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Discourse Cohesion and Accessibility of Referents in Oral Narratives: A Comparison of L1 and L2 Acquisition of French and English

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This study aims at comparing L1 and L2 acquisition processes through an analysis of the linguistic means used to ensure discourse cohesion in the oral narratives of French and English four-, seven- and ten-year-old children and of adult learners of these two languages. We focused on the use of high accessibility markers (HAM) (zero anaphora, subject and object pronouns) and low accessibility markers (LAM) (definite noun phrases) by the different groups of learners to analyze the way they maintained and switched reference to the protagonists of the story. Our results highlight a tendency to underspecification among children, who use HAM in a higher proportion than native adults and produce ambiguous forms in context; and a tendency to overspecification among adult advanced and intermediate L2 learners, who favour LAM even where pronouns could be envisaged. This might be explained by the impact of cognitive factors as well as crosslinguistic influences on the productions of L1 and L2 learners.

Keywords: cognitive maturity, age, L1 acquisition, L2 acquisition, nominal reference, underspecification, overspecification, accessibility of referents

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Cette étude vise à comparer les processus d'acquisition de la L1 et de la L2, à travers l'analyse des moyens linguistiques mis en œuvre pour établir la cohésion discursive dans les récits oraux d'enfants anglophones et francophones de 4, 7 et 10 ans, ainsi que dans ceux d'adultes apprenants de l'anglais et du français. Nous analysons l'emploi par les différents groupes d'apprenants des marqueurs de haute accessibilité (HAM) (anaphore zéro, pronoms sujet et objet), et de basse accessibilité (LAM) (syntagmes nominaux définis) afin de déterminer la manière dont la référence aux deux principaux protagonistes du récit est maintenue ou modifiée. Nos résultats mettent en évidence la tendance des enfants à la sous-spécification: en effet, ils utilisent les formes HAM dans une plus grande proportion que les adultes et produisent de nombreuses formes ambiguës en contexte; quant aux apprenants adultes, ils ont tendance à la sur-spécification, au niveau avancé comme au niveau intermédiaire, et préfèrent des formes LAM même là où des pronoms pourraient être envisagés. Ces résultats peuvent être expliqués par l'impact des facteurs cognitifs ainsi que par les influences des langues sur les productions des apprenants de la L1 et de la L2.

Mots clés: maturité cognitive, âge, acquisition L1, acquisition L2, référence nominale, sous-spécification, sur-spécification, accessibilité du référent

1. Introduction

- 1 The challenge faced by children learning their mother tongue and adults learning a foreign language consists in being able to use target language linguistic forms so as to be understood, among others, by a native interlocutor. This implies being able to plan a cohesive discourse that takes into account the knowledge and expectations of the hearer¹.
- 2 According to Slobin (2012: 256), “children [...] lack the necessary social cognitive skills to take account of the needs of the listener and to make use of linguistic tools to engage in successful narrative discourse. The adult learners presumably have these skills in their native language, and are faced with the challenge of finding the necessary second language tools to fashion coherent narratives”. Indeed many observed differences between child and adult language acquisition, such as discursive competence, are assumed to stem from the degree of cognitive maturity of the learner (Hickmann, 2003; Watorek et al. (eds.), 2012). The productions of children are largely age-dependent: Hickmann (2000) argued for a developmental path between ages 4, 7 and 10. As for the L2 productions of adults, they are influenced to a large degree by their proficiency level (even if crosslinguistic factors, and especially L1 influence, need to be taken into account). Many studies have analyzed the similarities and differences between child and adult acquisition, to measure the impact of cognitive and linguistic factors. Various aspects have been handled: spatial reference (Hendriks & Hickmann, 1998), temporal reference (Hendriks, 1999), finiteness (Dimroth et al., 2003; Perdue, 2009 and 2010), scope particles (Benazzo et al., 2004), reference to entities (Lambert & Lenart, 2004; Lenart & Perdue, 2004; Chini, 2005; Lenart, 2006 and 2012). One of the questions we wish to answer in this paper is how L1 and L2 learners use the various referring expressions at their disposal to accomplish the imposed oral narrative task: to what extent does their use of referring expressions ensure discursive cohesion in their narrative discourse? Does the cognitive maturity factor explain the choice of reference markers made by child L1 and adult L2 learners?
- 3 An interesting model of how referring expressions are used by native speakers and interpreted by their interlocutors is Accessibility Theory (Ariel, 1988 and 1990). The central issue addressed by Ariel is, in the words of Zribi-Hertz (1992: 257), “how is the hearer led to correctly identify the referent of a nominal expression used by a speaker?”. Accessibility is presented by Ariel (1990) as a cognitive concept linked to the structure of memory and accessibility marking as a linguistic means to trigger efficient information retrieval by the hearer in short-term or long-term memory. Ariel’s model is particularly interesting since it hypothesises that the cognitive processing of referring expressions is highly dependent on

1. In acquisition studies, the hearer is generally assumed to be a collaborative interlocutor, and the learner’s speech is analyzed in the light of what native speakers of the language actually produce. For a discussion of the role of the native speaker in L2 acquisition studies (see Mulder & Hulstijn, 2011).

their accessibility: “Each referring expression is seen as coding a specific degree of mental accessibility as its discourse function” (Ariel, 2004: 92). She hypothesizes that the type of referring expression used to maintain reference in discourse is linked to the degree of accessibility of the referent in the linguistic or physical context, or in relation with general/mutual knowledge.

- 4 We will use this framework to compare the use of anaphoric expressions to maintain cohesion in the oral narratives of L1 child learners and L2 adult learners of French and English. Telling a coherent story implies using reference so as to enable the listener to identify the salient characters. It reveals the narrator’s pragmatic competence as well as his/her knowledge of appropriate referential devices to maintain reference to the protagonists and signal when there is a shift to another protagonist (Lenart & Perdue, 2004; Yusun Kang, 2004).

- 5 The adequacy of linguistic expressions depends on whether the referent under discussion has already been introduced in the discourse, is known through knowledge of the world or is unknown to the addressee. As Ariel puts it in her Accessibility Theory, the retrieval of the referent by the interlocutor is conditioned by the speaker’s choice of referring expression.

- 6 We hypothesize that this is more difficult for children than for adults learning a second language, and that the choice of referent is conditioned by the capacity of the learner to choose referring expressions that are inferable by the hearer.

- 7 Various studies analyze the use of linguistic forms that enable discourse construction and anaphoric linkage (Ahrenholz, 1998 and 2005; Munoz, 2000 [mentioned in Hendriks, 2003a]; Chini, 2005; Leclercq, 2013). These studies tend to indicate that L2 speakers are over-explicit and use fuller forms than expected. They also show that over-explicitation in the L2 data occurs at an intermediate stage (in the initial stages, discourse topics are often omitted in spontaneous speech production). On the contrary, children under 10 tend to be underspecific in their use of referring expressions (i.e., they use pronouns even if the referent is ambiguous, as shown by Hendriks [1999; 2000]).

- 8 In this study, we will compare the acquisition of French and English as a mother tongue by children aged 4, 7 and 10; and French and English as a foreign language by francophone and anglophone adults. We will analyze the oral film retellings of adult L2 learners of French and English and of children learning these two languages. Our aim is to evaluate the claim that one of the main differences between L1 and L2 acquisition is that children tend to be underspecific as regards the use of referential expressions in discourse (Lenart, 2006) whereas adult learners tend to be overspecific when they use their L2 in oral narratives (Williams, 1988; Hendriks, 2003a and b; Yusun Kang, 2004; Chini, 2005; Leclercq, 2013). We will specifically focus on how four- to ten-year-old children and adult L2 learners develop referential marking in their narratives in order to examine the impact of cognitive factors on interlanguage development.

- 9 After a brief review of theoretical and methodological issues, we will present the results of our study on the maintaining of reference in oral narratives.

2. Theoretical framework and methodology

2.1. Accessibility Theory (Ariel, 1988, 1990, 2006)

- 10 In a narrative discourse, a speaker must first introduce the main protagonists (in French and in English, generally through the use of existential sentences with an indefinite noun phrase [NP] [Leclercq, 2009]). Then he/she can rely on different anaphoric expressions to maintain reference to this entity, switch reference and/or reintroduce it.

- 11 According to Ariel, the form chosen to express reference is selected according to the speaker's perception of the accessibility of the referent to the hearer.

- 12 For a referent to be accessible in discourse, it must have been introduced first or be extremely salient in the extralinguistic context. Ariel (2006: 15) specifies that Accessibility Theory "assumes a logically prior distinction between identifiable/Given entities (coded as definite) and nonidentifiable/Given entities (coded as indefinite). Identifiable entities are ones for which the addressee is assumed to be able to access mental representation". Since indefinite NPs are used to introduce into the discourse entities that are not previously known by the interlocutor, and are therefore non-accessible, Ariel does not include indefinite NPs in the category of referential expressions. Once introduced, the entity becomes accessible and can be subsequently referred to through the use of anaphoric NPs.

- 13 Ariel's model predicts that definite NPs and proper names are used when the referent has a low accessibility status in a given context; pronouns and zero anaphora are used when the referent is highly accessible (a linguistic antecedent is usually provided); finally, demonstratives, that "connect discourse to given entities from the physical surroundings" (Ariel, 1988: 76), are used when the referent has a mid accessibility status. As Zribi-Hertz (1992: 257-258) puts it:

In other words, by using a higher-Accessibility marker M₁ (e.g. a pronoun, rather than a name), the speaker, in the unmarked case, indicates to the hearer that the referent is close and/or has an obviously unique and salient referent, and/or occurs within the same discourse domain. By using a lower-Accessibility marker M₂ (e.g. a name, rather than a pronoun), the speaker conversely indicates that the referent is remote, and/or potentially non-unique, and/or not salient, and/or is separated from E₂ by a discourse boundary.

- 14 Zero anaphora is presented by Ariel as even more accessible than overt subject pronouns. Moreover, in French and in English, a referent is more accessible when it has a subject function than an object function in the utterance: indeed, in SVO (subject-verb-object) languages, the subject is generally more salient than the object. We are now going to see how accessibility markers are used within the informational structure of narrative discourse.

	French	English
HAM (high accessibility markers)	subject pronouns: il/qui/Ø object pronouns: le/lui/la	subject pronouns: he/who/Ø object pronouns: him/it/her
MAM (mid accessibility markers)	full NP with demonstrative/ possessive: ce/son chien	full NP with demonstrative/ possessive: this dog/his dog
LAM (low accessibility markers)	full NP with definite article: le chien	full NP with definite article: the dog

Table 1. Types of accessibility markers in French and in English

2.2. Quaestio model of discourse analysis (Klein & von Stutterheim, 1991)

- 15 To analyze the oral productions of our two types of learners in French and English, we draw on a model of discourse analysis called Quaestio, proposed by Klein and von Stutterheim (1991). Ariel's model helps us determine the referential status of the markers used by our different groups of speakers, while the Quaestio model provides us with the referential movement in the narrative as well as the informational status of entities. The specificity of this model is that it can be applied to any language or discourse type. The Quaestio is defined as an implicit or explicit question that implies two interacting levels of discourse organization in the answer: propositional (local) and textual organizations. The narrative discourse reflects the answer to the Quaestio "What happened (to P) in T_i (in S)?" "P", if expressed, refers to a protagonist, "T" specifies a temporal interval, and "S" refers to space. The speaker chooses the events to be narrated, orders them by expressing the temporal relations between them, ranks them in main structure (foreground), which answers the Quaestio directly, and in secondary structure (background). At the same time, the Quaestio is the application, on the local level, of a conventional *wh*-question test to identify the focus. Focus is what is not given by the Quaestio. What is given constitutes the topic. For the following example: Yesterday Paul went to London, the Quaestio can be "What happened to Paul yesterday?". The topic, given by the Quaestio, is constituted by entity and temporal reference; the reference to the event "went to London" is the focus.
- 16 Semantic contents (reference to time, space, process, entities, modality) are necessarily organized in linguistic expressions in a given language. The development of the information is visible through textual means of cohesion: connectors, anaphora, word order, and determiners. In sum, the Quaestio determines the referential movement, i.e., the selection and the linearization of the information (introduction and continuation: maintaining of reference, switch and reintroduction of reference).
- 17 Various overlapping levels must be taken into account: the global/macrostructural level to assess how information circulates in discourse, through the introduction of new entities, and the maintaining (or switching) of reference to given elements; and the local level, where the speaker attributes an informational status (topic or focus) to entities. In a narrative, which constitutes the answer to the "What happened to P in T?" Quaestio, "T" (temporal interval) and "P" (entity) belong to the topic

component; the predicate elements, answering the “what” part of the Quaestio, belong to the focus component. This informational layout is generally guided by global discursive constraints, even if the choice of perspective (attribution of topic or focus status to an entity) belongs to the speaker. Additionally, each element possesses a referential status according to its degree of accessibility (HAM, MAM or LAM).

- 18 In the domain of entities, the referential movement first implies bringing a referent into existence in discourse. This indicates that it becomes accessible to the hearer and may serve as an anchor for future anaphoric chains. From an informational viewpoint, the introduction of a new entity generally gives it a focus status (in athetic utterance or not). When the speaker refers to an entity that has already been introduced in discourse, he/she maintains reference through the use of a definite NP or a pronominal form, in topic or focus, depending on the perspective chosen by the speaker. In French and English, the topic is usually expressed in initial position, and followed by the focus, which does not necessarily refer to a new element (it may refer to a highly accessible element). The following example shows us the informational structure of a typical oral narrative.

[1] Donc c'est l'histoire d'un petit chien
qui se réveille un matin [...]
et il décide d'aller voir **son maître**
qui est un petit garçon. [...]
il [= chien] lui [= garçon] donne une petite veste [...]
il [...] reçoit aussi une écharpe de **son maître le petit garçon**².
(Bruno, French native speaker)

- 19 In example [1], “un petit chien” is introduced in the narrative in focus³ (informational structure) within a presentative structure (“c'est l'histoire de...”); the referential status of the entity is given by the use of an indefinite NP, which indicates that the referent is not directly accessible to the hearer. Once the entity has been introduced, reference is maintained through the use of the relative pronoun “qui” and the subject pronoun “il”, which both constitute topical information, and whose referent is easily accessible (“chien” is now given information). A second entity is then introduced in focus: the dog's master (“son maître”). This second referent is identifiable relative to the anchor entity “dog”, but its degree of accessibility is intermediate since “maître” hasn't been previously introduced. As this is newly provided information, the speaker attaches an accessible semantic content to identify the referent (“son maître le petit garçon”).

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2. “So it is the story of a little dog / who wakes up one morning [...] and he decides to go see his master / who is a little boy [...] / he [dog] gives him [boy] a little jacket [...] / he [...] also receives a scarf from his master the little boy”.
3. Following Klein and von Stutterheim (1991: 11), when we say “in focus” or “in topic”, we mean that the referential expression has a topic or focus informational status: “the terms of ‘topic’ and ‘focus’, as used here, refer to components of the entire information expressed in an utterance, rather than the words or constituents which express this information. In other words, we must distinguish between ‘topic’ and ‘topic expression’, ‘focus’ and ‘focus expression’”.

- 20 Reference to “maître” et “chien” is then maintained, in topic (“qui”, “il”), and in focus “lui” (the utterance “il lui donne une petite veste” answers the implicit question *What happened for the dog after that?*; “il” corresponds to the topic information, and the rest [“donne une petite veste”, “lui”] is in focus).
- 21 As for the topic, it is envisioned in the Quaestio model from a pragmatic point of view: it depends on the representation that the speaker builds of the mental state of his/her interlocutor (cf. Lahousse, 2003). Indeed, the model underlies a complex set of information (a *Gesamtvorstellung*, cf. Klein & von Stutterheim, 1991: 1) which includes all levels of representation on the speaker’s side. Within the referential movement (global level of discourse organization, comprising the introduction, reintroduction, maintenance and switch of referents), each entity has a topical or focal informational status as well as a referential status linked to the accessibility of the referent for the interlocutor. These two levels are not directly correlated. However, in French and in English, entities newly introduced in discourse usually belong to the focus component. According to Lambrecht (“Principle of the Separation of Reference and Relation”, 1986) and Blanche-Benveniste (“dispositif auxiliaire de la détermination nominale”, 1997), new elements are brought into existence thanks to presentative structures, and only then can a predication be made about them. Once the entity has been introduced (and therefore activated/accessible in discourse), it may be promoted to a topic status. A connection can be made between textual structure (Quaestio model), topic continuity and accessibility (Chafe, 1976).
- 22 In Ariel’s theory, the topic element is more salient – and therefore more accessible – than non-topic elements. Object pronouns (which belong to the focus component in our database)⁴ are nevertheless highly accessible markers as well.

HAM	1. Zero anaphora (topic) 2. Subject pronouns (topic) 3. Object pronouns (topic or focus)
MAM	4. Demonstrative/possessive NPs (topic) 5. Demonstrative/possessive (focus)
LAM	6. Definite NPs (topic) 7. Definite NPs (focus)

Table 2. Accessibility scale for French and English

- 23 We therefore wish to test the following hypotheses:

1) Child L1 learners overuse HAM markers even if the referent has not been properly introduced within discourse (they rely heavily on the extralinguistic context and

4. In our database, we only found object pronouns with a focus status. However, this is not always the case: for example, in dislocations, which are frequent in informal French, object pronouns can take a topic status. This is illustrated in the sentence “Pierre, Jean l’a vu hier”, in which *Pierre* and the associated object pronoun *l’* have topic status.

do not assess correctly their interlocutor’s knowledge of the story); however we expect target-like development to occur between 4 and 10 years old.

2) Adult L2 learners of French and English overuse LAM markers compared to native speakers of both languages, especially at an intermediate level.

3. Methodology

24 To test our hypotheses, we used a film retelling task that was developed by Watorek in a wider project on the construction of discourse by child L1 and adult L2 learners (Watorek, 2004). Our stimulus was a 5 min. silent cartoon (with background music but no speech) called Reksio. The cartoon features a little white dog (Reksio) and a little boy (his master). They decide to go ice-skating together on a frozen lake. Reksio returns safely but the ice cracks and the little boy falls into the water. To save him, Reksio uses his scarf and a ladder. He manages to haul the little boy onto the shore and warms him up with his scarf.

25 The stimulus presents the advantage of being attractive to children and adults. Moreover, it involves two male protagonists (dog and boy) who act in turns: in the narrative, the participants have to introduce both protagonists, maintain reference while avoiding ambiguity but also shift reference from one protagonist to the other. This makes this task appropriate for a study of reference maintenance strategies.

26 The experimental setting was slightly different for children and adults. With children, two interviewers were used. One gave instructions and the other was a naïve interlocutor who was not in the room when the film was displayed, and to whom the child told what had happened in the cartoon.

27 With adults, only one interviewer was used. The instruction given by the interviewer was: “Watch the cartoon and then tell me what happened, as I haven’t seen the movie”.

28 We collected a database of oral productions by four-, seven- and ten-year-old children, adult French learners of English and adult English learners of French.

Learners of French	Learners of English	Control groups
10 four-year-olds 10 seven-year-olds 10 ten-year-olds	10 four-year-olds 10 seven-year-olds 9 ten-year-olds	10 adult English native speakers 10 adult French native speakers
Adult EngL1 FrL2 - intermediate level ⁵ : 6 speakers - advanced level: 10 speakers	Adult FrL1 EngL2 - intermediate level: 10 speakers - advanced level: 10 speakers	

Table 3. Description of database

5. Due to data collection constraints, we could not get a larger set of intermediate learners of French. We are well aware of the limitations implied by such a small sample and are planning a new data collection to supplement our database.

- 29 All the adult learners were university students; intermediate learners were generally undergraduates, and advanced learners of English were Master's degree students majoring in English studies.
- 30 Their proficiency was assessed using placement tests focusing on vocabulary and grammar, which were weighted by an assessment of their oral production by an experienced language teacher. The test used with the English learners of French was a version of the *Oxford Quick Placement Test* (OPT); a test developed by the American University of Paris⁶ was used to assess the proficiency of the English learners of French.
- 31 While it is highly recommended to get an external measure of proficiency, it is a well acknowledged fact in the language testing domain that a grammar/vocabulary test such as the OPT is not necessarily a good predictor of the writing/speaking skills of the testee. As Canale and Swain (1980), Hulstijn (2010), Tremblay and Garrison (2010) and Carlsen (2012) point out, there is often a gap between what a test purports to test, and the actual proficiency level of the testee in the communicative skills⁷. This point was made as early as 1961 by Carroll, who stated that "the validity of the test can be established not solely on the basis of whether it appears to involve a good sample of the English language, but more on the basis of whether it predicts success in the learning tasks and social situations to which the examinees will be exposed" (Carroll, 1972 [1961]: 319). Therefore, when there was a substantial difference between placement test results and performance in the oral production task, we relied on the judge's assessment of oral production rather than on the placement test results, since our focus is on speaking skills rather than on learners' knowledge of grammar and lexicon. The judge's criteria included 3 sections: use of nominal and verbal morphology, lexical diversity and narrative construction.
- 32 The productions were recorded and transcribed using CLAN (Computerized Language Analysis) procedures.
- 33 We will first analyze the typological properties of French and English as regards a) the maintenance of nominal reference (which implies the use of HAM and MAM) and b) topic change/reintroduction of a given entity (which implies the use of MAM and LAM)⁸. We will then compare this with the use of accessibility markers by child learners and L2 adult learners of French and English.

6. Many thanks to Rebekah Rast.

7. This issue prompted the L2 Proficiency Assessment Workshop, 24-25 February 2012, in Montpellier, France (<https://sites.google.com/site/l2proficiency/home>) and is to be developed in a collective volume edited by Leclercq, Edmonds, Hilton. To improve the reliability of Second Language Acquisition research, we call for the development of a practical and efficient oral production assessment tool.

8. MAM forms may be used both for maintenance and topic change, for example in the case of an entity (re)introduced in focus, and then maintained in topic; when the topic change occurs with a MAM form, the speaker chooses to underline the semantic link with the other referent ("son N"), or to draw the interlocutor's attention with the deictic "ce N". Children struggle with the use of possessives, as will be mentioned in Section 5.

4. Typological properties of French and English

[2] C'est l'histoire d'un **chien**
Qui est très exigeant. [...]
 Donc **il** sort de sa niche
Il glisse sur la glace [...]
 Donc **il** demande à **son maître**
 De faire quelque chose.
Il finit par verser du sable
 Pour qu'il y ait plus de glace.
Le chien exige d'avoir des habits
 Donc **son maître lui** donne des habits⁹.
 FrL1 Florent

[3] It is a story about **a dog**
 and **he** wakes up one morning
 and ehm **Ø** comes out of his kennel
 and there has been ehm ice so frost cause
 the ground is very icy.
 And and ehm **he** slides on the ice
 And **Ø** falls over
 and ehm **Ø** goes
 and **Ø** calls **his owner**
who comes out to see
 and he – and **she** slips on the ice
 and **he** helps **her** get up again. [...]
 And then **Ø** decides [she]
 that **she'll** go ice skating
 so **she** gets her ice skates out. [...]
 and **her dog** tries these skates.
 AngL1 Barbara

34 Both French and English are obligatory subject languages. The above examples illustrate the fact that these languages have a similar set of linguistic means to introduce the protagonists of the story (presentative constructions with indefinite NPs), to maintain reference (various anaphoric pronouns in topic and focus) and to switch or reintroduce protagonists (definite NPs, in topic or focus). However, they differ in the way they use these various referential means to structure their narratives. The following table summarizes the markers used by native speakers of both languages.

9. FrL1 Florent: "It is the story of a dog / who is very demanding. [...] So he goes out of his kennel / he slips on the ice [...] / So he asks his master / to do something / He ends up pouring some sand / so that there remains no ice. / The dog demands to have clothes / So his master gives him clothes".

		FrL1	EngL1
DOG/ CHIEN	HAM	Il 46.6% Qui 3.4% Ø 5.5% Le/lui 8.2% (focus) Total 63.7%	He 41.5% Who 0.3% Ø 22.7% Him/her 5.5% (focus) Total 70%
	MAM	Son N 1% Ce N 0.3% Son N 1.7% (focus) Total 3%	His N 2% His N 10.7% (focus) Total 12.7%
	LAM	Le N 21.9% Le N + il 2.4% Le N 9% (focus) Total 33.3%	The N 13.5% The N 3.8% (focus) Total 17.3%
BOY/ GARÇON	HAM	Il/elle 43.6% Qui 1.8% Ø 3.2% Le/la/lui 11.5% (focus) Total 60.1%	He/she 54.8% Who 1.6% Ø 20% Total 76.4%
	MAM	Son N 5.3% Son N 8.5% (focus) Total 13.8%	His/her 0.3% This N 0.8% Total 1.1%
	LAM	Le N 19% Le N + il 2.1% Le N 5% (focus) Total 26.1%	The N 17% The N 5.5% (focus) Total 22.5%

Table 4. Types of reference markers in French and English L1 ¹⁰

4.1. Maintaining reference (HAM/MAM markers)

- 35 Native French and English speakers generally introduce protagonists in focus (“c’est un chien qui...”) then maintain reference in topic through anaphoric devices, the most frequent being subject pronouns “he”/“il”, around 45% in both languages. French speakers use relative clauses more than English speakers (FrL1: 3.4%, EngL1: 0.3%); this is probably due to the numerous presentative constructions. Zero anaphora is seldom used by French speakers (“chien”: 5.5%, “garçon”: 3.2%) but frequently by English speakers (“dog”: 22.7%, “boy”: 20%), who resort to coordinate clauses with zero anaphora to mark topic continuity and enhance discourse cohesion (Givón,

10. In Tables 4 to 8, percentages represent the number of occurrences of a category out of the total number of references to “chien”/“dog” and “garçon”/“boy” (all reference markers included) in the database. For example, there are 607 references to “dog” in the EngL1 corpus, 13.5% of which are definite NPs (“the N”) in topic. 1.6% of references to “boy” are made with the relative pronoun “who”. HAM + MAM + LAM forms = 100%.

1983; Ariel, 1988; Oh, 2006). In a study of interactional discourse, Oh (2006: 832) showed that zero anaphora is used by English native speakers when “telling a story in conversation in order to highlight the sequentiality of the events being described”, especially in the (pre) climax of the story. As for Williams (1988: 356), she observed in a study on the comparison of the use of zero anaphora among native and non-native varieties of English that “the native speakers tend to restrict their use of zero anaphora to either overtly or functionally coordinate clauses, with the referent in the preceding parallel clause”. This matches our corpus analysis: example [3] illustrates the fact that zero anaphora occurs in the English data in a series of main structure coordinate clauses narrating a sequence of events.

4.2. Shifting or reintroducing reference (LAM/MAM markers)

36 In both languages, the protagonists are usually reintroduced in topic using definite NPs: “le chien exige d’avoir des habits” ([2], FrL1). A few reintroductions are made in focus in a SVO structure (“alors il appelle son ami le chien au secours”, FrL1), but this is not the preferred option.

37 Reintroductions in topic are slightly more frequent in French than in English (“chien”: 24.3%; “garçon”: 21.1%; “dog”: 13.5%, “boy”: 17%).

38 This might be explained by the fact that 7/10 anglophones interpreted the second protagonist as a little girl instead of a little boy, which subsequently enabled them to use gender to avoid ambiguity when referring pronominally to the little dog (“he”/“him”) and to his master (“she”/“her”). The HAM rate for “boy” (76.4% among EngL1) is indeed remarkably high. Francophones mostly described a little boy (only 2/10 mentioned a little girl), which compelled them to regular reintroductions to avoid referential ambiguity.

39 Finally, we found dislocations in French (“le chien il”) to be infrequent in our adult database (around 2%), contrary to what happens in the child data. Dislocations in French are limited to very informal contexts and are therefore not common in a narrative discourse aimed at an adult interviewer, even if the stimulus is a cartoon for children.

4.3. Properties of French and English – summary

40 Native English speakers minimize the risk of ambiguity in the interpretation of pronouns because they attribute a different gender to the two characters.

41 As concerns the maintaining of reference, while the use of subject pronouns to maintain reference is very high in both groups, French speakers tend to use relative pronouns more than English speakers. The total use of relative pronouns is nevertheless quite low, even in French.

42 Finally, French speakers use zero anaphora very little (“chien”: 5.5%, “garçon”: 3.2%), contrary to English speakers who count it as their second favourite option (“dog”: 22.7%, “boy”: 20%) after subject pronouns.

43 Therefore, English speakers use more HAM markers and less LAM markers than French speakers to refer to both protagonists. This suggests that English narratives are more cohesive than French narratives, with a tendency in English to maintain reference longer, thanks to zero anaphora in coordinate clauses.

44 In line with the work of Lambert (1997), Lambert et al. (2003; 2008) and Leclercq (2009), we expect French learners of English to be influenced by their L1, especially at intermediate level, and use more LAM markers than English learners of French in their L2.

45 We are now going to focus on children and adult second language learners' use of accessibility markers to see to what extent cognitive maturity influences the use of referential devices in narrative discourse.

5. Child L1 learners' results

		FrL1 4yo	FrL1 7yo	FrL1 10yo
CHIEN (dog)	HAM	Il 65.8% Qui 2.5% Total 68.3%	Il 66.9% Qui 1.3% Ø 0.6% Le/lui 7% (focus) Total 75.8%	Il 66.4% Qui 3% Ø 0.4% Le/lui 7.1% (focus) Total 76.9%
	MAM	Son N 1.3% (focus) Total 1.3%	Son N 1.3% Son N 0.6% (focus) Total 1.9%	Son N 1.1% Son N 0.4% (focus) Total 1.5%
	LAM	Le N + il 25.3% Le N 5% (focus) Total 30.3%	Le N 3.2% Le N + il 18.5% Le N 0.6% (focus) Total 22.3%	Le N 1.7% Le N + il 15.8% Le N 4.1% (focus) Total 21.6%
GARÇON (boy)	HAM	Il/elle 58.4% Qui 2.6% Le/lui 9.1% (focus) Total 70.1%	Il/elle 54.8% Qui 2.4% Le/lui 12.7% (focus) Total 69.9%	Il/elle 47.3% Qui 2.6% Ø 0.5% Le/lui 18.6% (focus) Total 69%
	MAM		Son N 1.6% (focus) Total 1.6%	Son N 5% Son N 9% (focus) Total 14%
	LAM	Le N + il 23.4% Le N 6.5% (focus) Total 29.9%	Le N 5.6% Le N + il 18.3% Le N 4.8% (focus) Total 28.7%	Le N 3.2% Le N + il 10.6% Le N 3.2% (focus) Total 17%

Table 5. Type of reference markers used by French children

46 Children must learn to guide the addressee from the beginning, through the middle and to the end of the story, while using the appropriate linguistic tools, such as temporal markers, conjunctions, articles and pronouns. They must learn how to produce a cohesive discourse. They should not rely on the extra-linguistic context only but should also anchor the narrative in the (intra-)linguistic context (through anaphoric processes). Our analyses show that competence evolves with age: for example, children's narratives get longer from age 4 to 10, even if they remain shorter than adults'; episodes are described in a more exhaustive way (see Figure 2 infra). Formal rules at NP and utterance level are already mastered by the age of 4: the noun is preceded by a determiner and the syntactic structure in which the NP is inserted is formally correct. However, there are some differences as regards the use of certain forms to account for the referential movement. We will illustrate these differences in the following sections.

47 Tables 5 and 6 illustrate the evolution of the use of LAM, MAM and HAM by four-, seven- and ten-year-olds.

		EngL1 4yo	EngL1 7yo	EngL1 10yo
DOG	HAM	He 42.5% Ø 25% Total 67.5%	He 64.6% Ø 11% Him 3.9% (focus) Total 79.5%	He 54.4% Who 0.6% Ø 19.4% Him 2.5% (focus) Total 76.9%
	MAM		His N 0.6%	His N 0.6%
	LAM	The N 32.5% Total 32.5%	The N 17.7% The N 2.2% (focus) Total 19.9%	The N 18.8% The N 3.7% (focus) Total 22.5%
BOY	HAM	He/she 15.6% Ø 6.2% Him/her 21.9% (focus) Total 43.7%	He/she 52.3% Ø 6.9% Him/her 13.8% (focus) Total 73%	He/she 32.8% Who 5.1% Ø 8% Him/her 14.6% (focus) Total 60.5%
	MAM	His/her N 6.2% (focus) Total 6.2%	His/her N 2.3% (focus) Total 2.3%	His/her N 5.1% His/her 2.9% (focus) Total 8%
	LAM	The N 40.6% The N 9.4% (focus) Total 50%	The N 22.3% The N 2.3% (focus) Total 24.6%	The N 21.2% The N 10.2% (focus) Total 31.4%

Table 6. Type of reference markers used by English children

5.1. Maintaining reference to protagonists (HAM markers)

48 In L1 French and L1 English, maintained reference is ensured, as with adult native speakers, through HAM (subject pronouns mostly, as in [4]). French children

use them much more than adults. However, we observed a great variability among anglophone children, who use subject pronouns more often to refer to the dog in all age groups, and less often to refer to the boy. These children maintain reference to the boy in focus with object pronouns more frequently than adults who prefer maintaining both referents in topic (percentage of object pronouns in focus: 21.9% at 4, 13.8% at 7 and 14.6% at 10 and 0% for EngL1 adults, see [5]).

[4] alors **il** prend une échelle enfin d'abord **il** essaye d'y aller mais **il** a peur que **il** tombe
alors **il** prend une échelle avec l'échelle **il** la prolonge jusqu'à son maître¹¹.
ten-year-old child

[5] so **he** decided to walk across it and Ø help **him** out but it he just **he** couldn't reach **him**.
ten-year-old child

[6] **he** took the ladder and Ø walked on the ladder and Ø take the scarf.
four-year-old child

49 The use of zero anaphora (see [6]) illustrates the fact that children show a very early sensitivity to the means used by adults: English children already use it at age 4 as it is very common in English (> 20%), but French children use it in a very restricted way from age 7 only (less than 1% of children and 4% of adults use zero anaphora).

50 As regards the use of the relative pronoun, we may observe a difference between the two groups: francophone children use "qui" from the age of 4, whereas anglophone children start using "who" only around 10.

51 Generally speaking, referents are maintained in topic but the rate of maintenance in focus is superior to adults' usage (this is the case for seven- to ten-year-old francophone children and all anglophone children referring to the boy). Pronominal forms cause children specific problems when they are used in a context of referent change, as illustrated in examples [11] to [13] *infra*.

5.2. Shifting or reintroducing reference (LAM/MAM markers)

52 LAM or MAM markers are required to signal to the interlocutor that there is a topic change and that a referent is reintroduced. Younger children mostly indicate these changes in topic (see [7], [8]), since animate entities are seldom reintroduced in focus.

[7] and **the boy** tried reaching it but he couldn't. So **the dog** went out slowly onto the ladder...
ten-year-old child

11. "So he takes a ladder well first he tries to go there but he is afraid that he falls so he takes a ladder with the ladder he extends it to his master".

- [8] **le petit chien il** est resté près de sa niche. Alors ensuite **le petit garçon il** est rentré dans sa maison¹²
seven-year-old child

53 Francophone children massively use dislocation (“le chien il...”): even ten-year-old children use that structure much more frequently (15.8%) than adults (2.4%).

54 The tendency to change reference directly in topic diminishes with age and with the development of morphosyntactic forms (pronominalization, subordination). Indeed, there are more reintroductions in focus with LAM and MAM, which enable the change of topic as in [9] and [10]. These kinds of changes are nevertheless less frequent among children, apart from four- and ten-year-old anglophones who use more LAM in focus than adults do (the same tendency was observed for HAM in focus).

- [9] so **the dog** went across the ladder and Ø put a piece of little clothing off a scarf and Ø threw it towards his owner and then Ø pulled his owner out and then the owner went back.
ten-year-old child

- [10] et ensuite **le petit garçon** revenait avec son chien. Son chien allait à la niche et **le petit garçon** rentrait chez lui¹³.
seven-year-old child

55 As regards MAM, the possessive appears progressively in French L1 (1.3% at 4). But at the age of ten, the use of possessives is quite similar to that of adults, with more occurrences in topic among children. Anglophone children are set apart from the other groups by the fact that they frequently use the possessive forms from age 4 (6.2%); four- and seven-year-olds use NPs with a possessive referent almost exclusively in focus to refer to the boy. Ten-year-olds use them in topic, just like francophone children.

56 Some difficulties related to cohesion appear when children change referent by using a HAM, as illustrated in [11], [12] and [13]. These difficulties are reflected in the misuse of subject pronouns in both languages (il*/he*). As we can see in Figure 1, this procedure is frequent at the age of 4 (12.4% in French and 13.6% in English), and continues among four- and ten-year-olds. It decreases in English but this problem persists in French at the age of 10. French seven-year-old children avoid ambiguity because they mostly refer to the second protagonist as a girl (7/10).

12. “The little dog he stayed near his kennel. So then the little boy he came into his house”.

13. “And then the little boy was coming back with his dog. His dog was going to his kennel and the little boy was coming back home”.

- [11] **le p(e)tit chien il l'a sauvé et après i(l)s sont rallés dans la maison pour se &seS+ sécher et il* a bu un médicament**¹⁴.
four-year-old child
- [12] **The dog** got a ladder and **he** put it on ice and but **he*** couldn't reach it so **the dog** crept across the ladder and **Ø** took his scarf.
seven-year-old child
- [13] **He** ran up to **the little boy's door** and **he** rang the bell and the **he*** came out. **He*** went in and **Ø** got **the little dog** a coat and then **he*** went in again and **Ø** got some ice-skates.
seven-year-old child

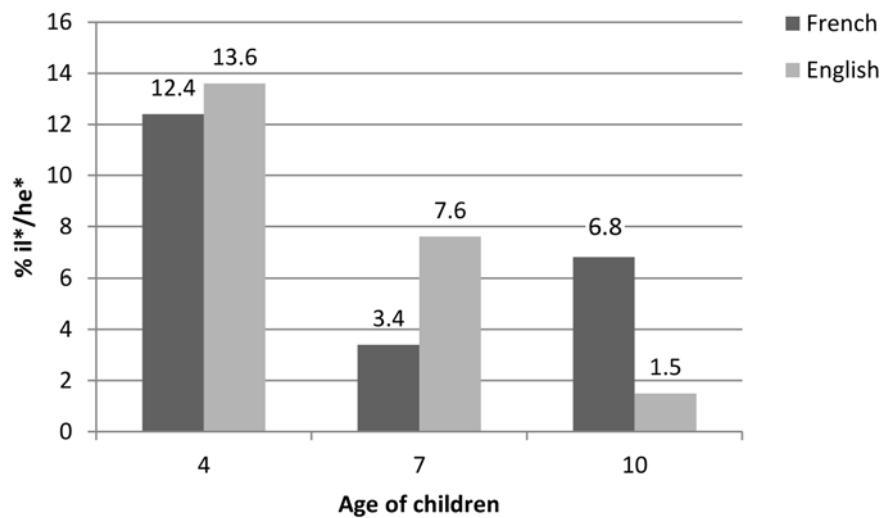


Figure 1. Percentage of ambiguous subject pronouns – French and English children

5.3. Summary of L1 children's results

- 57 Even if the target language system influences the child's linguistic choices, the acquisitional path is linked to the general development of the cognitive system. Generally speaking, a four-year-old child masters the morphosyntax of his mother tongue, since he makes few grammatical mistakes. Yet the acquisition of some of the functions of the available forms takes place gradually, as the child starts taking into account contextual data (place, interlocutor). This is the case for HAM (pronouns and zero anaphora), which are markers in charge of ensuring discursive cohesion.

14. "The little dog he saved him and then they went into the house to dry themselves and he* drank some medicine".

The referential chain becomes less and less ambiguous and the changes of referents are marked in a more explicit way as the child gets older. However, ten-year-olds still occasionally misuse HAM forms.

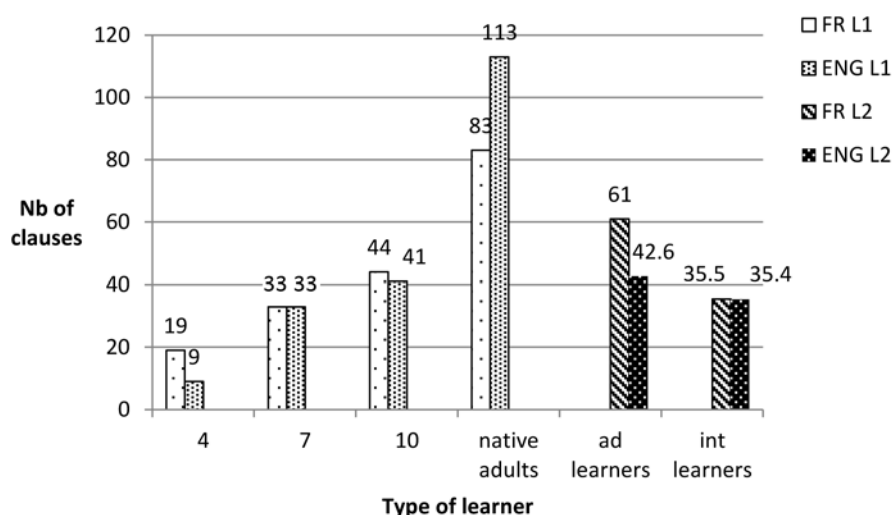


Figure 2. Type of learner and number of clauses in narratives

58 Finally, the impact of age is quite visible on the length of narratives: the number of clauses per narrative increases regularly from age 4 to 10 to adulthood. Adult advanced learners also produce longer narratives than children, but shorter than native speakers'. Indeed, L2 learners have to cope with the extra difficulty of retrieving linguistic means in a foreign language. Figure 2 hints at a clear effect of (1) cognitive maturity and (2) L2 proficiency on the length of narratives: the younger the learner, the shorter the narrative; the more advanced, the longer¹⁵. However, beyond the length of narratives, what matters is the use made by the different groups of speakers of cohesion markers, as will be illustrated in the following analyses.

6. Adult L2 learners' results

59 Contrary to children, adult second language learners possess the cognitive means required to construct a coherent and cohesive discourse from the beginning of the acquisition process (through their experience of L1), as they may transfer some linguistic elements from their L1. However, how do they select the accessibility markers to reintroduce and maintain reference to protagonists? To what extent are they influenced by the organization of their L1 (i.e., more cohesive narratives [with

15. Note that the group of advanced learners of English has a wider standard deviation than advanced learners of French, who are more homogeneous as regards the number of clauses in their narratives.

many HAM markers] in English than in French)? Is there a common acquisitional path from intermediate to advanced level, for FrL1 EngL2 and EngL1 FrL2?

6.1. French learners of English

[14] at the beginning there is **a little dog**
and **he** comes out his house
and **he** sees
that there is ice everywhere outside
and so **he** calls for **a little boy**
who comes out of the house
and **Ø** comes to help **him**
he puts salt on the ice
so that **the dog** can walk again
and then **the dog** complains
that **he** is cold
so **the boy** gives **him** a coats and a scarf.
FrL1 EngL2 Adeline (advanced)

[15] it's **a dog**
who wakes up.
and **he** tries to go out of his house and starts to fall.
because the water in front of his house has frozen.
he tries to go to the house of **his master**.
and **he** ## he +//.
it's really hard
he falls again and again.
but **he** finally he rings the bell.
and <the> [//] **a boy** e <go out> [//] goes out of the house.
the dog shows to the boy that the water has frozen.
and so **the boy** falls too on the ice.
FrL1 EngL2 Sandra (intermediate)

60 Only 1/20 learners of English referred to the second protagonist as a little girl. Intermediate and advanced FrL1 EngL2 mostly maintain reference to the protagonists of the story through HAM and LAM forms, just like native speakers. However they make different choices of markers within these categories: whereas native English speakers make a widespread use of zero anaphora (22.7% to refer to the dog and 20% to refer to the boy), French learners of English use it around 5% for both protagonists, regardless of their proficiency. Instead they use LAM forms (definite NPs) to a much greater extent than English native speakers.

61 Moreover, we observe a different distribution of markers for the first and the second protagonists.

- 62 To refer to the dog, FrL1 EngL2 mostly use the subject pronoun “he” (intermediate: 42%, advanced: 46%), which closely matches the rate observed for anglophone (41.5%) and francophone native speakers (46.6%).
- 63 At both levels, learners’ use of MAM forms (which totals only 3% of references to the dog in the FrL1 data) matches that of the target language (EngL1: 12.7%, intermediate EngL2: 14%, advanced EngL2: 12%).
- 64 The low use of zero anaphora is compensated for by a greater reliance on definite NPs (LAM), in similar proportions at both proficiency levels.
- 65 The second protagonist (“the boy”) is less frequently referred to with a HAM form (44% for both advanced and intermediate learners) than in the narratives of native speakers (FrL1 60.1%, EngL1 76.4%). Whereas EngL1 favour subject pronouns (54.8%) and zero anaphora (20%), learners use subject pronouns around 25% only, but use object pronouns around 11% (which is exactly the same as in FrL1). Even at advanced level, zero anaphora is seldom selected by learners to refer to the protagonist.
- 66 What is striking is that learners prefer definite NPs to refer to the boy in topic and in focus (around 50% at both levels, compared to 26.1% for FrL1 and 22.5% for EngL1). Learners seem to be more comfortable with explicit reference (a fact also noted by Hendriks [2003a and b], and Chini [2005] in her study on German learners of Italian), especially when the entity is in focus (intermediate: 18%, advanced: 16%, compared to EngL1 and FrL1: 5%). This is probably due to the fact that an entity referred to in focus is less salient than one in topic (see Ariel, 1990).
- 67 At both levels of proficiency, French learners of English use LAM to refer to the protagonist much more frequently than English native speakers. Even advanced learners behave as if they preferred to avoid risks and choose non-ambiguous means (full NPs) to maintain reference to protagonists, even if this implies non-optimal discursive cohesion. For example, in [14] the full definite NP (LAM) “the dog” is used in two consecutive utterances (“he puts salt on the ice so that the dog can walk again and then the dog complains”) instead of using the subject pronoun “he” or zero anaphora (HAM) as native speakers would do.
- 68 To conclude, French learners of English try to avoid risks and prefer non-ambiguous referring devices (LAM) to maintain reference to protagonists and ensure discursive cohesion. Their use of reference maintaining devices consequently appears as an interesting indicator of the proficiency level of learners.
- 69 Both groups of French learners of English therefore overspecify the reference to the second protagonist (“boy”), probably to avoid any ambiguity that might arise from the use of anaphoric pronouns (“he” or Ø may equally refer to “boy” or “dog”).

		Intermediate FrL1 EngL2 N = 10	Advanced FrL1 EngL2 N = 10
DOG/ CHIEN	HAM	He 42% Who 4% Ø 5% Him/her 4% (focus) Total 55%	He 46% Who 2% Ø 7% Him/her 6% (focus) Total 61%
	MAM	His N 0% His N 14% (focus) Total 14%	His N 1% His N 11% (focus) Total 12%
	LAM	The N 23% The N 8% (focus) Total 31%	The N 22% The N 5% (focus) Total 27%
BOY/ GARÇON	HAM	He/she 25% Who 3% Ø 5% Him/her 11% Total 44%	He/she 24% Who 2% Ø 6% Him/her 12% Total 44%
	MAM	His/her 7% (focus) This N 0% Total 7%	His/her 4% (focus) This N 0% Total 4%
	LAM	The N 31% The N 18% (focus) Total 49%	The N 36% The N 16% (focus) Total 52%

Table 7. Types of reference markers used to maintain reference and reintroduce protagonists by intermediate and advanced French L1 English L2

6.2. English learners of French

- [16] L'histoire commence avec **un petit chien**
qui est dans sa maison
et **il** sort de sa petite maison
et **il** essaye de marcher
mais **il** ne peut pas
parce qu'il y a de la glace par terre
donc **il** tombe par terre
et après ça **il** va à la maison de son +//.
d'**un petit garçon**
qui est peut-être son propriétaire
et **il** réveille **le petit garçon**
pour **lui** dire

peut-être qu'il y a de la glace devant la maison du chien
et donc **le petit garçon** sort de sa maison¹⁶.

EngL1 FrL2 Jonathan (advanced)

- [17] C'est une bande dessinée d'**une petit garçon et son chien**
et c'est pendant l'hiver parce qu'il est très froid
et **le chien** partir son petite maison de paille
et il &tombE parce que le sol est couverte avec le glace
et il &allE à la porte le maison de le petit homme
et il &frappE le porte
et **le petit garçon** &arrivE
et il voit le glace
et il &fixE le glace avec le &sel p'têtre
alors **le chien** &promenE sur le sol sans tomber
mais **le chien** c'est pas heureuse parce qu'il est très froid
et il veut une jupe comme le garçon
alors **le garçon** va trouver une petite jupe pour le chien¹⁷.
EngL1 FrL2 Maggie (intermediate)

70 Interestingly enough, only 1/16 of the learners of French saw a little girl in the second protagonist (remember that 7/10 EngL1 chose that option, which facilitated the identification of the protagonists even when a HAM form was used).

71 To refer to the dog, learners' use of HAM (intermediate: 60%, advanced: 67%) is close to that of natives (FrL1: 63.7%, EngL1: 70%). Their use of LAM is very close to the French pattern and is clearly distinct from the English preferences (intermediate: 36%, advanced: 25%, FrL1: 33.3%, EngL1: 12.7%).

72 The pattern is quite different when they refer to the boy: learners of French use HAM forms to a much lesser extent than French natives (intermediate: 31%, advanced: 47%, compared to FrL1: 60.1% and EngL1: 76.4%). Subject pronouns are used at a much lower rate (intermediate: 31%, advanced: 34%) than native speakers (FrL1: 43.6%, EngL1: 54.8%). Relative pronouns and object pronouns only appear at advanced level. Just like learners of English, learners of French use LAM markers (full NP "le garçon") in topic and focus much more frequently than native speakers (EngL2 intermediate: 61%, advanced: 46%, compared to FrL1: 26.1% and

16. "The story starts with a little dog / who is in his house / and he goes out of his little house / and he tries to walk / but he can't / because there is ice on the ground / so he falls down on the ground / and after that he goes to the house of his / of a little boy / who is maybe his owner / and he wakes the little boy up / to tell him / maybe there is ice in front of the house of the dog / and so the little boy goes out of his house".

17. "It is a comic with a boy and his dog / and it is during winter / because it is very cold / and the dog leave his little straw house / and he fall because the ground is covered with the ice / and he go to the door the house of the little man / and he knock the door / and the little boy arrive / and he sees the ice / and he fix the ice with the salt maybe / so the dog walk the ground without fall / but the dog it's not happy because it is very cold / and he wants a skirt like the boy / so the boy goes find a little skirt for the dog".

EngL1: 22.5%). This is even more striking at intermediate level where the boy is reintroduced in focus for 34% of mentions (advanced: 20%, FrL1 and EngL1: 5%). Learners may be afraid of the referential ambiguity linked to the use of pronouns, and resort to LAM to make sure their interlocutor will be able to retrieve the referent.

73 The relative pronoun “qui” is seldom used by learners, in line with what native speakers do. Finally, at both proficiency levels, learners of French avoid using zero anaphora, although it is predominant in their L1: either they are sensitive to the lack of use of this form in their target language, even at intermediate level; or they wish to avoid any ambiguity in their use of referential markers.

74 To sum up, learners of French use LAM much more than native speakers: they overuse definite NPs to refer to the second protagonist, just like learners of English.

		Intermediate EngL1 FrL2 N = 6	Advanced EngL1 FrL2 N = 10
DOG/ CHIEN	HAM	Il 51% Qui 4% Ø 2% Le/lui 3% (focus) Total 60%	Il 60% Qui 2% Ø 1% Le/lui 4% (focus) Total 67%
	MAM	Son N 1% Ce N 0% Son N 3% (focus) Total 4%	Son N 0% Ce N 0% Son N 8% (focus) Total 8%
	LAM	Le N 24.5% Le N + il 0% Le N 11.5% (focus) Total 36%	Le N 21% Le N + il 1% Le N 3% (focus) Total 25%
BOY/ GARÇON	HAM	Il/elle 31% Qui 0% Ø 0% Le/la/lui 0% (focus) Total 31%	Il/elle 34% Qui 5% Ø 1% Le/la/lui 7% (focus) Total 47%
	MAM	Son N 4% Ce N 4% (focus) Total 8%	Son N 0.5% Ce N 0.5% Son N 6% (focus) Total 7%
	LAM	Le N 27% Le N + il 0% Le N 34% (focus) Total 61%	Le N 24% Le N + il 2% Le N 20% (focus) Total 46%

Table 8. Types of reference markers used to maintain reference and reintroduce protagonists by intermediate and advanced English L1 French L2

6.3. Adult L2 learners: discussion of results

- 75 Crosslinguistic influences are perceptible in the oral narratives of L2 learners of French and English, as illustrated by their use of zero anaphora and object pronouns. This is perceptible at both levels of proficiency, even if advanced learners' choices of referential forms are closer to target language preferences than those of intermediate learners'. However, the fact that both groups of learners over-specify reference by using LAM where natives use HAM suggests a common learner referential strategy.
- 76 All learners (EngL2 and FrL2, intermediate and advanced) re-introduce the second protagonist with a complete NP/LAM (the boy) more frequently than native speakers. We assume they favour over-explicit reference to avoid ambiguous pronominal reference ("he"/"il" may refer to "the dog" or "the boy"), facilitate the retrieval of the referent, and thus make sure their message gets through to their interlocutor. Indeed the second protagonist is the one introducing a break in narrative continuity; it is therefore essential for speakers to signal the referential shift in the least ambiguous way.
- 77 Few learners of English use zero anaphora to maintain reference, which suggests that (1) target discursive cohesion means are not yet mastered by advanced learners and (2) intermediate and advanced learners rely on linguistic strategies common to L1 and L2 (maintaining reference with subject pronouns, shift with NP).
- 78 Yusun Kang (2004) found similar results in a study on the use of Korean EFL (English as a foreign language) learners' referential strategies in oral narrative discourse (Frog Story). Korean is a topic-drop language in which 3rd person pronouns are rarely used in oral discourse; NPs may be omitted as long as the referent can be understood in context. Zero anaphora and full NPs are therefore likely to be found where pronouns are expected in English discourse. In spite of the fact that both the Korean and native English speakers used zero anaphora quite frequently in their native languages to refer to the characters of the story (a boy, a dog and a frog), the Korean learners of English (all at intermediate level of proficiency) did not do so in English L2. Yusun Kang (2004: 1986) attributes this to "the L2 challenges they were experiencing in their production of oral discourse" and she notes "a tendency to over-specify the referents", but was unable to ascertain whether this is due to an L1 transfer effect or to L2 influence. Our results suggest a learner strategy to avoid ambiguous reference, in line with Hendriks (2003a and b), Lenart and Perdue (2004), Lenart (2006) and Chini (2005), who also propose that it could be a means to reduce the cognitive load induced by the task. Finally, while Chini (2005) and Ahrenholz (2005) suggest that over-explicitness is typically associated with an intermediate stage of competence, at which lexical and morphosyntactic problems are "felt to be more urgent to solve than textual cohesion" (Chini, 2005: 96), we observe it even at an advanced level of proficiency, regardless of L1 properties (in English, zero anaphora is used abundantly while this is not the case in French). This seems to indicate that maintaining discourse cohesion is a costly procedure, even at an advanced proficiency level.

7. Discussion

79 To sum up, our initial hypotheses are confirmed: the marking of referential
accessibility reflects a problem of under-specification in children, while adult
learners opt for over-specification, to prevent referential ambiguity, due to their
awareness of the discourse issues involved.

80 Our results highlight the impact of cognitive maturity and of crosslinguistic
influences in the acquisition of L1 and L2 French and English, although the
small size of our database (6 to 10 speakers in all groups) limits the scope of our
conclusions.

81 As regards the impact of cognitive maturity, we noticed that younger children
are under-specific in their choice of referring expressions: they favour HAM, i.e.,
pronouns, even when the referent is not easily retrievable in context.

82 We also observed that children's use of referring expressions evolves from
under-specificity to more adult-like forms from age 4 to 10; as expected, the use of
HAM forms develops between 4 and 10 years old; but ten-year-olds (especially the
French children) still use ambiguous HAM forms, contrary to adults.

83 The use of certain forms (such as dislocations in French) is restricted to children's
discourse. Once the speakers become aware that these forms are stylistically marked
as informal, they drop their usage. It is worth noting that ten-year-old French
children still use these forms quite a lot, but adult native speakers and learners use
them very seldom.

84 Moreover, idiosyncratic uses in child production generally result from the fact
that they do not fully master the rules of narrative discourse – a problem related to
cognitive maturity. Taking the addressee's perspective into account, that is, adopting
a perspective other than their own, appears to be difficult for children up to the age
of seven, as evidenced by the overuse of HAM. Indeed, children acquire gradually
the various functions associated with articles, pronouns and Ø, since cognitive and
language skills develop at the same time as they acquire their L1.

85 In contrast, the adult L2 learner already possesses (more or less universal)
cognitive skills which were developed through his experience of L1. Yet, the learner
is faced with a cognitive overload due to the incomplete mastery of the linguistic
system of L2. This overload constrains discourse planning and leads learners to
select LAM referential forms, which provide semantic content without relying on
the interlocutor's retrieval of information from context.

86 Adult L2 learners of French and English are over-specific in their choice of
referring expressions compared to native speakers of both languages (they favour
LAM, i.e., full NPs, even when the referent is easily retrievable in context).

87 Finally, although we expected a target-like development at advanced level, we
found that advanced learners still use LAM where HAM could be expected, which
suggests a deeply ingrained tendency to overspecification among learners. It would

be necessary to examine the productions of very advanced L2 learners to check whether they feel secure enough to adopt target language referring strategies.

88 On the other hand, our study highlights the fact that crosslinguistic differences and proficiency do have an impact on the productions of learners. Indeed, children's productions showed the influence of the source language from a very young age: zero anaphora is already widespread in the production of English four-year-olds; adult FrL1 EngL2, probably under the influence of L1 French, are reluctant to use it even at advanced level. The fact that the other group of L2 learners (EngL1 FrL2) use very little zero anaphora in their L2 productions may be attributed to learners' sensitivity to the L2 input (zero anaphora is widespread in English but not in French), but also to their tendency to overspecify and favour full NPs.

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