Session 6 Role of subordination in narratives
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1. Information status at clause level

a) Accord prominence to newly introduced entities

Existentials and perception verbs with indefinite you/we as means of introducing inanimate entities. By predicating existence entities are accorded prominence :
Ex. 1 *there are / you can see* <u>*huge sheets of paper flying around*</u>

Newly introduced entities coded as argument in a clause in which the protagonist is the agent or experiencer are accorded less saliency
Ex. 2 *he falls into a new world* <u>*with huge sheets of paper*</u>

b) Maintain protagonist in topic position

Perception verbs with protagonist in subject position
Ex. 3 *il entend la goutte d'eau qui tombe* (he hears a drop of water which falls)
Ex. 4 *he observes a woman **who is being caught** because she has stolen a loaf of bread and says to the police, **who has caught her***
 The event where other characters or inanimate entities take the role of the agent is thus integrated in the main body of a text (foregrounded).

c) Downgrade events and participants with and without exclusion from the main body of a text
Ex. 5 *il trempe ses mains dans cette feuillle humide qui se froisse et se déchire et l'emporte en profondeur* (he dips his hands in this soggy paper that crumples and tears and takes him in the depth).

Ex. 6 *Das Männchen fällt nun auf eine neue Ebene* (..), *die* <u>*mit Blättern*</u> (..) *also keine Baumblätter sondern* <u>*Schreibblätter*</u> *große Blätter überdeckt ist.* The little-man falls now onto a new level(..), which with <u>leaves</u> (..), not tree-leaves but <u>sheets of paper</u> big sheets covered is.

2. Informational status given to inanimate entities as reflected at clause level
The analysis focuses on dynamic situations in which the inanimate entities occur as agents and experiencers and are thus potential candidates for inclusion in the narrative sequence (wind blows paper into his face; water is dripping down; a rock is heading towards him).

Table 1 Ratio of subordinate clauses (to main clause)

	L1 ENG	L1 FR	L1 GER	L2 FR	L2 GER

Subordinate	19.1	37.0	11.2	30.9	9.4

The use of subordination is significantly higher in French than in English & German. Both groups of learners retain the source language coding principle at the clause level.

Table 2 Introduction of inanimate entities as reflecting focusing and downgrading patterns

	L1 ENG	L1 FR	L1 GER	L2 FR	L2 GER
Existential +perception verb	83,1	58,6	54,6	67,6	51,9
Argument	16,9	41,4	45,4	32,4	48,1

In English the referents are introduced as the main content of a clause. In French and German they are more likely to appear as an argument in a clause in which the protagonist is the agent or experiencer.

Table 3 Overall references to inanimate entities *vs* protagonist

L1 ENG	L1 FR	L1 GER	L2 FR	L2 GER
34,5	35,8	24,5	34,1	26,7

Numbers show that reference to entities is close in English and French and contrasts with German where it drops significantly. German speakers focus attention on the protagonist and tend to mention entities only when they have a direct impact on the little sand man.

Numbers for L2 French compare with French L1 and English L1. L2 German retain the L1 German preferences as shows lower numbers of reference to entities than in English.

Table 4 Reference to inanimate entities in subject position of main clause

L1 ENG	L1 FR	L1 GER	L2FR	L2 GER
26,0	10,4	14,7	13,2	24,3

Concerning eligibility of mention of entities in subject position, French and German cluster together and contrast with English. With 13.2%, French learners compare with their L1. Concerning German learners of English, although the value for main clauses is close to the target language, they still tend to downgrade the status of these entities as they often occur as the subject of a subordinate clause (see table 5).

Table 5 Reference to inanimate entities in subject position of subordinate clause

L1 ENG	L1 FR	L1 GER	L2FR	L2 GER

2,5	43,1	12,2	35,1	29,0

Contrarily to English L1s, German L1s tend to downgrade inanimate entities and consequently, accord prominence to the protagonist. French also accords prominence to the protagonist but to a lesser degree: inanimate agents are mentioned but typically occur as subject of a subordinate clause. Globally both learner groups show similar preferences to their respective L1s.

Typical descriptions of the same scene in L1s and L2s
Ex. 7
L1 ENG - *as he is walking a piece of paper flies in his face,*
L1 FR - *il évite une feuille qui lui tombe dessus* (he avoids a sheet of paper that is falling on him)
L1 GER - *und wird von einem Fetzen Papier umgeschmissen* (and is thrown down by a sheet of paper)

L1FR L2E
01   *he tries to dig the ground with a stone*
02   ***where the drops are falling***
03   *and the earth cracks*
04   *and once again he falls in the hole*

L1 GER L2E
01   *and then he comes to the sheet of paper*
02   ***where the water is dripping from above***

Summary
Reference to entities is close in English and French (SVO languages) and contrasts with German (V2 language) where it drops significantly. French and German downgrade inanimate entities by means of subordination, but to a larger extent in German by omitting altogether reference to the inanimate entities or referring indirectly to its participation by coding in passive constructions. In sum, all variables reflect a prominence of the protagonist in German, which is not the case in French and English.

Discussion
In the two languages in which the syntactic subject has a fixed position agents of different kinds qualify, while in German (V2 language) all the variables taken into consideration point to a clear a tendency to focus attention on one candidate – the protagonist.
Preference for information selection in English and French is also the case in other languages sharing the same SVO feature (Italian & Spanish). Likewise German shares the same options with Dutch, also a V2 language. Therefore we can attribute to the influence of grammatical features the decisions in attending to both categories of entities (SVO factor) and to focus on the protagonist (V2).

Why should French speakers downgrade inanimate entities by subordination and

German tend to leave them out?
Mention of the endphase of an event is a core factor in advancing the story line in German and French (cf. numbers of bounded events). Inanimate entities *wind blowing, papers flying* do not readily fit the requisite of completion. In German the influence of the temporal frame of reference based on shift together with the V2 feature come into play at the level of **information selection.** In French influence of the temporal/causal frame comes into play at a later stage of the process: that of **attributing informational status**.

Specific interaction of clusters of grammaticized features
Structural features (temporal concepts, role of the syntactic subject, and word order constraints) which affect the domains of time, events and entities, interact in different ways to narrow down the options and guide information organization and information structure in the languages studied.

Type of knowledge involved

The coherence in choices manifest in the narratives suggests that native speakers have gradually learnt how to adjust the constraints of communicative tasks to the specific grammatical structure of their language. They have constructed overall guidelines which determine selection at all levels of text construction together with the acquisition of forms/function relations.
"*The findings across domains show that discourse- internal uses of linguistic devices are a rather late development, which emerges at about six to seven years of age and continues to evolve until at least ten years of age or even thereafter*."
Hickmann (2003) – Children's Discourse: Person, Space and Time across Languages

"*In becoming a native speaker of a given language, the child learns to attend to particular aspects of experience and to relate them verbally in ways that are characteristic of that language.*"
"*Becoming a native speaker requires attention*
– to the grammaticized semantic distinctions of the language
– and to the ways in which grammatical forms are deployed in the construction of connected discourse." Berman & Slobin (1994): "Becoming a Native Speaker"

'*Thinking for speaking' involves picking those characteristics of objects and events that (a) fit some conceptualization of the event, and (b) are readily encodable in the language. I propose that, in acquiring a native language, the child learns particular ways of thinking for speaking.* " Slobin (1996) – "Thinking for Speaking"

L2s hurdles
The very **nature of this knowledge** is not deterministic at one level but as a set in the sense that this knowledge is interconnected. To reach native-like proficiency L2 speakers must discover the implications of grammatical features for information structure and its link with other grammatical features piece by piece.

 Knowledge of information organization and information structure concerns decisions

made in the first stage of the production process (deciding what to say) and therefore must be deeply rooted and automatically activated to meet the requirements of speech online.

'In one's native language, thinking for speaking is habitual, automatized, unconscious. Even if L2 is typologically similar to L1, form-function mappings require concerted attention during learning. When L1 and L2 are typologically different, familiar strategies are unavailable and some accommodation must be made. Slobin 2010 (in press)

Complementary bibliography

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