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► **To cite this version:**

Arnaud Arslangul. Introducing a New Protagonist in L2 Chinese Narratives: Syntactic Construction and Information Organization. *Language Teaching Research*, 2023, 10.1177/13621688231197912 . hal-04216899

HAL Id: hal-04216899

<https://inalco.hal.science/hal-04216899>

Submitted on 25 Sep 2023

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**Introducing a New Protagonist in L2 Chinese Narratives:
Syntactic Construction and Information Organization**

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Abstract

Building a complex discourse is not an easy task for second language learners. This study investigates how L1 French L2 Chinese learners convey the function of referent introduction in narratives. It aims to identify which syntactic constructions are used to highlight new information and relate it to given information at the utterance level, and how learners organize information between utterances to ensure discourse cohesion. The procedure used consists of the analysis of an oral corpus collected from five groups of participants ($N = 110$): French and Chinese native speakers, and three groups of learners (low, intermediate and advanced levels). The stimulus of the elicited task is a comic strip. The results show that low learners mostly follow the canonical word order, while intermediate learners demonstrate more syntactic diversity but still differ from native speakers at the discourse level. Advanced learners almost achieved native-like proficiency and demonstrated only one difference when compared with the target pattern that lies in the lexical-semantic characteristics of the predicate used.

Keywords: L2 Chinese; narratives; referent introduction; information organization; spatial anchoring; locative inversion; presentative construction; unaccusative verbs

Introduction

Learners of a second language (L2) who want to build a complex story face a very difficult task¹. Compared to young children learning their first language, L2 learners have the

¹ I would like to express sincere thanks to anonymous reviewers for their valuable remarks on the earlier version of this paper.

social cognitive skills to fashion a successful narrative (Hendriks, 1998; Slobin, 2012).

However, in order to construct a coherent and cohesive discourse in L2, they do not have to acquire only a new set of lexico-grammatical features and their syntactic combinations, but must include the particular discourse that guide the principle of information organization in their target language. They need to select and order information of different conceptual domains (such as time, locations, entities, etc.) in a sequence of sub-events, and also take into account the hearer's knowledge of what is given or new information (Carroll & Lambert, 2006; Levelt, 1989).

What is more, all human languages also appear to have different syntactic constructions for describing the same particular event (the so-called *allosentences* in Lambrecht, 1994). For instance, several constructions are available to introduce a new referent in discourse in standard Chinese (Liu, 2003; Liu, 2014; Zhang, 2009), as well as in French (Fuchs, 2009; Lahousse, 2006; Lambrecht, 1994). A language may employ different allosentences to serve the same particular discourse function; moreover, languages may differ in the manner in which information structure is mapped onto syntax in describing the same event. In L2 acquisition, this kind of discourse-motivated form-function mapping corresponds to another typical difficulty (Callies, 2009; Ryan & Crosthwaite, 2020).

Several studies have examined the introduction of referents in L2 discourse for European languages (see Hendriks, 1998; Lambert & Lenart, 2004; Turco, 2008; *inter alia*), while research on L2 Chinese has focused on more formal descriptions of the linguistic means to be found in the introduction of new referents, including the locative inversion and the unaccusative verbs (Xue, 2005; Yang et al., 2007; Yuan, 1999; Zhang, 2011; but see Lena, 2020). The present study tries to combine these two aspects by investigating the discourse-syntax interface. It focuses on the function of referent introduction in order to better understand discourse cohesion in second language, and how it evolves with the development

of learners' overall proficiency. It aims to determine to what extent L1 French L2 Chinese learners are able to apply the principles of information organization of their target language in producing a narrative discourse in their L2. More precisely, its goal is to understand (1) which syntactic constructions are used to highlight new information and relate it to given information at the utterance level, and (2) how learners organize information between utterances to ensure discourse cohesion.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the research background of the study. This includes the description of the syntactic constructions available in Chinese and French to introduce a new referent in discourse, the language production and the discourse model used to analyze the data, and the previous studies of fundamental issues about word order, referent introduction and information organization in L2. Section 3 outlines the corpus analysis methodology. Section 4 lays out the main results discussed in Section 5, followed by the conclusions.

Background

Referent Introduction in Chinese and French

Natural languages are equipped with different formal means of conveying information structure meanings, including prosody, morphology, lexical markers, or syntactic positioning. This section focuses on the main syntactic constructions used to introduce a new animate referent (protagonist) in Chinese and French narratives, starting with the canonical predicative construction, and then considering three constructions that represent non-canonical word order using postposing or inversion (Birner & Ward, 2009; Ward & Birner, 2004). All these constructions correspond to what Lambrecht (1994) calls *sentence-focus* structure. They reflect the non-binary semantic structure which characterizesthetic sentences (Kuroda, 1973; Sasse, 1987). Unlike categorical statements, which are made up of two acts (naming an entity and making a statement about it),thetic sentences are simple non-predicative assertions of

states of affairs that present the existence of an event or an entity in a holistic way. The statement is considered in focus as a whole; i.e., the focus extends over both the subject argument and the predicate.

Canonical Predicative Construction

According to Kuroda (1973) and Lambrecht (1994), a canonical predicative construction with an indefinite subject reflects the non-binary semantic structure which characterizesthetic sentences. Even if it presents the pragmatically unmarked word order, it has a *sentence-focus* structure: its function is to introduce a referent into the discourse and not to attribute a quality to a topic referent. In (1a) is reproduced an example from Lambrecht (1994, p. 168), to which are added the Chinese (1b) and French (1c) translations:

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|--------------|---------|--------|--------------|------------------|
| (1) | a. | ... and then | a | boy | came in... | |
| | b. | 然后一个男孩进来了 | | | | |
| | | ránhòu | yī-gè | nánhái | jìn-lai | le |
| | | then | one-CLF | boy | enter-hither | CRS ² |
| | c. | et puis | un | garçon | est entré | |

Many authors have noted that there is a strong tendency in Chinese to have a definite subject, the so-called *definiteness effect* (i.a., Li & Thompson, 1981; Xu, 1995). However, more recent studies reveal that there are exceptions to this tendency. They show that this construction can be used to introduce a new event and the beginning of a new episode in the chronology of the narrative (the indefinite subject is often preceded by contextual information, related to the time of the action); it emphasizes the event, and not the protagonist, who is considered secondary information (Fang, 2019; Liu, 2003; Liu, 2014; Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2009).

Bi-clausal Presentative Construction

The *bi-clausal presentative construction* involves the postposing of the noun phrase (NP) referring to the new protagonist that is in subject position in the canonical predicative

² Abbreviations used in the examples: CLF classifier, CRS current relevant state, PFV perfective aspect, and 3SG third person singular.

construction. The construction is semantically simple but syntactically complex, composed of a presentative clause followed by a predicative clause. The NP is the object of the first verb and the subject of the second verb. The discourse function of this construction is not to make a statement about an entity or event, but to introduce a new referent in the discourse and provide new information about it.

In Chinese (Huang & Shi, 2016; Li & Thompson, 1981; Xu, 2015; Zhou & Shen, 2016), the construction begins with the existential verb *yǒu* 有 ‘exist’, which is followed by the NP referring to the new protagonist, and then directly by the second clause:

- (2) 有一群游客从博物馆里走出来。
 yǒu yī-qún yóukè cóng bówùguǎn=li zǒu-chu-lai
 exist one-CLF tourist from museum=inside walk-out-hither
 ‘There is a group of tourists that is walking out of the museum.’

In French (Conti, 2010; Lambrecht, 1988, 1994, 2000), the bi-clausal presentative construction often starts with a personal pronoun and the verbs *avoir* ‘have’, *y avoir* ‘there be’, *voir* ‘see’ or with the presentatives *voici* ‘here is’ and *voilà* ‘there is’. The following position is filled by the NP, itself followed by the relative pronoun *qui* ‘who’ introducing the predicative relative clause:

- (3) Il y a un homme qui sonne à la porte.
 there.is a man who is.ringing at the door
 ‘There is a man ringing at the door.’

This construction is very frequent in spontaneous oral speech in Chinese (Zhang, 2009; Zhou & Shen, 2016) as well as in French (Lambrecht, 1988, 2000).

Monoclausal Presentative Constructions

The term *monoclausal presentative constructions* bring together two constructions that are often compared in the literature: the *existential construction* as in (4), and the *locative inversion* as in (5) (Bresnan, 1994; Fuchs, 2009, 2014; Givón, 2001; Lahousse, 2006; Lambrecht, 1994; Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 1995; Teixeira, 2016). In the Chinese literature, the existential construction and the locative inversion are referred to as *sentences of existence*

and appearance (Huo, 2021; Li, 2010; Pan, 2003; Pan & Yan, 2007; Paul et al., 2020; Shuai, 2017; Wu, 2006; Xuan, 2011; Zhang & Fan, 2010).

- (4) a. 饭馆里有两个人。
 fànguǎn=li yǒu liǎng-gè rén
 restaurant=inside exist two-CLF person
 b. Il y a deux personnes dans le restaurant.
 there.are two people in the restaurant
 ‘There are two people in the restaurant.’
- (5) a. 饭馆里走出两个人。
 fànguǎn=li zǒu-chu liǎng-gè rén
 restaurant=inside walk-exit two-CLF person
 b. Du restaurant sortent deux personnes.
 of.the restaurant exit two people
 ‘Two people walk out of the restaurant.’

At the syntactic level, the monoclausal presentative constructions involve a locative phrase (LocP) and a NP that denotes the referent whose existence or appearance is being asserted. The existential construction involves the postposing of the NP, while the locative inversion causes the relative positions of the two constituents to be effectively swapped: the NP that canonically appears in subject position instead appears post-verbally, while the LocP is in pre-verbal position.

At the discourse level, these constructions have a function of presentative focus: the previously inactive referent denoted by the post-verbal NP is introduced on the scene (referred to by the LocP) to become the new focus of attention, and thus to ensure that this referent becomes active for the following discourse (Birner, 1996; Bresnan, 1994; Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 1995).

In French, when the verb of the existential construction is the stative verb *y avoir* ‘there be’, the LocP can occur in pre-verbal position or in post-verbal position (6). Unlike in French, the place of the LocP in Chinese is fixed, always in pre-verbal position (4a)-(5a).

- (6) (En face) il y a un petit restaurant (en face).
 (in front) there.is a small restaurant (in front)
 ‘There is a small restaurant in front.’

The existential construction has an unbounded stative predicate (*y avoir* ‘there be’ and *yǒu* 有 ‘exist’), while the locative inversion has a bounded eventive predicate that includes unaccusative verbs, such as inherently directed motion verbs (e.g., *venir* and *lái* 来 ‘come’, *arriver* and *dào* 到 ‘arrive’), and verbs of (dis)appearance (e.g., *se produire* and *fāshēng* 发生 ‘happen’, *apparaître* and *chūxiàn* 出现 ‘appear’).

In Chinese, the predicate can also include a directional verb compound that is a verb of motion followed by a directional complement (Li & Thompson, 1981; Liu et al., 1998). This complement is an intransitive verb that indicates the deictic and/or non-deictic path of the moving entity (e.g., *pǎo-chu-lai* 跑出来 ‘run-out-hither’).

It is important to note that the locative inversion has a canonical word order alternative; compare (5) and (7):

- (7) a. 两个人从饭馆里走出来。
liǎng-gè rén cóng fànguǎn=li zǒu-chu-lai
two-CLF person from restaurant=inside walk-exit-hither
b. Deux personnes sortent du restaurant.
two people exit of.the restaurant
‘Two people walk out of the restaurant.’

However, the existential construction does not have such a direct alternative. In (4a), the new referent can only occur in post-verbal position. The pre-verbal position is only possible if the existential verb is replaced by a locative verb such as *être* ‘be’ and *zài* 在 ‘be at’. The construction in (8) is mostly used with a definite NP in the subject role to answer the question “where is X?”, and not to introduce a new referent in discourse.

- (8) a. 那两个人在饭馆里。
nà liǎng-gè rén zài fànguǎn=li
that two-CLF people be.at restaurant=inside
b. Les deux personnes sont dans le restaurant.
the two people are in the restaurant
‘Those two people are in the restaurant.’

Whereas the locative inversion is frequent in colloquial speech in Chinese (Xuan, 2011, 2016), it is very restricted in French and often more used in literary discourse (Cappeau & Lahousse, 2015; Fuchs, 2009, 2014).

To summarize the main differences between the four preceding syntactic constructions, Liu (2003) and Zhang (2009) pointed out that the monoclausal presentative constructions are used to introduce a referent in respect to a spatial anchoring, using the space domain to establish a distinction between given referents and new ones. The canonical predicative construction, on the other hand, is used to introduce a referent in the storyline of the narrative in respect to a temporal anchoring. In narratives, the temporal ordering of the sub-events can be lexically encoded (e.g., *ránhòu* 然后 and *ensuite* ‘then’) or left implicit when the chronological order of the events in the story is respected. Finally, the bi-clausal presentative construction lies between the two former constructions. It often does not use explicit temporal or spatial anchoring to introduce the new referent; the event is understood as taking place “here-and-now” in the discourse.

Huumo (2003) as well as Partee and Borschev (2007) also suggest that the main difference between existential and canonical predicative sentences is not in their objective semantic content, but rather in the subjective way in which the situation is addressed. According to them, the canonical predicative structure places the protagonist at the center of the perspective, whereas the existential sentence takes the locative phrase as the starting point for structuring the description of the situation. This should also apply to the locative inversion (spatial anchoring).

Those four syntactic constructions with a sentence-focus structure are all established means to introduce a new discourse referent. Following Carroll and Lambert (2003), a distinction is drawn between these prominent introductions in which the only animate referent of the utterance is the new protagonist, and the introductions that do not occur in their own

right but are embedded in other contexts referring to actions of another given protagonist. These introductions also occur in a canonical predicative construction, but it has here the unmarked topic-comment or *predicate-focus* structure (Lambrecht, 1994). The new referent is mostly introduced as the object of a verb of perception (e.g., *pèngdào* 碰到 ‘run into’, *découvrir* ‘discover’) in respect to another entity, the protagonist of the story, which is the subject of the utterance (entity anchoring):

- (9) 他突然看到了一个陌生人。
 tā tūrán kàndào-le yī-gè mòshēngrén
 3SG suddenly see-PFV one-CLF stranger
 ‘He suddenly saw a stranger.’

In (9), the new referent of the focus expression *mòshēngrén* 陌生人 ‘stranger’ in object position is introduced through the perception of the NP-referent *tā* 他 ‘he’ that is the topic-subject of the utterance.

Language Production and Discourse Analysis Model

Levelt’s (1989) language production model provides a representation of the various processes involved in the generation of spontaneous oral speech and the macrostructural organization of information. According to this model, the production process starts with the conceptualization of the message to be transmitted. The speaker selects and orders information in a sequence of sub-goals, and plans an informational perspective (assignment of an accessibility status to the referents, assignment of the topic role to one of the referents, etc.) for each speech act in the form of a conceptual structure, called the *pre-verbal message*. The conceptual structure is then translated into a linguistic structure with the grammatical and phonological encoding of internal speech. The last operation is the execution of the phonetic plan with the articulatory organs to produce overt speech.

The process of discourse construction as envisaged by this psycholinguistic model of production can be described through the discourse analysis model developed by von

Stutterheim and Klein (1989, 2002) (see also von Stutterheim & Carroll, 2018). It allows us to analyze how L2 learners construct their pre-verbal message and structure their discourse regarding the introduction of new referents.

This model considers that any coherent discourse differs from an arbitrary accumulation of utterances because it is entirely the answer to a question, either explicit or implicit, which constitutes the interpretation given by the speaker to a situation of communication. This abstract question is called the *quaestio*, which gives its name to the model. The *quaestio* applies four constraints to the organization of the discourse.

At the global level of the text, it defines the distribution of information between the foreground and the background of the discourse. The foreground constitutes the skeleton of the text; it consists of utterances which answer the *quaestio*. The background includes utterances that do not directly answer the *quaestio* but are used to add marginal information in the text.

At the utterance level, the *quaestio* selects the domains to which the utterances of the foreground refer. There are five referential domains: time, space, entities (animate and inanimate), predicates (states, events and properties) and modality.

The *quaestio* also determines referential movement, i.e. the way in which the information from the five referential domains develops from one utterance to another. After the introduction of a referential domain in the text, the reference to this domain can be maintained or shifted by other information from the same domain in the following utterances and throughout the discourse.

Finally, the *quaestio* determines the distribution of information between the topic and focus components of the utterance. The topic is composed of the given information presupposed by the *quaestio*, while the focus is the component that answers the *quaestio*.

In narrative discourse, the *quaestio* can be formulated as: “What happened (to a protagonist) at this time (and at this place)?” The foreground is composed of sub-events which are related to each other in a causal or temporal relation (chronologically ordered by default). This study analyzes the referential movement in two domains, the shift in the entities domain and the maintenance in the space domain respectively, as illustrated in (10):

- (10) a. 他看到一个洞，
 tā kàndào yī-gè dòng (foreground)
 3SG see one-CLF hole
 entity predicate entity (time)
 maintenance shift shift (shift)
 topic focus
 ‘He sees a hole.’
- b. 洞里跑出一只老鼠。
 dòng=li pǎo-chu yī-zhī lǎoshǔ (foreground)
 hole=inside run-out one-CLF mouse
 space predicate entity (time)
 maintenance shift shift (shift)
 topic focus
 ‘suddenly a little mouse runs out from the hole.’

In this short example, there is a shift in the domain of entities between *tā* 他 ‘he’ in (10a) and *lǎoshǔ* 老鼠 ‘mouse’ in (10b). This new entity is part of the focus component of the utterance. It is introduced in relation to the spatial point of reference *dòng* 洞 ‘hole’ which is given information maintained from (10a), and represents the topic component of (10b). When a main protagonist has already been introduced in a narrative, and the speaker wants to add a new one into the storyline, there is a shift in the entities domain that has a contrastive function. This study precisely examines the introduction of the supporting protagonists such as *lǎoshǔ* 老鼠 ‘mouse’ in (10b); the reference to the main character in the story is not analyzed. For the sake of clarity, the term ‘introduction of a new protagonist’ is used throughout the study in place of ‘shift in the entities domain’.

Previous Studies

Developmental Principles in Word Order

According to Klein and Perdue (1993), word order at a very basic level of proficiency can be explained on the basis of a limited set of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic principles. At the semantic level, they showed that the NP-referent with highest control comes first in the utterance (*Controller First Principle*). This leads learners to establish a correspondence between the pre-verbal position of the utterance and the controller of the action. At the pragmatic level, they argued that the focus expression occurs toward the end of the utterance (*Focus Last Principle*).

These semantic and pragmatic constraints on the utterance structure can be related to the *Unmarked Alignment Hypothesis* developed in the Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998, 2005). This hypothesis predicts the correspondence principles between the three levels of structures in syntax (argument, functional and constituent-structure). At the initial state of development in L2 acquisition, the default mapping is the canonical word order: the most typical word order for that language. In SVO languages, such as French and Chinese, this results in the agent being mapped onto the subject. Furthermore, the first noun phrase of the utterance is mapped onto the subject, as the learner does not differentiate between topic and subject functions. At later stages, the topic is assigned to non-argument functions (adjuncts) and finally to a core argument other than the subject.

According to the same aspect of word order acquisition, Oshita (2001) formulates a developmental account to capture and relate a variety of phenomena observed with unaccusative verbs (e.g., the use of ungrammatical passive unaccusatives or the reluctance to accept unaccusatives in the canonical 'NP + V' order) which he calls the *Unaccusative Trap Hypothesis*. He claims that they can all be explained by the fact that L2 learners "fail to distinguish unaccusatives and unergatives as distinct lexico-syntactic classes because of the

saliency of the NP-V word order in which most tokens of intransitive verbs appear in the input” (p. 286).

The lexical-semantic characteristics of the unaccusative verbs is captured by Sorace’s (1993, 1995) *Split Intransitivity Hierarchy* (about Chinese, see Lu & Lee, 2020; Xue, 2005). The author claimed that events can be analyzed at the lexico-conceptual level in terms of three paired features, i.e. dynamic/static, telic/atelic, and concrete/abstract. Change of location verbs, which display dynamic, telic and concrete features, are considered at the core of unaccusativity, while verbs of controlled non-motional process, which display static, atelic and abstract features, are at the core of unergativity.³

Several studies have investigated the acquisition of non-canonical word order related to the locative inversion and unaccusative vs. unergative verbs distinction in L2 Chinese, mostly by English learners (Xue, 2005; Yang et al., 2007; Yuan, 1999; Zhang, 2011). In judgment tasks, the results showed that only advanced learners allowed the “V + NP” pattern with unaccusative motion verbs. In oral production tasks, only some learners at intermediate and advanced levels were able to correctly make the unaccusatives vs. unergatives distinction, and had the intuition to use locative inversion in a context eliciting the use of that construction, instead of the canonical SV construction.

In the present study, learners’ ability to identify the unaccusative verbs and use the “V + NP” pattern will greatly determine their choice between the different syntactic constructions available to convey the introduction of the referent in the discourse.

³ The Split Intransitivity Hierarchy is composed of eight categories: change of location (e.g., ‘arrive’), change of condition (e.g., ‘wilt’), appearance (e.g., ‘appear’), continuation of pre-existing condition (e.g., ‘stay’), existence (e.g., ‘exist’), uncontrolled process (e.g., ‘tremble’), controlled motional process (e.g., ‘swim’), controlled non-motional process (e.g., ‘work’).

Referent Introduction

Many studies analyzed the syntax-discourse interface and overall discourse-determined word order (including presentative constructions, cleft sentences, dislocations, etc.) in several L1s and L2s configurations, at different levels of proficiency (for a literature review, see Lozano & Callies, 2018). The results basically showed that low level and intermediate level learners did not demonstrate knowledge of how new information interacts with word order, and that only advanced learners' production was native-like (Donaldson, 2012; Hertel, 2003). Chini (2002) showed a clear developmental sequence in L2 Italian discourse: whereas low and intermediate learners were able to use the existential construction “*esserci* ‘there is’ + S” and the presentative construction “*esserci* ‘there is’ + S + *che* ‘that’...”, only advanced learners used the “unaccusative V + NP” construction to the same extent as native speakers. Andorno (2012) confirmed this result, but also showed that even advanced learners were different from native speakers in respect to the textual function of the VS word order. From a language awareness perspective, Callies and Keller (2008) showed that even near-native German-speaking learners of L2 English lack conscious awareness and explicit knowledge of the linguistic devices which are used to highlight information in a text.

Past research on the introduction of a referent in discourse primarily focused on the marking for newness at the NP level (Chini, 2005; Crosthwaite, 2014; Crosthwaite et al., 2018; Nakahama, 2009; Ryan, 2016). L2 studies of the syntactic position of the new referent at the utterance level are less numerous. Hendriks (1998) showed that L1 Chinese L2 German learners used the postverbal position to mark new information to the same extent as native speakers. Turco (2008) and Aleksandrova (2012) also confirmed this tendency. Moreover, Turco (2008) showed that L1 French L2 Italian learners primarily postposed the new referent with the existential construction and the bi-clausal presentative construction, but much less with the “unaccusative V + NP” construction (as described by Chini, 2002).

These studies on syntax-discourse interface and discourse referent introduction all confirm the difficulty of the “Unaccusative Trap”.

Information Organization

Languages often provide several options for describing the same event. When producing an utterance, the speaker must make three different types of choices: lexical choices (choosing particular words over others), structural choices (between different syntactic constructions) and contextual choices (expressing information or not, according to the knowledge shared with the interlocutor). These choices reflect the way in which the speaker wants to formulate his discourse, his “perspective” on what is being said. Perspective taking, or information organization, represents a challenge in L2 acquisition because the target language may involve subtle principles that are not easy for learners to recognize. A number of studies have examined these principles in different conceptual domains, such as time, space, events, and entities (Carroll & Lambert, 2003, 2006; Flecken et al., 2015; Gerwien & von Stutterheim, 2022; Lambert et al., 2022; Tomita, 2013). They focused on the extent to which learners succeed in the planning of their discourse as formulated in Levelt’s (1989) model, and provided empirical evidence supporting the fact that L2 learners tend to retain the underlying principles of their native language⁴. Carroll and von Stutterheim (2002) even suggested that “recognition of these principles constitutes one of the ultimate hurdles in gaining full proficiency in a second language” (p. 366).

⁴ L2 learners evidence conceptualization transfer from their L1 in different aspects: L1 French L2 English learners link utterances via causal instead of temporal relations in narratives (Carroll & Lambert, 2003); L1 French L2 German use path adjunct to express the location of the entity instead of the contours of the ground in motion events description (Flecken et al., 2015); L1 English and Spanish L2 German learners use object-centered perspective instead of a spatially-based perspective in descriptive tasks (Carroll & von Stutterheim, 2002).

Research Questions

This review of previous studies showed that learners, especially at lower levels of proficiency, are not very aware of how new information interacts with word order at the utterance level, and have difficulty with the information organization at the discourse level. The present study analyzes the function of referent introduction in L1 French L2 Chinese narratives in order to understand how learners construct a cohesive narrative in a second language. Its aims to identify the developmental path of L1 French L2 Chinese learners at three levels of proficiency for the following research questions:

RQ 1: At the utterance level, how is the information structure mapped onto syntax (ordering of given/new information in syntactic constructions)? Do learners use the same syntactic construction(s) as native speakers to introduce the new (supporting) protagonists in narratives?

RQ 2: At the discourse level, which domain of reference or perspective is chosen as the given information to introduce new information and achieve discourse cohesion (spatial vs. temporal vs. entity anchoring)? Do learners follow the principles of information organization of their target language?

The study

Participants

The participants in this study fell into five groups (see Table 1): two groups of native speakers (French and Chinese speakers) and three groups of L1 French L2 Chinese learners ($N = 110$). The level of proficiency in the L2 for low and intermediate learners was controlled based on their grades in their university programs. Low learners had received approximately 400 hours of classroom training at the end of the first year of their bachelor's degree; according to their program, their average level corresponds to A2 on the CEFR scale. They learned the existential construction a year prior to the data collection, and the locative

inversion as well as the bi-clausal presentative construction a few months prior to the experiment. Intermediate learners had received around 900 hours of classroom training at the end of the third year of their bachelor's degree, which corresponds to level B2. They had all spent at least a month in Chinese-speaking countries at the time of the corpus collection.

Advanced Chinese learners have spent long periods of time in Chinese-speaking countries and had over ten years of learning experience in the language. Unlike the other groups of participants, who were all university students in France or China at the time of recording, advanced level learners were teachers of L2 Chinese in the French secondary education system.

Table 1

Participant information

	<i>n</i> (male / female)	Mean (SD) age	length of exposure	length of residence
French native speakers (Fr)	24 (12/12)	23 (4.4)	n/a	n/a
Chinese native speakers (Ch)	24 (12/12)	22 (2.6)	n/a	n/a
Low learners (Low)	24 (8/16)	22 (3.9)	3;3 (1;9)	0;2 (0;4)
Intermediate learners (Int)	24 (7/17)	22 (1.3)	5;2 (2;1)	0;9 (0;6)
Advanced learners (Adv)	14 (7/7)	40 (10.5)	11;6 (4;9)	5;5 (4;7)

Note. The mean (standard deviation) length of classroom exposure to Chinese and residence in a Chinese speaking country are given in “year(s);month(s)”.

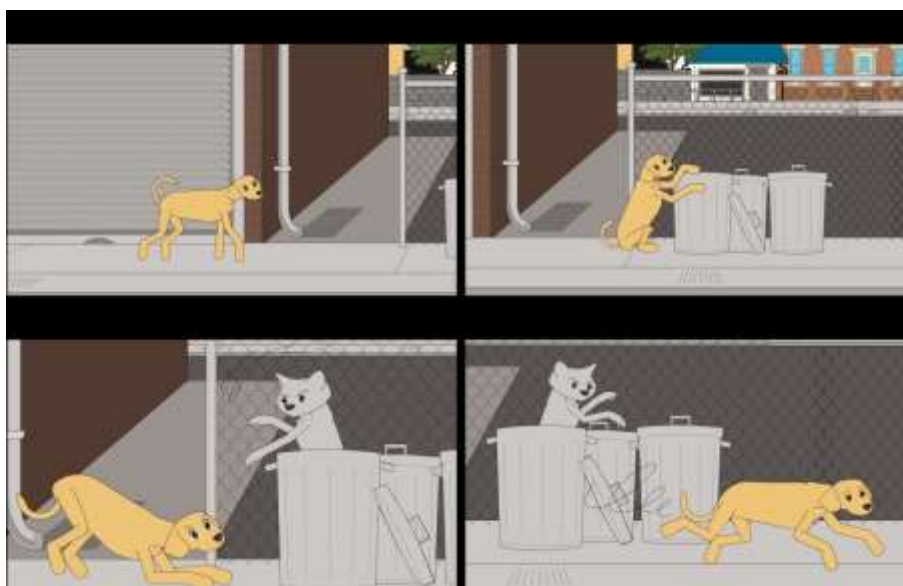
Materials

The oral corpus collection was based on a comic strip composed of twelve sequences. It included a first sequence that introduced the main protagonist, a little dog looking for something to eat. It was followed by a training sequence which was used by the experimenter to present the procedure to the participant. This was followed by the eight target sequences that were under analysis (see Figure 1). They were interspersed with two sequences used as distractors. The target sequences, as well as the training sequences, were built on the same

model and each introduced a new protagonist. They were all composed of four drawings. The second image showed the main protagonist approaching a three-dimensional entity which was the spatial point of reference for the appearance of the new (supporting) protagonist in the following image. The third image revealed the sudden and unexpected appearance of the new protagonist that came out of the entity introduced in the previous image. The last image showed the dog leaving the scene.

Figure 1

Example of target item



Procedure

The experimenter assigned the elicited task to each participant individually. He briefly presented the support, the main protagonist and his journey, and then gave the instructions to the participant. He/she was asked first to browse the entire comic strip, in order to get familiarized with the overall story, then to narrate it using the images. The participants were instructed to retell the story in the third person, as if they were speaking to a native adult speaker who was not physically present during the collection, who did not know the story and had no visual access to the comic strip. They were also instructed to tell a story rather than providing a static description of each image. The learners had at their disposal a small list of

Chinese nouns with their French translations, which were assumed to be unknown (e.g., *lājītǒng* 垃圾桶 ‘trash can’, *sōngshǔ* 松鼠 ‘squirrel’).

Coding System

The data was recorded, then transcribed and coded with the CLAN software of the CHILDES system (MacWhinney, 2000). The discourse was segmented into utterances. The total number of utterances analyzed was 880 (eight target items per story by a total of 110 speakers). Each target utterance introducing a new supporting protagonist, other than the main protagonist (the little dog), was coded at two levels: at the syntactic level, the construction used, as well as the locative phrase expression and position; at the information level, the perspective taking (spatial vs. temporal vs. entity anchoring), and ordering of the topic/focus components. The marking for newness at the NP level (with the indefinite determiner “*yī* 一 ‘one’ + classifier” in Chinese) was also coded, but since the three groups of learners showed no difficulty with this indefinite marker, the results were not discussed in this study.⁵ All the examples below come from this corpus; the abbreviation of the group and the number of the participants are noted in parentheses.

Results

This section reports the experiment results obtained by applying the *quaestio* discourse analysis model to the corpus collected from the five groups of participants. It first details the syntactic constructions used to introduce the new protagonists in discourse (Section 4.1), and the expression and position of the locative phrase in the utterance (Section 4.2). When the data followed a normal distribution, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) parametric test

⁵ A one-way analysis of variance (Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test) showed no statistically significant difference between the Chinese native speakers and the three groups of learners, $\chi^2(3) = 4.73$, $p = .193$, $\varepsilon^2 = .056$ ($Mdn = 1.00$ for each group).

was used to compare the means of the five groups. Otherwise, a Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test on medians was used. A significant level of $p < 0.05$ is assumed throughout the experiment.

Syntactic Construction

Canonical Word Order

A one-way ANOVA on the canonical predicative construction (11)-(12) showed a statistically significant difference between the groups (see Figure 2), $F(4,105) = 45.5$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.634$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed that French native speakers ($M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.18$) used it more frequently than the other four groups, and that low learners ($M = 0.40$, $SD = 0.33$) used it more frequently than Chinese native speakers ($M = 0.08$, $SD = 0.13$) and the two other groups of learners; intermediate learners ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.17$) and advanced learners ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 0.05$) were not different from each other and from Chinese native speakers.

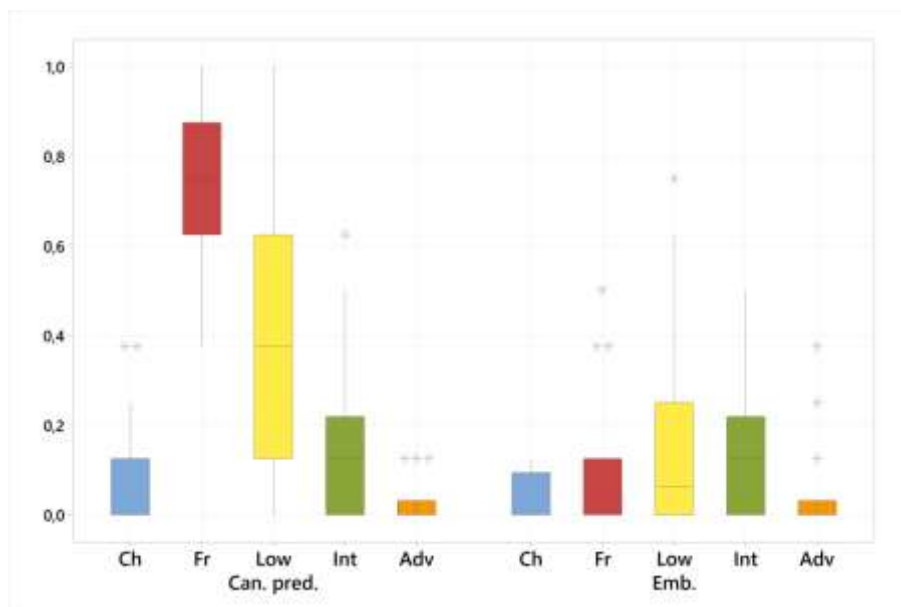
- (11) 忽然一个工人从下水道口出去。(Low-20)
 hūrán yī-gè gōngrén cóng xiàshuǐdàokǒu chū-qu
 suddenly one-CLF worker from manhole exit-thither
 'Suddenly a worker comes out of the manhole.'
- (12) Soudain un travailleur sort du trou. (Fr-18)
 suddenly a worker exits of.the hole
 'Suddenly a worker comes out of the hole.'

The embedded introduction (13) was mainly used by low and intermediate learners ($Mdn = 0.13$ for both groups), but a one-way ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test) failed to show a significant difference between the groups (see Figure 2), $\chi^2(4) = 9.19$, $p = 0.056$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.089$.

- (13) 小狗看到一个鱼。(Low-24)
 xiǎo gǒu kàndào yī-gè yú
 little dog see one-CLF fish
 'The little dog sees a fish.'

Figure 2

Canonical word order: Canonical predicative construction and embedded introduction



Notes. Ch. = Chinese native speakers. Fr = French native speakers. Low = low learners. Int = intermediate learners. Adv = advanced learners. Can. pred. = canonical predicative construction. Emb. = embedded introduction

Non-canonical Word Order

A one-way ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test) on the bi-clausal presentative construction (14) showed a statistically significant difference between the groups (see Figure 3), $\chi^2(4) = 11.1$, $p = 0.026$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.102$. Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons indicated only one difference: intermediate level learners ($Mdn = 0.25$) used this construction more frequently than French native speakers ($Mdn = 0.00$).

- (14) 可是有个小猫从那个垃圾桶出来。(Int-15)
 kěshì yǒu gè xiǎo māo cóng nà-gè lājītǒng chū-lai
 but exist CLF small cat from this-CLF trash.can exit-hither
 ‘But a small cat comes out of that trash can.’

A one-way ANOVA (Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test) on locative inversion (15) showed a statistical difference between groups (see Figure 3), $\chi^2(4) = 71.3$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.654$. Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons indicated that Chinese speakers ($Mdn = 0.75$) used it more than the other four groups; advanced learners ($Mdn = 0.50$) used it more than French native speakers ($Mdn = 0.06$) and the two other groups of learners;

there was no difference between low learners ($Mdn = 0.00$), intermediate learners ($Mdn = 0.00$), and French native speakers.

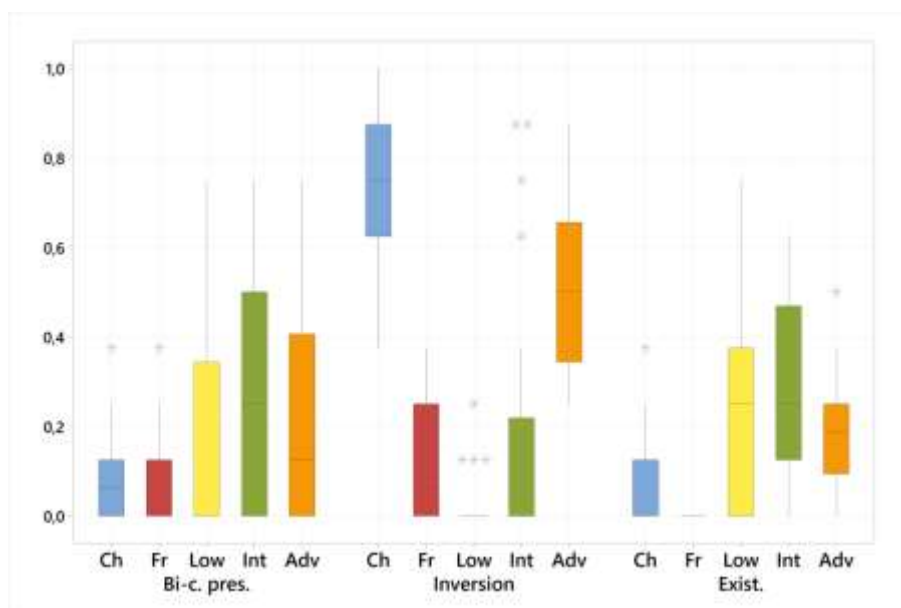
- (15) 然后从小洞里面冒出一个兔子。(Adv-17)
 ránhòu cóng xiǎo dòng lǐmian mào-chu yī-gè tùzi
 then from small hole inside emerge-out one-CLF rabbit
 ‘Then a small rabbit emerges from the small hole.’

A one-way ANOVA on the existential construction (16) showed a statistical difference between groups (see Figure 3), $F(4,105) = 13.00$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.331$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey’s HSD revealed that low learners ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.21$) and intermediate learners ($M = 0.28$, $SD = 0.20$) used it more frequently than Chinese native speakers; no difference was found between Chinese ($M = 0.07$, $SD = 0.12$) and French native speakers ($M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.00$), between the three groups of learners, and between advanced learners ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.15$) and Chinese native speakers.

- (16) 洞里面有一个鼹鼠。(Int-09)
 dòng lǐmian yǒu yī-gè yǎnshǔ
 hole inside exist one-CLF mole
 ‘There is a mole inside the hole.’

Figure 3

Non-canonical word order: Bi-clausal presentative construction, locative inversion and existential construction



Notes. Ch. = Chinese native speakers. Fr = French native speakers. Low = low learners. Int = intermediate learners. Adv = advanced learners. Bi-C. pres. = bi-clausal presentative construction. Exist. = existential construction.

Locative Phrase: Spatial Point of Reference

An important characteristic of the materials used in this study is that the new supporting protagonists are all introduced in respect to a particular spatial point of reference which is represented in the second image of each target sequence. The reference to the entity used to do so is first introduced in a preceding utterance (17a)-(18a), and then (explicitly or implicitly) maintained as topic (given information) when introducing the new protagonist (17b)-(18b).

- (17) a. 它遇到一个垃圾桶,
 tā yùdào yī-gè lājītǒng
 3SG come.across one-CLF trash.can
 ‘It comes across a trash can,’
- b. 从垃圾桶里钻出来一只猫。(Ch-20)
 cóng lājītǒng=li zuān-chu-lai yī-zhī māo
 from trash.can=inside slip-out-hither one-CLF cat
 ‘a cat comes out of the trash can.’
- (18) a. Il arrive ensuite près d’ un gazon.
 3SG arrive then near a lawn.
 ‘Then it arrives near a lawn,’
- b. et soudain de la terre sort une taupe. (Fr-06)
 and suddenly from the ground exits a mole
 ‘and suddenly a mole comes out of the ground.’

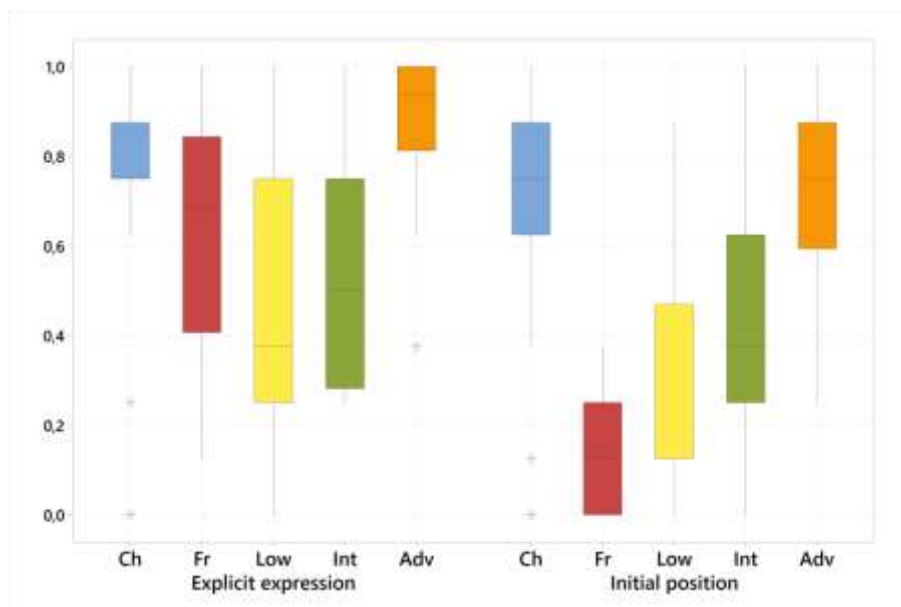
A one-way ANOVA was performed in order to determine to what extent the participants explicitly maintained the topical spatial point of reference with a locative phrase when introducing a new protagonist (17b)-(18b). The test was statistically significant (see Figure 4), $F(4,105) = 6.81, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.206$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey’s HSD indicated that Chinese native speakers ($M = 0.79, SD = 0.24$) and advanced learners ($M = 0.87, SD = 0.19$) had similar scores; low learners ($M = 0.50, SD = 0.31$) and intermediate learners ($M = 0.57, SD = 0.26$) were not different from each other and from French native speakers

($M = 0.60$, $SD = 0.26$) but these three groups all scored lower than the Chinese native speakers and the advanced learners.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test whether participants differed in the extent to which the locative phrase occurred in the initial position of the utterance (17b)-(18b). The test was also statistically significant (see Figure 4), $F(4,105) = 26.91$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.506$. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD showed that Chinese native speakers ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 0.26$) scored higher than French native speakers ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.14$), low learners ($M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.25$) and intermediate learners ($M = 0.43$, $SD = 0.26$), but were not different from the advanced learners ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 0.23$); low and intermediate learners were not significantly different from each other; but these two groups scored lower than the advanced learners.

Figure 4

Locative phrase: Explicit expression and initial position



Discussion

L1 Discourse

French speakers rarely modified the SV word order, and mostly introduced the focal new protagonist in pre-verbal position: “NP + V (+LocP)”. These utterances were integrated

in the chronology of the story with the same syntactic construction as those describing the actions of the main character (temporal anchoring).

Chinese speakers changed the canonical word order using the locative inversion to introduce the focal new protagonist in post-verbal position: “LocP + V + NP”. This choice had two consequences. At the utterance level, the information structure followed the given-new and topic-focus order. At the discourse level, a clear referential linkage from one utterance to another was created in the space domain (spatial anchoring): the focal entity of a preceding utterance was maintained in utterance initial position as the topic, in reference to which the new protagonist was introduced. This type of referential movement, which Daneš (1974) calls *simple linear thematic progression*, is well known in Chinese (Zhu, 1995), and has also proven to be important for establishing cohesion in descriptive discourse (Arslangul & Watorek, 2021).

Developmental Path in L2

The aim of the present study was to investigate how L1 French L2 Chinese learners achieve discourse cohesion, and more precisely how they manage the introduction of new protagonists in narratives at three levels of proficiency. Before examining the details of this developmental path, it is first possible to notice that the three groups of learners rarely used the embedded introduction (entity anchoring). These adult L2 learners all know how to fashion coherent narratives, their discourse skills were already fully developed in their L1, from which they transferred the basic principle that new protagonists who play a role in the storyline should be introduced in a prominent way.

Utterance Level: Syntactic construction

Low learners constitute the group of learners that used the canonical predicative construction to the greatest extent (40% of all their introductions). The SV word order is the most common in colloquial French but also in Chinese, as learners were easily able to notice

in their input. Thus it may be considered language neutral, unspecific word order, which allows them to map the most prominent semantic role available in the utterance onto the subject in initial position, as the Unmarked Alignment Hypothesis (Pienemann, 1998, 2005) predicts.

When the NP-referent with the highest level of control also happens to belong to the focus of the utterance, the learner is faced with a choice between the principles of Controller First and Focus Last (Klein & Perdue, 1993), which are contradictory in this particular situation. In this study, low learners gave up the Focus Last principle (utterance level) and indicated the accessibility status of the new referent with the sole indefinite determiner “yī 一 ‘one’ + classifier” (phrase level), as for example *yī-gè yǎnshǔ* 一个鼹鼠 <one-CLF mole> in (13). It allowed them to clearly mark the referent for newness with a simple and well-established linguistic device in their L2 system without moving away from the SV word order.

It is however important to acknowledge that low learners also happened to deviate from the canonical word order, using the existential construction (23%), the bi-clausal presentation (17%), and to a much lesser extent, the locative inversion (3%). Also in the scope of the Processability theory, Håkansson et al. (2002) formulated the *Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis* and argued that the transfer of morphosyntactic structures from L1 can occur only if the L2 has developed to the point at which this particular material can be processed. Even if constructions of non-canonical word order are available in French, it seems that low learners had not totally developed the processing prerequisites needed to transfer these L1 linguistic devices to L2 consistently.

With the development in proficiency, intermediate level discourse was characterized by a clear evolution toward the target pattern. These learners did not rely on the canonical predicative construction anymore (15%); they went beyond the unmarked alignment, and

started to prepose the locative phrase using the existential construction (28%) and the locative inversion (17%).

In intermediate learners' data, there were 4 occurrences (2.1%) of a syntactic structure that differed from the native-like word orders, with the locative phrase followed by the new referent ("LocP + NP + V"):

- (19) ?从这个洞一个兔子出来。(Int-15)
 cóng zhè-gè dòng yī-gè tùzi chū-lai
 from this-CLF hole one-CLF rabbit exit-hither
 'From this hole a rabbit comes out.'

The fact that these occurrences were very rare shows that learners did not consider it as a totally acceptable and productive structure. Learners seem to know that in order to prepose the LocP, the NP that refers to the new protagonist has to be moved out of the subject position of the canonical SV construction. Therefore, the tendency to prepose the LocP is related to their ability to postpose the NP after an unaccusative verb ("V + NP" pattern), and it is clear from previous studies that it is generally not frequent at this level of proficiency.

It is also worth noting that this group is the one that used the bi-clausal presentative construction most often (29%). They may have considered this construction, which is also available in their L1, as a more dedicated tool to markedly identify a new referent in discourse (as in Turco, 2008).

Contrary to the results of several previous studies (i.a., Donaldson, 2012; Hertel, 2003), intermediate learners indicated some knowledge of how new information interacts with word order. However, as Chini (2002) and Andorno (2012) demonstrated for L2 Italian, these learners had the tendency (even if not statistically significant) to select the existential construction over the locative inversion.

As for advanced learners, they achieved native-like pattern as they organized the utterance in given-new and topic-focus order with the monoclausal presentative constructions.

The only difference from native speakers' productions lied in the lexical-semantic characteristics of the predicate.

Whereas Chinese native speakers postposed the NP that refers to the new protagonist after a directional verb compound, such as *tiào-chū(-lái)* 跳出(来) 'jump-out(-hither)', advanced learners did so after the verb *yǒu* 有 'exist' of the existential construction to a greater extent. They used less change of location verbs that are at the top of the Split Intransitivity Hierarchy (Sorace, 1995). This tendency to avoid motion verbs (and compounds) and to select the existential verb is in line with previous studies (Xue, 2005; Yang et al., 2007; Yuan, 1999; Zhang, 2011), which suggested three explanations for the difficulty of the acquisition of unaccusative verbs.

First, they pointed out that the locative inversion is not frequent in the learners' input, especially at low and intermediate levels. Second, whereas the external argument of the unergative verbs has to move to the pre-verbal position, the movement of the internal argument of the unaccusative verbs is optional. This type of verb is then characterized by syntactic optionality: the construction is most of the time an alternative construction for its canonical counterpart, which can be confusing for learners. Finally, the use of locative inversion is, to a great extent, determined by discourse constraints that learners may not be aware of.

These phenomena certainly contributed to the general tendency observed in the present study, it is also possible to add a number of other observations captured during the analysis.

In our data collection materials, all the new protagonists appeared for the first time as rushing out of a location. According to Talmy's (2000) typological framework, French and Chinese belong to two different categories of languages in respect to how they express motion events. Our data confirmed this tendency: whereas the motion events were dominantly

described with the simple path verb *sortir* “exit” by French native speakers, Chinese native speakers used a directional verb compound to encode path in the directional complement (*chū* 出 “out”), while the verb added an information about the manner of motion (*pǎo* 跑 “run”, *zuān* 钻 “slip”, etc.). Comparing the two languages, it is clear that Chinese is complex as far as the linguistic means used in motion events expression for learners who speak French as their L1. What is more, a large number of studies showed that the typological properties of the L1 have an influence on the encoding of motion events in L2 even at a fairly advanced level (Cadierno, 2008; Hendriks & Hickmann, 2015; Sharpen, 2016; on L2 Chinese see Arslangul, 2015; Arslangul et al. 2018; Wu, 2014; Wu et al., 2022). This can partly explain why advanced learners avoided the use of directional verb compounds to a certain extent.

Furthermore, the verb of the existential construction denotes an unbounded stative situation that does not need to be marked for perfectivity by the aspectual particle *-le* 了, which also constitutes a well-known difficulty in L2 Chinese. Besides, the fact that the existential construction does not have a direct canonical alternative represents a regularity that can be considered as a facilitating factor. As a result, the existential verb *yǒu* 有 ‘exist’ may be bound to the “LocP + V + NP” word order (Zhang, 2011).⁶

Furthermore, the post-verbal NP of the existential construction can refer to an animate or inanimate entity that is introduced in the discourse. In the case of the locative inversion, it only refers to animate referents which participate to the change of location and present

⁶ It is worth noting that, in the scope of Construction Grammar, Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) proposed the concept of *Collostructional analysis* which precisely measures the degree of attraction/repulsion of a lemma to a slot in one particular construction. In L2 research, Ellis and Larsen-Freeman (2009) also accounted for the emergence of constructions from their frequency distributions in the input.

semantic properties of the controller of the action, usually in subject position.⁷ Therefore, using the existential verb has two advantages. First, it enables learners to follow the pattern of the L2 they have identified at the utterance and discourse levels (topic-focus order and spatial anchoring). Second, it allows them to still conceive the post-verbal NP as a more prototypical object. This way, they avoided postponing an argument that could also occur in subject position. These learners were still reluctant to the “unaccusative V + NP” pattern with an inherently directed motion verb (or compound), but instead of using the SV word order as low learners did, they went around the “unaccusative trap”, and distinguished themselves from the native speakers, by choosing a verb that is lower on the Split Intransitivity Hierarchy.

Discourse Level: Information Organization

The function of referential introduction in Chinese was mainly conveyed by the locative inversion; the reference to space was explicit, in utterance initial position, and assigned the role of perspective anchoring. In order to develop their discourse competence and achieve native-like proficiency, learners have to identify the linguistic means available in L2 as well as to determine which of the spatial vs. temporal anchoring is used in Chinese to ensure discourse cohesion.

Low learners have not acquired the most important syntactic construction to do so for the present narrative task, which was the locative inversion, and to a lesser extent, the existential construction. They were thus not able to take into consideration the information organization of their target language. They introduced all protagonists (main and new) in the same utterance initial position, and their actions were organized in chronological order. This strategy was the simplest way from a syntactic and discourse point of view to deal with the production task.

⁷ For contributions of animacy to grammatical function assignment and word order, see Branigan et al. (2008); Comrie (1989); Li et al. (1993).

Intermediate learners developed a complex L2 system but they still were not aware of the principles of information organization in Chinese. This is not surprising since many studies analyzing L2 discourse have found evidence that learners, even at very advanced stages of acquisition, tend to retain the underlying principles of their L1 (Carroll & von Stutterheim, 2002; Lambert et al., 2022; Tomita, 2013).

Advanced learners, however, achieved native-like pattern. As Chinese native speakers, they used a spatial point of reference as the given information to introduce the new protagonists, i.e. they choose the spatial anchoring to ensure discourse cohesion.

Limitations

The present study concentrated at the utterance level on the syntactic marking of information structure; it did not touch upon the prosodic focus marking, and the interaction between the prosodic and syntactic means of focus marking. It is clear that learners' use of syntactic positioning to mark focus increased with their level of proficiency. However, more work is needed to determine if learners can use prosodic marking when they do not use syntactic marking, or if they can combine the two levels of focus marking, with utterance final position on the one hand, and extended pitch accent and longer duration on the other hand (Yang & Chen, 2014; Zhang & Pan, 2019).

The data analyzed in this article was elicited by using a comic strip especially created for the study. It was designed to incite participants to describe the appearance of the new protagonists introduced in the target items with a locative inversion. In order to represent the appearances as unambiguously as possible, the new protagonists were represented as rushing out unexpectedly from inside a three-dimensional entity. Furthermore, in order to prompt the use of the locative inversion, the target items had to create the discourse conditions of use of this construction. To do so, the three-dimensional entity used as a spatial point of reference to introduce the new protagonists was clearly introduced in the second image of each sequence.

This given information was then available to be referred to in the locative inversion. The comic strip had the advantage to guide the productions and thus making it easier to compare the different groups of speakers, but it also undoubtedly contributed to the results in the present study, and especially to the high frequency of the locative inversion and reference to space in the Chinese data. Future research, using other materials representing different conditions of appearance is therefore needed to complete the present study.

Conclusions

The corpus analysis carried out in this study allowed us to understand the relation between the word order at the syntactic level and the information organization at the discourse level in Chinese and French.

Additionally, the marked differences between the three groups of learners have been discussed. Their L2 system follows an evolution from the unmarked alignment to native-like pattern. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing a developmental sequence from the canonical to the non-canonical word order, and the existential construction before the locative inversion.

From the information organization standpoint, there is a switch from temporal to spatial anchoring at the advanced level. This demonstrates that, contrary to previous results, advanced learners, who have not totally mastered the formal system of the target language for the lexical-semantic characteristics of the predicate used, can first achieve native-like pattern in the principles of information organization in L2 discourse.

As an extension of the present study, it would be pertinent to test when the transfer of morphosyntactic structures from L1 can occur in L2 in order to assess whether learners that frequently use the locative inversion in their L1 (e.g., Italian) follow the same developmental path in L2 Chinese as French-speaking learners.

As an extension of the present study, it would be pertinent to test further the Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis (Håkansson et al., 2002) in order to assess whether learners that frequently use the locative inversion in their L1 (e.g., Italian) are able to transfer this syntactic construction from L1 to L2 from a lower level of proficiency and follow a different developmental path in L2 Chinese from French-speaking learners.

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