Italian

I.Revolon

1. Language description

Italian is a Romance language, as it directly derives from Latin. It is historically based on Florentine, a Tuscan dialect that obtained the status of official language variety between the 14th and the 16th century and that was used for educational, administrative and literary purposes (Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005; Kramer, 2009)

Despite many dialects being still spoken and sometimes learned as a first language (Kramer, 2009), nowadays Italian is the official language of Italy and the prominent varieties are Florentine, Milanese and Roman (Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005). However, it needs to be noted that local accent differences are present according to the geographical area considered (Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005).

Italian is spoken in Italy by 60 million people and it is one of the official languages of Switzerland, where it is spoken by 300 000 people in Canton Tessin and Canton Graubuenden. A small minority of Italian speakers can also be found in Istria as well as in Malta. Expatriate immigrant communities speaking Italian can be found in different parts of the world such as France, Germany, North and South America, United Kingdom and Australia (Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005; Kramer, 2009; Expat Insider, 2016; AIRE, 2009).

Table 1

Consonant system of Italian (adapted from Bortolini, 2004)

			Coronal				Dorsal			
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
plosives	p b			t d			k g			
nasals	m	(ɱ)		n		ɲ	(ŋ)			
Trill				R		(R)				
fricatives		f v		s z	ʃ [ʒ]					h
affricate				ts dz	tʃ dʒ					
liquids				l		ʎ				
semi-vowels	w					j	w			

() → allophones [] →sound not typically found in Italian but present in loanwords

As far as consonants are concerned, the following aspects need to be noted (Berruto, 2006; Bertinetto & Loporcaro, 2005; Maddieson, Flavier, Marsico, Coupé, & Pellegrino, 2013):

- variants to the rhotic /r/ such as the uvular /ʀ/ and /ʁ/ are accepted;
- most consonants can occur single or geminate in intervocalic position. Geminates – phonetically long consonants – play an important role in Italian in that they confer a different meaning to the words. For example, *note* /ˈnɔte/ (musical notes) – *notte* /ˈnɔt:e/ (night); *pala* /ˈpala/ (spade) – *palla* /ˈpal:a/ (ball); *coro* /ˈkɔro/ (choir) – *corro* /cor:o/ (run 1st sing);
- intervocalic /z/ could be either voiced – eg. *chiesa* /ˈkjɛza/ (church) – or voiceless – e.g. *chiesa* /ˈkjɛsa/ (church) – depending on the dialectal influence. Typically, it is voiced in the northern regions;

- another regional difference is evident in the affricates /ts/ and /dz/. For example, the standard Italian *zio* /'tsio/ is pronounced in the North as /'dzio/; *alzare* (to raise) is pronounced as /al'tsare/ in the North and as /al'dzare/ in the South.

Syllable structure

The canonic syllabic structure of Italian is quite simple and it is formed by CV (Consonant-Vowel), as in the word /mela/ (apple), which is formed by two CV syllables [me]+[la]. Other typical structures include:

V → /'ape/ (bee) = [a]+[pe]
VC → /'arto/ (limb) = [ar]+[to]
CCV → /'stel:a/ (star) = [ste]+[l:a]
CVC → /'konto/ (bill) = [kon]+[to]
CCCV → /'strut:so/ (ostrich) = [stru]+[t:so]

Stress

According to the stress, Italian words can be divided in:
- oxytone words, when the last syllable is stressed – e.g. in /kwali'ta/ (quality)
- paroxytone words, when the penultimate syllable is stressed – e.g. in /pja'tʃere/ (pleasure)
- proparoxytone words, when the third last syllable is stressed – e.g. in ['kamera] (room)
- 'bisdrucciole', when the fourth-last syllable is stressed – e.g. /'kapitano/ (3rd plural of the verb to happen).

The most frequent words in Italian are paroxytone whereas 'bisdrucciole' are more rare. Oxytone words are the only ones where the accent is orthographically marked (Berruto, 2006).

2. Phonological Development

Table 2

Acquisition ages of Italian consonants according to Zmarich et al. (2012) and Zanobini (2011)

Age	Initial position	Intervocalic position
1;6 – 1;11	p t b	p t n
2;0 – 2;5	k m n v l	k m d v z l
2;6 – 3;6	g f s d	g f s ʃ
> 4	f r tʃ dʒ dz	ʎ r ɲ tʃ ts dʒ dz
	clusters	clusters

3. Common phonological processes

Both Zmarich (2012) and Zanobini (2011) registered the phonological errors made on average by their samples. For the age groups analysed by Zmarich (18-36 months), the most frequent errors were cluster reductions followed by fronting, deletion of weak syllable and stopping and they tend to decrease with age. Zanobini, for the older age group (36-42 months) observed that cluster reduction was still the most frequent error followed by /r/ → /l/ substitution and sound deletion.

Table 4

Error patterns according to Zmarich (2012) and Zanobini (2011)

Process	Example	2;6 – 3;0	3;0 – 3;6
Fronting		********	
Stopping		********	
Del. weak syl.		********	
CC reduction		********	********
Gliding		********	********
Del. fin. cons.		********	********

4. Lexical development

The most prominent studies in Italian literature regarding vocabulary development are those related to the Italian standardization of the CDI – the *Primo Vocabolario del Bambino*; PVB (Caselli & Casadio, 1995; Caselli, Casadio & Bates, 1999; Caselli, Pasqualetti & Stefanini, 2007). Overall, the developmental phases observed for Italian children are similar to those of the English peers (Caselli & Casadio, 1995):

-Vocabulary limited to 10 words; Routine and Word Games phase
-Vocabulary about 200 words; Reference phase (predominant nouns);
-After 100-200 words; Predication phase (when verbs and predicates tend to increase);
-Vocabulary about 400 words; Grammar phase (when grammatical functors start being produced).

Zmarich and colleagues investigated lexical development in relation to articulation. To do so, they analysed the phonetic features of the words included in the PVB. Preliminary results suggest that later acquired words are also more complex from an articulatory point of view. That is, phonetic complexity might play a role in the development of vocabulary and its composition (Zmarich et al., 2009).

5. Results of normally developing Italian toddlers

No data.

6. References

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