Linkage in narratives: A comparison between monolingual speakers of French and Italian, and early and late French-Italian bilinguals

SILVIA NATALE

Abstract

In the course of language acquisition learners have to deal with the task of producing narrative texts that are coherent across a range of conceptual domains (space, time, entities) – both within as well as across utterances. The organization of information is analyzed in this study, on the basis of retellings of a silent film, in terms of devices used in the coordination and subordination of events within the narrative sequence. The focus on subordination reflects a core grammatical difference between Italian and French, as Italian is a null-subject language while French is not. The implications of this contrast for information structure include differences in topic management within the sequence of events. The present study investigates in how far Italian-French bilingual speakers acquire the patterns of monolingual speakers of Italian. It compares how early and late bilinguals of these two languages proceed when linking information in narratives in Italian.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the role of language-specific typological contrasts in determining narrative structure has been increasingly coupled with psycholinguistic methods of analysis in the study of language acquisition. Narratives require speakers to organize experience into structured units by drawing up a sequence of events, with specifications on the way in which they are interlinked, as well as the perspective from which they are viewed, such as the point of view of the narrator, or one of the participants, which may then gain 'topic' status.

Narrative proficiency requires the acquisition of linguistic knowledge that enables speakers to produce a coherent text in accordance with the structural means that each language provides. Native speakers acquire general principles that guide decisions with regard to information selection (deciding what

IRAL 51 (2013), 151–169
DOI 10.1515/iral-2013-0007
0019042X/2013/051-151
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to say), 'topic' management (introducing and maintaining reference to an entity as 'topic'), the anchoring of predicate argument structures in context (time, space), and at the focus of the present study, the way predicate argument structures are mapped into form (main clause or subordinate clause, linkage between clauses). For a sequence of propositions to be coherent, speakers have to learn how all this is executed in consistent terms.

Starting at the level of 'macro-planning' in text production (cf. Levelt 1989, 1999), the frame of analysis for the present study is based on findings with regard to the role of core grammatical features such as word order constraints, null-subject, grammaticalized aspect, for information organization for the text as a whole (cf. Carroll and von Stutterheim 2003; von Stutterheim, Carroll and Klein 2003; Carroll et al. 2008). The relevance for textual planning, as well as acquisition, is that decisions are not solved for each utterance in turn, but also rely on planning principles that hold on a default basis in language production for a given text type. In this framework, attention has been addressed both to late as well as early bilinguals (L2 English–German; L2 German–English; L2 French–English) and their difficulties in acquiring the linguistic knowledge that determines the interplay between grammaticalized concepts and information organization at the level of the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic interface (late bilinguals, Carroll and Lambert 2003, 2006; von Stutterheim and Lambert 2005; early Dutch–German bilinguals, Flecken 2011).

The present study makes use of the differences and similarities between two typologically close languages, French and Italian, in order to compare differences and similarities between early and late bilinguals (French-Italian) when carrying out the same narrative task in Italian. Focus is placed on the fact that the null-subject language Italian can maintain reference to an entity with consistent use of zero anaphora with its implications for the use of specific types of subordinate clauses. Use of 'null' subjects (zero anaphora) in reference maintenance is possible on a consistent basis because number and person are coded morphologically on the verb (both orthographically and phonetically) with a one to correspondence between morpheme and person, i.e., there is a distinct morpheme for first, second, third person, both singular and plural.[1] This grammatical feature allows omission of a personal pronoun unless contrasts or emphasis of different kinds are highlighted (Chini 2003b). This has consequences for reference management and information flow in that the referent to which a zero form applies has to be highly salient for the interlocutor. Other possible referents are kept to a minimum, as the interlocutor cannot rely on a noun

1. For example, for the verb *giocare* ('to play', present indicative): *gioco* (first pers. sing. 'I play') *giochi*, (second pers. sing. 'you play'), *gioca* (third pers. sing. 'he/she/it plays'), *giochiamo* (first pers. plural, 'we play'), *giocate* (second pers. pl. 'you play') *giocanno* (third pers. pl. 'they play').

phrase or pronoun (gender) to identify the appropriate referent. Furthermore, null-subject is a marker in information structure for 'topic' status, with the occurrence of null and overt subjects determined by discourse-pragmatic factors (see Schwarze 1995). The notion of 'topic' relates to the distribution of given (topic) and new information in a sentence. Information with topic status will have high degree identifiability for the interlocutor and typically precedes mention of new information in the sentence (see, for example, Lambrecht 1994). Since the language provides this feature in reference management, this means that principles underlying information organization in Italian are designed so as to take this grammatical feature into account. Its consequences for the use of subordination in narratives by L1 speakers, as well as those of Italian-French bilingual speakers, is at the focus of the present study. An example with a morpheme on the verb marking third person singular is illustrated as follows.

(1) *Paolo è partito per le vacanze. Ha portato con sé molti libri perché desider-a leggere.*
'Paolo has left for his vacation. _Have-$_{3rdpers.sing}$ took with him many books because _wish-$_{3rdpers.\ sing}$ to read'

The absence of a pronoun is licensed in this case by the fact that there is a clear candidate to which the null-subject can apply.

As will be shown below, this contrast between Italian and French is coupled with differences in the use of specific types of subordinate clauses within the chain of events (gerunds in Italian and relative clauses in French). The main research question thus concerns the extent to which the early versus late bilinguals uncover language-specific patterns in information organization in Italian that are grammatically driven and differ from L1 French.

2. Acquisition of subordination and coordination in narratives

Cross-linguistic studies on linkage in narratives, using the same stimulus material as in the present study (re-tellings of a silent film, see below), have focused on the use of temporal and causal relations in English, French and German when sequencing events (use of the temporal 'then' and the causal 'so', 'because'). Temporal linkage is the predominant form in German and contrasts with a higher frequency of causal means when linking events in English and French. Analyses of advanced L2 French-English as well as L2 German-English speakers show that the learners retain the preferences of the L1 in their narratives in the L2 (Carroll and Lambert 2003, 2006). The use of causal or temporal linkage correlates in the L1s with grammatical differences between these languages (word order constraints) and their role in information organi-

zation. The advanced L2 German learners of English did not acquire knowledge at the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic interface with respect to the role of the syntactic subject when weighting and encoding information for expression: The syntactic subject has a fixed position in both English and French as the first main constituent in a clause (SVO); this correlates with the accordance of a high status to the agents of an action as candidates for mention as subject of a clause (main, subordinate) and a focus on causal relations when linking events. This contrasts with German (a 'verb-second' [V2 language]) in which the position of the syntactic subject is relatively free. In this case the main protagonist in the narrative is accorded the highest status for mention as subject of a clause (see in detail Carroll et al. 2008), and events proceed in time with the protagonist 'in control' so to speak. A similar pattern also applies to the V2-language Dutch (see Flecken 2011).

With regard to the use of subordination in narratives, previous findings have shown that in the course of acquisition the learners for the languages studied rely mainly on temporal subordinate clauses in early to intermediate phases of acquisition in L2 Italian (Giacalone Ramat 1999, 2003 for German learners of Italian; Chini 2003a for German learners of Italian; Valentini 2003 for Chinese learners of Italian). An analysis of Chinese learners of Italian shows overuse of temporal subordination, compared to L1 Italian data at early to intermediate stages, while use by advanced learners finally matches native speakers' usage (Rosi 2010). For late Dutch-French bilinguals, Degand and Hadermann (2009) report an overuse of explicit temporal relations in French narratives for both subordination as well coordination.

Studies of early bilinguals and L1 acquisition indicate the nature of the demands on the learner in acquiring native-or adult-like competence when organizing information and creating coherence in complex tasks such as a narrative. Based on the same stimulus material as the present study, Flecken (2011) also reports over-reliance by early Dutch-German on temporal relations when linking events, with over-explicit use of the temporal shifter 'then', compared to monolingual German and Dutch speakers. Halm (2012) describes in an extensive analysis of the acquisition of narrative competence by German L1 learners (ages 7–14) how these are characterized by over-explicit temporal marking (temporal shifter *dann*, 'then') when linking events, compared to narratives by adult speakers for the same task. This lasts until the age of 13–14 when means to express linkage begin to diversify.

The present study examines the role of linkage in narratives by French-Italian early and late bilinguals with regard to the means used in coordinating events, as well the types of subordination which these learners use, compared to monolingual speakers of Italian. In addition to the factor 'null-subject', a further grammatical contrast which is relevant in the present context is the fact that word order is relatively free in Italian, but not in French.

3. Narrative structure, subordination and coordination

Narrative structure rests on the basic distinction between utterances that form the 'main structure' or 'foreground of the text' and serve to encode the sequence in which the events narrated took place, and 'background' or 'side structures' that provide additional information relevant to the event sequence (see, for example, Labov and Waletzky 1967; Labov 1997; Hopper 1979; von Stutterheim and Klein 1989). In the present study, the scope of analysis concerns the function of subordination as observed within the 'main structure' or 'foreground' of the narrative – that is, the main sequence of events as construed by the narrator. Events in the main structure of the narrative answer the underlying question or 'quaestio' "What happened (to x) at t_n", "what happened (to x) at $t_n + 1$", "what happened (to x) at $t_n + 2$" and are thus ordered on the basis of the core relation of 'temporal shift' (von Stutterheim and Klein 1989). In other words, events are presented as constituting a change of state and thus reach a point of completion. In this case the post time of the completed event presents the interval in which the subsequent event takes place. The temporal relation is anaphoric ('what happens after event t_n is completed') and is typically expressed by a temporal shifter such as 'then'.

In addition to the analysis of subordination, the comparison with the two groups of learners also includes the use of coordinating conjunctions (e.g., the temporal shifter *poi* (then) in Italian, *ensuite* (then), the causal or conclusive *donc* (so) in French), as their role in sequencing events also differs cross-linguistically, as indicated above (Carroll and Lambert 2003, 2006).

4. Methodology

4.1. *Stimulus*

Participants were asked to re-tell the content of a short silent film *Quest* (7 minutes long) that depicts the adventures of an animate-like protagonist, a clay figure, in his search for water. This journey covers five different episodes (the different episodes take place in different worlds, i.e., desert-like worlds of sand, paper, stone, and two different industrial settings) where the protagonist is confronted with hostile natural forces such as high winds, falling rocks etc., which continually interfere with his quest.

4.2. *Selection of the stimulus and information structure*

With regard to information structure in the narrative, it is important to note that there is only one half-animate entity in this film, which promotes the clay fig-

ure as the main candidate for the role of syntactic subject of a main clause and 'topic status', for languages in which this relevant. The clay figure is frequently confronted with inanimate entities as agents of an action; they are also candidates for mention as syntactic subject of a main clause, as mentioned above.

As will be shown below, topic status is assigned to the protagonist as the main candidate for mention as the subject of a main clause within the narrative sequence. This is driven in Italian via the presence of null-subject, as discussed above. It is important to note that gerunds, as subordinate clauses, fall in line with this pattern in that the topic of the main clause is maintained, also with null-subject, in this subordinate clause as well. Gerunds allow this form of elision, showing that information flow is less likely to be interrupted by the mention of other entities. Relative clauses, on the other hand, the largest group of subordinate clauses in French, typically occur in contexts in which another entity is introduced (*there are huge rocks which are shooting up out of the ground*; see examples for French in 5.1 below). French-Italian bilingual speakers have to learn that there is a preference in Italian to have a null-subject and topic maintenance across main as well as subordinate clauses within the sequence of events in narratives in Italian. Information flow in this form is not found in L1 French narratives. The role of this contrast is examined in the following analysis for both early and late French-Italian bilinguals when retelling the contents of a silent film in Italian.

4.3. *Data collection procedure*

The participants were told that they will first see the entire film, and that this will be re-shown and stopped after each main episode (the world of sand, paper, stone, etc.) At the end of each episode they will be asked to tell 'what happened', *cosa è successo?* in Italian, *qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?* in French, with regard to the episode they just saw. The procedure aims to reduce memory load in order to guarantee a higher comparability with regard to the events retold. The digitally recorded narratives were subsequently transcribed and segmented into propositional units.

4.4. *Participants*

The L1 Italian participants ($n = 23$, balanced for gender) are all university students and were recorded in Italy (Universities of Naples and Turin) and at the University of Heidelberg. In the latter case they were Italian students within the European Erasmus programme (with low to intermediate knowledge of German). Recordings were carried out shortly after their arrival in Germany. The L1 French participants ($n = 23$, balanced for gender) are also university

Table 1. *Overview of recordings*

Language	N	Proficiency	Place of recording
Italian	23	Monolingual	Naples and Turin
French	23	Monolingual	Paris
L2 Italian	16	High-intermediate	Milan
French-Italian Bilinguals	15	Bilingual, with very advanced proficiency both in Italian and French	Milan

students and were recorded at the University of Paris VIII. The early ($n = 15$) as well as the late French-Italian bilinguals ($n = 16$) all attend a French school in Milan, where the recordings were carried out, and are on average 16 years old. The early bilinguals are from families where one parent is French and the other Italian and both Italian and French are spoken at home (one parent, one language). They were born and raised in Italy and have been attending a French school since the age of three (*école maternelle/kindergarten*) where their education is conducted entirely in French (French educational system), while Italian is taught as a second language. In a language background questionnaire they also stated that they have contact with Italian-speaking friends outside school. The late bilinguals, whose parents are expatriates, have been living in Italy for periods ranging between three and eight years. Despite this difference in years of exposure to Italian, their proficiency in school tests on Italian was classified in all cases as high-intermediate. The language recorded for this stage of the experiment for both the early and late bilinguals is Italian, while parallel recordings in French will be carried out at a later date. As data collection is still underway, Table 1 gives an overview of the data analysed so far.

It should be noted, with regard to the numbers, that subordination is not a marked feature of the narrative sequence as events that advance the story line are typically encoded in main clauses. Subordinate clauses are more frequent in sections that provide background information on the events. However, the forms used when subordinating information within the event sequence reflect core typological differences between the two languages and are in this sense highly relevant for the study of language acquisition. In the present data set L1 Italian subordinate clauses amount to 36 out of 299 utterances in this context (12.0 %). Frequencies in French are comparable at 23 out of 274 utterances (8.39 %). This applies with a data base of 23 narratives in each language. Given the low numbers, the analysis focuses on the most frequent forms of subordination with regard to their role in information structure.

5. Results

5.1. *Subordination*

5.1.1. *Italian.* Gerunds are the most frequent type of subordinate clause, as shown in Table 2. They account for 55.55 %, that is, 20 out of the total of 36 subordinate clauses (with a total of 299 utterances) in the narrative sequence, the main structure of the narrative.

The following examples illustrate how these types of subordinate clauses are encoded in Italian:

(2) Temporal
Mentre si rialza, sente di nuovo il ruomore dell'acqua
'While he gets up, hears again the sound of water'
Causal:
Il nostro amico improvvisamente si sveglia, perché un foglio gli passa / lo sfiora
'Our friend suddenly wakes up, because a sheet passes / touches him'
Object
Vede che un masso cade dal cielo
'He sees that a rock falls from the sky'
Gerund
Allora alza le mani cercando di raccogliere queste gocce
'So he lifts his hands trying to collect these drops'
Relative
Si crea anche qui un vortice che lo assorbe completamente.
'Here again a swirl arises which sucks him in completely.

Gerunds can be defined as "a non finite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination" (Haspelmath and König 1995: 3). They can express causal, instrumental, or conditional meanings, depending on "syntactic, semantic and contextual factors" (Giacalone Ramat 2003: 183). In the present task, the protagonist, the clay figure, is encoded in almost all cases as the syntactic subject of a main clause.

Table 2. *Subordination in L1 Italian (n = 23, main structure with 299 utterances, thereof 36 subordinated)*

Temporal	Causal	Object	Gerund	Relative	Infinitive
8	3	1	20	2	2
22.22%	8.33%	2.77%	55.55%	5.55%	5.55%

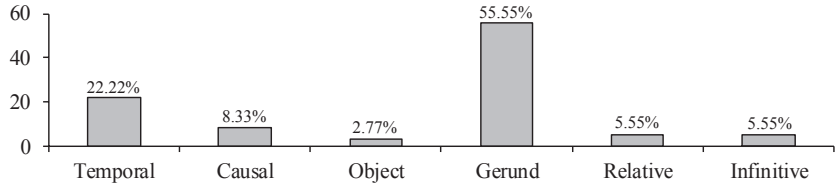

Figure 1. *Graphic overview subordination in L1 Italian*

For information structure, the significant factor is that the subject of the gerund is generally omitted and is identical with the syntactic subject of the main clause. Use of this type of subordinate clause thus avoids interruptions in information flow in this null-subject language and supports 'topic' maintenance.

(3) *alla fine toccando questo foglio*
'in the end touching this sheet'
finisce *con* *lo* *sprofondare* *di nuovo*
ends (3rd pers) up with falling down again
'he ends up with falling down again'

5.1.2. *L1 French.* The comparison between L1 French and L1 Italian reveals the following differences. In contrast to L1 Italian, relative clauses are the most frequent form within the event sequence in French (53.33 % in L1 French as opposed to 5.55 % in L1 Italian).

Table 3. *Subordination in L1 French (n = 23, main structure with 274 utterances, thereof 45 subordinated)*

Temporal	Causal	Object	Gerund	Relative	Present Participle
3	1	2	14	24	1
6.66 %	2.22 %	4.44 %	31.11 %	53.33 %	2.22 %

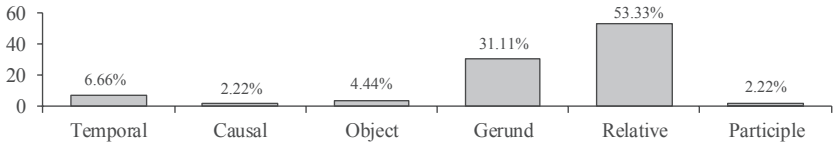

Figure 2. *Graphic overview subordination in L1 French*

Table 4. *Relative clauses in L1 French and L1 Italian*

	Relatives clauses in main structure	Relative clauses overall occurrence (main and side structure)
L1 Italian	2/36 = 5.55 %	44/210 = 20.95 %
L1 French	24/45 = 53.33 %	75/317 = 23.65 %

In the majority of cases (59.09 %), the syntactic subject of the subordinate relative clause is an environmental entity such as 'a rock', a 'gust of wind', a 'sheet of paper', etc. (For instance: *Il se retrouve sur une pierre qui monte*, 'He finds himself on a rock which rises'). As in Italian, the protagonist shows the highest frequency as the syntactic subject of a main clause in the event sequence. Occurrence of another entity as subject of a main clause would lead to 'topic shift', which means that subordination with a relative clause avoids a shift in information structure of this kind.

The absence in Italian of relative clauses with mention of a new entity as subject avoids interruption in information flow, because this would often entail increased use of pronouns in reference management when referring to the protagonist, which has topic status. As a null-subject language, linguistic means to mark an entity with 'topic' status is given in the form of the 'null' morpheme. As mentioned above, information flow is planned by the L1 speaker so as to avail of this feature in reference management, which is not the case in French. As shown in Table 4 below, this is borne out by the absence of relative clauses in Italian that lead to the introduction of other entities and the possibility of having to use pronouns when reintroducing the 'topic' entity – the protagonist. This factor is not relevant in information organization in French and this typological difference between the two languages has to be recognised when learning Italian.

At this point it is important to mention that relative clauses do occur in L1 Italian in the side structure of the narrative. (For instance: *ci sono delle gocce d'acqua che cadono dall'alto*, 'there are drops of water which fall from above'). In both languages, relative clauses serve in overall terms (both within the main and side structure) in conjunction with existential expressions such as 'there are' (*ci sono/il y a*), to introduce entities to the domain of discourse ('there are huge rocks which are continually shooting up from under the ground'). Yet in French they can occur as part of the main structure and relate to events that form part of the narrative sequence, while in Italian they mainly occur in descriptions giving background information (side structures).

Example 4 below illustrates how events are categorised as belonging to either the main structure, i.e., the event sequence, or to side structures of the narrative, with examples for relative clauses for French. For the utterances a)

and b), roughly translated as 'sheets of paper which fly around for a while', the event in question belongs to the side structure because it does not occupy a single temporal interval but continues while d) and e) occur. With d) and e), by contrast, ('his falling' and 'finally finding a place'), both events answer the global question 'and what happened then?' They each occupy a specific interval, thus constituting part of the event sequence – the main structure of the narrative.

(4) a. *Et donc il y a des feuilles de papier* (side structure)
and so there are sheets of paper
b. *Qui volent un peu partout*
which fly a little bit around
c. *Et il y en a une*
and there is one
d. *qui le fait tomber.* (**main structure**)
which makes him fall.
e. *Et finalement il trouve l'endroit* (**main structure**)
And finally he finds the place.
f. *Où ces gouttes d'eau tombent.* (side structure)
There where these drops fall.

Gerunds come second in L1 French, as the numbers show, (for example, *et en creusant dans cet espace humide il est encore aspiré*, 'and by digging in this humid place he is again sucked in') but they do not occur as frequently as in L1 Italian.

5.1.3. *Summary of L1 results.* In summary, different types of subordinate clauses are used in Italian and French to guarantee topic continuity within the event sequence, given the typological differences between the two languages and the consequences for information organization which they entail (89.81 % of utterances in the L1 Italian narratives show null-subject (zero anaphora). For the learner it is not simply the question that Italian allows omission of the subject. Information flow has to be organized so as to accommodate this feature as it affects the way references to other entities, apart from the protagonist, are managed within the event sequence, thereby contrasting with French. The most frequent means of subordination in the null-subject language Italian, the gerund, serves in maintaining the protagonist as subject and 'topic' within the sequence of events and allowing continuing use of the null-morpheme. The protagonist is also the subject of the gerund, so that the main and subordinate clause share the same referent and there is no need to mention the protagonist explicitly in either the main or the subordinate clause. In other words, the subordinate clause in L1 Italian must meet certain requirements because the 'null'

morpheme would not distinguish between the protagonist (he) and a force (it), as both would be marked in reference maintenance on the verb via the same morpheme for 'third person'. Consistent use of pronouns in reference maintenance would not fall in line with a 'null-subject' language either. So a different solution to French in information flow is adopted. The analysis of this null-subject language illustrates how continuity in information flow is ensured in a way that is compatible with the formal structures (null-subject) which the language provides by limiting references to other entities as subject of a main as well as a subordinate clause. It pinpoints the problem of analysis for the learner in acquiring this knowledge. In French, on the other hand, the most frequent type of subordinate clause – relative clauses – can be used to introduce other entities, such as the inanimate agent of an action, encoded as the syntactic subject of a clause, within the main structure of the narrative. This occurs in conjunction with an existential (there is an x which ...). Disambiguation with references to the protagonist is carried out by the use of pronouns or noun phrases. The use of relative clauses allows speakers to switch from the protagonist as subject of a main clause to another entity as subject of a subordinate clause.

These contrasts in the consistent use of different forms of subordination in Italian and French illustrate how planning principles for information organization in complex tasks of this kind take place at the level of macro-planning for the entire narrative; they need not be weighed up anew at each relevant point, when the question of encoding options arises, as they apply consistently throughout the narrative. These are factors which bilingual speakers have to deal with, ideally on a separate basis, in language production when carrying out a narrative task in one or the other language.

5.1.4. *Learners of Italian: Late bilinguals.* Coming now to late bilinguals, the types of subordinate clauses used in the narratives can be categorised as learner-specific, given the tendency to use temporal subordinate clauses (e.g., *quando* 'as', for instance: *Quando si toglie il foglio di faccia vede che uno di questi fogli è bagnato*, 'as he removes the sheet from his face he sees that one of these sheets is wet').

Table 5. *Subordination in L2 Italian (n = 16, main structure with 277 utterances, thereof 35 subordinated)*

Temporal	Causal	Gerund	Relative
18	2	3	12
51.42 %	5.71 %	8.57 %	34.28 %

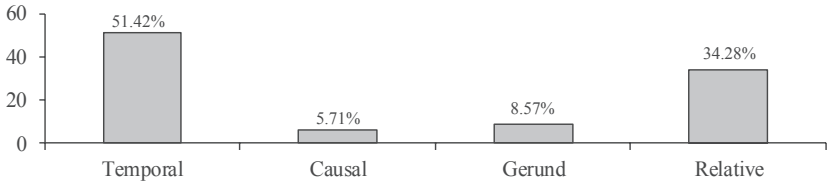

Figure 3. *Graphic overview subordination in L2 Italian (late bilinguals)*

As found in the narratives of other learners (see Section 2 above), the use of temporal subordinate clauses is higher than in the narratives of the L1 speakers (where this type of subordination plays a minor role). Use of gerunds is low, compared to L1 Italian, and the rate of occurrence of relative clauses is closer to L1 French.

In summary, the use of temporal linkage devices points to a learner-specific form and cannot be ascribed to either French or Italian. Although the absolute numbers are low in general for this group, the findings may point to the fundamental role of temporal relations in a narrative task. The reliance on temporal connectors, as well as temporal subordinate clauses, may be explained by the fact that the relations they encode belong to the backbone of the narrative "What happened (to x) at t_n", "what happened (to x) at $t_n + 1$", "what happened (to x) at $t_n + 2$". Learners at this stage of acquisition exploit explicit temporal linkage devices in association with the sequential chain of events.

Learners of Italian: Early bilinguals. The findings for the early bilinguals are as follows: In contrast to the late bilinguals, relative clauses are the most frequent form of subordination, but use of gerunds is also relatively high (18 instances versus 25 for relatives). Temporal linkage (17.74 %) is closer to L1 Italian (22.22 %), as opposed to L1 French (6.66 %).

In summary, the early bilingual speakers show greater similarity with L1 French in the use of subordinate clauses within the main structure of the narrative, given the frequency of relative clauses as representative of the core typological contrast between L1 Italian and L1 French. But use of gerunds is not

Table 6. *Subordination in bilingual data ($n = 15$, main structure with 323 utterances, thereof 62 subordinated)*

Temporal	Causal	Object	Gerund	Relative
11	2	6	18	25
17.74 %	3.22 %	9.67 %	29.0 %	40.32 %

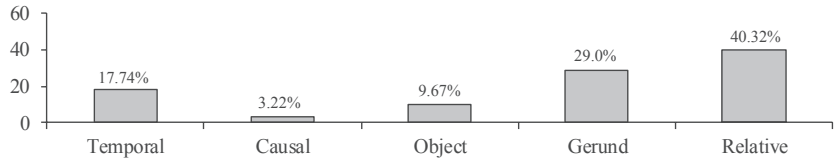

Figure 4. *Graphic overview subordination in bilingual data*

entirely absent, in contrast to the late bilinguals, where the frequency of both typologically relevant forms (gerunds and relative clauses) is low. The early bilinguals also differ from late bilinguals with regard to the role of temporal clauses in that the latter rely to a greater extent on explicit temporal linkage devices associated with the sequential chain of events – the core structural feature of a narrative. In this sense reliance on linkage via the temporal domain may reflect earlier stages of acquisition, with diversification to other domains (e.g., topic assignment) as a sign of further development in marking coherence.

5.2. *Coordination*

The final section of the analysis focuses on the occurrence of forms that link utterances at a paratactic level: They encompass the temporal shifter 'then', expressed as *poi* in Italian, *ensuite; puis* in French, the adversative 'but', expressed by *ma*, *però* in Italian *mais* in French, and conclusive conjunctions such as 'therefore', *quindi*, *dunque*, *perciò, per cui, allora* in Italian; *donc* in French. Table 7 presents an overview for all four groups.[2]

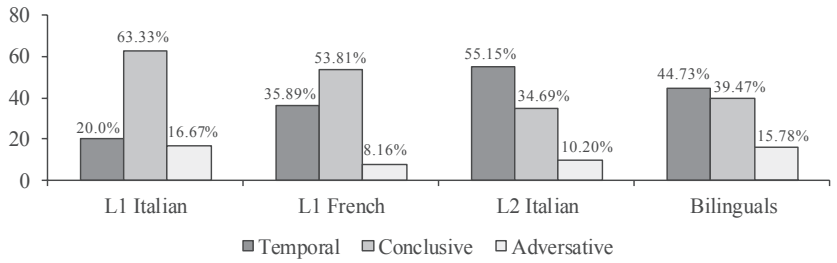

Figure 5. *Graphic overview coordination*

2. In the analysis it has been taken into account that coordinative means such as *donc* or *puis* in French can have depending on the context in which they occur, either discursive or a distinct semantic meaning.

Table 7. *Coordination*

Temporal	Conclusive	Adversative	Total	Main structure	
L1 Italian	6	19	5	30	299 utterances
%	20.0	63.33	16.67	10.03	
L1 French	14	21	4	39	274 utterances
%	35.89	53.81	8.16	14.23	
L2 Italian	27	17	5	49	277 utterances
%	55.15	34.69	10.20	17.68	
Early bilinguals	17	15	6	38	323 utterances
%	44.73	39.47	15.78	11.76	

In L1 Italian there is a predominance of conclusive forms, whereby one event is presented as a consequence of a former event (Giusti 2001). A temporal component is implicit only in the sense that one event follows the other. In L1 French conclusive forms are also the preferred option, but temporal forms are more frequent than in L1 Italian (35.89 % in L1 French as opposed to 20.0 % in L1 Italian).

With regard to the two groups of bilinguals, the predominance of temporal linkage in the form of subordinate clauses in the narratives of the late bilinguals is confirmed with the results for coordination: Subordinate clauses that encode temporal relations show the highest frequency in the narratives of the late bilinguals, a clear preference which also applies with temporal connectors. The means used by early bilinguals show greater diversity and include both temporal and conclusive connectors.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this study on the acquisition of Italian by early and late French-Italian bilinguals, focus was placed on information organization in narratives that is driven by core typological contrasts that differ for these close-related languages. The typological contrast at issue in the analysis relates to the presence and absence of 'null subject' (present in Italian but not in French) with its implications for information structure. This involves differences in 'topic' management, coupled with the use of specific forms of subordination (gerunds in Italian and relative clauses in French) that serve to encode 'topic' continuity. As discussed above, the gerund has the function of maintaining the protagonist as subject and 'topic' within the event sequence. Null-subject and the gerund go hand in hand

as the main and subordinate clause share the same referent. In other words, reference to the protagonist typically remains implicit in the main clause as well as the gerund. Continuity in information flow is ensured in a way that reflects a core structural feature of the system – the presence of null-subject.

The most frequent form of subordination in L1 French takes another course, so to speak, as utterances with relative clauses constitute the most frequent form within the event sequence. The rate of occurrence for relative clauses in L1 French is similar to that of gerunds in Italian, but relative clauses serve to introduce other entities, apart from the protagonist, to the domain of discourse. In L1 Italian, by contrast, this is carried out within the side structure of the narrative where background information on the events is supplied. This ensures 'topic' continuity within the event sequence on a scale that matches the morphological means that allow null-subject in reference maintenance.

Use of subordination by L2 speakers (late bilinguals) mainly relates to the event sequence and the temporal domain, given the prominent use of temporal clauses. This pattern is learner-specific in that it does not occur to the same extent in either L1 Italian or L1 French. The late bilinguals have not yet acquired the core principle in information organization and topic management for the null-subject language Italian – the use of gerunds which allow elision of the syntactic subject in support of topic maintenance. Temporal subordination and temporal linkage reflect a focus on event sequences in information organization, thereby presenting evidence of learner-specific principles that may relate to the stage of acquisition. Unlike the late bilinguals, the early bilinguals do not focus on temporal subordination but are more likely to use relative clauses, as well as gerunds. As the frequency with which relative clauses occur is high, and compares with L1 French and not L1 Italian, this group of learners is less likely to organize information flow with reference maintenance to the protagonist as topic, compared to L1 Italian speakers.

Concerning the findings for means used in coordination, forms expressing a conclusive relation between events are preferred in L1 Italian as well as in L1 French. In contrast, however, connectors expressing a temporal relation emerge as a bilingual-specific preference which is observed for both the early and late bilinguals, and reflects findings for other groups of learners, both early bilinguals as well as first language learners L1. The findings again reflect the status of temporal linkage as a core element in a task which requires speakers to draw up a sequence of events on the basis of what happened first, what happened next.

The aim of the present study was to investigate to what extent the two groups of learners would reveal principles of information organization that predominate in Italian, the country in which they reside, given the emphasis in their daily contacts at school on French. The early bilinguals, who have acquired both languages on the basis of one parent, one language, all show evidence of

a system closer to L1 French with regard to the factors studied in the present analysis. As the cross-linguistic findings to date for narrative proficiency show, learners must draw on knowledge underlying information organization, based on the specific tools that each language provides. In L1 German this process continues until the age of 13/14 (see Halm 2012). The present group of learners are aged 16 and in order to gain full proficiency in the organization of information for expression they must establish linguistic knowledge at the syntactic-semantic interface for two different languages, in accordance with their specific typological structure. Taking into account the evidence for L1 acquisition, we do not yet know what the complexity of the task means for the language learner: The language-specific patterns described above show how encoding decisions are not solved for each utterance in turn, but also rely on planning principles that hold on a default basis for a given task. For the organization of information flow, learners have to acquire the knowledge which gives priority to one form of subordination over another, for example, without highly evident forms of feedback, as no one form is incorrect as such. Acquisition of this knowledge is not additive, with the addition of one form of subordinate clause after another to the learner's repertoire. For the study of language acquisition it is still necessary to ascertain how learners uncover the different hierarchical orders underlying information organization and the status of the means that drive it.

University of Bern
⟨silvia.natale@rom.unibe.ch⟩

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