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Similar forms with different functions.
The (un)learning of the Italian periphrasis
andare a + infinitive by L1-Spanish speakers

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Abstract

Despite their formal similarity, the Italian periphrasis *andare a* "go to" + infinitive and the Spanish periphrasis *ir a* "go to" + infinitive display different values. In this paper, we investigate how Spanish (L1) speakers acquire *andare a* + infinitive when learning Italian as a second language (L2). This case study offers a good vantage point from which to observe the interaction between learning (values that are present in L2 but not in L1) and unlearning (values that are present in L1 but not in L2) in the acquisition of L2 forms that are structurally but not functionally similar to L1 forms. An experimental study based on acceptability judgements shows that while a long and intense exposure to the L2 input allows both learning and unlearning, L2 instruction not focused on the two periphrases and with little exposure to input is less successful: unlearning of non-target values is only reached by advanced speakers, who moreover generalise the inhibition of the L1-transfer to values that are accepted by native speakers. This suggests that in cases like the one under investigation here a focused pedagogical intervention may be useful.

Keywords: Romance periphrases, aspect, unlearning, second language acquisition.

1. *Introduction*

Learners of a second language (L2) that is closely related[1] to their first language (L1) enjoy many advantages in their acquisition process but must also face specific challenges. One such challenge consists in learning L2 forms that are very similar to L1 forms but have completely

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[1]   In this paper, we operationalise the closeness of two languages as a function resulting from their belonging to the same language family and their mutual intelligibility. Following this operationalisation, Gooskens *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that, within the Romance family, Italian and Spanish is the most closely related language pairing after Spanish and Portuguese.

or partly different meanings and functions or are used in different varieties and contexts in the two languages. This is the case for 'forms' at all levels of analysis. For example, Spanish and Italian both have the grapheme <d>, but while in Italian <d> always corresponds to [d], in Spanish it corresponds to either [d] or [ð] depending on the phonetic context. At a lexical level, closely related languages often have so-called 'false friends', that is, words with similar or identical form but with different meanings, such as *palestra*: Portuguese "conference", Italian "gym". In these cases of form and function mismatch, learners need not only to *learn* new functions to be added to the interlanguage, but also to *unlearn* (Gass and Mackey, 2002) functions that are associated with a similar form in the L1 but not in the L2. In our examples, L1-Italian speakers must not only learn that in Spanish some <d>s are to be read as [ð], and that Portuguese *palestra* means "conference", but they also have to inhibit the L1 transfer that would lead them to read all <d>s as [d] and to attribute to *palestra* the meaning "gym".

Italian and Spanish being very closely related, L2 acquisition in both directions abounds with such cases of mismatch. Among them are many verbal periphrases, which are present in the two languages and are often formally similar (Ambrosini and Della Putta, 2021). This is the case of the periphrasis which is the subject of this study, that is, Italian *andare a* "go to" + infinitive. Despite the formal correspondence between *andare a* + infinitive and its Spanish counterpart *ir a* "go to" + infinitive, the two periphrases display different values. The Italian structure has a culminative and, more rarely, a prospective aspectual value, while the Spanish one is widely used with a temporal value, and also has aspectual and modal values (Olbertz, 1998; Squartini, 1998; Garachana, 2018; see § 2 for a more detailed description). Moreover, the Italian periphrasis is less frequently employed overall, as some of its uses tend to be restricted to specific diastratic and diaphasic varieties, and it is less codified (e.g., it is often absent from descriptive and pedagogical grammars) compared to its Spanish counterpart (see Renzi, 2012: 103).

The question we address in this paper is: how do L1-Spanish speakers of Italian acquire the periphrasis *andare a* + infinitive? To

answer this question, we conducted an experimental study using acceptability judgements. Three groups of informants participated in the study: (i) L1-Spanish speakers with different levels of proficiency in Italian, who were formally instructed in Italian in their home country, (ii) L1-Spanish speakers of Italian with no formal instruction in the language, who have lived in Italy for longer than one year, and (iii) a control group of Italian native speakers.

We believe that this case study offers a good vantage point from which to observe the interaction between learning and unlearning in the acquisition of L2 forms that are structurally but not functionally similar to L1 forms. More specifically, we aim to investigate the role played by two factors. First, the level of L2 proficiency: do learners' judgements become increasingly native-speaker-like as proficiency increases, as one would expect? Second, L2 input: is there a difference between learners who are formally instructed in their home country and learners who are not formally instructed but have been living in Italy, and do judgements become increasingly native-like as the length of stay in Italy increases?

2. *Italian* andare a + *infinitive and Spanish* ir a + *infinitive*

A large number of studies have focused on verbal periphrases in the Romance languages in general, and on verbal periphrases in Italian and Spanish more particularly (see, among many others, Dietrich, 1973; Olbertz, 1998; Squartini, 1998; Gómez Torrego, 1999; Bertinetto, 1991; RAE, 2009: 529-556; Fábregas, 2019; Laca, 2021). Studies specifically dedicated to *andare a* + infinitive (Amenta and Strudsholm, 2002; Valentini, 2007) and *ir a* + infinitive (Fernández De Castro, 1999; Matte Bon, 2006; Bravo, 2008; Bravo and Laca, 2011) are also numerous. The abundance of research on the topic is at least partly due to the fact that on many even quite fundamental issues, scholars are far from having reached a definitive position.

First, criteria for defining what counts as a periphrasis are still highly debated as not all of these work equally well across languages,

or across different sets of periphrases in a single language, to the point that periphrasticity is often considered as a gradient notion (Laca, 2021). As regards the Italian periphrasis we are focusing on here, it seems that it does indeed have uses that can be considered periphrastic according to the main criteria of periphrasticity (Bertinetto, 1990). For instance, the verb *andare* is largely desemantised, the relative order of *andare* and the infinitive is fixed, and it is only possible to insert 'light' elements between the two (see Amenta and Strudsholm, 2002; Valentini, 2007). Other criteria that are commonly used to define periphrasticity seem to be less relevant for *andare a* + infinitive: clitic climbing, for example, also applies when *andare a* + infinitive is not used periphrastically (Strik-Lievers, 2017: 171).

Second, both the Italian and the Spanish periphrasis co-exist with synthetic forms that have partly coinciding functions. Myriad papers have been dedicated, for example, to the competition between *ir a* + infinitive and the synthetic future, and have tried to disentangle the peculiarities of the two forms (among others, Matte Bon, 2006; Bravo, 2008; Lara-Bermejo, 2016). The problem is further complicated by the fact that the distinction between the periphrastic and the synthetic future is not of a semantic nature only: variation in usage is often determined on diatopic, diaphasic, diastractic, or pragmatic grounds. As observed by Laca (2021), this complex situation, where the competition between synthetic and analytic forms is played out on several fronts, increases the difficulty in describing the features of periphrases. Synchronic dimensions of variation are also crucial for *andare a* + infinitive, as its periphrastic uses tend to be limited to specific varieties of Italian, being virtually absent (and often stigmatised) in others. In Strik-Lievers (in press) it is shown that periphrastic *andare a* + infinitive is more common in written language, while in spoken language it is very rare, except in expository discourse (e.g., university lectures). Its variability and marginality exclude *andare a* + infinitive from L1 and, more importantly for our purposes, L2 pedagogical grammars (Oricco, 2020).

The extent and variety of the literature existing for both the Italian and the Spanish periphrasis does not allow us to do it justice here. What is needed for our purposes is a contrastive outline, based on this

literature, of the *main* values of the two periphrases. This will help us in telling apart the cases in which learning is required (i.e., when the Italian periphrasis has values that are absent in the Spanish) from those in which unlearning is required (i.e., when the Italian periphrasis does not have values that are present in the Spanish).

Bearing in mind the many pitfalls involved in the description of the two periphrases, we are aware that the categorisation proposed below in § 2.1 is far from complete and indisputable, and that the separation between different values as well as the interpretation of individual examples may be more nuanced than presented here. Some rigidity in categorisation is however required for operational reasons, given the experimental nature of this study. The decision to ask Italian native speakers for scalar acceptability judgements rather than binary ones is motivated precisely by an attempt to mitigate this problem (see § 4.1). For instance, the fact that a given sentence including *andare a* + infinitive is commonly used in some varieties but almost never in others might be reflected by a dubitative intermediate rating. Through scalar acceptability judgements, in fact, a 'gradient of acceptability' can be constructed, and therefore do justice to how speakers perceive the correctness of a sentence, which ultimately depends on a complex interplay of different linguistic constraints (Francis, 2022: 1-16). After this premise, we can now contrastively illustrate the main values displayed by the Italian periphrasis and its Spanish counterpart.

2.1. *Uses of the two periphrases: a contrastive overview*

In addition to their periphrastic uses, both *andare a* + infinitive and *ir a* + infinitive also display non-periphrastic, fully compositional uses, where *andare* and *ir* keep their physical motion meaning, as in (1) and (2):

(1) *Ora   vado   a   comprare   le   ciliegie   al   mercato.*[2]
     now   I.go   to   buy   the   cherries   to.the   market
     "I now go to buy cherries at the market."

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[2]   All Italian examples are our own.

(2) *No   pude   ir   a   verla.*
    not   I.could   go   to   see.her
    "I could not go to see her."

<div align="right">(RAE, 2009: 2158)</div>

In what follows, we only focus on: (i) periphrastic uses, because the non-periphrastic uses exemplified above do not present significant differences between the two languages nor specific challenges for learners, and (ii) uses that are displayed when *andare* and *ir* are in their present indicative, since this is the only form we use in our test sentences (see § 5). We first illustrate the uses that characterise the Italian periphrasis but not the Spanish, and then those that characterise the Spanish periphrasis but not the Italian.

2.1.1. *Values of Italian* andare a + *infinitive*

Andare a + infinitive is used with a culminative (i) and, to a lesser extent, a prospective aspectual value (ii). In some cases, the semantic contribution is harder to classify, as it is rather bleached (iii). Additionally, it may form collocations (iv) when specific verbs appear in the infinitive (e.g., *sapere* "to know", *finire* "to finish").

(i) *Aspectual (culminative)*
    The Italian periphrasis mainly has an aspectual value that can be defined as culminative, following Veland (2004; or resolutive, in Bertinetto, 1991). *Andare* maintains here the deictic orientation that characterises its lexical use (Bertinetto, 1991: 141), describing a metaphorical and non-planned motion that culminates in the event expressed by the verb in the infinitive, as in (3):

    (3) *Questo   stadio   va   a   sostituire   quello   vecchio.*
         this   stadium goes   to   replace   that   old
         "This stadium replaces / ends up replacing the old one."

(ii) *Aspectual (prospective)*
    Andare a + infinitive can also be used to express an action that will occur in the near future, as in (4):

(4) *Vado   a   illustrare   la   mia   proposta.*
     I.go   to   explain   the   my   proposal
     "I'm going to explain my proposal."

This value is shared by the Spanish periphrasis, which however displays a wider range of prospective aspectual uses. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, while the prospective use is prominent in Spanish, being widely employed across varieties and clearly codified by grammars, in Italian it is rather marginal and mostly bound to specific varieties. For instance, it is found in the semi-scientific Italian (Sobrero, 2003: 241) of university students' essays and dissertations, where the prospective use of the periphrasis – condemned by prescriptive publications since the 19th century – has a textual-deictic function (Strik-Lievers, in press). A related use is the one exemplified in (5), where the periphrasis refers to an action that the speaker is about to perform, and is typically found in videos illustrating practical procedures such as recipes (Frosini, 2020):

(5) *Andiamo   a   separare   l'   albume   dal   tuorlo.*
     we.go   to   separate   the   egg.white   from.the   yolk
     "Let's separate the egg white from the yolk."

(iii) *Pleonastic*
     In varieties such as scientific and semi-scientific writing, which often feature 'empty' analytic forms (e.g., *viene ad essere* lit. "comes to be" instead of *è* "is", Berruto, 2012: 100), *andare a* + infinitive is frequently also used with values that do not easily fall into the categories described above, or into other categories. The aspectual content of the periphrasis is rather bleached, to the point that it seems to be almost pleonastic and can be replaced by a synthetic form with little if any semantic loss (Renzi, 2019: 15-16). For example, in (6), while possibly having a culminative nuance, *va a indicare* could be replaced by the present indicative *indica* without semantic loss.

(6) *L'   alto   numero   di   morti   va   a   indicare*
     the   high   number   of   dead   goes   to   indicate
     un   peggioramento   della   situazione.
     a   worsening   of.the   situation
     "The high number of deaths indicates a worsening of the situation."

Valentini (2007) observes that in this case the role of the periphrasis is mainly to highlight the functionality of the event in the predicate, that is, in (6) *va a indicare* could be paraphrased as "has the function of indicating".
Example (7) is possibly more connected to the prospective use, but again replacing *va a diminuire* with the present indicative *diminuisce* does not involve appreciable semantic differences.

(7) *Piano piano   va   a   diminuire   il   numero*
     gradually   goes   to   decrease   the   number
     di   contagi.
     of   infections
     "The number of infections is gradually decreasing."

(iv) *Collocations*
    Finally, the periphrasis displays some uses that can be considered collocational, being characterised by little to no productivity and a meaning that cannot be included in the aspectual categories above. For instance, the imperative *vai a sapere/capire* ("to know/understand") is used as a discourse marker, as in (8):

(8) *Potresti   vincere, vai   a   sapere.*
     you.might   win   go   to   know
     "You might win, who knows."

2.1.2. *Values of Spanish* ir a + *infinitive*

Ir a + infinitive is frequently used, and it displays various temporal (i, ii), aspectual (iii), and modal (iv) values. Additional less common values have also been identified in the literature (v).

(i) *Temporal (future)*

The main periphrastic use of *ir a* + infinitive is temporal (RAE, 2009: 2113). Here, the periphrasis expresses future tense, and in Spanish it is more and more frequently replacing the synthetic future, as in (9) (Matte Bon, 2006; Bravo, 2008; Lara-Bermejo, 2016):

(9)   *Si   te   lo digo, ¿me vas   a   querer más?*
       if   you it say   me   you.go to love   more
       "If I tell it to you, will you love me more?"
<div align="right">(Gómez Torrego, 1999: 3368)</div>

(ii) *Temporal (planned future)*

The temporal periphrasis can also take on modal nuances of intentionality, thus expressing what is often called planned future, as in (10) where – unlike in the case of (9) – the periphrasis cannot be replaced by the synthetic future:

(10)   *Si vas   a   venir, dínoslo.*
        if you.go to come   tell.us.it
        "If you are going to come, do tell us."
<div align="right">(Gómez Torrego, 1999: 3369)</div>

(iii) *Aspectual (prospective / immediate prospective)*

In this use, *ir a* + infinitive refers to an action due to start in the near future. It can refer to both prospective aspect and immediate prospective aspect (see Dik, 1997: 238-239 for this distinction, exemplified in English by *John is going to cry* and *John is about to cry* respectively). While the prospective value is shared by the Italian periphrasis, the immediate prospective value (also labeled 'imminential'), exemplified in (11), is not.

(11)   *Señores,   va   a   comenzar el   partido.*
        gentlemen goes to begin   the   match
        "Gentlemen, the match is about to start."
<div align="right">(Gómez Torrego, 1999: 3368)</div>

Incidentally, it is to be noted that the distinction between the aspectual uses and the (increasingly expanding) temporal uses of the periphrasis is much discussed in the literature (see Bravo, 2008: Ch. 3) and is not always straightforward, with many examples that are open to both interpretations. For example, *va a llover* (Bravo, 2008: 201) can be interpreted both temporally ("it will rain", e.g., in weather forecast for next week) and aspectually ("it is about to rain", e.g., spotting dark clouds in the sky and hearing thunder).

(iv) *Modal*
The Spanish periphrasis can also display a modal value of possibility or probability which is close to that of conjectural future (Bravo, 2008: 22), as in (12), although this is less frequently attested compared to the temporal and aspectual use.

(12) *Va   a   haberlo   matado   Juan.*
      goes   to   have.it   killed   Juan
      "It was probably Juan who killed him."
                                      (Gómez Torrego, 1999: 3370)

(v) *Other values*
Finally, *ir a* + infinitive has several uses that do not fall within the categories above and which, unlike Italian 'pleonastic' uses, are relatively frequent and can be found across genres and varieties. This is the case with the value that is described as evidential in RAE (2009: 2159)[3], that found in exclamative sentences (RAE, 2009: 2116)[4], and the many values that we did not consider here because they are only available when *ir* is inflected in forms other than the present indicative (for a detailed description of all the

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[3]   An example of evidential use proposed in RAE (2009: 2159) is: *¿Dónde está Juan? ¿Dónde va a estar? En el bar* "Where is Juan? Where will he be? At the bar": the fact that Juan is at the bar, at the time of the utterance, is presented as evident.
[4]   Among the examples of periphrasis in exclamative sentences, RAE (2009: 2116) has: *¡Cómo le vas a decir eso a un amigo!* "How can you say that to a friend!".

uses, see Bravo, 2008; RAE, 2009: 529-556; Gómez Torrego, 1999). Collocational uses, some of which closely correspond to the Italian ones, are also attested[5].

3. *L2 learning of similar structures with different functions*

The interlanguage resulting from the acquisitional process of a L2 closely related to the L1 presents, from its very beginning, a peculiar morphosyntactic organisation, usually more complex than the one found in the interlanguage of learners with an L1 distant from the L2 (Díaz *et al.*, 2007; Ringbom, 2007: 1-4; Ringbom and Jarvis, 2009). This phenomenon is easily observed in the productions of L1-Spanish speakers learning Italian. Facilitated by the structural proximity of the two codes and by a generally rather *unconcerned* psychotypological attitude (Kellerman, 1983), the 'hispanohablantes' attempt — early on — to produce complex grammatical categories with complex morphosyntactic means, which however are often not fully target-like (Schmid, 1994: 196). A detailed analysis of their interlanguage reveals that it is characterised by both simplifications and complexifications (Schmid, 1994: 208) of the Italian morphosyntax. The former phenomenon encompasses, for example, paradigmatic regularisation and allomorphy reduction, which also concerns learners of distant languages; the latter phenomenon is characterised by the recourse to structures or functions typical of Spanish that are erroneously transferred to Italian, so much so as to obtain an interlanguage that is morphosyntactically more complex, in some areas, than Italian itself (Schmid, 1994: 210; Della Putta, 2016).

The transfer of L1 features that are not target in the L2 occurs due to an excessive reliance on the strategy of congruence (Schmid, 1994) between the two languages, which gives L1-Spanish speakers the belief that they can express, in Italian, even complex functions through

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[5]   For instance, *vete a saber* functions as a discourse marker, much like Italian *vai a sapere*: *Vete a saber lo que habrían dicho de mí!* "Who knows what they will have said about me!" (GÓMEZ TORREGO, 1999: 3372).

morphosyntactic realisations typical of their L1. According to Corder (1984), this is motivated by the fact that learners of closely related languages base their interlinguistic hypotheses on the characteristics of the L1, gradually adapting and modifying them on the basis of the data coming from the L2 input. Learners are thus engaged in a process of falsification and/or confirmation of their hypotheses, that are *prima facie* based on the L1 model. This is called a restructuring *continuum*: the learner, through exposure to the input and its analysis, refutes or reinforces the 'instinctive' hypotheses of congruence between the two languages.

To avoid the erroneous transfer of L1-based values, L1-Spanish speakers of Italian need to unlearn such values. The term 'unlearning' refers to a cognitive process that enables the individual to inhibit past knowledge and behavioural routines that have become obsolete and may undermine new knowledge acquisition, therefore affecting the adaptation to environmental change (see Grisold and Kaiser, 2017). In L2 speakers, the same inhibitory processes are activated to avoid code-mixing and L1 transfer during language production and comprehension (Zirnstein *et al.*, 2018; McManus, 2022: 40-44). L2 speakers need, in fact, to inhibit L1 processing habits that may lead to L1-L2 conflict and overlapping. Therefore, while acquiring an L2, individuals do not unlearn an L1 property or structure in the sense that they forget it, but, rather, they inhibit its activation in L2 contexts that potentially but wrongly trigger it. This is a difficult issue, as learners must notice the presence of an absence, that is, the non-appearance of an L1 form in the L2 or of an L1 function or meaning that is not mapped on an L2 form. Unlearning is therefore a process driven by indirect negative evidence, i.e., by the absence of something in the L2 input (Gass and Mackey, 2002; Pearl and Mis, 2016; Schwartz and Goad, 2017). The process of learning, by contrast, is driven by positive evidence, i.e., the appearance, albeit with varying degrees of salience and frequency, of a new form or of new functions or meanings in the L2 input (DeKeyser, 2016).

Many studies put forward the idea that unlearning is a more demanding task than learning (Schwartz and Goad, 2017: 237;

Cuza *et al.*, 2012: 635; Grüter *et al.*, 2010: 129; Spada and Tomita, 2010: 268; Gass and Mackey, 2002: 255) as it is generally maintained that it is difficult for learners to generalise negative evidence from input alone (but see Yang, 2015 for a different position on this issue). When unlearning of L1 rules is detected (cf. Yuan, 2001; Gabriele, 2009), it is reported to be a slower process compared to learning[6]. The learning/unlearning issue is further complicated when the L2 input fails to provide robust evidence of what is ungrammatical in the target language (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2006; Han, 2014). This can be the case with structures that are highly variable and unevenly distributed in the L2 input: learners find it difficult to distinguish between target and non-target uses in the L2. The inhibition of the transfer of L1 similar structures seldom happens, and this can lead to fossilisation in the interlanguage.

4. *L2 learning of* andare a + *infinitive by Spanish speakers*

The case of the use of *andare a* + infinitive by L1-Spanish speakers of Italian is a typical example of L2 complexification, as learners tend to make an over-extended use of the periphrasis *andare a* + infinitive with values that pertain to Spanish but not to Italian. In particular, a frequent transfer of temporal and planned future values from the Spanish to the Italian periphrasis, as in (13), is observed in many studies (see Della Putta, 2016 and Bailini, 2016 for an overview).

(13) ?*Da   domani   vado   a   essere   un   bravo   studente.*
      from   tomorrow   I.go   to   be   a   good   student
                                                        (Della Putta, 2016: 243)

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[6]   In a cross-sectional study, Della Putta and Strik-Lievers (2020) looked at how L1-Spanish students of Italian unlearned the aspectual value of durativity of the periphrasis *estar* + gerund, formally similar to Italian *stare* + gerund, on which only the value of progressivity is mapped. The results showed that the unlearning of the use of *stare* + gerund with durative aspectual values improves alongside the general level of proficiency of the learners but nevertheless, even at advanced levels, it reached only 57% correctness: a certain degree of uncertainty remains.

The acquisition of *andare a* + infinitive by L1-Spanish speakers is particularly complex because it requires both learning and unlearning. On the one hand, Spanish values which are not target in Italian have to be unlearned. On the other hand, new values, which are target in Italian but are not present in Spanish have to be learned. Against this background, our study seeks to answer the following research questions:

– RQ1 – What happens when learners deal with a L2 periphrasis that sounds familiar, but whose values and uses are different from those of the 'corresponding' L1 one?
– RQ2 – Is the learning of 'new' periphrastic functions easier or more difficult than the unlearning of L1-functions that are not target in the L2?
– RQ3 – Is the 'attuning' to target-like Italian features of *andare a* + infinitive modulated by the proficiency level of the L1-Spanish speakers?
– RQ4 – Is the 'attuning' to target-like Italian features of *andare a* + infinitive modulated by the amount of input exposure of the L1-Spanish speakers?

4.1. *Methods*

To answer our research questions, we designed an on-line, untimed test that consists of 48 items (see the *Appendix*), of which 24 are target sentences and 24 are fillers. The 24 target items include both arguably acceptable Italian uses of *andare a* + infinitive (see § 2.1.1) and arguably unacceptable sentences that are calques of uses of *ir a* + infinitive which are theoretically described as grammatical in Spanish but ungrammatical in Italian (see § 2.1.2), as in (14):

(14) ²*Se   vai   ad andare alla   festa,   dimmelo!*
     if   you.go   to   go   to.the   party   tell.me

Participants were asked to judge the items on a 5-pointscale (1 being 'fully incorrect' and 5 being 'fully correct'). This allows the

creation of a gradient of acceptability, which is a particularly valuable measure when dealing with rather unstable structures. For example, it is useful for the analysis of structures which show diastratic or diaphasic variation, which are constrained by pragmatic or stylistic factors or display some unstable grammatical features given, e.g., language contact or evolution (Schütze, 2019: 55-96; Francis, 2022: 202-210). This is the case of *andare a* + infinitive which, as discussed in § 2, is a periphrasis whose use is quite marginal and mostly bound to specific varieties, contexts of use and functions. For this reason, we did not opt for a production test, which can often fail to elicit rare, unstable or sociolinguistically constrained structures (Francis, 2022: 4-5). All sentences were in the present tense (*presente indicativo*), except for those with the collocations *vai a sapere* and *vai a capire,* where the imperative in any case shares its form with the present indicative. They were created using simple language, with morphosyntactic phenomena that are usually presented in a beginners' course of L2 Italian; we furthermore tried to use a transparent lexicon, given the high degree of intercomprehension between Spanish and Italian (Donato and Pasquarelli-Gascon, 2015). We administered the test to three groups of speakers: (i) native speakers of Italian; (ii) instructed L1-Spanish speakers of Italian; (iii) non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers of Italian. Native speakers' judgements are used as a baseline against which we evaluate learners' judgements. Given the variability of *andare a* + infinitive and given the lack of a clear and unified description of its values in standard Italian, we felt it was vital to ascertain how its uses were judged by Italian native speakers, and not to simply rely on theoretical descriptions or on our own acceptability judgements.

The instructed L1-Spanish speakers studied Italian in their home country; this group of participants allows us to explore L2 proficiency level as a variable (RQ3). The non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers had not received formal instruction of Italian but had been living in Italy for more than one year. This group of participants allows us to explore the amount of input (operationalised as length of stay in Italy) as a variable (RQ4).

4.2. *Participants*

For the 'native speakers of Italian' group, we enrolled in the study 165 Italian speakers (mean age 38.7, range 17-76; 65% F, 35% M). The subjects were randomly chosen: the test was sent to a first batch of 25 acquaintances, whom we asked to extend the test to others such as family members, colleagues, etc. The 165 subjects were mainly born and raised in Northern Italy (77%); 78% of them hold a university degree (bachelor, master, or PhD) and the remaining 22% have a high school diploma. The group is thus particularly homogenous as regards the diatopic variety of Italian used and the educational level.

For the 'instructed L1-Spanish speakers of Italian' group, we enrolled 91 students[7] of L2 Italian (mean age 33.3, range 19-72; 52% F, 48% M). Five subjects were removed from the sample for the lack of clear information about their study course; the remaining 86 students were divided into three competence groups: beginners (N = 34), intermediate (N = 31) and advanced (N = 21). The competence of the subjects was measured on the last test they took at their university or school. In 88% of cases, the answers were given according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) competence levels. In the remaining 12% of cases, the subjects did not evaluate their competence level according to the CEFRL descriptors, but their self-assessment was clear enough for us to place them in one of the six CEFRL competence levels. Furthermore, we asked the subjects to state how long they had been studying Italian, and we found a linear, strong relationship between the two variables 'competence level' and 'study length' (Pearson $r = 0.71$). In general, beginners studied Italian for less than 2 years, intermediate learners from 2 to 4 and advanced learners for more than 4 years.

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[7]   Among these, 13 declared themselves to be bilingual Catalan/Spanish speakers. As Catalan does not make use of a periphrastic structure similar to *andare/ir a* + infinitive to express temporal and aspectual values (Lara-Bermejo, 2021), and as *ir a* + infinitive is less used in the Spanish spoken in Catalan-speaking regions of Spain (Enrique-Arias, 2010), we decided to ascertain if the answers of this subset of informants were somehow different. We therefore run a U-Mann Whitney test with a 2-level independent variable (Catalan or Spanish as L1) and, as dependent variables, the ratings given to the 24 target items. In no cases were significant differences found: it was therefore not necessary to exclude the 13 bilingual subjects from our sample.

It should be noted here that the uses of *andare a* + infinitive are not dealt with in L2 pedagogical grammars (see § 2), and that, more generally, periphrases are not analysed in a contrastive manner in L2 Italian courses for Spanish speakers (Ambrosini and Della Putta, 2021). Although we cannot exclude the possibility that teachers corrected non-target uses of *andare a* + infinitive, we can suppose that the instructed group participants did not receive a robust explicit instruction on the differences between *andare a* + infinitive and *ir a* + infinitive. In addition, these learners had studied Italian in Spain only and had not spent long periods in an Italian-speaking country: they had never had everyday, direct access to standard and nonstandard Italian.

For the 'non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers of Italian' group, we enrolled 69 participants (mean age 36.8, range 24-67; 58% F, 42% M) who had been living in Italy for at least one year. All of these were immigrant workers who had received no or nearly no formal Italian instruction. By 'nearly no instruction' we mean: (i) that the amount of formal instruction for Italian declared by the subjects did not exceed six months, and (ii) that in these 6 months the instruction did not have a Spanish-Italian contrastive basis, i.e., it was designed for multilingual classes. Self-study, when reported, was accepted. Against this criterion, seven subjects had to be excluded from the original sample as they had received more than 6 months of formal instruction. Out of the remaining 62 individuals, 2 were Spanish citizens, while all the others came from South America[8], mainly from Chile, Peru, or Bolivia. 48 of the 62 participants lived in the Turin area, 11 lived in Lombardy and the remaining 3 lived in Tuscany, Lazio, and Sicily. The regional Italian they have been exposed to is therefore similar to that of the Italian informants, with a predominance of Northern-Italian varieties. 88.5% of the non-instructed population said they use Italian every day. We divided the 62 subjects into 3 groups: short-stay (N = 34, residence from 1 to 10 years), middle-stay (N = 18, 11 to 20 years) and long-stay (N = 10, more than 21 years). The mean residence time is 10.1 years (range 1-40).

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[8]   We are aware that the population of the two Spanish-speaking groups speaks different diatopic varieties of Spanish. Nevertheless, the *ir a* + infinitive periphrasis is substantially equally used in the Spanish-speaking world, with the exception of the Catalan-speaking regions of the Iberian Peninsula (BLAS ARROYO, 2008).

5. *Results*

5.1. *Italian speakers*

The analysis of native speakers' answers allows us to sketch an acceptability gradient for the 24 target sentences, to be used as a baseline. In Table 1, target sentences are ranked from the least to the most acceptable. Figure 1 graphically displays the gradient.

SENTENCE RANKING	SENTENCE	VALUE	MEAN ACCEPTABILITY RATING*
1	*Se vai ad andare alla festa, dimmelo!*	Planned future	1.01
2	*Non trovo le chiavi della macchina: va ad averle prese Luca*	Modal	1.03
3	*Sono stanco e questa sera non vado a uscire*	Planned future	1.05
4	*Marco e Ana questa sera vanno a venire al concerto*	Future	1.06
5	*Se non studi, non vai a passare l'esame*	Future	1.19
6	*Quel ragazzo va a essere un bravo architetto*	Future	1.29
7	*Vanno a essere le tre, sono le 14.55*	Aspectual (immediate prospective)	1.44
8	*È tardi, la biblioteca va a chiudere*	Aspectual (immediate prospective)	1.48
9	*Senza i guanti vai ad aver freddo alle mani*	Future	1.51
10	*Vai a credere che sono pazzo, ma non importa!*	Modal	1.59

Table 1. *Italian speakers' acceptability judgements*
(* 1 = fully incorrect; 5 = fully correct) (continues).

Sentence ranking	Sentence	Value	Mean acceptability rating*
11	*Torniamo a casa, va a piovere*	Aspectual (immediate prospective)	1.74
12	*Signore e signori, lo spettacolo va a cominciare*	Aspectual (immediate prospective)	2.34
13	*Vado a raccontarvi la mia giornata tipica in Italia*	Aspectual (prospective)	2.57
14	*La pasta è pronta e ora vado a mettere il parmigiano*	Aspectual (prospective)	3.12
15	*Piano piano va a diminuire il numero di contagi*	Pleonastic	3.24
16	*L'alto numero di morti va a indicare un peggioramento della situazione*	Pleonastic	3.37
17	*Le voci del coro vanno a formare una bella melodia*	Aspectual (culminative)	3.7
18	*Questa lezione va a concludere il corso di geografia del professor Rossi*	Pleonastic	3.73
19	*In questo capitolo vado ad analizzare i dati dello studio*	Aspectual (prospective)	3.75
20	*Il nuovo palazzo va a sostituire quello vecchio*	Aspectual (culminative)	3.8
21	*Il denaro va a finanziare il nuovo progetto urbanistico*	Aspectual (culminative)	3.85
22	*Se non prendi l'ombrello va a finire che ti bagni*	Collocation	4.09
23	*Vai a sapere cosa pensano gli spagnoli degli italiani*	Collocation	4.24
24	*Vai a capire che problema ha Lucia: è sempre triste*	Collocation	4.3

Table 1. *Italian speakers' acceptability judgements*
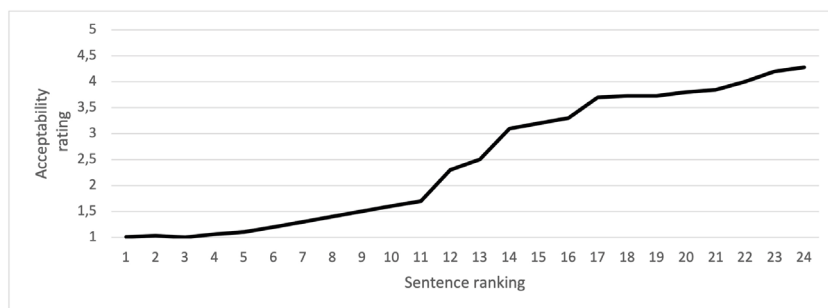*(* 1 = fully incorrect; 5 = fully correct).*

Figure 1. *Italian speakers' acceptability judgement gradient.*

Native speakers' ratings show a clear judgement of unacceptability for those items that are calques of Spanish sentences with (simple and planned) temporal values; the same can be said for the (probability) modal value and for the immediate prospective aspectual value. A t-Test for paired samples run between each sentence reveals a non-significant statistical difference (p always < .05) between the judgements for sentence 1 to 11. A first discontinuity in the judgements can be appreciated between sentences 11 and 12: here, the t-Test gives a statistically significant difference (t: -5; df: 163; p: <.001). Even though we classify sentence 12 (*Signore e signori, lo spettacolo va a cominciare*) as aspectual (immediate prospective), and even though all the other immediate prospective sentences have been judged as clearly unacceptable, it is from this sentence onwards that the judgements of the Italian native speakers start to rise towards a higher acceptability cline. Sentence 12, which lies, for its semantics, between the immediate prospective and prospective aspectual values, leads on to a cluster of sentences (between 13 to 16) that received doubtful judgments. The mean rating of these sentences is 3.05, with no statistically significant acceptability difference between them: this places pleonastic and aspectual prospective values (displayed by sentences 13 to 16) in a 'grey zone' where the Italian speakers are uncertain about their acceptability. Another discontinuity point runs between sentences 16 and 17: the t-Test reveals a statistically significant difference between the means of the two

sentences (*t*: -3.7; df: 163; *p*: < .001). Indeed, from item 17 onwards, Italian native speakers seem to be less unsure about the acceptability of sentences: all aspectual culminative sentences, a pleonastic and an aspectual prospective one were judged above 3.5 points. Only the three collocations were judged above 4 points, showing substantial agreement about their acceptability.

This analysis gives a picture of strong agreement on the unacceptability of temporal, planned future, modal and aspectual immediate prospective values mapped onto *andare a* + infinitive. These values are core values of *ir a* + infinitive, and L1-Spanish speakers of Italian therefore have to unlearn their mapping onto *andare a* + infinitive. Pleonastic and aspectual prospective values are judged with doubt, whereas the aspectual culminative values are accepted with less hesitancy, although they are still rated below 4 points. L1-Spanish speakers therefore need to learn these values as they are not displayed by *ir a* + infinitive but, given native speakers' doubt about their acceptability (which probably reflects their marginality and variability of use), we can infer that the Italian input itself will not give clear cues about their status to the learners. This should not be the case with collocations, which are judged as acceptable with stronger conviction by the Italian speakers. Finally, the prospective value is shared by the two languages, and again, this value should arguably not represent a problem for L1-Spanish speakers, even though the average rating by Italian speakers of aspectual prospective sentences is only 3.2 points. In the next sections we will test these hypotheses.

5.2. *Instructed L1-Spanish speakers*

We compare the judgements of the three competence groups (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) against those of the Italian native speakers.

In Table 2 we report the descriptive statistics, and Figure 2 shows the judgement gradient of the 4 groups.

		Beginners N = 34	Intermediate N = 31	Advanced N = 21	Control (Italians) N = 165
1 - Planned future	Mean	4.02	3.42	1.95	1.01
	Std. Deviation	1.17	1.65	1.28	0.17
2 - Modal	Mean	3.46	2.58	1.76	1.03
	Std. Deviation	1.05	1.41	1.34	0.17
3 - Planned future	Mean	3.91	3.52	1.43	1.05
	Std. Deviation	1.03	1.57	1.08	0.22
4 - Future	Mean	4.11	2.65	1.62	1.06
	Std. Deviation	1.29	1.64	1.2	0.45
5 - Future	Mean	4.12	3.58	1.62	1.19
	Std. Deviation	1.15	1.59	1.16	0.55
6 - Future	Mean	3.78	2.84	1.67	1.29
	Std. Deviation	1.27	1.55	1.24	0.74
7 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	3.82	3.16	2.05	1.44
	Std. Deviation	1.17	1.61	1.66	0.84
8 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	4.18	3.32	1.95	1.48
	Std. Deviation	1.06	1.62	1.28	0.85
9 - Future	Mean	3.78	2.61	1.81	1.51
	Std. Deviation	1.17	1.54	1.29	0.99
10 - Modal	Mean	3.18	2.74	1.57	1.59
	Std. Deviation	1.36	1.48	1.12	1.12
11 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	4.12	3	1.52	1.74
	Std. Deviation	1.12	1.61	0.98	1.19
12 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	4.15	3.74	2.48	2.34
	Std. Deviation	1.37	1.67	1.78	1.4

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of instructed L1-Spanish speakers and Italians (continues).*

		Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced	Control (Italians)
		N = 34	N = 31	N = 21	N = 165
13 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	3.65	3.23	2.14	2.57
	Std. Deviation	1.52	1.63	1.39	1.54
14 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	3.38	3.9	2.33	3.16
	Std. Deviation	1.37	1.3	1.46	1.47
15 - Pleonastic	Mean	3.38	3.26	2.19	3.24
	Std. Deviation	1.28	1.39	1.33	1.48
16 - Pleonastic	Mean	3.62	2.9	1.95	3.37
	Std. Deviation	1.21	1.4	1.2	1.38
17 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	3.12	3.61	3.62	3.7
	Std. Deviation	1.37	1.54	1.28	1.26
18 - Pleonastic	Mean	3.32	3.26	2.76	3.74
	Std. Deviation	1.32	1.5	1.37	1.26
19 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	3.94	3.55	1.95	3.74
	Std. Deviation	1.35	1.63	1.47	1.35
20 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	3.41	3.26	2.86	3.8
	Std. Deviation	1.4	1.44	1.8	1.32
21 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	3.71	3.42	2.76	3.85
	Std. Deviation	1.38	1.41	1.55	1.26
22 - Collocation	Mean	2.59	2.58	1.38	4.09
	Std. Deviation	1.35	1.54	0.67	1.07
23 - Collocation	Mean	3.35	3.61	3	4.21
	Std. Deviation	1.41	1.41	1.48	1.03
24 - Collocation	Mean	3.76	3.32	2.9	4.24
	Std. Deviation	1.33	1.58	1.81	1.16

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of instructed L1-Spanish speakers and Italians.*
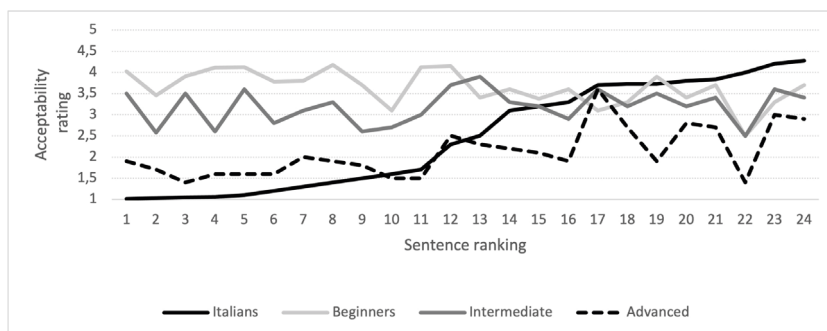
Figure 2. *Italian and instructed L1-Spanish speakers'*
acceptability judgements.

We performed a Kruskall-Wallis[9] test with 'Competence' as
the between-subjects independent variable and the judgements of
the 24 sentences as dependent variables. When the results of the
Kruskall-Wallis test were statistically significant, we performed a
Bonferroni-Dunn as post hoc test. Let us consider the first 12 sen-
tences, i.e., those on which are mapped values to be unlearned be-
cause they are typical of the Spanish periphrasis, and which the Ital-
ian speakers judged as unacceptable. Significant differences (p always
< .05) for all the 12 items were detected. The post hoc test revealed
a significant difference between the judgements of the control group
and those of the beginners and intermediate groups for all 12 items:
these groups tend to judge these items as acceptable and therefore
rate them significantly higher than the Italian native speakers. Be-
tween the beginners and intermediate groups few signs of improve-
ment in unlearning are appreciable: indeed, only for sentences 2, 4,
9 and 11 the post hoc revealed a significant difference between the
judgements of the two groups. The advanced group is, as we can ap-
preciate from Figure 2, more in line with the trend of the control

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⁹   We ran a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normal distribution of the 24 de-
pendent variables (judgements about the 24 sentences) across the four levels of the inde-
pendent variable 'Competence', which includes the three proficiency levels of the Spanish
speakers and the Italian informants. The data are not normally distributed (p always < .05),
and so we opted for non-parametric statistic tests.

group: the judgements of sentences 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 are not significantly different. Our data suggest that unlearning is at least partially possible, as we witness an accrued ability to recognise the unacceptability of *andare a* + infinitive when associated with immediate prospective and, in some cases, with temporal and modal values. The planned future value seems to be the hardest to unlearn. We note again that this value is the most frequent in Spanish (Aaron, 2006), and this might explain its strongest retention in the advanced learners' interlanguage hypothesis. Any improvement seems very slow and clearly at risk of selective fossilisation: as discussed in Della Putta and Strik-Lievers (2020), improvements happen only at high competence levels.

Moving now to the sentences for which the control group provided the most doubtful ratings (sentences 13 to 16), significant differences between the judgement rate of the four groups are detected: $H(3) = 9.1$, $p = .04$ for sentence 13; $H(3) = 12.4$, $p = .01$ for sentence 14; $H(3) = 11.4$, $p = .02$ for sentence 15; $H(3) = 13.1$, $p = .01$ for sentence 16. We notice a different phenomenon to that seen for the first 12 sentences: the advanced group judge these items as unacceptable (all 4 judgements are below 2.4 points), whereas the control group raise their judgement rate, albeit remaining essentially in doubt about their acceptability: the post hoc test reveals a significant (p always < .05) statistical difference between control and advanced groups for sentences 14, 15 and 16, whereas the judgements for sentence 13 are not significantly different. No significant differences were found between the intermediate and control groups for sentences 14 and 15, neither are they found for sentence 16 between the control and beginners group. Advanced learners seem to judge negatively these more unstable sentences, whereas the basically doubtful trend of beginners and intermediate subjects aligns them more with the judgements of Italian native speakers.

Let us now compare the judgements given to the last 8 sentences (17-24), whose values must be learned by L1-Spanish speakers. In particular, the culminative and pleonastic values are not displayed by *ir a* + infinitive, and they are therefore new uses to be learned.

A non-significant (H(3) = 5.9, p = .116) difference for sentence 17 was detected: the four groups all judged it as partially acceptable (mean of the 4 judgements: 3.51). For the remaining seven items, significant differences between the 4 groups are seen. The post hoc test shows that the advanced group judged sentences 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24 always with significantly lower scores than the control group: advanced L1-Spanish speakers seem to overgeneralise the idea that *andare a* + infinitive is not part of the Italian grammar. If compared to the control and advanced groups, the beginner and intermediate groups were more doubtful about the acceptability of the last 8 sentences: apart from sentence 18, on which the judgements of the two groups are in line with those of the control group, for sentences 19-24 the judgements were always statistically significantly lower than the control groups and higher than the advanced groups.

To sum up, the data coming from the instructed population of our study show that unlearning the non-target Italian values of *andare a* + infinitive is possible, but it is a slow process and happens only in advanced learners. Interestingly, advanced learners overgeneralise unlearning even to those sentences that were judged as doubtful or acceptable by the Italians. We can hypothesise that this overgeneralisation is at least partly due to the fact that the positive evidence of the use of *andare a* + infinitive is rather uneven and unclear in the input. A similar but much weaker phenomenon occurs for the beginner and intermediate groups: they judge with greater doubt sentences 13-24, remaining in a sort of 'grey area' where L2 target or L2 partially target sentences are judged neither acceptable nor unacceptable.

5.3. *Non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers*

We first compare the judgements of the three groups (short stay, medium stay, and long stay) against the judgements of the Italian native speakers. In Table 3 we report the descriptive statistics, and Figure 3 shows the judgement gradient of the 4 groups.

		SHORT STAY	MEDIUM STAY	LONG STAY	CONTROL (ITALIANS)
		N = 34	N = 18	N = 10	N = 165
1 - Planned future	Mean	2.38	1.33	1	1.01
	Std. Deviation	1.6	0.97	0	0.17
2 - Modal	Mean	2.5	1.11	1	1.03
	Std. Deviation	1.52	0.32	0	0.17
3 - Planned future	Mean	2.62	1.28	1	1.05
	Std. Deviation	1.67	0.57	0	0.22
4 - Future	Mean	2.65	1.11	1	1.06
	Std. Deviation	1.67	0.32	0	0.45
5 - Future	Mean	2.56	1.39	1	1.19
	Std. Deviation	1.74	1.04	0	0.55
6 - Future	Mean	2.85	1.28	1	1.29
	Std. Deviation	1.73	0.67	0	0.74
7 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	2.85	1.78	1.2	1.44
	Std. Deviation	1.54	1.22	0.63	0.84
8 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	2.76	1.17	1.4	1.48
	Std. Deviation	1.56	0.38	1.26	0.85
9 - Future	Mean	2.74	1.89	1.2	1.51
	Std. Deviation	1.58	1.37	0.63	0.99
10 - Modal	Mean	2.41	1.72	1.8	1.59
	Std. Deviation	1.56	1.27	1.69	1.12
11 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	3.24	2.28	1.8	1.74
	Std. Deviation	1.71	1.78	1.69	1.19
12 - Aspectual (immediate prospective)	Mean	2.76	1.83	1.6	2.34
	Std. Deviation	1.74	1.29	1.35	1.4

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers and Italians (continues).*

		SHORT STAY	MEDIUM STAY	LONG STAY	CONTROL (ITALIANS)
		N = 34	N = 18	N = 10	N = 165
13 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	3.44	2.22	2.4	2.57
	Std. Deviation	1.5	1.35	1.51	1.54
14 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	2.38	2.89	1.7	3.16
	Std. Deviation	1.58	1.68	1.34	1.47
15 - Pleonastic	Mean	2.79	2.61	2.3	3.24
	Std. Deviation	1.67	1.75	1.34	1.48
16 - Pleonastic	Mean	3.12	3.06	2.7	3.37
	Std. Deviation	1.63	1.66	1.64	1.38
17 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	3.09	2.89	2.2	3.7
	Std. Deviation	1.6	1.57	1.93	1.26
18 - Pleonastic	Mean	2.79	3.5	3.6	3.74
	Std. Deviation	1.75	1.62	1.84	1.26
19 - Aspectual (prospective)	Mean	3.24	3.5	4.5	3.74
	Std. Deviation	1.63	1.76	1.27	1.35
20 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	2.79	3.61	1.8	3.8
	Std. Deviation	1.34	1.38	1.23	1.32
21 - Aspectual (culminative)	Mean	3.09	3.89	3.4	3.85
	Std. Deviation	1.69	1.57	1.99	1.26
22 - Collocation	Mean	4.03	3.89	3.9	4.09
	Std. Deviation	1.19	1.68	1.37	1.07
23 - Collocation	Mean	3.32	4.28	4.6	4.21
	Std. Deviation	1.63	1.36	1.26	1.03
24 - Collocation	Mean	3.32	4.28	4.6	4.24
	Std. Deviation	1.63	1.36	1.26	1.16

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers and Italians.*

Figure 3. *Italian and non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers'
acceptability judgements.*

We performed a Kruskall-Wallis test[10] with 'Length of stay'
as the between-subjects independent variable and the judgements
of the 24 sentences as dependent variables. When the results of the
Kruskall-Wallis test were statistically significant, we performed a Bon-
ferroni-Dunn as post hoc test.

We start our analysis with the first 12 sentences, whose values need
to be unlearned. A significant difference between the 4 groups for all
the 12 items was seen (*p* always < .05). The post hoc test signalled that
between the short-stay and the other three groups the judgement dif-
ferences are always significant: the short-stay subjects always judged the
first 12 items as more acceptable than the other 3 groups. No signifi-
cant differences were revealed between the control and the long-stay
group; the same can be said for the medium stay group, which judged
only sentence 9 as significantly more acceptable than the control and
long-stay groups. These results suggest that the long-stay group has un-
learned the values of *ir a* + infinitive that are not displayed by *andare
a* + infinitive. The same can be said for the medium-stay group, who

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[10]   We ran a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normal distribution of the 24
dependent variables (judgements of the 24 sentences) across the four levels of the independent
variable 'Length of stay', which includes the three length-of-stay levels of the Spanish speakers
and the control group of Italian informants. The data are not normally distributed (*p* always
< .05), and so we opted for non-parametric statistic tests.

achieved the same results as the long-stay one, sentence 9 excluded. The short-stay group, on the other hand, always judged the 12 sentences as significantly more acceptable than the control group. Nevertheless, we notice that their judgements exceed 3 (3.24) points only in sentence 11: there is a tendency to judge the first 12 sentences as almost unacceptable. A comparison (performed with a Kruskall-Walls test with Bonferroni-Dunn as post hoc test) between the short-stay group's judgement of the first 12 items with those of the beginner and intermediate instructed groups revealed that the former significantly (p always < 0.5) outperformed in unlearning the other two. This can be interpreted as an advantage of naturalistic acquisition in comparison to instruction, albeit not targeted to the differences between the two periphrases.

Moving now to the most doubtful sentences for the control group (sentences 13 to 16), significant differences between the 4 groups were detected for all the items: H(3) = 13.2, p = .01 for sentence 13; H(3) = 9.3, p = .04 for sentence 14; H(3) = 14.5, p = .002 for sentence 15; H(3) = 11.8, p = .03 for sentence 16, but the post hoc gave a rather complex picture: sentence 13 was judged significantly (p = .052) more acceptable by the short-stay group than the other 3 groups; sentence 14 was judged in a significantly more acceptable way by the control group, and the group that best approaches the control judgements is the intermediate one; for sentence 15 and 16 we notice the same phenomenon as for sentence 14: the control group rates them significantly higher than the other 3 groups. The data suggest that the rising gradient of the control group seen in § 5.1 is not followed by the non-instructed speakers: their judgements remain in line with those given to sentences 1 to 12. The exception to this trend is sentence 13, which was judged as more acceptable by the short-stay group. A comparison with the instructed group shows that the advanced and long-stay groups judged very similarly the 4 sentences here: a Mann-Whitney U Test performed on the judgements of the 2 groups detected no significant differences between the two groups: U = 101, p = .86 for sentence 13; U = 85, p = .14 for sentence 14;

U = 102, p = .88 for sentence 15; U = 78, p = .21 for sentence 16. The overgeneralisation of unlearning on these ambiguous sentences happens equally for the two groups. Moreover, the judgements on sentences 14, 15 and 16 by the short and medium-stay groups are always significantly lower than those given by the beginners and intermediate subjects: non-instructed subjects tend to judge the doubtful sentences as less acceptable than the instructed informants. It seems that, apart from sentence 13, rated similarly by all groups, instructed subjects were globally more in line with Italian speakers in judging these items.

For the last cluster of sentences, the values of which need to be learned, no significant differences between the judgements of the 4 groups were revealed for items 17, 20, 22 and 23 (p always > .05). These sentences were judged as basically acceptable by all groups, despite the tendency of the short-stay group to give them lower ratings. For sentence 18 and 19, the test signalled a statistical difference (H(3) = 12.1, p = .01 and H(3) = 8.2, p = .04, respectively), which the post-hoc reveals to be only between the control and the short-stay group, who rated these items significantly lower than the Italians. For sentence 21 and 24, the significant difference (H(3) = 18.3, p = .003 and H(3) = 13.9, p = .004 respectively) was seen between the short-term and the other groups, the short term group being the subjects that judged these items as the least acceptable.

To sum up, our data suggest that the medium- and long-stay groups succeed in both unlearning and learning. In particular, we observe the learning of the target Italian values of *andare a* + infinitive by non-instructed L1-Spanish speakers, while instructed subjects largely failed to learn these values. This suggests that natural acquisition not only helps the unlearning, but also the learning of L2-target values more than instruction, at least when not focused on the phenomenon under consideration. In some cases (sentence 17, 20, 22 and 23) this is appreciable also in short-stay learners, i.e., in people in Italy for 1 to 10 years.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Based on the analysis presented in § 5, we can now answer our four research questions:

RQ1 – *What happens when learners deal with a L2 periphrasis that sounds familiar, but whose values and uses are different from those of the 'corresponding' L1 one?*
Learners have both to learn new L2-values of the periphrasis and to unlearn L1-like values, by inhibiting the transfer of values that are not target-like. Learning and unlearning are not equally difficult processes for learners (see answer to RQ2), and their success appears to positively correlate with the amount of input exposure (see answer to RQ4); regarding the level of L2-proficiency, the correlation is only positive for unlearning, but not for learning (see answer to RQ3).

RQ2 – *Is the learning of 'new' periphrastic functions easier or more difficult than the unlearning of L1-functions that are not target in the L2?*
The unlearning of non-target values of *andare a* + infinitive does not seem to occur in the instructed beginner and intermediate groups: these groups tend to judge as highly acceptable all L1-like values of the periphrasis, therefore showing little awareness of the differences between Spanish and Italian as concerns the structures considered here. For the advanced instructed group, unlearning seems to be easier than learning, to the point, however, that it tends to be overextended: they judge as unacceptable all Spanish-like uses of the periphrasis, including those that are accepted by Italian speakers. Non-instructed subjects show good results in both learning and unlearning: it is especially the long-stay group that demonstrates good developmental trajectories in both tasks. Overall, our study suggests that unlearning is more difficult than learning only for beginner and intermediate instructed subjects.

RQ3 – *Is the 'attuning' to target-like Italian features of* andare a + *infinitive modulated by the proficiency level of the L1-Spanish speakers?*

For the process of unlearning, it is: more advanced learners unlearn much better. For the process of learning, it is not: the more advanced judge *all* uses of the periphrasis as unacceptable, including those accepted by native speakers, whereas the uncertainty of the beginner and intermediate subjects helps them, although probably by chance, to approach more closely Italian native speakers' ratings.

The answer to this question is therefore nuanced: a higher proficiency level corresponds to judgements that are more native-like regarding features that have to be unlearned, but not for new features that have to be learned.

RQ4 – *Is the 'attuning' to target-like Italian features of* andare a + *infinitive modulated by the amount of input exposure of L1-Spanish speakers?*

For the process of unlearning, we see that after 11 years of exposure (medium- and long-stay groups) there is no difference between the judgements of learners and those of the control group. With less than 11 years exposure (short-stay group), the interlanguage hypotheses are still too L1-biased to approach natives' judgements. The same can be said for learning, although there are some cases in which the short-stay group already judges the sentences in a way that is not significantly different from native Italians. Overall, we can give a positive answer to this question: the greater the input exposure, the more native-like the judgements.

Some consideration on the limitations of this study are in order. Firstly, our data come from untimed acceptability tests. This implies that the judgements of the sentences may be biased by excessive metalinguistic introspection and may thus not be fully illustrative of informants' actual linguistic competence (see Plonsky *et al.*, 2020 for a discussion). Secondly, the test used to create the acceptability gradient of Italian speakers may have induced informants to judge the sentences more strictly, precisely because they were asked to make judgements

on an uncoded and highly diaphasically unstable structure. Production data of Italian speakers might have given a different picture of the use of *andare a* + infinitive. A good way to test if production data differ from acceptability judgements would be to consider, in a future study, corpus data of spoken Italian, in which the values of *andare a* + infinitive could be detected in a bottom-up way; indeed, similar methodological concerns come from Francis (2022: 194-236), who suggests combining judgement data with corpus data.

To sum up, the results of our study are in line with those of scholars who maintain that unlearning is a slow process, as retrieving indirect negative evidence from L2 input is a challenging mental operation that depends on the available amount of L2 input exposure (see discussion in Yang, 2015). This leads to unlearning trajectories that are in line with the process of learning, at least as far as this periphrasis and closely related languages are concerned. With low input exposure, which typically characterises the learning of an L2 in one's home country, unlearning is only reached at an advanced proficiency level and is overgeneralised to target uses of the periphrasis. Such overgeneralisation is due not only to the scarcity of input exposure but also to its quality, which in this case is low given the variability and uneven distribution of *andare a* + infinitive. For these reasons, we suggest that in cases like that investigated here, a targeted pedagogical intervention should be considered to compensate for the lack of input. In other words, structures with similar form and different functions in highly intercomprehensible languages should be presented in a contrastive way in pedagogical grammars and should be explicitly dealt with in the classroom.

Author contributions

Both authors contributed to the conceptualization of the work. For academic reasons only, the scientific responsibility is attributed as follows: §§ 1 and 2 to Francesca Strik-Lievers, §§ 3 and 5 to Paolo Della Putta, and §§ 4 and 6 to both.

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Appendix

Target items

1. Se vai ad andare alla festa, dimmelo!
2. Non trovo le chiavi della macchina: va ad averle prese Luca.
3. Sono stanco e questa sera non vado a uscire.
4. Marco e Ana questa sera vanno a venire al concerto.
5. Se non studi, non vai a passare l'esame.
6. Quel ragazzo va a essere un bravo architetto.
7. Vanno a essere le tre, sono le 14.55.
8. È tardi, la biblioteca va a chiudere.
9. Senza i guanti vai ad aver freddo alle mani.
10. Vai a credere che sono pazzo, ma non importa!
11. Torniamo a casa, va a piovere.
12. Signore e signori, lo spettacolo va a cominciare.
13. Vado a raccontarvi la mia giornata tipica in Italia.
14. La pasta è pronta e ora vado a mettere il parmigiano.
15. Piano piano va a diminuire il numero di contagi.
16. L'alto numero di morti va a indicare un peggioramento della situazione.
17. Le voci del coro vanno a formare una bella melodia.
18. Questa lezione va a concludere il corso di geografia del professor Rossi.
19. In questo capitolo vado ad analizzare i dati dello studio.
20. Il nuovo palazzo va a sostituire quello vecchio.
21. Il denaro va a finanziare il nuovo progetto urbanistico.
22. Se non prendi l'ombrello va a finire che ti bagni.
23. Vai a sapere cosa pensano gli spagnoli degli italiani.
24. Vai a capire che problema ha Lucia: è sempre triste.

Filler items

1. È stato dormendo fino ad ora ma è ancora stanco.
2. Ho conosciuto a Marta tre anni fa in Inghilterra.
3. Se hai mal di denti devi andare al dentista.
4. Da ore Pedro andava cercando una soluzione al problema.
5. Da quando ha iniziato la dieta è andato costantemente perdendo peso.
6. Non posso venire al cinema, domenica: mio esame è lunedì alle 9.
7. Ho stato in Francia solo una volta nella vita.
8. L'anno scorso Luca ha tornato dalle vacanze molto felice.
9. Da piccolo io era un bambino molto riservato: parlavo poco.
10. Ho stato studiando tutta la notte per l'esame di storia.
11. Tutti i giorni aiuto a mia vicina di casa.
12. L'anno prossimo andrò a Italia per le vacanze.
13. Sabato ho nuotato per due ore senza fermarmi.
14. Lucia ha incontrato Mario per la prima volta due anni fa.
15. Per conoscere il voto dell'esame, sono andato dal professore.
16. Negli ultimi anni, Michele è diventato sempre più critico.
17. Con il tempo, i risultati scolastici di Margherita sono migliorati.
18. La mia macchina è una Fiat Punto del 2005.
19. A 20 anni sono stato in Irlanda per studiare inglese.
20. Io e i miei amici siamo partiti per il Marocco il 10 agosto.
21. Quando andavo a scuola mi piaceva studiare storia.
22. Ieri ho cucinato senza pausa dalle 10 alle 13.
23. Buongiorno, sto cercando Francesca Bianchi, la direttrice dell'ufficio.
24. In Spagna le città sono molto belle e ordinate.