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# Focus last and Agent first in basic varieties: What happens when the agent loses control?

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## 1. Basic variety (Klein & Perdue 1997)

❖ SEM1 <= controller-first / agent-first

*The NP-referent with highest control comes first*

❖ PR1 <= focus last / topic first = maintenance of topical entity

*Focus expression last*

❖ CONTEXTS OF COMPETITION

*Discourse contexts in which the NP-referent in topic loses control*

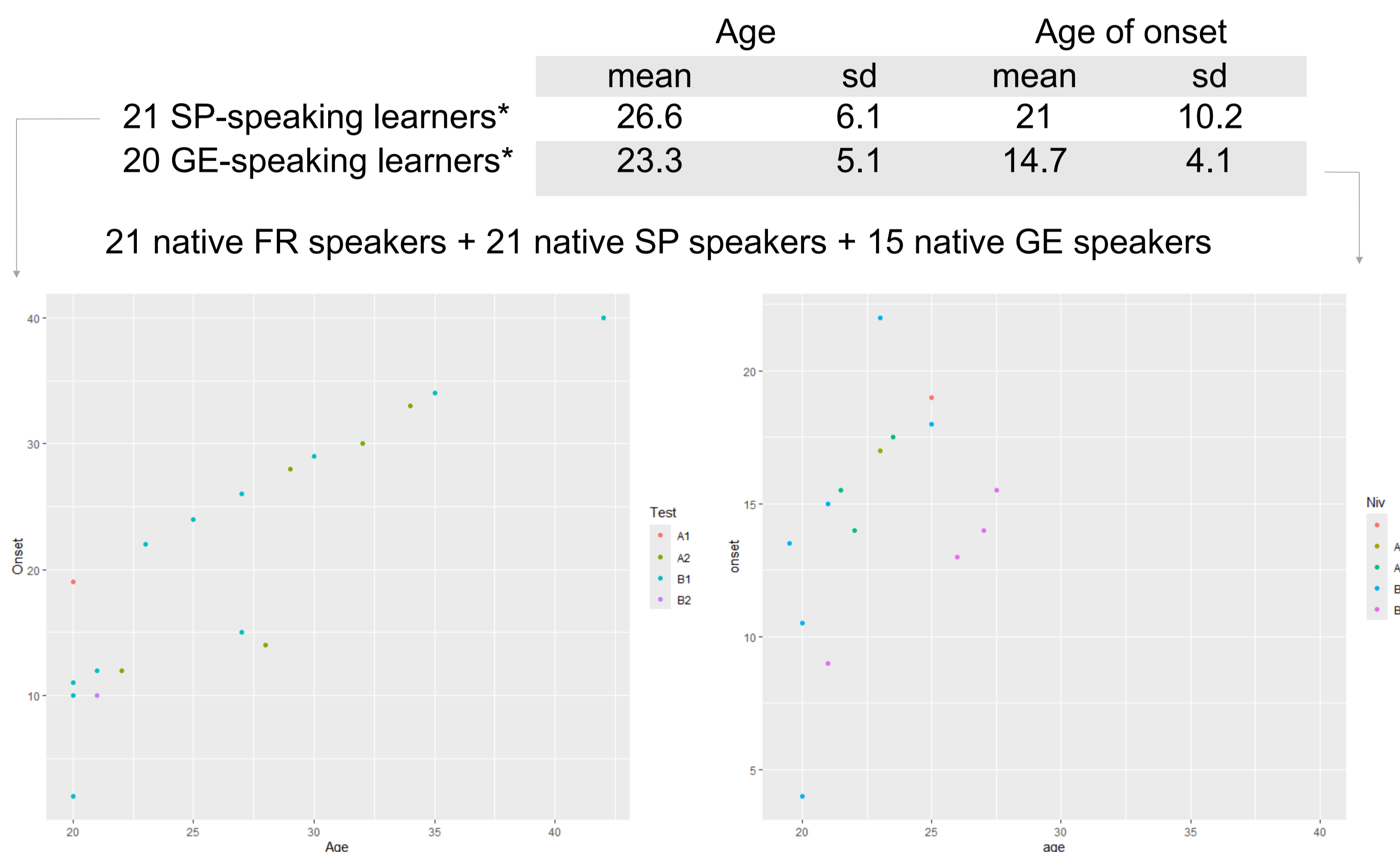
## 2. Research questions / hypotheses

What happens when the topical entity loses control in L2 French?

H1 = Introduction of new entity as agent (SEM1 prominent)

H2 = Maintenance of topical entity as patient (PR1 prominent)

## 3. L2 French participants



\*Scores measuring proficiency obtained from Dialang placement test targeting the vocabulary (Lancaster University)

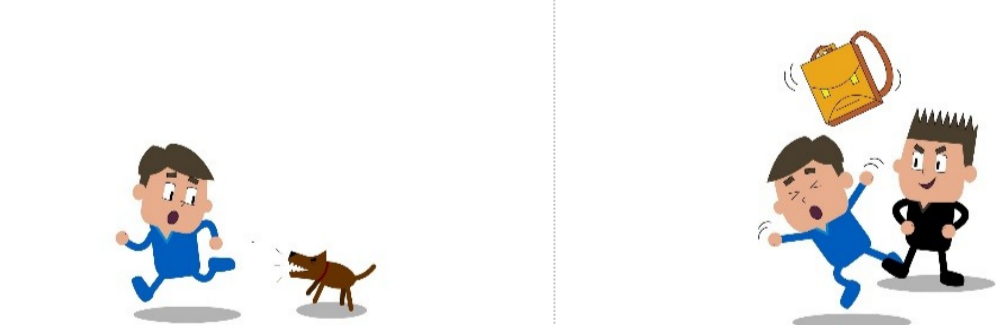
## 4. Alex corpus and methods

Offline retelling task

Instruction introducing a NP-referent as topical entity : **Voici Alex. Racontez ses dernières aventures ! Here is Alex. Tell us about his latest adventures!**

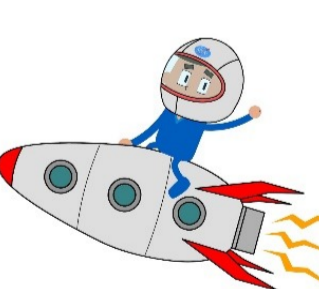
### TARGET ITEMS

The NP-referent in topic loses control



### FILLERS

The NP-referent in topic controls the situation



✓ 84 responses in L1 FR + 84 responses in L1 SP + 60 responses in L1 GE

✓ 84 responses in L2 FR by Spanish-speaking informants

✓ 80 responses in L2 FR by German-speaking informants

Free available corpus (LLING 2023)

## 5. How responses were classified

### 5.1 Discursive means (Table 1)

(i) The NP-referent in topic is maintained

⇒ *ahm... eeh... il a se bat- ? ahm... s'est battu avec un collègue*

(ii) Another entity is introduced

⇒ *mmh il y a un garçon qui... lui fait mal*

## 5.2 Syntactic realization (Table 2)

Topical entity as affected SBJ / DO

(1) <i>Il s'est pris une voiture</i>	V+N collocations
(2) <i>er wird geschlagen</i>	Passives ( <i>être / se faire / wurde / ser</i> )
(3) <i>Alex il est tombé pour terre</i>	Dynamic-V encoding control loss
(4) <i>A él lo atropellaron</i>	DO left-detached construction

Topical entity as active subject

(5) <i>Alex se battre avec ah un homme</i>	Dynamic-V encoding agency
(6) <i>Alex fui- fuit d'un chien</i>	Motion-V + causative instigator

Topical entity as experiencer

(7) <i>Alex a peur de le chien</i>	State-V encoding internal causation
(8) <i>Les deux personnages se battent</i>	Se- verbs encoding control symmetry

## 6. Results

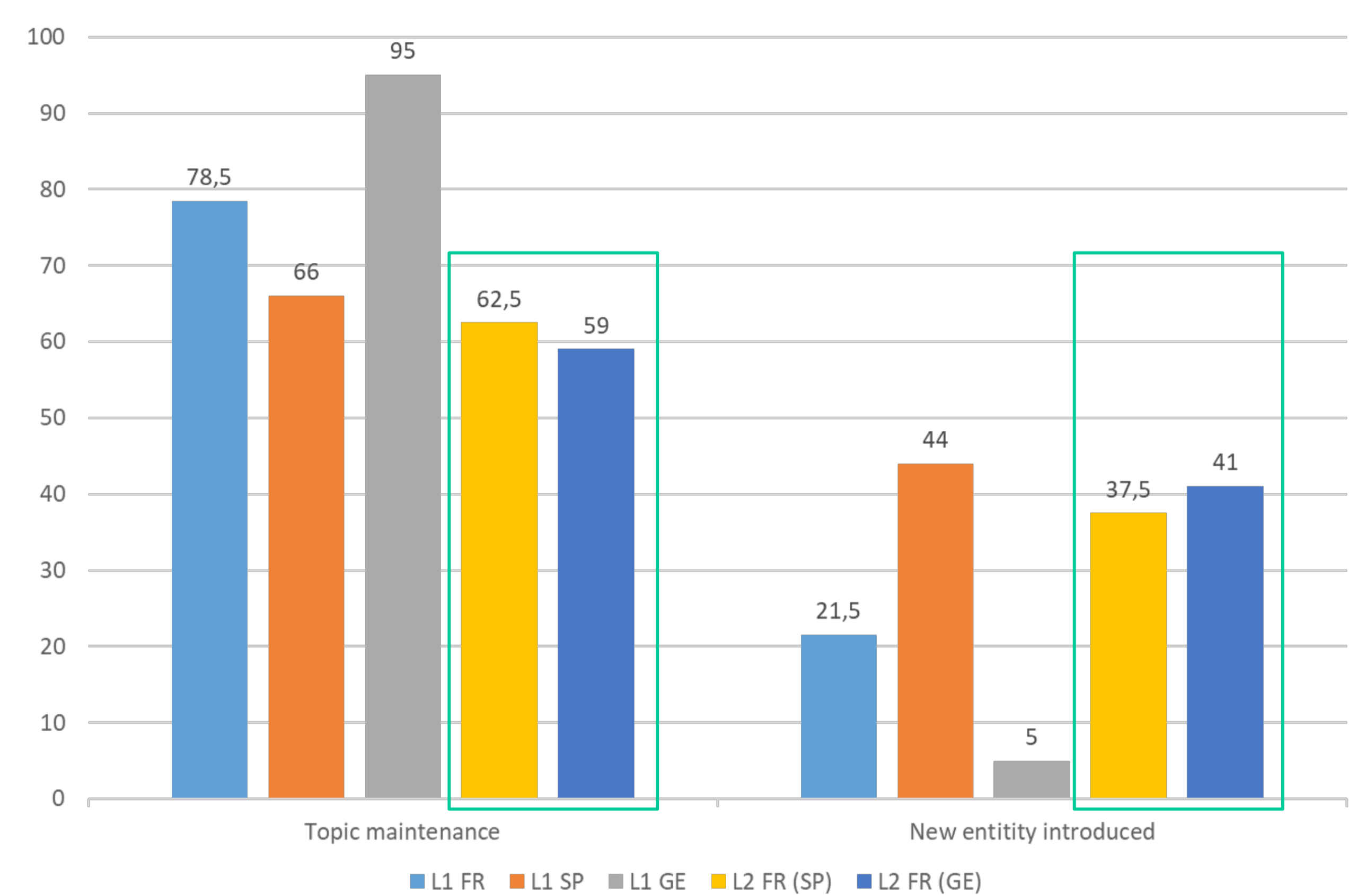


Table 1. Responses maintaining the topical entity vs. introducing a new one (in %)

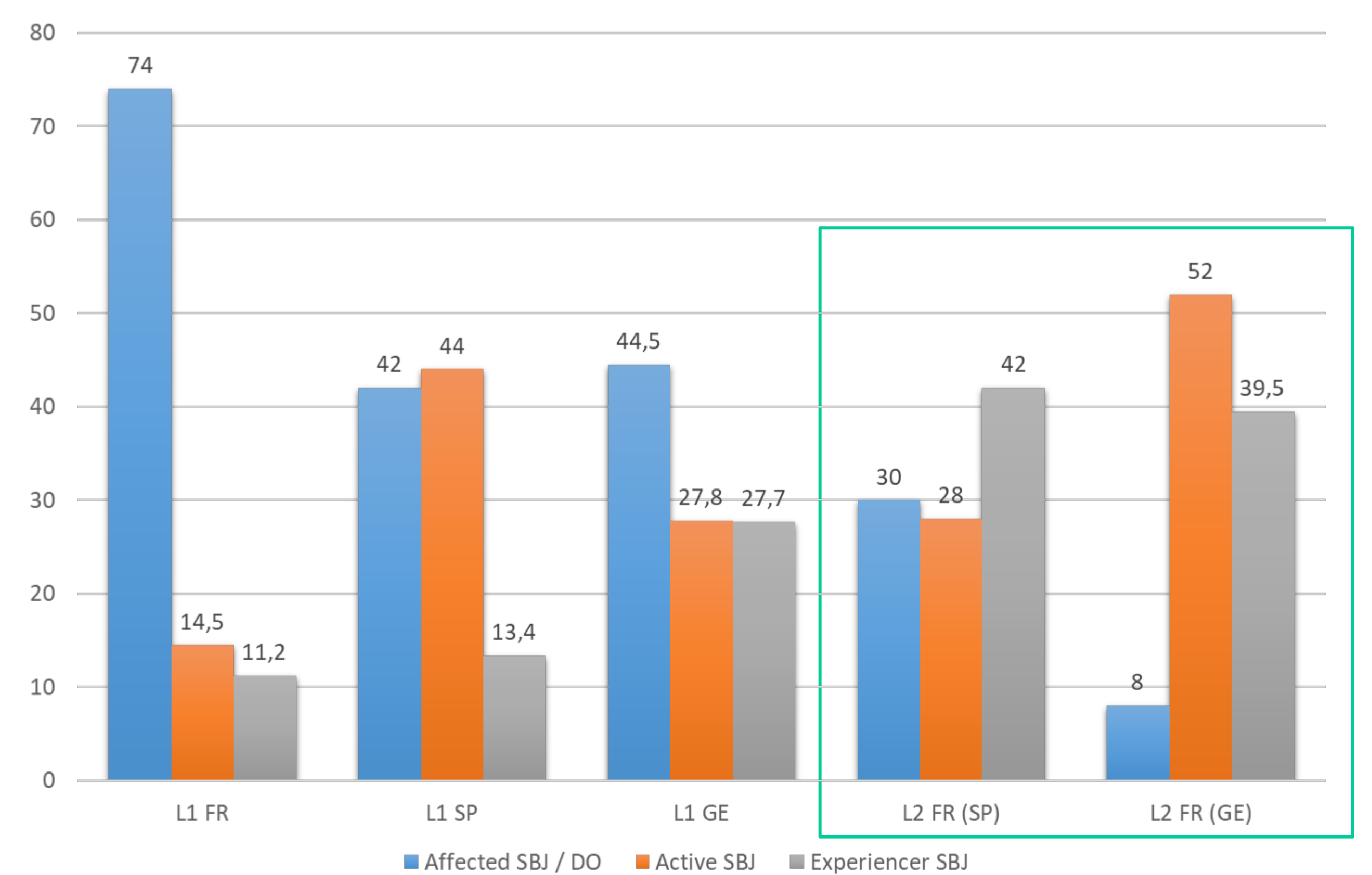


Table 2. Syntactic realization of the maintained topical entity (in %)

## 7. Conclusions

H1/ SEM1 prominent = Not confirmed: the maintenance of the topical entity is the more frequent case across L2 French groups, as well as across L1 groups.

H2/ PR1 prominent = Partially confirmed: the topical entity is maintained as a patient in L1 French but as an experiencer or agent of a caused motion event in many descriptions in L2 French.

⇒ PR1 tends to prevail over SEM1 in post basic varieties when solving contexts of competition

⇒ BV account still efficient to grasp the structure of learner varieties

## References

KLEIN, Wolfgang & Clive PERDUE. 1997. The Basic Variety. Or: Couldn't natural language be much simpler? *Second Language Research* 13, 301-347.

Laboratoire de linguistique de Nantes (LLING) (2023). *Les aventures d'Alex* [Corpus]. ORTOLANG (Open Resources and TOols for LANGuage) - [www.ortolang.fr](http://www.ortolang.fr), v2, <https://hdl.handle.net/11403/les-aventures-dalex/v2>.