									4	15.4 2002
										5	28.5 2002

The transcriptions of the recordings were made using the CHAT transcription system, developed within the CHILDES project (MacWhinney, 2000), and were automatically annotated with morphological tags through the MOR program, part of the CLAN suite of tools (MacWhinney, 2000). Thanks to its structured design, range of proficiency levels, and rich transcriptions, the *InterIta* corpus offers a valuable resource for research on second/third/foreign language acquisition, particularly for analysing spoken Italian in a Swedish learner context.

An example extract of a transcribed recording with links to the audio is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. *Extract of a transcribed recording with Alice*

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*PAO: ciao # Paolo. [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_0_1216]
*ALI: ciao # <mi chiama> [/] mi chiamo Alice
      www. [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_1216_4304]
*PAO: perfetto Alice.
*ALI: hm.
*PAO: è un cognome svedese? [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_4304_7726]
*ALI: eh +... [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_8064_8799]
*PAO: www? [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_8666_9427]
*ALI: www eh eh credo xxx svedese. [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_9349_12780]
*PAO: +^ mhm perfetto # e Alice quanti anni
      hai? [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_12441_15449]
*ALI: ho # diecineove [*] ## &h anni. [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_15614_19504]
*PAO: mhm # e dove abiti? [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_19383_21789]
*ALI: eh abito a Bromma Alvik con mia
      famiglia. [%snd:"ALICE1.WAV"_21708_25518]

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3. PREVIOUS STUDIES BASED ON THE *INTERITA* CORPUS

Besides serving as data source for several unpublished BA theses at Stockholm University, *InterIta* has been used in a series of studies in the field of second and third language acquisition.

The use of discourse markers in learners and native speakers has been investigated by Pauletto, Bardel (2015), Pauletto (2016) and Pauletto, Bardel (2016) and the corpus has also served as data source for studies on lexical sophistication (Bardel, Gudmundson, Lindqvist, 2012) and lexical complexity (Bardel, Gudmundson, 2018).

In the domain of grammar, Gudmundson used the corpus to investigate the

acquisition of grammatical gender, published first in a licentiate thesis⁸ (Gudmundson, 2010) and later in a PhD thesis (Gudmundson, 2012). The verb system, which has been thoroughly and deeply examined in international second language acquisition research concerning several different target languages (see e.g., Kihlstedt's work, 1998, with the *InterFra* corpus for French), was explored in a number of *InterIta* participants by Walhberg (2007). This licentiate thesis on modality comprised also the mapping of tense and aspect morphology, following the implicational scale suggested by Giacalone Ramat (e.g., 2002, 2003) for Italian L2 learners living in Italy. Verb morphology was also explored by Bardel (2005) in a case study of the learner Katarina (first described in an unpublished manuscript by Bardel, Lindqvist, 2004). The Swedish learner, who had advanced knowledge of English and French and basic knowledge of Spanish, followed the developmental order of this scale, which suggests that the learning of Italian verb morphology in formal settings is very similar to that in informal settings. Besides this, Katarina advanced very quickly from one developmental stage to the next. Positive transfer, that is, a facilitative effect of previously studied Romance languages was therefore suggested to play a role.

Following Katarina longitudinally (four data points), the study by Bardel (2005) complemented oral production data with introspective data. The comments in her diary exhibited a conscious and strategic reliance on French:

There are no big difficulties, because the similarities with French are notable. The trick is to know which verbs take *to be* and which to take *to have* and then you have to learn the participle and the form. One difficulty is the agreement of the participle with the subject by gender and number. This rule has more consequences in Italian than in French, regarding pronunciation (Bardel, 2005: 25, our translation).

While cross-linguistic influence (CLI), or transfer, in additional language learning can exist at all language levels, in oral production data of the kind gathered in *InterIta*, instances of CLI are detectable particularly in the lexical domain (Williams, Hammarberg, 1998; Bardel, 2015; Lindqvist, 2025). Studies on CLI in vocabulary acquisition have been conducted leveraging the *InterIta* corpus, with inspiration from pioneering work by Dewaele (1998) and Williams and Hammarberg (1998) among others. This was first described by Bardel and Lindqvist (2004), reported on in Bardel (2005), and then further developed and discussed in Bardel and Lindqvist (2007).

Drawing on the recordings with Katarina, and focusing on the lexical domain, Bardel and Lindqvist (2007) distinguished between two major categories of lexical CLI: *code-switches*, and *word construction attempts*. The former were either from (a) Spanish, seemingly slipping in without the learner noticing, or (b) French, and then most often immediately corrected by the learner herself, or (c) Swedish in the later recordings, apparently used as a communication strategy, given that the interlocutor understood Swedish. The word construction attempts were mainly built on French words, indicating conscious use of this background language. While Spanish was prominent in code-switches in spite of Katarina's low mastery of this background language, her high level of competence in French proved to be beneficial especially in word construction attempts. Some examples are *severo* (from French *sévere*, En: 'severe'); **esciarpa* (from French *écharpe*, En: 'scarf', target: 'sciarpa'); **lire* (from French *lire*, En: 'read', target: 'leggere'); all according to the learner's own introspective comments (Bardel, Lindqvist, 2007: 136-138).

⁸ In Swedish higher education, a licentiate thesis may be written and defended halfway to the PhD degree in some disciplines, where the licentiate degree is an option available in some disciplines. It comprises two years of postgraduate studies and a short thesis.

In sum, this study registered different types of lexical CLI, *code-switches* with different pragmatic or compensatory functions and *word construction attempts* employed as strategical solutions in a learner of Italian as additional language. It was followed up later in Bardel (2015), where an outline of formal as well as semantic types of lexical CLI in French and Italian as L3 was presented, based on taxonomies that had been suggested by Ringbom (2001; 2007) and further explored in a series of studies by Lindqvist on French as L3 (for an overview see Lindqvist, 2025).

The results from Bardel's (2005) case study suggest positive transfer from French in the development of the verb system. However, as seen there are quite few studies based on *InterIta* concerning the development of verb morphology and only one that discusses it in relation to the role of previously learned languages. It would therefore be interesting to continue researching this area. The exploratory study presented in the next section incorporates lexical CLI to seek indications of which languages are activated in connection with the expression of tense and aspect at different developmental stages of Italian as L3.

4. AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TRANSFER IN THE VERBAL DOMAIN

Besides having already offered a solid ground for several studies, the richness of the data gathered in the *InterIta* corpus can still provide new insights. In what follows, a longitudinal study of a subset of three students from the *InterIta* corpus will be presented. The aim of the study is to explore transfer phenomena in relation to the development of the verbal domain.

Specifically, we will focus on both lexical cross-linguistic influences and on how learners develop their expression of past events morphologically. The expression of past events in Italian is known to be a challenging domain to acquire, especially for learners with Germanic languages as background languages as these languages codify aspectual differences in different ways than Italian and other Romance languages do (e.g., Colonna Dahlman, Bernardini, in this issue). Italian past tenses not only locate events in time but also express different perspectives (aspects) (Giacalone Ramat, 2002). Italian clearly distinguishes between perfective and imperfective aspect, expressed by perfective (e.g., *passato prossimo, passato remoto*) and imperfective (e.g., *imperfetto*) tenses. Imperfective aspect further includes progressive, habitual and continuous aspect⁹. In contrast, Swedish does not mark aspect morphologically having a simple (*preteritum*) and compound (*perfekt*) past usually expressing perfectivity. The distinction in Swedish is about the temporal relevance of the event. Imperfective aspect is conveyed in Swedish either by *preteritum* or through lexical means, like, for example, the periphrastic construction *hålla på att* + infinitive, appr. 'to keep on doing something' (Blensenius, 2015). Because of these structural differences, Swedish learners of Italian may struggle to acquire Italian's aspectual systems. As already mentioned, Swedish university students of Italian are generally multilingual and their knowledge of other languages, especially structurally similar ones, may help them in the learning process. Knowing French, which also distinguishes between perfective (*passé composé*) and imperfective (*imparfait*) tenses, was suggested to boost the learning of Italian tenses by Bardel (2005) and has been convincingly shown to do so by Vallerossa (2023).

Besides previous language knowledge, other factors may play a role in the learning of tense and aspect but, due to space limitation, we will only focus here on the role exerted

⁹ The boundary between progressive, habitual, and continuous aspect is not always clear-cut. In this study, we follow Comrie (1976), who defines continuous aspect as the combination of imperfective morphology with stative predicates. Progressive aspect expresses ongoing situations, while habitual aspect refers to recurring events (Bertinetto, 1986).

by the semantic categories of verb predicates. Vendler (1957) classifies verb predicates combining the properties of telicity, dynamicity and punctuality. Telicity has to do with whether a predicate implies the reaching of a goal while dynamicity indicates the deployment of energy. Punctuality allows to distinguish between durative and punctual predicates. Atelic predicates include activities ('to play') and states ('to be') depending on whether they are dynamic or not. Telic predicates can be distinguished in durative accomplishments and punctual achievements. For the purpose of this study, we only distinguish between states, activities and telic predicates. The semantic properties of verb predicates are at the ground of the most influential hypothesis attempting to explain the appropriation of past tense morphology in first and second language acquisition, namely the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* (Andersen, 1993; but see also Bardovi-Harlig, Comajoan-Colomé, 2020, for a review of studies). In its last version (Andersen, 2002), the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* predicts two distinct learning trajectories: perfective morphology is incipiently combined with telic predicates and, only subsequently, extended to atelic ones, first to activities and finally to states. The reverse pattern is observed for imperfective morphology, which initially appears with atelic verbs and is later used with telic ones.

While the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* views a flexible use of both perfective and imperfective forms across all verb types as the final stage of learning, research shows that the tendency to match verb predicates and tense-aspect inflectional morphology – the so-called *Congruence Principle* – usually emerges only in later stages (see e.g., Rastelli, 2021; Vallerossa, 2023). At earlier stages, learners often rely on a single past tense form, a pattern described by the *Default Past Tense Hypothesis* (Salaberry, 2000). Finally, although there is general agreement that perfective morphology is acquired before imperfective morphology (Bardovi-Harlig, Comajoan-Colomé, 2020), the developmental path of the different imperfective functions remains unclear. Drawing on Lardiere's *Feature Reassembly Hypothesis*, Domínguez, Arche, and Myles (2017) found that English-speaking learners of Spanish had difficulties rejecting the use of the Spanish Preterit in continuous contexts. This is attributed to the fact that English possesses distinct forms to express habituality (*used to*) and progressivity (the Past Progressive), but lacks dedicated means to encode continuous aspect, which is instead conveyed by the ambiguous Simple Past.

Based on spoken data from Swedish L1 learners of French, Kihlstedt (1998) proposed an implicational scale for the acquisition of the imperfective aspect. According to this scale, the *imparfait* first appears with stative predicates (*caractérisant*) and is subsequently extended to dynamic predicates (*habituel*). It then combines with explicit frequency markers (*habituel fréquentatif*), followed by progressive uses (*progressif*), and finally extends to telic verbs (*aux confins*).

Rosi (2009) proposed a similar acquisitional scale for imperfectivity that partially mirrors earlier findings (Kihlstedt, 1998; Giacalone-Ramat, 2002). In her study, the continuous function emerged first but, unlike Kihlstedt's model, the progressive function was acquired before the habitual.

4.1. Research questions and methodology

Assuming a third language perspective, the present study investigates the development of tense-aspect morphology in Italian as an additional language in light of the following research questions:

1. What verbal predicates and what aspectual functions are employed with perfective and imperfective morphology in the oral production of Swedish students of Italian over

time?

2. Can phenomena of transfer be detected in the verbal domain and if so, when in the developmental process are such phenomena visible?

For the present study, three learners (Alva, Eva and Anna) from the group of intermediate learners in the *Interita* corpus were selected. Table 2 shows the three dates of recordings (DR1; DR2; DR3), the number (N) of the recording selected, the interval between the first and the second recording (INT1-2) and the interval between the second and the third one (INT2-3). The data were mainly collected between 2001 and 2003, with the exception of Alva, whose recordings took place between 2004 and 2007. In the case of Eva, three of six available recordings, namely recordings 2, 4 and 6, were selected. The interval between the first two recording is almost the same with all three participants, approximately ranging from four to five months. The interval between the second and the third recording varies considerably, with Anna being recorded after three months while Eva and Alva after more than one year since they were abroad.

Table 2. *Recordings from Interita (DR=date of recording; N=number of recording; INT=interval between recordings)*

Learner	DR 1	N	INT1-2	DR 2	N	INT2-3	DR 3	N
Alva	2004-09-26	1	5m 19d	2005-03-17	3	1y 11m 10d	2007-02-27	4
Eva	2001-11-28	2	4m 27days	2002-04-24	4	1y 5m 28d	2003-10-22	6
Anna	2001-09-19	1	4m 19d	2002-02-07	3	3m 7d	2002-05-14	4

At the time of the first recording, Alva was 29 years old and had been living in Italy for two years. She was attending *Italian 2* at Stockholm University through distance studies. Alva, an L1 speaker of Swedish, was teaching English in Italy and spoke Italian on a daily basis with her boyfriend and his family. As the other two participants, she had studied English in school. She had also studied French and Spanish and she mentioned in the interviews that these languages may have helped her during early stages of acquisition of Italian.

Eva, also an L1 speaker of Swedish, was 20 years old when she was first recorded. She was attending the course *Italian 1* at Stockholm University and her use of Italian was at first limited to the classroom environment. Her third recording was conducted after an 11 months residence in Italy as an Erasmus student. Eva had studied French and Latin as well as Italian in upper secondary school.

Anna was 21 at the time of the first recording. She had moved to Sweden as a small child and, besides Swedish, she reported Bosnian as L1. At Stockholm University, she was attending a program in political sciences with the combination of a modern language (i.e., Italian). At the time of the first recording, she was attending the course *Italian 1*. Among other things, her interest in Italian was determined by the fact that her sister lived in Italy. Anna had studied Spanish and had spent one semester in Spain before starting her studies in Italian.

4.2. Results: The development of verb morphology

In this first section of the Results, we provide an overview of the longitudinal development of the learners' production of *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*, together with the

distribution of these two past tenses across categories of lexical aspect.

4.2.1. *Alva*

Table 3 shows Alva's occurrences of tense-aspect morphology in the three recordings. As can be seen in the table, she consistently uses past tense morphology already from the first recording. In the first recording, Alva employs perfective morphology with all categories of lexical aspect and generally with adverbials, both punctual (1) and durative (2).

(1) *Lui si è laureato due anni fa.*
'He graduated two years ago'.

(2) *E poi e ho studiato il francese a scuola qui eh qui in Svezia per sei anni. Ho vissuto eh sei mesi a Parigi e poi ho studiato lo spagnolo eh tre anni.*
'And then I studied French at school here ehm here in Sweden for six years. I lived ehm six months in Paris and then I studied Spanish ehm three years'.

In this first recording, imperfective morphology is used exclusively in its continuous value (i.e., with stative predicates) indicating a durative and concluded situation in the past. In (3), Alva juxtaposes a situation in the past expressed with *imperfetto* ('era') with a change of condition conveyed by *passato prossimo* ('è stato').

(3) *È una bella domanda perché prima ero [IMP] molto più eh. Ma viaggiare per me era [IMP] più un'avventura forse ma poi siamo andati [PF] in Africa con la mamma di mio fidanzato ed è stato [PF] un viaggio molto molto molto bello.*
'It is a good question because before I was more ehm. But travelling for me was more like an adventure maybe but then we went to Africa with my boyfriend's mother and it was a very, very, very nice trip'.

Table 3. *Alva's distribution of past tense forms across categories of lexical aspect (Sta=stative; Act=act; Tel=telic; Tot=total) and aspect (Perf=perfective; ImpCon=imperfective continuous; ImpHab=imperfective habitual; ImpPro=imperfective progressive; Per=progressive periphrasis) in the three recordings. *Ambiguous forms.*

	1				2				3			
	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot
Perf	9	11	15	35	3	14	23	40	12	16	30	58
Imp Con	4	0	0	4	12	0	0	12	26	0	0	26
Imp Hab	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	1
Imp Pro	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	3*	1*	4
Per	0	2	0	2	0	7	2	9	2	11	0	13

Also in the second recording, Alva uses perfective tenses with all verb categories. Perfective morphology also appears in foreground events carrying the narrative forward. Another tendency in Alva's production is to use durative adverbs with durative predicates

(‘I studied for one year and a half’) while punctual adverbs are used with achievements (‘I started in 1995’), as in example (4).

(4) *Ho iniziato a studiare all'università nel 1995. E ho iniziato a studiare le scienze umanistiche. E ho studiato un anno e mezzo. Ho fatto storia dell'arte per un anno mi sembra. E poi sono andata a Parigi. Sono stata lì sei mesi a studiare.*

‘I started to study at university in 1995. And I started to study humanities. And I studied one year and a half. I studied history of art for one year I guess. And then I moved to Paris. I’ve been there six months to study’.

In the second recording, Alva extends imperfective aspect to other predicates than statives (5), showing the habitual use of *imperfetto*, and she also uses periphrastic constructions in nine occurrences as in (6).

(5) *Studiavamo [IMP] tutti e due lì. Lui studiava [IMP] design però alla scuola di design [...] mentre io ero [IMP] all'università.*

‘We both studied there. He studied design but at the design school while I was at university’.

(6) *Sto studiando [PER] l'italiano a distanza. Sto facendo [PER] questo corso su internet.*

‘I am studying Italian at a distance. I’m doing this online course’.

In the third recording, all functions conveyed by perfective and imperfective morphology are observed and more complex temporal relationships are established by means of the pluperfect (7).

(7) *E le prime volte che sono eh che ero andata [PLUP] in Italia non sapevo niente.*

‘And the first times that I have ehm had gone to Italy I didn’t know anything’.

As in the second recording, Alva uses *passato prossimo* in foreground contexts. In the final recording, she also uses *imperfetto* in background contexts, which provide additional details (Hopper, 1979). By doing so, she exhibits complex narrative structures, as in (8).

(8) *Siamo stati [PF] lì due volte. Allora una volta eravamo [IMP] soltanto nella Costa Smeralda e poi eh la seconda volta eravamo [IMP] lì in Costa Smeralda una settimana e poi abbiamo preso [PF] la moto perché eravamo [IMP] in moto e abbiamo fatto un giro [PF] eh all'altra parte dell'isola.*

‘We have been there twice. So once we were only in Costa Smeralda and then ehm the second time we were there in Costa Smeralda one week and then we took the motorcycle because we had a motorcycle and we took a tour on the other part of the island’.

A final remark concerns the use of the *imperfetto* in example 9, produced by Alva in the third recording. According to Kihlstedt (1998), this is an instance of so-called *imparfait aux confins*, i.e., an imperfective tense with a telic verb, which represents the last stage of acquisition of imperfective functions.

(9) *E iniziava a slittare.*

‘It started to slide’.

4.2.2. *Eva*

When observing the developmental pattern shown by Eva (Table 4), an overall limited use of past tenses can be noted in the first two recordings, with 15 and 21 forms respectively. As mentioned above, Eva commenced her studies in Sweden, and was studying there at the time of the first two recordings, whereas her last interview was recorded after a residence in Italy.

Table 4. *Eva's distribution of past tense forms across categories of lexical aspect (Sta=stative; Act=act; Tel=telic; Tot=total) and aspect (Perf=perfective; ImpCon=imperfective continuous; ImpHab=imperfective habitual; ImpPro=imperfective progressive; Per=progressive periphrasis) in the three recordings*

	1				2				3			
	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot
Perf	1	0	12	13	2	5	11	18	9	5	17	31
Imp Con	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	55	0	0	55
Imp Hab	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Imp Pro	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Per	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	3	1	4

In the first recording, Eva only uses perfective morphology with telic predicates, with the exception of one stative predicate. In the second, she extends the use of perfective morphology to activities. Imperfective morphology only occurs once in each of the first two recordings, while it surpasses perfective morphology in the third recording, the latter occurring in 31 instances. Imperfective morphology is used 55 times with stative predicates, 44 of which are represented by the predicate *to be* as in (10).

(10) *ma per studiare era [IMP] bello perché eh era [IMP] tranquilla così ma era [IMP] veramente bella e l'università era [IMP] un po'...*

'But for studying it was nice because it was quiet like that but it was very beautiful and the university was a little...'

In the third recording, Eva uses perfective morphology with both telic and atelic predicates. A certain tendency in Eva's production is a polarization of certain tenses with specific predicates regardless of their semantics; for example, the predicate *to be* patterns consistently with *imperfetto*, whereas *to like* is exclusively realized through *passato prossimo*. In this case, the selection of predicates might be formulaic rather than signalling a mastery of *imperfetto* and of its functions.

Eva's development thus reflects the predicted progression of the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis*, by initially restricting perfective forms to telic predicates and gradually extending them to atelic ones. The last recording shows a marked shift toward imperfective morphology, especially with stative verbs such as *to be*, combined with a consistent reliance on formulaic uses of certain predicates.

4.2.3. *Anna*

Table 5 shows Anna's use of tense-aspect morphology in the three recordings. Overall, few occurrences of past tenses are represented in all the recordings: there are 37 forms in the first, 27 in the second and 24 in the third. Perfective morphology largely dominates the first and the second recording with 30 and 26 occurrences, respectively. In the third recording, both perfective and imperfective tenses are employed, the latter being adopted 11 times in its continuous function.

The use of perfective morphology is oftentimes realized in cleft sentences (11), which are also frequent in Swedish (e.g., *det var det (som) jag sade* literally 'it was that, that I said').

(11) *È quello che ho detto [PF].*

'That's what I said'.

Considering the overall occurrences of *imperfetto*, seven forms are employed in a non-target like fashion. The general impression is that *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* are utilized interchangeably as markers of pastness yet lacking any aspectual distinction.

(12) *Quando lui apriva [IMP] la lettera vedeva [IMP] due biglietti per il teatro.*

'When he opened the letter he saw two tickets for the theatre'.

(13) *E arrivavo [IMP] il pronto soccorso.*

'And the ambulance arrived'.

Table 5. *Anna's distribution of past tense forms across categories of lexical aspect (Sta=stative; Act=act; Tel=telic; Tot=total) and aspect (Perf=perfective; ImpCon=imperfective continuous; ImpHab=imperfective habitual; ImpPro=imperfective progressive; Per=progressive periphrasis) in the three recordings. *Ambiguous forms*

	1				2				3			
	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot	Sta	Act	Tel	Tot
Perf	7	12	11	30	3	4	19	26	4	0	8	12
Imp Con	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	11
Imp Hab	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Imp Pro	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1*	1*
Per	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

4.3. Results: Transfer phenomena

Instances of transfer in the verbal domain can be of various types, for example lexical or grammatical, and serving different purposes. In Alva's recordings, no transfer occurrences are observed, which is probably related to her high proficiency level (see Table 3).

In Eva's first two recordings, a few occurrences of lexical transfer are found. Example (14) shows code-switching to Swedish, which serves a pragmatic function as Eva is searching for a lexical solution in Italian.

(14) *Sono felice perché ho nej vad heter det ho ottenuto un appartamento.*

‘I am happy because I *how do you say it* (Swedish) got an apartment’.

Example (15) displays a word construction attempt where the learner relies on French for the choice of the lexical verb *to drive*. At the same time, she attaches the morphology for Italian verbs belonging to third conjugation, such as *preferisce* (‘he/she prefers’). Another aspect worth mentioning is that Italian has the verb *condurre* (‘to conduct’) which may be used as *to drive* but it is less idiomatic than *guidare* to drive. As such, the learner would show a semantic transfer from French based on the existence of a similar word.

(15) *L'uomo conduisce la macchina.*

‘The man *drives* (from French *conduit*) the car’.

These instances are indicative of a simultaneous activation of different background languages. As mentioned above, an overextension of imperfective morphology is attested in Eva’s third recording, which may be interpreted as transfer. It is difficult to identify the exact source language, as both Swedish and English have an ambiguous simple tense (i.e., *preteritum* and *simple past*) to express perfective and imperfective aspect. In this case, the similarity of forms, namely the fact that *preteritum*/*simple past* and the target *imperfetto* are all simple tenses, might be responsible for a transfer of meaning (see Kihlstedt, Vallerossa, 2026).

Several instances of transfer are found in Anna’s recordings. Swedish is generally employed to elicit help from the interviewer (16), while both Swedish and Spanish occur as sources of lexical transfer, seemingly unconsciously, like in example (17).

(16) *eh leggere i libri secondo me è più meglio.* Alltså vad heter bästa?

‘To read the books is better. Ehm how do you say “best”? (Swedish)

(17) *non ho parlato [PF] per due anni adesso però sono stata [PF] dalla mia sorella questo verano per un mese e sono tornata [PF] qui per studiare alla nivå di università.*

‘I haven’t spoken for two years now but I stayed at my sister’s place this summer (from Spanish *verano*) for one month and I came back here to study at university level (from Swedish *nivå*)’.

In (17), both Spanish and Swedish are activated but it is difficult to know whether this target-like production with *passato prossimo* is the result of transfer from Spanish. As suggested in Bardel and Lindqvist (2007: 144), it may be the case that a learner with basic knowledge of two languages with so many similarities at the lexical, phonological and grammatical level as Spanish and Italian, is not always able to distinguish between the two languages, that is, to be sure whether a word belongs to the Spanish or the Italian vocabulary. In the example below, although the word *verano* indicates activation of Spanish at the lexical level, when it comes to the verb system Anna’s knowledge of Spanish does not seem to facilitate, as she uses *imperfetto*, which is not target-like:

(18) *L'ultima volta era [IMP] questo verano (from Spanish verano).*

‘Last time was this summer (from Spanish *verano*)’.

The different use of tenses in (17) and (18) is worth commenting on. The distinction between the two sentences regards the temporal location of the situations. In (17), the event time is in the past domain (‘I haven’t spoken’; ‘I stayed’), but the point of reference (i.e., the validity of the assertion conveyed by the sentence in general) anchors these events

to the present domain by means of the adverbs ‘now’ and ‘this summer’. In Comrie’s words, these forms convey perfect values describing “a situation that started in the past but continues (persists) in the present” (1976: 60). The sentence ‘I stayed at my sister’s place this summer for two months’, has a perfect of recent past, expressing a recent time reference. Consequently, all situations expressed in example (17) are connected to recent or current situations.

In (18), the event is also located in the past but no reference to the present domain is presupposed. The past location of the situation is reinforced by the adverb *last time*, which excludes any pertinence to the present. Although *imperfetto* is employed, a target-like choice in this sentence would be a perfective tense such as *passato prossimo*. A similar use of *imperfetto* instead of *passato prossimo* is also found in (19) where code-switching from Swedish occurs.

(19) *\eh non poteva [IMP] fermarsi allora han slog i [PRET].*
‘He couldn’t stop so he hit (Swedish)’.

As mentioned above, both Swedish and English have a simple past tense to express concluded situations, while they use a compound tense to express events with a relevance to the present (the *perfekt* in Swedish and present perfect in English). If interpreted this way, the use of *imperfetto* to express past concluded situations and *passato prossimo* for situations with a persisting effect on the present may be determined by negative transfer from Swedish or English (Vallerossa, 2021; Kihlstedt, Vallerossa, 2026). This interpretation may be corroborated by the use, in the same sentence, of the Swedish *han slog i*, which is conjugated in *preteritum*.

4.4. Preliminary observations

The aim of this small-scale study was to explore transfer phenomena in relation to the development of the verbal domain in three learners of Italian L3. Overall, across the three recordings, the learners exhibited distinct developmental patterns, both in their use of perfective and imperfective morphology across different verb types and functions (research question 1), and in the manifestation of transfer phenomena (research question 2). As we will discuss below, these results may be determined by a conspiracy of factors, such as the different proficiency levels of the learners, the explicit teaching of past tense forms, frequency in the input and a differential use of background languages.

Delving deeper into the first part of research question 1 about verb semantics, the findings only partially corroborate the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis*. In Eva’s first recordings, there is a clear tendency of using *passato prossimo* with telic predicates. Otherwise, the prototypicality notion postulated by the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* seems mostly to apply to imperfective morphology, largely associated with atelic and, specifically stative, predicates (cfr. Kihlstedt, 1998). Perfective morphology, on the other hand, appears with all verb categories, rather aligning with the *Default Past Tense Hypothesis*, according to which «at the beginning stages learners use a default marker of past tense to mark verbal endings conveying past time reference» (Salaberry, 2000: 170).

The extended use of *passato prossimo* with atelic predicates may be determined by several factors. In instructed contexts, *passato prossimo* is generally the first past tense form to which guided learners are introduced and, consequently, it is common that beginners only use this tense in absence of alternative past forms. The use of *passato prossimo* with atelic predicates may also depend on the fact that this category includes very frequent predicates such as *to be* or *to have* (Giacalone Ramat, 2002). Furthermore, in the *InterIta* corpus,

students were asked, among other things, to talk about their experience of learning Italian, their perception of Italy and the differences between Italy and Sweden. Such range of topics is likely to determine a preference for using atelic verbs for expressing personal opinions, for example *to like* or *to suppose*, or activities of various types, such as *to study* or *to travel*.

Moving to the second part of the first research question, namely the functions conveyed by Italian tenses, learners undergo phases similar to those attested in previous studies (Kihlstedt, 1998; Salaberry, 2000). Imperfective morphology appears later than perfective, as postulated by the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (see Bardovi-Harlig, Comajoan-Colomé, 2020) and is largely employed in its continuous value with stative predicates. Successively, imperfective morphology is used to express habitual contexts, as in Anna's second recording (*imparfait habituel* in Kihlstedt, 1998). A final stage where imperfective morphology is attached to telic predicates (see Rosi, 2008, for Italian and Salaberry, 2000, for Spanish) is quasi-absent in our small-scale sample except for Alva producing, in Kihlstedt's words (1998), a form of *imparfait aux confins*. As mentioned above, the learners consistently rely on the notion of prototypicality for imperfective morphology but the range of predicates is limited to a few verb types, such as *to be* or *to have*. This, in turn, raises the question on whether these forms are learned as formulaic expressions, such as 'when I was a child', 'when I was fifteen'. Formulaicity is undoubtedly an important component for the extensive number of states in *imperfetto* but at least Alva, in our sample, is capable of using imperfective morphology in various contexts, showing to have developed a mastery of the different functions of *imperfetto*.

More difficult to comment on is the second research question, investigating how knowledge of previous languages may influence the acquisition of past tense morphology. Overall, we believe that the different transfer patterns are determined by the different proficiency levels. At the time of the first recording, Alva was already at a more advanced stage than Eva and Anna, which is evident in her richer and more developed tense-aspect morphology. No obvious instances of lexical transfer were found in her production, probably due to her relatively high proficiency level. However, the results from Eva and Anna do not pattern with each other in any obvious way: Eva displays a less evident use of transfer limited to word construction attempts and Anna shows a more frequent and diverse use of different languages. The occurrences of word construction attempts and code-switching suggest simultaneous activation of languages, but without introspective comments from the learners themselves, it is hazardous to draw any conclusions about the degree of awareness behind these instances of lexical CLI.

In the recordings with Eva and Anna, instances of grammatical transfer may be connected to Swedish or English, but in different ways. Eva's overextension of the *imperfetto* in perfective contexts resembles what has been defined as *perfective imperfect* in a study on the longitudinal development of past tense morphology in the L3 French of a highly proficient L2 speaker of Swedish (Kihlstedt, Vallerossa, 2026):

Initially, Swedish, and to a certain extent English, is responsible for what we call the perfective imperfect, as in *je faisais* 'I did' where *j'ai fait* 'I have done' is more appropriate [...]. The incorrect use of the imperfect in perfective contexts is determined by an incorrect assumed similarity across background languages: the simple tense forms in Swedish and English seem to trigger the French simple form *imparfait* (Kihlstedt, Vallerossa, 2026: 55)

Anna's choice of different past tense markers seems instead to reflect a temporal distinction as the one existing in her background languages Swedish or English: *imperfetto* would express events located in a distant past and *passato prossimo* events with a connection

to the present, thus showing a mismatch of forms and functions resulting in negative transfer (*preteritum/Simple Past* ≠ *imperfetto* and *perfekt/Present Perfect* ≠ *passato prossimo*).

A similar result is found in a study with Swedish L1 speakers learning Italian with and without previous knowledge of Romance languages (Vallerossa, 2021). While learners with previous knowledge of a Romance language used the contrast between *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* in an aspectually proper way, those lacking such knowledge seemed to interpret the distinction between these two tenses as a merely temporal one. Vallerossa (2021: 13) also shows an introspective comment of a student reporting:

(20) *Pp passar inte eftersom det är en avslutad händelse för länge sedan. Dåtid så sent som i går, alltså pp. Imperfetto skulle indikera längre förflytten tid.*
'Pp (*passato prossimo*) does not work because it is a completed event long ago.
Past as late as yesterday, which is pp. *Imperfetto* would indicate more distant past time'.

The cases of Eva and Anna are therefore interesting from a transfer perspective as they seem to indicate that even if both have Swedish as L1 and can be expected to have high proficiency in English, transfer outcomes may differ. There are however other differences in their multilingual profiles, which lie beyond the scope of this study, such as Anna having two L1s and Eva having less experience of informal language learning in her background.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, our small-scale study based on the production of three learners from the *InterIta* corpus shows that the corpus represents a valuable resource for the study of spoken Italian. It could be useful in a larger study tracing the development of the verb system in learners of Italian. The corpus also proves particularly suitable for continuing the investigation of CLI at the lexical level initiated by Bardel and Lindqvist (2007), in order to map systematic patterns across speakers at different proficiency levels. Furthermore, the data gathered through recordings of native speakers of Italian have only been used as L1 benchmark and remain unexplored in their own right. However, the limitations of *InterIta* are noticeable when it comes to detecting grammatical transfer in the domain of verb morphology, particularly in the tense-aspect domain as discussed in this study. This highlights the potential to complement corpora of this kind with additional data sources, such as tests and introspective data, which could provide valuable insights into how learners themselves verbalize and reflect on their production (see Bardel, Lindqvist, 2007; Vallerossa, 2023; Vallerossa, Toth, 2023; Kihlstedt, Vallerossa, 2026).

Interita also offers opportunities for future research on other aspects of spoken language, such as for example pronunciation, not least considering the role of other languages spoken by the participants. This is a hitherto unexplored potential of the corpus which, with its recordings, actually provide direct access to phonological and prosodic phenomena. Taken together, these considerations underscore the strengths of the corpus while at the same time pointing to the necessity of methodological approaches that integrate multiple data types in order to fully capture the complexity of additional language development.

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