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**METADISCURSIVE FUNCTIONS
AND DISCOURSE MARKERS IN L2 ITALIAN**

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Abstract: The onomasiological approach (from function to form) to the study of the acquisition of discourse markers in L2 proposed here takes discursive functions as a starting point and analyses which strategies are employed by the learners to convey those functions. In this paper this theoretical approach is briefly presented and illustrated with some metadiscursive functions found in a corpus of Spanish speakers of L2 Italian and a corpus of L1 Italian speakers. Its main advantage is that it offers a complex picture of the acquisitional process that goes beyond lexical acquisition of these units and allows for a global understanding of the dynamics of learner varieties.

Key words: Discourse markers, L2 acquisition, metadiscursive functions, onomasiological approach, code-switching.

1. Discourse markers in Romance Second Language Acquisition: previous research

Although research on the presence and role of discourse markers (DM) in Second Language Acquisition, and particularly in the case of Romance Languages, does not go back more than 20 years there are already some well-established facts upon which most researchers agree. What has been observed to date is that DMs appear from the first stages of language acquisition (Andorno 2007, 2008; Bardel 2002, 2003; Bini & Pernas 2007; Diao-Klaeger & Thoerle 2013) and their number rises throughout the acquisitional process (Guil 2015, Pauletto & Bardel 2015 for L2 Italian; Pascual Escagedo 2015 for L2 Spanish; Hancock & Sanell 2010 for French). The first DM to emerge in the interlanguage are those phonetically similar to the ones in the L1 and those phonetically 'light' (one syllable or maximum two syllables) such as Italian *sì, no, ok, bene, ma*, French *oui, non, si, bien, alors*, Spanish *sí, no, vale, pues*. In intermediate and advanced levels there is an enrichment of lexical units functioning as DMs, mainly connectives but also those linked to politeness strategies such as mitigation and intensification (Guil *et al.* 2008). However, pragmatic competence seems to improve at a slower rate than lexical and morphosyntactic competence (e.g. use of verbal tenses) and some DMs are completely absent or scarcely found in the interlanguage and therefore experts talk about a 'fossilization' process when compared to acquisitional paths in L1 (Romero Trillo 2002). This fossilization concerns not only the lexical level but also the prosodic and the functional level, i.e. the fact that some of these DMs are never pronounced in spoken discourse with the right intonation or adjustment of the intonation to the function¹ and the fact

¹ In the field of prosody in L2 acquisition there is still a long way to go. An excellent first step in this direction is De Meo and Pettorino (2012), although it contains no article devoted to the prosodic acquisition of DMs.

that learners do not attribute exactly the same functions to these DMs as native speakers (NS): either less functions or, more frequently, more and different functions from the ones the DMs fulfill in L1.

The research we present here is mainly centered on this last aspect: functional symmetries and asymmetries in L1 and L2's uses of DMs. We are convinced that the functional approach is more fruitful in acquisitional research than the lexical approach as it does not determine a previous inventory of DMs and allows the researcher to find not only how many DMs are used to convey a certain function at each level but also to discover what other strategies a learner may be using to convey that function (paralinguistic cues, repetition, mimicking, etc.). Thus in this study we will adopt an onomasiological approach to try to find out which discursive functions are activated by Spanish learners in their process of learning Italian as a second language and, when these functions are carried out using DMs, which DMs are chosen in each case.

The assignment of discursive functions to DMs is based on the taxonomy of discursive functions presented in López Serena and Borreguero (2010) and revised in Borreguero (2015). Thus after a general presentation of the database of the study (2), we will briefly describe this taxonomy (3.1) to focus later only on the metadiscursive function and present the data about DMs related to different metadiscursive functions found in our corpus (3.2).

2. Aims and methodology of the research

This article will show some partial results obtained in a long-term complex study about the acquisition of Italian DMs by Spanish NS. The initial aim of this research (which has been conducted by the members of the A.Ma.Dis. Research group and developed through different financed research projects since

2006²) was to assess the acquisition of textual strategies in spoken competence in L2 Italian by a group of learners whose mother-tongue was Spanish, i.e. a closely related language. Among these textual strategies we have studied politeness strategies (Guil et al. 2010), interruptions (Borreguero & Pernas 2010) and modifications of word order with pragmatic purposes (Borreguero 2014), but our main focus of interest has been the acquisition of discourse markers (Guil et al. 2008; Guil 2009a/b, 2015; Borreguero 2009b, 2012; Pernas 2009; Bazzanella & Borreguero 2011).

Our results are based on *data* extracted from an audiovisual corpus of Italian L2 (360 minutes, 38.000 tokens approximately). The corpus, collected in 2006, is formed by 36 conversations (10 minutes each) divided into 3 levels of competence (initial, intermediate, advance, 12 interactions per level) and 2 types of interactions (symmetric and informal, between learners, and asymmetric and more formal, between a learner and a native teacher). All of the informants were learning Italian in an institutional context for four hours a week. Learners at the initial level were recorded 7 months after their first Italian course (level A1.3-A2.1 of the CERF), learners at the intermediate level had followed Italian courses for almost 3 years (level B1.3-B2.1) and learners at the advanced level had studied Italian for almost 5 years (level C1). Moreover, some of the informants at the intermediate and advanced levels had spent some time in Italy, but less than a year in any case. The interactions of the learners (4 per level) were recorded with a videocamera without the presence of the researcher (although in some cases the researcher also acted as a teacher in the asymmetric interactions). Learners received only vague indications about the topic of conversation and the fictitious roles (friends, students sharing a flat) they had to assume

² Detailed information about this group and the projects, including the corpus, the database and main publications, can be found at www.marcadores-discursivos.es

and in all cases there were task-oriented interactions (such as buying a present for a mutual friend, or getting a job as baby-sitter in an Italian family), thus the result was semi-spontaneous interactions. We also had a control-corpus of two NS (different from the ones participating in the asymmetric interactions) carrying out exactly the same task-oriented interactions as the learners³. The number of participant and their level of competence is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Participants in the A.Ma.Dis. Corpus

Participants	Italian Native Speakers	Italian L2 learners		
		Initial Level	Intermediate level	Advanced level
	4	4	4	4

In order to study the acquisitional process, interactions were transcribed in Conversational Analysis transcription conventions and also in the CHAT-LAN conventions established by the CHILDES Programme, and exhaustively read to identify all of the DMs and their occurrences. Each DM was attributed one or more discursive functions according to its context of occurrence. All this information was collected in an Access Database in order to be able to make an automatic query by DM, level of competence, type of informant and function. Each index/file card in the Database contains information about the conversation (number, type, place of registration), the informant (type, level of competence), the DM, its function, its context of occurrence and other relevant information to understand its functions (position, whether it is part of a chain of DMs, prosodic features, etc.).

The advantages of having such an amount of information at our disposal is that we can track the number of DMs in each level of

³ For the purposes of this study we have taken into account both the productions of native speakers in symmetric and in asymmetric conversation.

competence, the functions ascribed to a single DM and the number of DMs fulfilling a single function across the corpus, among others. Here we will focus our attention on which DMs are chosen by the learners to serve the purpose of expressing metadiscursive functions such as opening and closing the interaction, signaling changes in discursive topics, or reformulation among others.

3. Metadiscursive functions

3.1. A functional approach to DMs: a taxonomy of discursive functions

Bazzanella (1995) divided DMs into two main macrofunctions – interactional and metadiscursive – and in later works (Bazzanella 2006) announced a third cognitive macrofunction which has not been fully developed. Taking these three macrofunctions as a point of departure, López Serena and Borreguero (2010) developed a detailed taxonomy that has been recently revised in Borreguero (2015)⁴. We will briefly present here this taxonomy in order to understand the position of the metadiscursive functions to which this study is devoted.

The interactional macrofunction gathers together all the functions relating to the relationship between the speaker and the listener in conversation and can be divided into 3 main subgroups: a) functions assumed by the speaker who takes the turn (also called conversation control functions), for example, functions related to turn alternation, such as taking, keeping and leaving the floor; functions whose aim

⁴ This is, of course, only one proposal of taxonomy among many others (cf. Pons 2000, 2006; Loureda and Acín 2010), but we have found it especially useful for the study of DMs in the interlanguage. Due to space limitations we cannot offer here examples of all the functions mentioned, but the reader can find a more detailed description of this function and numerous examples in the studies quoted in this paragraph.

is to request or keep the receiver's attention, and functions linked to politeness strategies such as mitigation and intensification; b) functions assumed by the listeners who have no intention of taking the floor but produce phatic cues and express their emotions regarding what the speaker says; c) functions assumed by listeners who intend to take the floor and react to what has been said by showing agreement (i.e. producing a collaborative answer) or disagreement (reactive answer) or by requesting an explanation.

As we will see below, the metadiscursive macrofunction gathers together all the functions related to text building and production and can be divided into two main subfunctions: a) functions related to the organization of textual information, such as marking the order of different topics in the text, marking out the introduction, change and closing of discursive topics, inserting digressions, topic resumption and summing-up, marking the opening and closing of interactions, focusing relevant information and adding new information about a settled topic; b) functions related to the linguistic formulation of the text. This function covers all the strategies to keep the floor while having difficulties to plan an utterance and are therefore strictly linked to online planning in spoken communication. But linguistic formulation also encompasses the reformulation function and its variants (paraphrastic and not paraphrastic).

Finally, the cognitive macrofunction assembles all the functions that have an impact on the semantic contents conveyed by the utterance. This function can be divided mainly into two subgroups: a) connective functions linking the semantic contents of the utterances and reflecting or creating among them logic or argumentative relations (cooriented relations such as addition, cause-consequence, finality, justification, etc.; and anti-oriented relations such as opposition, contrast, and mitigating the relevance of what has previously been said). We have introduced a further distinction in these connective functions according to what is being 'connected'. When a DM establi-

shes a connective relationship between two utterances or segments of an utterance we speak of connection, but when the relationship is established between a linguistic component (utterance or segment of utterance) and implicit information that the listener/reader must infer from the co-text or context, we are then talking about inferential connection; b) functions related to the conveying of modal values, such as epistemic and doxastic modality, engagement or distance from the propositional content or indications about the source from which the speaker has had access to the information (evidentiality).

All these functions are summed-up in Table 2. However, the inventory of subfunctions is far from exhaustive and only intends to suggest possible functions subsumed under each main type of function.

Table 2. Taxonomy of discourse functions

Discursive macrofunctions	Types of functions	Some subtypes of functions
• <u>Interactional</u> → otherness axis	Conversation control	Taking, keeping and leaving the floor
		Request for attention, reception control, request for confirmation
		Mitigation, Intensification
• <u>Metadiscursive</u> → textual axis	Conversational contact	Phatic function, expression of emotions and attitudes
	Reaction	Collaborative answer, reactive answer, request for explanation
• <u>Cognitive</u> → semantic axis	Information organization	Information ordering, marking out discursive topics (topic change, digression, recovering, summing-up), focusing, adding a comment on a settled topic
	Linguistic formulation	Online planning, reformulation
• <u>Cognitive</u> → semantic axis	Logic-argumentative connexion	Argumentative co-orientation (e.g. addition, consequence, finality)
	Inferential connexion	Argumentative anti-orientation (e.g. opposition, contrast, minimizing the relevance of some information)
	Utterance modal values	Engagement or distance from utterance content Epistemic / doxastic modality Indicating the source of information (evidentiality)

It is important to take into account the fact that all these functions are not exclusive to DMs but there is a variety of discourse elements that may fulfill them in oral and written discourse: interjections, filled pauses, repetitions, prosodic cues, etc. From the onomasiological perspective adopted here (from the function to the linguistic element), the focus is on how speakers carry out these necessary functions while producing their discourse and to what extent DMs are only one of the many strategies employed by the speakers. However, in this paper attention will be mainly paid to the tokens of DMs in the interlanguage, leaving aside other strategies.

Due to the polyfunctionality of DMs, the same DM can frequently assume more than one function in the same context (the so-called syntagmatic polyfunctionality, cf. Bazzanella 1995). On the other hand, these functions are not exclusive in the sense that they can converge in the same DM, especially in the case of interactional functions. It is thus very frequent to find a DM marking both floor taking and mitigating at the same time, to give just one example.⁵

3.2. Metadiscursive functions in learner varieties

In this section we will analyse the main metadiscursive functions found in our corpus. We will try to identify the type of DM employed to carry out each of these functions by native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) distributed in the three above-mentioned levels of linguistic competence. Although in our corpus we have many tokens of DMs with interactional and cognitive functions, we have chosen to analyse DMs with metadiscursive functions because, as far as we know, studies in this field have not paid enough attention to the strategies adopted by the learners to build their

⁵ In our analysis we have taken into account the primary functions as well as the secondary and tertiary functions of the DM. This hierarchical difference will not be meaningful for the present study.

texts in order to provide them with a clear structure and to ease the information processing on the side of the interlocutor (but cf. recently Pascual Escagedo 2014⁶, Jafrancesco 2014).

Due to space limitations we will not analyse all the metadiscursive functions we have found in our corpus. We will focus mainly on two functions related to information organization (opening and closing interactions, changing topics) and two functions related to formulation of the message (online planning and reformulation), leaving aside important functions such as ordering, focalization and topic progression.

3.2.1. *Information organization*

As explained above, under the label of information organization we gather all the functions fulfilled by different elements that provide indications about the internal structure of the text. While building a text of a certain extension, the speaker/writer must offer some indications about the order in which the information is presented, the changes in the discursive topics dealt with, the most important information in each utterance and the thematic progression or development of a discursive topic by adding new information (comments) about it, once the topic has been established. Some of these functions are more frequent in written texts (such as ordering the information) and some are not often realized through the use of DMs, for example focusing important information in spoken texts is usually accomplished through prosody. These differences are to some extent reflected in our corpus, but our focus of interest here

⁶ This author adopts the same onomasiological approach that has been presented here but she takes into account of all the functions at each level of competence, paying exclusive attention to DMs and not to other textual strategies. She has observed that DMs with metadiscursive functions are scarcely represented in her corpus of Italian speakers of L2 Spanish (only 35 DMs, 15% in A1-A2 levels, 2% in B1 and 5% in C1 of the total number of DMs in her corpus) and there is only a slight increase at the advanced level (Pascual Escagedo 2014: 153).

is to discover which DMs deployed by the learners reflect the native use and which ones are not usual or less frequent in L1 Italian.

3.2.1.1. Opening and closing the interaction

One function fulfilled by DMs is to formally signal the opening or the closing of the interaction immediately after or immediately before the exchange of greetings (DMs occupy the absolute initial position of the interaction less frequently, see below).

We have found different DMs with the function of opening the interaction: *be'* 'well', *allora* 'then', *dunque* 'therefore', *cioè* 'that is to say', *sì* 'yes' and *e* 'and', as can be seen in Table 3.⁷ Sometimes these DMs are followed by a DM with an interactional function such as *guardi* 'look', *senta* 'hear', *ascolta* 'listen', the most frequent combination being *allora guardi* 'well look'. We have also found two cases in which DMs with a mainly interactional function are the only explicit marks to open the interaction: *ascolta*, *senta* 'listen, hear' (this happens only in NS turns as can be seen in Table 3). According to Pons (1998: 219-220) and Ghezzi and Molinelli (2015), DMs derived from verbs of perception not only function as attention-getters in conversation, but they also focus the relevance of what is being said by conveying an instruction to carefully process the information. In this case, they mark an action with very high communicative relevance as the opening of the interaction.

The number of tokens of these DMs in our corpus is very low both in NNS and NS, thus this is clearly a metadiscursive function which is not mainly fulfilled by DMs. We can still observe a light increase of DMs in the advanced level, which almost equals NS production.

⁷ The English translations of Italian DMs are only meant to help the non-Italian speaker reader to get an approximate idea of their meaning. The high number of pragmatic values and discursive functions adopted by DMs in different contexts makes it extremely difficult to offer an accurate and at the same time valid-for-all-contexts translation.

Table 3. Opening / closing interaction functions

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	NATIVE
Opening Interaction				
allora	1		3	4
ascolta				2
be'			1	
cioè		1		
dunque			2	
e	1			
senta				1
si				1
Total	2	1	6	6
Closing Interaction				
allora			1	6
bene [benissimo]			1	
d'accordo	2		2	5
niente			1	3
ok	3	2	1	7
pues		1		
va bene	1		1	6
Total	8	3	7	27

However, only one of these DMs (*allora*) is found with this function in L1 Italian⁸. In fact, *allora* in that position is an almost completely desemantized DM which can signal the absolute beginning of an interaction, quite an odd position for most DMs:

(1) A: alloraaa↑

B: ciao!

A: &eh / Laura &eh / dunque / sei arrivata da quando? / non so→

⁸ We have also found one occurrence of *ah!* in absolute initial position in L1 but interjections, though clearly assuming discursive functions in text construction, will not be taken into account in this study. For a discussion about why interjections should or should not be considered as DMs, see Porroche and Laguna 2015, Borreguero 2015.

B: &eh da pochissimo / guarda! / sono→ / tre giorni↓ / sono arrivata qua il fine settimana↓ (5SG6, 1-4, A is an advanced learner and B a native spaker)⁹

'A: soooo

B: hi!

A: &eh / Laura &eh / then / when did you arrive? / I don't know

B: &eh very recently / look! / I have / three days / I have arrived here last weekend¹⁰

What is more interesting are the tokens of DMs in absolute initial position which are uncommon in L1. This is the case of *be'* that usually indicates a reaction to what has been said (Pauletto and Bardel 2015). We can hypothesize that the learner is not able to distinguish between the common function of taking the floor with *be'* as a reactive answer and taking the floor for the first time in conversation, which is its primary function in this occurrence (or maybe that we are dealing with a transfer from Sp. *bien*).

(2) A: *be'* / [scusami =]

B: [°(ciao)°]

A: = maa / &eh / [non=]

B: [°(dimmi)°]

A: =ho capito il tuo nome tra tanta gente! (5VA4, 1-5)

'A: well / [excuse me =]

B: [°(hi)°]

⁹ References to the corpus contain information about the level of competence (1 for beginners, 3 for intermediate, 5 for advanced), the place where the informants were registered (SG = Segovia, VA = Valencia) and a number identifying the type of interaction according to the topic (1-2 are symmetric interactions, 3-6 are asymmetric interactions).

¹⁰ Translations of the examples are only intended to facilitate the comprehension of the Italian texts. They are not meant to provide an accurate translation in any case.

A: buut / &eh/ [I haven't =]

B: [°(tell me)°]

A: = understood your name among all these people!

The same applies for this very uncommon use of *cioè* in absolute initial position:

(3) A: *cioè* / [ma cosa fa-]

B: [dai! / che CA]SIno!

A: *sì* / lo so↓ / che facciamo con questo? / vi hanno aumentato→

B: ci hanno [aumentato l'affitto]

A: [ci hanno aumentato] / *sì* (3VA2, 1-5)

'A: I mean / [but what is he doing]

B: [come on! what a DISASTER]

A: *yees* / I know / what should we do with this? / they have increased

B: they have [increased our rent]

A: [they have increased] / *yes*'

We have also taken into account DMs which are not placed in the first turn of the conversation, but instead immediately after the greetings. In this position *allora* appears already at the initial level, as can be seen in (4):

(4) A: &eh ciao! / Chelo / come stai?

B: ciao / ciao / bene / e tu?

A: &eh / bene / &eeeh allora // &eh / noi abbiamo fatto questee appu- queste appuntamento / peer / preparare / il-una festa aaaa no stra amica (1SG1, 1-3)

'A: &eh hi! / Chelo/ how are you?

B: hello / hello / well / and you?

A: &eh / good / &eh so // &eh / we have made these appointments
these appointments/ tooo / prepare / the- a partyyy our friend'

In this case, after the greetings A (Beginner) show some difficulties to take the floor and begin her utterance as it is shown by the filled pause preceding her answer (*bene* 'well') to B's question. After another filled pause *allora*, which in L1 Italian has reached the necessary level of desemantization (and thus of grammaticalization) to appear in absolute initial position (similar to Spanish *bien* / *bueno*, cf. Pons & Estellés 2014), formally signals the opening of the interaction and the introduction of the first topic (see below).

At the advanced level we have a discrete increase of DMs in this function, incorporating *be'* and *dunque*. However, it must be said that three of these tokens are produced by the same learner who is a teacher of French and here we may hypothesize a positive transfer with French discourse markers: *alors* / *allora*, *donc* / *dunque*.¹¹

(5) A: (buono) questo caffè!

B: ((a che è)) molto buono! / [certo!]

A: [è] buono! / &eh / &eh / bellissimo
questo posto↓

B: (RISATE)

A: &eh dunque! / hai pensato qualcosa peer→

B: &eh sì / è quello che volevo dirti↑ / perché io non ho
avuto appena il tempo↑ / e mi è venuto così in fretta che→

¹¹ These transfer phenomena are evident also in other cases. For example, two learners at the initial level working as a French teacher in one case or having a good knowledge of French in the other produce 58 tokens of *d'accordo* while the other two learners of this level produce none. We have found more transfers between L2 and L3 DMs than between L1 and L2.

/ non ho- non ho avuto il tempo / ((e)) dobbiamo decidere adesso cosa regaliamo a Laura↓§ (5SG1, 1-7)

'A: (good) this coffee!

B: ((it is)) really good! / [for sure]

A: [it is] good! / &eh / &eh / very beautiful
this place

B: (LAUGHS)

A: &eh then! / have you thought about something for

B: &eh yes / this is what I wanted to tell you / because I have hardly had the time / and it has come to me in a rush so that / I didn't have the time / ((and)) we must decide now what to offer to Laura'

Contrary to this situation, DMs are frequent in the metadiscursive function of closing the interaction¹². Most conversations finish with an interchange of agreements, but we consider closing DMs those ones which express agreement with not only what has been said in a previous turn, but with the end of the conversation in general (for example, when the speaker repeats the agreement marker in successive turns). DMs in this function are mainly *va bene*, *bene*, *ok*, *d'accordo* 'ok', all of them showing agreement with what has been previously said, but also *niente* 'nothing', that explicitly signals that there is nothing to add to the conversation. The most striking difference with the DMs opening the interaction, which are also very frequent in their common function of showing agreement from the initial level (collabora-

¹² Also in this case we have take into account not only the final closing of the interaction but also some pre-closing DMs, i.e. DMs that signal that one of the participants is willing to close the interaction and begin to prepare the interlocutor for that (normally asking him to arrange a meeting or to exchange phone numbers). The most frequent DM in this pre-closing function in our corpus is *allora*.

tive answer), is the high frequency of DMs at the initial level (8 tokens, although in 6 of them their primary functions is to show agreement), whereas we have found only 3 and 7 tokens respectively in the intermediate and advanced level. As we can see in Table 3, NS tend to use a variety of DMs to mark the closing of a conversation, thus this seems to be a function that is not well integrated in the interlanguage.

A good example of how these closing and pre-closing DMs can cluster together are the final turns of this symmetric interaction between NNS:

(6) A: ok / e se §
B: § d'accordo?
A: se c'è qualcosa andiamo in giro
B: d'accordo!
A: eh! / [benissimo!]
B: [va bene!] / ciao!
A: deciso! / (RISATE) (SSG1, 259-265)

'A: ok / and if §
B: § ok?
A: if there is anything we go for a walk
B: ok!
A: eh! [perfect!]
B: [ok!] / bye
A: decided! (LAUGHS)'

However what we have not found in learner's interlanguage is a string of DMs such as the one we have found in NS:

(7) B: d'accordo / guardi / io sono molto interessato al lavoro
[eee]

A: [allora] / adesso/ mi lascia il suo numero di telefono↑
/ [...] ee le daremo una risposta se / se le va bene

B: d'accordo / va bene // allora§

A: §niente§

B: §molte grazie eee / ci [sentiamo=]

A: [sentiamo]

B: =d'accordo / [(.)]

A: [arrivederci] (NAT4, 96-103)

'B: ok / look / I am very interested in this job
[aaand]

A: [so] / now / you give your telephone number / and
probably / in a week / we will call you aand give you
an answer / if it is ok for you

B: I agree / ok // so §

A: § alright §

B: § thank you very much aaand /
see [you =]

A: [you]

B: = ok / [(O)]

A: [bye]'

In NS *allora* is frequently used as a pre-closing DM, i.e. it is the DM employed by NS to indicate that the conversation is reaching its end and the only task left is to arrange an appointment for a further meeting. In this sense, *allora* has the double function of opening and closing interactions at the same time (Bazzanella & Borreguero 2011), as it can be seen in (8), but while the opening function is acquired at the advanced level, learners show bigger difficulties in acquiring the closing function:

(8) A: buongiorno↑

B: buongiorno

A: piacere↑ / Eugenio Bellanca / lei si chiama? §

B: § sì / &eh / Paula

A: Paula↓ / allora / Paula / guardi / &eh / uhm / non so se ha parlato con la mia segretaria↑ / le ha già spiegato un po'→
[...]

A: sì! / anche↑ / volendo / allora / guardi / facciamo così / io↑ / &eh / mi faccio vivo io / &eh / se non ha altre domande da farmi↑ / per me il colloquio→ //

B: ok

A: è [concluso↑=] (5VA5, 1-5, 137-139, conversations ends at turn 149, A is a NS)

'A: good morning

B: good morning

A: pleasure / Eugenio Bellanca / what's your name? §

B: § yes / &eh
/ Paula

A: Paula / so / Paula / look / &eh / uhm / I don't know if you have talked to my secretary/ she has already explained a little bit

[...]

A: yes! / also / if we want to / so / look / we do it like that / I / &eh / I'll call you / &eh / if you haven't any other questions / for me the interview //

B: ok

A: is [finished=]

3.2.1.2. Changing topics

In a spontaneous conversation, even when there is a prespecified topic, speakers tend to introduce new topics and digressions during

the conversation. Sometimes the rapid succession of topics can be hard to follow and the speakers need to signal these changes. In Table 5 we present the different functions we have analyzed and the DM used in the corpus by the NS and NNS to serve this purpose.

3.2.1.2.1. Introducing a new topic or changing the current topic of conversation is a metadiscursive function fulfilled by a great variety of DMs (in our corpus we have found 31 different DMs and combinations of DMs, as can be seen in Table 5; DMs introducing the first conversational topic are not taken into account because they have been analyzed under the opening/closing interaction function). The most frequent of all by and large is *e* ‘and’ which is present from the initial level (72 occurrences) and surprisingly close to the use of NS (88 occurrences). *E* can introduce a topic which is part of the encyclopaedic knowledge of the interlocutors (Guil 2012, Mandelli 2006) and that explains why it is so often employed by NS. The phonetic simplicity of this DM and its semantic and pragmatic similarity to the Spanish DM *y* ‘and’ may explain the rapid acquisition of this DM in this function. However, with this exception, the use of DMs by learners of the initial level is scarce and limited to single tokens of *allora* ‘then’, *però* ‘but’ *anche* ‘also’, *per quanto riguarda* ‘regarding x’. The striking use of *per quanto riguarda* in the first level can be explained as a consequence of the mirror effect, that is, the fact that learners repeat expressions that are very often used by the native speaker they are interacting with, as it can be seen in (10), where A is the native speaker and B the learner.

- (10) A: perfetto // ee poi per quanto riguarda per esempio il luogo
 / noi andremo vicino aa→ / a Malaga↑
 B: sì
 A: più a sud↑ / [verso]
 B: [al mare?]

[...]

A: per cui / non so / vivresti con noi↑ / staresti lì con noi

B: ok

A: eee / per quanto riguarda le mansioni↑ / non so se / &eh

B: e cosaa // devo fare?

A: sì / &eh / io non so se ti piace lo sport / pensavamo di farti fare anche [attività=]

[...]

A: = possiamo fare così

B: per quanto riguarda i soldi?

A: sì / lo stipendio→ / io ho pensato una cifra intorno ai mille euro (1VA3, 103-106, 111-115, 177-179, A is a NS, B a NNS)¹³

'A: perfect // and then regarding for example the place / we will go near tooo / to Malaga

B: yes

A: further south / [towards]

B: [to the sea?]

[...]

A: therefore / I don't know / you would live with us / you would stay there with us

B: ok

A: aaaand / regarding your tasks / I don't know if / &eh

B: and what // do I have to do?

¹³ The interaction that simulates an interview to get a job as a baby-sitter is the one with a more rigid structure. The native speaker has a very active role playing the part of the employer and asking questions to the learner. There are several issues that have to be tackled such as time, salary, timetable, the children, the tasks, etc. so it is precisely in this conversation where the function of introducing and changing topics is more necessary. The native speakers use very frequently topic introducer DMs such as *per quanto riguarda* 'as far as x is concerned' (25 tokens in the corpus), but we have only found two tokens in the interlanguage and this shows that the mirror effect is very weak in asymmetric conversations. However, this occurrence of *per quanto riguarda* at the initial level can only be explained as a consequence of the mirror effect.

A: yes / &eh / I don't know if you like sport / we were thinking about you doing some [activity]

[...]

A: = we can do so

B: regarding the money=

A: yes / your salary / I have thought something around one thousand euro'

The situation does not improve significantly in the intermediate level, except in the use of adversatives *ma* and *però* 'but' as DMs specialized in this function (10 and 3 tokens respectively). More interesting are the changes observed at the advanced level: DMs such *e poi* 'and then' and *no* 'no', which have almost no presence in previous levels, serve this purpose and other DMs scarcely used in previous levels become more systematically used, such as *allora* (9 occurrences), *anche / e anche* (5 occurrences), *però* (9 occurrences), but notice that *però* is never used by native speakers with this function. Maybe the variety of DMs employed at this level could explain the decrease of tokens of the otherwise omnipresent *e* at this level. Finally, as far as NS are concerned, we have observed three important differences with the learners' interlanguage: a) first of all, NS employed both a considerably higher number of DMs (191) and a great variety of them (15 different DMs, while only 7 at the initial level and 11 at the intermediate and advanced levels); b) secondly, NS use DMs that are never present (or almost never) in the interlanguage, such as *e poi*, *per quanto riguarda* (see ex. 10), and *ti dico/le dico* and variants, as we can see in (11):

- (11) A: [quindi conosci abbastanza bene] una zona abbastanza↑ /
ti dico / il complessoo / alberghiero è abbastanza nuovo mi
sembra che l'abbiano inaugurato l'anno scorso // il campo da
golf l'hanno inaugurato sei mesi fa perché io ci sono stato→
/ così ho fatto→ /// (3VA5, 223)

'A: [then you know quite well] an area quite / I tell you / the hotel / structure is quite new I think it has been inaugurated last year // the green has been inaugurated six months ago because I was there / so I have done ///'

And c) finally L2 Italian speakers resort to some DMs for these functions that are not frequent in NS such as additive focus particles (cf. *anche*) and adversative connectives (cf. *ma* and *però*).

Besides, we have found some cases of code-switching. As this is quite a difficult function for a beginner it comes as no surprise that learners code switch and use a DM from their L1 (*bueno* 'well') to signal the introduction of a new topic¹⁴.

(12) B: devo→ / no / dobbiamo aspettare cinque minuti↓ / (RISATE)

A: lo stai caricando anche [la=]

B: [sì↓]

A: = batteria?

B: anche la batteria↓ / (RISATE)

A: (RISATE) / bueno possiamo→ / vado a fare un un caffè ↑
// sì / si vuoi sì / gradisci un caffè ↑ / e mentre possiamo pensare en altre→ / en altre possibilità ↓ (3SG1, 110-115)

'B: I must / no / we must wait for 5 minutes/ (LAUGHS)

A: you are also charging [the=]

B: [yes]

A: = battery?

B: also the battery / (LAUGHS)

¹⁴ This could also be the case of *però*, because one of the main difficulties we have had during the analysis have been the phonetically similar DMs such as Italian *però* / Spanish *pero*. It is hard to assess whether the learner has acquired the lexical unit but not its prosodic profile or it is just a case of transfer.

A: (LAUGHS) / well we can / I go to make a a coffee // yes / if you want to yes / would you like a coffee / and in the meanwhile we can think about / about other possibilities'

In any case, a change of topic is not always explicitly marked by a DM. Speakers (both NS and NNS) can resort to other textual strategies to indicate a topic change such as word order alternation, prosodic breaks (13) or an utterance with explicit information announcing a new topic (14):

(13) B: sì / però / anche quattro anni nove / loro / i bambini hanno / qualcuna difficoltà qualcuna ma[lattia // sono nervosi?=¹⁵] (3VA3, 48, NNS)

'B: yes / but / as well as four years nine / they / do the kids have / any difficulty any illness // are they nervous?'

(14) A: ah / una domanda / una curiosità / come hai studiato tu l'italiano? / dov'è che l'hai [imparato?] (1VA3, 263; NS)

'A: ah / a question /a curiosity / how come you have studied Italian? / where have you [learned it]?'

Table 4. Topic switch functions

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	NATIVE
Introduction / Change of topic or subtopic				
allora / e allora	3		9	10
anche /e anche	1	1	5	2
anzi				2
ascolta				1
be' / ma be'		1		1
bueno	1	2		

¹⁵ Sometimes *ma* 'but' is pronounced as *me* due to a transfer with French *mais* 'but'.

comunque			1	5
dunque		1	1	2
e	72	65	43	88
e poi / e dunque / e quindi	1	2	11	23
invece / e invece			1	5
ma / e ma ¹⁵	5	10	9	10
no / no sì / sì		4	22	9
per quanto riguarda	1			15
per quel che riguarda		1		
però	1	3	9	
poi			3	
riguardo a				1
ti dico / le dico / ti spiego / le spiego / (ti) direi		1	2	23
tra l'altro				1
vediamo				1
Total	85	91	115	209
Closing the topic				
allora	2		3	10
comunque				1
d'accordo	9		1	12
dunque			1	
niente				2
ok	1	5	2	18
quindi		1		
sì		2		1
va bene	2	2	1	5
Total	14	10	8	49
Digression				
a proposito				2
Picking up a topic				
allora	1	2	2	3
comunque				2
dunque			1	
e		1	2	1
e poi			2	
e quindi			1	
effettivamente			1	
le dico				1
ma		1	2	1
niente			2	
no			2	1
però			11	
Total	1	4	24	9
Summing up				
allora			2	
buono	1			
ciòè		1		

dunque			1	
in fin dei conti				3
insomma				38
ok	1	2		
poi				1
quindi			1	
va bene	1			
Total	3	3	4	42

3.2.1.2.2. *Closing topics*. The function of closing the topic is normally not marked during conversation, because the introduction of a new topic is enough to close the active topic. On the other hand, many interactional DMs which have the function of showing agreement (such as *ok*, *va bene*, *bene*, *d'accordo*, *certo*, etc.) can also be interpreted as a kind of closing: once the interlocutors have agreed upon something they feel ready to move to a new topic. So in our analysis we have only taken into account the DMs that explicitly signal the closing of a topic after the agreement has been reached. This is the case in (15) where after a long talk about what to eat in the city of Segovia, the learner reintroduces a previous topic using the explicit DM *ok* that can be considered a topic closing mark.

(15) A: è molto calorico va be' però se poi uno dopo cammina

B: sì / è vero

A: smaltisce un po' quindi / [ah ok]

B: [è vero] e ci sonoo altro posti
che visitare (3SG4, 247-250)

'A: it has a high caloric value ok but if afterwards you walk

B: yes / it is true

A: you work it off a little bit thus / [ah ok]

B: [that's true] and there are
other places to visit

In our database we have observed a significant difference between NS and NNS as far as the use of DMs in this function is concerned. The most striking thing, however, is not that NS use more DMs than NNS but the fact that it is not possible to outline a clear acquisitional process, as initial level learners use more DMs than advanced level ones (except for the use of *d'accordo* at the initial level cf. note 14 above) and the most used DMs are different in each level of competence. In any case NNS do not use any DMs that does not serve this same purpose in NS speech, with the exception of *dunque* and *quindi* 'then, therefore' that in L1 Italian have mainly interactional and logic-argumentative functions, such as taking the floor after a question and presenting a consequence, respectively.

3.2.1.2.3. *Digression*: we have only found 2 tokens of a prototypical DM for marking digression such as *a proposito* in NS turns. Therefore, this function is not fulfilled by DMs in our corpus which does not mean that NNS and NS speakers do not abandon the main thread of discourse at several points, but digressions are marked as simple introductions of new topics – and it is rarely the case that a topic previous to a digression is explicitly resumed – or speakers resort to other devices such as interjections and prosodic markers. Moreover, in NS the introduction of a digression is reinforced by some metalinguistic comments such as in (16):

- (16) A: ah / a proposito / scusa se ti interrompo e cambio discorso però / mi interesserebbe sentire un po' / laa→ / la tua opinione / in Italia si parla tantoo / di Zapatero / di questoo→ / nuova / maniera di fare la politica / eccetera / in Italia soprattutto la sinistra / è veramentee→ / uhm / molto / direi quasi tifosa di questo Zapatero // eee // ma qua come- come- la gente come lo vede? (NAT3, 57)

'A: ah / by the way/ excuse me if I interrupt and change topic but / I am interested a bit / in your / your opinion / in Italy people talk a lot / about Zapatero / about this / new / way of making politics / etc / in Italy particularly the left / is really / uhm / very / I would say almost a fan of this Zapatero // aaand // but here how- how- do the people see him?'

3.2.1.2.4. *Picking up a topic* after a digression. This is a metadiscursive function which is usually explicitly marked by a DM contrary to digressions and topic closing. Although the number of DMs found in our corpus with this function is low, this could be explained by the linear development of the interaction, especially the asymmetric ones, where there is not much opportunity to go back to previous topics. Besides, this function can be fulfilled by an utterance and not exclusively by DMs, as in (17-18) where the NS playing the role of the interviewer goes back to the description of the job with *come le dicevo* 'as I told you', after the topic closing mark *d'accordo* 'ok':

(17) A: ah / quindi / le farebbe anche bene insomma / no?

B: sì sì

A: ah / d'accordo / ehm // &eh appunto come le dicevo stiamo cercando questa persona perché venga con noi al mare con i bambini ee vorremmo andare nella zona di Malaga [più o meno] (3SG5, 65-67)

'A: ah/ so / it would be good for you then / no?

B: yes yes

A: ah / ok / ehm // &eh precisely as I told you we are looking for someone to come with us to the sea with the children aaand we would like to go to the area of Malaga [more or less]'

(18) A: [guardi / da noi] / innanzitutto si tratta di di questo periodo di vacanze / poi non lo sappiamo come organizzeremo la la cosa però chiaramente / se dovremo ricorrere a una persona e con lei ci troveremo bene / magari / il nostro rapporto /potrà continuare però // tornando↑ / aa→ // alle vacanze / no? / le dico noi noi andremo↑ / ooo / nella Costa del Sol / &eh§ (NAT4, 61)

'A: [look / with us] / first of all it is for the holiday season / so we don't know how we will organize things but clearly / if we need someone and we are happy with you / maybe / our relationship can continue but // going / baack to // to the holidays / ok? / I tell you we we will go / eeeither / to the Costa del Sol / &eh§'

While this function is almost absent in initial and intermediate levels, it is expressed using 24 DMs at the advanced level. The only DM which seems to be consistently used with this function is *però* 'but' which is never used by NS. However, what is most interesting is the increasing awareness of the learners that they have at their disposal some textual mechanisms to indicate that a topic is brought forward again in the conversation. Let us analyze an example in (19) where the topic of buying a present in the sex shop shows up regularly during conversation:

(19) B: no / però qualcosa dobbiamo trovare perché / allora / praticamente / avevamo pensato / lui c'ha questo zaino che porta sempre in giro con-con- con lui però è un poo' / vecchio↓ / °(che fa un po' cagare)° / e quindi /avevamo pensato comprare / uno zaino così / carino come parte del regalo // poi c'era l'altra Elena che diceva di andare al sex shop / ee comprare qualcosa di divertente (2'') [(())]

[...]

A: cinque persone→ / °(be' / qualcosa si può fare)° non è
chee / e poi che questo del sex shop es un poo' buffo perché↑
/ poi compri sempre le stesse cosee→

[...]

B: sì / (3'') e poi questa cosa del sec- del sex shop lo facciamo
pure↑ / sì /dai (5VA1, 14, 57, 94)

'B: no / but we must find something because / well / practi-
cally / we had thought / he has this backpack that he always
carries on with-with-with him but it is a bit / old / °(it stinks)
° / and then / we had thought / a backpack soo / pretty as
a part of the present / besides there was Elena proposing to
go to the sex shop / aand buy some funny stuff (2'')

[...]

A: five people / °(well / we might do something)° / and then
this sex shop stuff is a bit weird because / you always buy
the same stuff after all

[...]

B: yes / (3'') an then this sec- sex shop stuff we do it too /
yes / come on'

This is, however, one of the discursive functions where the difference between NNS and NS does not consist of a lesser variety and quantity of DMs in the interlanguage, but rather of a higher quantity and a certain abuse, i.e. learners attribute to some DMs a discursive function that it normally does not have in L1: this is the case of *dunque*, *e poi*, *effettivamente*, *niente e però* to which advanced level learners attribute the function of picking up the thread of discourse after a digression.

3.2.1.2.5. *Summing-up*. The last function in topic management is the summing-up function. When the speakers consider they have reached an agreement about some issue or provide enough information about it they may be willing to present a summary of what has previously been said. This strategy reflects a good management of text information and requires an appropriate linguistic competence. As Table 5 shows there is a considerable distance between NNS and NS in the use of DMs fulfilling this function. However, it must be taken into account that 38 out of 42 tokens from NS are instances of the DM *insomma* 'to sum up', which is particularly frequent in one of the NS (33 occurrences) while it is never used by 2 of the 4 native speakers. Learners cannot identify the right DM to mark this function which, incidentally, is scarcely present in their discourse, thus they recur to other DMs (normally those used for closing the interaction or the topic) and even to code-switching like in the initial-level *bueno*. We can therefore say that this function is not very frequent in our corpus, except in the case of one single NS, which can be considered a sort of idiosyncratic phenomenon.

Due to space limitations we will not deal with other metadiscursive functions related to the organization of text information, such as ordering or focalization of relevant information or development of a well-established topic by addition of new comments. We will just mention that while focalization is a function fulfilled by a variety of elements, such as additive and exclusive focus particles (*anche, solo*) and particularizers such as *soprattutto, appunto, ecco* (overall, exactly) (cf. König 1991 for a detailed description of these categories), the development of topics is mainly restricted to DMs with additive meaning, mainly *e, anche, tra l'altro* and *poi*¹⁶:

¹⁶ We have found 17 tokens of *poi* in NS, which is by far the most frequent DM in this function.

(20) B: guarda / se vogliamoo pagare di meno / andiamo in periferia⁻ / ma io in periferia- vado in periferia[↓] // non c'è il carattere della città / poi devi spendere tanti soldi anche in trasporto pubblico / e andare a casa soltanto per dormire[↑]
(3VA2, 23-24)

'B: listen / if we want to pay less / we can go to the suburbs / but I in the suburbs- I'd go to the suburbs // there is not the character of the city there / so you must spend so much money on public transport / and go back home only to sleep'

3.2.2. *Formulation*

The second group of metadiscursive functions, according to our classification, encompasses all the functions related to the formulation of discourse. As we are analyzing spontaneous spoken discourse, which has not been previously planned and cannot be reviewed and modified after it has been produced, two functions seem to be of special relevance as part of the formulation process: (a) the function of gaining time while thinking of what to say next without losing the floor, which we have called online planning and (b) the function of reformulating what has just been said in order to rephrase or modify it.¹⁷

3.2.2.1 Online planning

Spontaneous conversation requires the special ability to produce discourse with a very short term of preplanning. This highly demanding cognitive ability becomes more difficult when speaking

¹⁷ Notwithstanding the high number of studies on reformulation strategies in Romance and Germanic languages (cf. Garcés Gómez 2008), few of them are devoted to the acquisition of these strategies by L2 learners, although there have been some attempts to introduce reformulation in language learning, focusing mainly on the language processing of written texts (Thornbury 1997).

a foreign language. The difficulties to keep on track with the on-line planning are reflected in different ways in the speech itself: silences, filled pauses, vowel lengthening and of course DMs. The literature has named the DMs with this specific function as fillers (It. *riempitivi*, Sp. *muletillas*) often attributed to the scarce linguistic competence of the speaker. But, as it can be observed in Table 5, DMs with this function are highly present in both NS and NNS interventions. This clearly contradicts claims such as Jafrancesco's (2015: 13) about the decrease of DMs with this function along with an increase of linguistic competence.

The most striking difference between them, however, concerns the frequency and variety of DMs. Contrary to what could be expected, NS produce not only a larger quantity of DMs but overall they are able to monitor their online planning activity with a huge variety of DMs (16 different DMs to be precise), while NNS employ both a smaller quantity and a more restricted inventory of these units although following a clear acquisitional path (4 in the initial level, 7 at the intermediate level and 13 at the advanced level).

Most of the DMs fulfilling this function are polyfunctional, which means that they do not only serve the mentioned purpose of online planning but assume other functions in discourse. For example, just to mention the more frequent in our corpus, *diciamo (che)* 'let's say (that)' is also a DM for mitigation, so the speaker is adopting a polite strategy to present information to the listener at the same time that he is trying to gain time to formulate his utterance; *va be* 'ok' adds a positive value about the commented situation or idea while formulating it; *insomma* 'to sum up' presents the utterance as a kind of conclusion or resumption of what has been said before, but without actually formulating any.

In (22) the NS in the role of the employer must answer the learner's very direct question about her salary and he tries to gain time while thinking about how to present information with which

the interlocutor might not agree by pausing frequently, lengthening the final vowel in *noi* and using a DM (notice, by the way, how during her turn the learner uses in a very clear way both strategies of closing and opening a topic with DMs):

(22) B: [uscire↑ / ok / ok] / e il compeenso? / avete pen[sato]

A: [sì] / noii / diciamo / che saresti spesata di tutto / e a parte quello pensavamo aa a un compenso dii / uhm millecento euro / al mese (3VA3, 126-127)

'B: [go out / ok / ok] / and the salary) / have you [thought about]

A: [yes] / weee / let's say / that we will cover all your expenses / and besides this we have thought about a salary of / uhm one thousand one hundred euros / a month'

However, with the exception of *non so* 'I don't know' (and its phonetic and syntactic variants *non lo so*, *no so* and code-switching *no sé*¹⁸) which is very frequent in L1 and L2 Italian, there are significant differences between the DMs employed to convey this function, leaving aside those which are never present in the interlanguage (*come dire*, *diciamo*, *ecco*, *insomma*). We can observe two main tendencies: a) the selection of very few forms which are constantly repeated, without excluding that some of these are clearly idiosyncratic (the use of *cioè* by one of the students of the intermediate level is a good example) and b) the resort to code-switching, which is particularly obvious in the case of Sp. *bueno* but also in the assignment of discursive functions to the Italian adjective *buono*, which is phonetically similar to it.

¹⁸ The Spanish form *no sé* and transfer variants such as *no so* are present in the three levels of acquisition.

Table 5. Online planning function

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	NATIVE
Online planning				
allora	1		1	1
be'		1	5	8
bueno	3	5		
buono	2		1	
cioè		26	7	17
come dire				11
così			5	12
diciamo (che)			1	53
dunque			3	4
ecco				12
in effetti				1
insomma				26
le dico				4
niente		1	5	26
no		2	12	11
non so / non lo so / no so / no sé	21	53	83	90
poi			4	2
va be'		3	4	31
voglio / volevo dire			3	5
Total	27	91	134	314

3.2.2.2. Reformulation

Reformulation is a textual strategy closely linked to online planning. Following a classical division we can distinguish between paraphrastic and non-paraphrastic reformulation. In the first case, speakers try to rephrase what they have just said in order to make it more understandable for the listener. This function is almost exclusive to NS speech in our corpus (with the exception of the 9 tokens of *cioè* in the intermediate level due to the incorrect overuse of this DM by one participant). NS resort to a variety of DMs to mark paraphrastic reformulation, but *cioè* 'that is to say' and *diciamo* 'let's say' are the most frequent ones.

Table 6. Reformulation functions

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	NATIVE
Paraphrastic reformulation				
bueno		1		
ciòè		9	2	12
diciamo				7
dunque				1
insomma				4
vale a dire				1
voglio dire				3
Total		10	2	28
Non-paraphrastic reformulation				
anzi				1
bueno ¹⁹	4	3		
buono	1			
ciòè		2		
diciamo				1
no	1	1	1	2
va be'		1		1
voglio dire		1	2	3
Total	6	8	3	8

On the other hand, non-paraphrastic reformulation responds to the speaker's intention to modify what has already been said. This modification can entail either a simple rectification or a conclusion or summary (Rossari 1994). Due to the small number of DMs with this function in the corpus we have not taken into account these further distinctions in our analysis. This second type of reformulations is much less frequent in our corpus but more equally distributed throughout the 4 levels of linguistic competence. However initial and intermediate level learners resort frequently to code-switching, as it can be seen in (22), where the learner rectifies to clarify that she only has visited one city in Tuscany:

¹⁹ At the intermediate level it adopts the incomplete form *bué* in one of the occurrences.

(22) A: ma / io sono toscana↓ / vivo in un posto- in un paesino vicino a Pisa↓ / quindi / forse è una zona che no→ / ancora non hai visto↓

B: IO!/? / sì! / [io conosco la =]

A: [sì!/? / conosci la Toscana!/? / uhm uhm]

B: = Toscana→ / bueno / Firenze →/ [qualcheee] (1SG4, 47-50)

‘A: but / I am from Tuscany/ I live in a place- in a small village near to Pisa / so / it is maybe an area that /you still have not visited

B: ME? / yes! / [I have visited it=]

A: [really? / have you visited Tuscany? / uhm uhm]

B= Tuscany / well / Florence / [someee]’

4. Conclusions

The onomasiological approach allows us to adopt a different perspective from the usual one in acquisitional studies and in studies on DMs in general. Instead of focusing on the single lexical units, their presence and functions in the interlanguage, the focus is on which discursive functions are carried out by learners, what strategies they resort to in each case (prosodic cues, vowel lengthenings, pauses), when they use DMs and which ones they use for which functions. This approach has the advantage of highlighting the differences between discursive functions. In fact, from the analysis presented here it is easy to see that DMs are hardly employed to carry functions such as opening interaction or reformulation²⁰ – especially

²⁰ Another function found in our corpus which is scarcely signalled by a DM is the ordering of information: speakers present successive information but without using explicit markers, which otherwise are very frequent in written texts (such as *first of all, secondly, on the other hand*). In our corpus we have only found 1

non-paraphrastic reformulation – and that in these cases NS and NNS tend to resort to other strategies such as prosodic cues.

However, functions such as introducing a new topic rely heavily on DMs which become the preferred textual strategy in this case, a result that agrees with what was found by Jafrancesco (2015: 35) in her corpus. Besides, the onomasiological approach allows us to compare better L1 and L2 as it shows which functions are lacking in the learner varieties and which lexical elements are lacking in each function. This clarifies that the acquisition of a lexical unit does not imply necessarily that NNS are able to use that lexical unit with the appropriate functions and makes it easy to identify divergences from the L1.

As far as functions are concerned, we can see in Table 7 that there is a strong disymmetry between the different analysed functions: in L1 Italian, DMs are used mainly in the changing of a topic and online planning; they are also used in closing a topic, summing-up, closing an interaction and paraphrastic reformulation and scarcely used in the other functions (opening interaction, digression, picking up a topic and non-paraphrastic reformulation).

Table 7. Metadiscursive functions and DM tokens

	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED	NNS	NS
Opening interaction	2	1	6	9	6
Closing interaction	8	3	7	18	27
Introduction / Change of topic	85	91	115	291	209
Closing topic	14	10	8	32	49

occurrence of *innanzitutto* ‘first of all’ in NS and 2 of *prima di tutto* ‘first of all’ in intermediate and advanced NNS respectively. DMs with the function of continuing or closing a sequence of ideas are slightly more frequent: *da un'altra parte* ‘on the other hand’ (2 tokens in advanced NNS and 1 in NS), *dopo* ‘secondly’ (1 token in intermediate and 2 in advanced NNS) and *poi* ‘secondly / then’ (1 token in intermediate, advanced and NS, respectively). This shows how spoken/written varieties determine the presence or absence of discursive function and their marks.

Digression				0	2
Picking up a topic	1	4	24	29	9
Summing-up	3	3	4	10	42
Online planning	27	91	134	252	314
Paraphrastic reformulation		10	2	12	28
Non-paraphrastic reformulation	6	8	3	17	8

In learner varieties the presence of DMs in metadiscursive functions is clearly underrepresented in functions such as summing-up and paraphrastic reformulation, while markers are overrepresented in picking up a topic and non-paraphrastic reformulation. From an acquisitional point of view, we observe that DMs increase, according to expectations (Jafrancesco 2015: 11), in functions such as topic switching and recovery, and online planning, while in other cases the evolution is far from clear: their presence decreases (moving away from L1) in functions such as closing a topic and paraphrastic reformulation. These facts are still hard to explain and contradict the general expectation, but we must not forget that learners' idiosyncrasies are an important and disturbing function when analyzing learner varieties, especially in relatively small interlanguage corpora. Finally, phenomena such as L1 (or other L2) transfer and code-switching indicate that functions have been appropriately acquired but the learner is still lacking enough lexical resources to convey them.

To sum up, the proposed onomasiological approach offers a clearer picture of the different stages in the acquisitional process as far as the presence of DMs is concerned but also pays attention to the development of certain discursive functions. DMs do not have a homogenous distribution in the different functions in the L1 and this should be a starting point to assess the progress in language acquisition (other factors such as situation, text type and discourse genre should also be taken into account). We have illustrated this approach with metadiscursive functions, but it can evidently be ap-

plied also to interactional or cognitive functions in order to have a much more complete and complex picture of the situation. Thus, it would be easier to contrast not only L1 and L2 or different learner varieties but also different L1 which could prove to be a very useful tool for translation purposes.

Finally, the onomasiological perspective conceives DMs as a possible textual strategy among many others (linguistic resources such as NP and whole utterances but also prosodic cues and other paralinguistic phenomena, mimics, kinesics) and makes possible a global understanding of the complexity of the interlanguage and its dynamic evolution, which is not limited to an increase of lexical elements and morphosyntactic constructions.

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