

Alessia Iurato is the winner of the HICCS Graduate Student Award



Alessia Iurato, Ph.D. candidate enrolled in the XXXV cycle of the PhD program in Asian and African Studies, has been chosen by the **Hawai'i International Conference on Chinese Studies (HICCS)** committee, in a blind review process, as the winner of the 2022 HICCS Graduate Student Award for her paper titled “**Linking learner corpus and experimental data in studying the acquisition of the Chinese 是 *shì*... 的 *de* construction by L1 Italian learners: A triangulated approach**”. Alessia Iurato will present her paper in January at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, in the USA, during the HICCS, among top scholars in Chinese Studies from all over the world.

Alessia Iurato is conducting her Ph.D. research at **Ca'Foscari University of Venice**, in cotutelle with the **University of Bremen**, in Germany, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. **Bianca Basciano** and Prof. Dr. **Marcus Callies**. The provisional title of her PhD research is “**The acquisition of the 是 *shì*... 的 *de* construction by L1 Italian learners: a learner corpus-based study**”.

Linking learner corpus and experimental data in studying the acquisition of the Chinese 是 *shì*...的 *de* construction by L1 Italian learners: A triangulated approach

The Chinese 是 *shì*...的 *de* construction, often thought to be similar to cleft constructions, poses a challenge for L2 learners because it has very different properties from *it*- or pseudo-clefts in languages like English (Paul & Whitman 2008, Xu 2014).

This construction has been widely studied both from the theoretical point of view (Cheng 2008, Hole 2011, Shyu 2015) and from the perspective of Second Language Acquisition (Mai & Yuan 2016, Su & Tao 2018). However, a uniform treatment in the literature cannot be found; most of the confusion arises from the fact that *shì*...*de* is generally used as a cover term for at least four distinct constructions (Paul & Whitman 2008: 413). I will only focus on the acquisition of the *shì*...*de* pattern proper (Paul & Whitman 2008); it consists of a positionally determined contrastive focused component (Jing-Schmidt 2017) and a presupposition, where future oriented temporal adverbs are excluded, and has a past-tense reading only (Simpson & Wu 2002, Paul & Whitman 2008), as e.g. in

- (1) 他是昨天来的
tā shì zuótiān lái de
3SG COP yesterday come DE
'It was yesterday that he came'(Jing-Schmidt 2017: 213)

I adopt a multi-method triangulated approach, grounded in Learner Corpus Research (Granger 2008), consisting in the combination and analysis of both corpus data and experimental data, in order to provide different insights into the phenomenon under study (Callies 2013). I collected written and oral data of 103 L1 Italian BA and MA students at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (grouped into proficiency levels according to their HSK Chinese language proficiency test score) through open-ended tasks to compile an error-tagged learner corpus. A pragmatic annotation was also added to the corpus. Moreover, I collected experimental data elicited through experimental tasks to counterbalance potential avoidance phenomena and construct underrepresentation (Tracy-Ventura & Myles 2015, Gilquin 2021). Furthermore, I gathered comparable spoken and written data of 30 L1 Chinese speakers who serve as control group.

The study will address the following research questions:

- Do the learners across different proficiency levels use the *shì*...*de* construction, and if so, do they have (explicit) knowledge of its pragmatic meaning?
- What types of grammatical errors emerge from learners' data and what are the error rate and the accuracy rate of the *shì*...*de* construction across different proficiency levels?
- Are there any differences in the use of the *shì*...*de* construction by L1 Chinese speakers and L2 Italian learners to highlight information and to produce contrastive focus?

Preliminary results of quantitative and qualitative analysis show that learners use the construction with a low frequency and a low accuracy rate. Learner errors primarily involve the underuse of the construction due to an overgeneralization of the perfective aspect marker 了 *le*, followed by the misuse of the construction in sentences with stative verbs and future-oriented temporal expressions, attributed to learners' deficient knowledge of the constraints of their usage.

Results also indicate that learners are not aware of the appropriate pragmatic functions (highlighting information and corrective contrast) of the *shì*...*de* construction.

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