

## Referential cohesion in Hungarian: a developmental study

Gabriella Fekete  
Université Lyon 2  
ISH-DDL, 14 Avenue Berthelot 69007 Lyon, France  
gabriella.fekete@univ-lyon2.fr

Producing a narrative text is a complex task for which referential cohesion is essential. Speakers are required to introduce referents, as well as to maintain, switch and reintroduce them. Even though these discursive functions are shared across all languages, each language uses different linguistic means to appropriately establish referential cohesion. Much work has been devoted to studying how children develop the ability to successfully establish referential cohesion in narrative texts (Kail and Hickmann 1992; Hickmann et al. 1995; Jisa 2000). Much of this work has shown that children's mastery of referential cohesion develops very gradually and is intricately influenced by development in syntax. Depending on their mastery of the variety of linguistic forms used for referential purposes, speakers can employ different strategies such as a thematic subject strategy, a nominal strategy or an anaphoric strategy (Wigglesworth 1997). Du Bois (1987) proposed that among the various structural configurations of arguments, some are preferred in discourse, and these one would be potentially universal.

Our study examines how Hungarian speakers establish referential cohesion in narrative texts. Our corpus is composed of narratives elicited from four groups (5-year-olds, 7/8-year-olds, 10/12-year-olds, and adults) of Hungarian native speakers. The narrative task used to elicit the narratives is a series of pictures with no text (*Frog, Where are you?* Mayer, 1969), which has served as the basis for a number of cross-linguistic developmental studies (Berman and Slobin 1994). The series of pictures recounts the adventures of two principal characters (a boy and a dog) in search of their runaway frog. Over the course of the story the boy and the dog encounter a host of secondary characters (a mole, an owl, a swarm of bees and a deer).

We will focus, in particular, on the range of linguistic forms employed to maintain and to reintroduce the principal characters as subjects. Hungarian is a pro-drop language, and word order is very flexible and perhaps best described as being pragmatically determined. We test the hypothesis that Hungarian children organize their narratives in a picture by picture fashion whereas adults organise their narrations around episodes. The children and adults of our corpus make use of different strategies, although their preferred argument structure already follows similar patterns from the age of 5. We explain our results by taking into account both linguistic and pragmatic development.

### References

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