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Indice

RECENSIONI

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The construction of textual cohesion in narrative texts: evidence from different tasks by Italian children from 4 to 10 years old

This work focuses on the way Italian informants of different ages (4, 7, and 10 year old children and adults) build discourse cohesion and thematic coherence with respect to two different narrative tasks. The data was collected using the video clip The Finite Story (Dimroth, 2006) and a sequence of 30 pictures composing a story (created by C. Dimroth as well). The characteristic of these two tasks is to involve a non prototypical flux of information since the episodes to retell force speakers to continually contrast entities, time spans and positive or negative polarities, besides of course maintaining or reintroducing the reference to some of the preceding referential domains. These tasks should force speakers to employ anaphoric means such as additive particles, temporal adverbs, polarity markings and prosodic strategies etc. This work will essentially explore three subjects: a. the cognitive processes guiding Italian children's narrations at the different ages considered here, and consequently the different comprehension they have of the tasks proposed; b. the linguistic means children use to make the text cohesive; c. the influence of the typological specificities of Italian language on points (a) and (b). The results will be compared, as far as the available studies make it possible, to the ones relative to children of the same age learning German, Polish and French.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the way Italian children, aged from 4 to 10, build thematic coherence and discourse cohesion with respect to two different types of narrative tasks (cf. sections 1.1 and 1.2). In particular, we shall compare the different modalities by which children reproduce the proposed stimuli according to their different ages.

The peculiarity of the activities that the children accomplished is that of involving a non prototypical flow of information, namely varied referential restrictions: contrasts[1] of entities and polarities, maintenance of the same predicate, temporal shifts etc.

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[1] We shall adopt the notion of contrast proposed by Umbach (2004), which is based on comparability presupposing both similarity and dissimilarity.

The two stimuli we used to elicit our data have already been used in other studies, but with respect either to adults or to children learning an L1 other than Italian (cf. Benazzo *et al.* 2004; Dimroth *et al.* 2010; Giuliano 2012a; 2012b).

With respect to the tasks in question, we shall consider just some of the possible information configurations, and with respect to these we shall evaluate the way children report their conceptual content and the linguistic means used to establish anaphoric linkage with what comes previously. Then, by comparing children's narrative productions to those of adults, it will be possible to establish how close or how far are the very young subjects' retellings from those of adults for the different ages considered here. The analysis of adults' linguistic productions will allow us to say what is typical of the mature Italian "narrative perspective", with respect to our two specific tasks, and whether/how children make their narrations conform to this perspective, which can be driven by specific typological and pragmatic patterns. As a matter of fact, our two tasks, when tested on adults speaking different languages (French, Italian, Dutch, German, English), brought to the identification of typologically and pragmatically driven perspectives (cf. Dimroth *et al.* 2010; Giuliano 2012a; 2012b; cf. also section 2 for a discussion of this point)

Several studies in the last twenty years have debated the role of the mother tongue in shaping human beings' thought since very early childhood, both from a conceptual and linguistic point of view and from a textual and discourse perspective (cf., for instance, Bowermann 1996a/b; Hickmann / Hendriks 2009/2010; Giuliano / Di Maio 2007; Slobin 1987, 2003). Nevertheless, our data show that from four to ten children still have much to acquire in terms of "perspective".

We shall reserve the last section to a crosslinguistic comparison between our narrative results for Italian and what emerges from the study by Benazzo *et al.* (2004) with respect to the acquisition of Polish, French and German as L1s.

1. *The tasks*

Data for this study was collected using two different tasks: a short film called *The Finite Story* (Dimroth 2006), never tested on children, and a

sequence of thirty pictures that we shall call the "picture story" (created by Christine Dimroth as well), tested just on Polish, German and French children.

1.1. *The Finite Story*

The video clip *The Finite Story* is about three men, Mr Blue, Mr Green and Mr Red, living in three different flats of the same building, which one night catches fire. It is subdivided into several segments – the content of which is illustrated in table 1 *infra* – and involves several referential restrictions: *contrasts* of entity and polarity, maintenance of the same predication, temporal shifts etc., which force the narrator to employ a great variety of anaphoric means.

We will focus on three information structures (IS: I, II and III), each of which is repeated two or three times during the story (they are shaded in table 1; for acronyms, cf. the *Symbols and abbreviations* section at the end of the work), that have already been explored on adults native speakers of Italian, French, German and Dutch (cf. section 2).

Table 1*. The *Finite Story*

Nr	Film segment	IS wrt antecedent segment	Utterances with IS marking
1/2	Introduction protagonists / flats		
3	Mr Blue going to bed, sleeping		
4	Mr Green going to bed, sleeping	**I: Different TT, different TE, same POLARITY, same PREDICATE (wrt 03)	*Anche il Sign. Verde va a letto* ('Mr. Green also goes to bed')
5	Mr Red going to bed, sleeping	I: Different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED (wrt 03/04)	*IL SIGN. ROSSO^2 va a letto* ('MR RED goes to bed')
6	Fire on the roof		
7	Mr Green sleeping		
8	Mr Red sleeping	I: different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED (wrt 07)	*Il Sign. Rosso fa la stessa cosa* ('So does Mr. Red')

2 Capital letters mark prosodical prominence.

Nr	Film segment	IS wrt antecedent segment	Utterances with IS marking
9	Mr Blue not sleeping	II: Different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 03/04)	*Solo il Sign. Blu non dorme* ('Only Mr. Blue does not sleep')
11	Mr Blue calling fire brigade		
12	Fireman in bathroom, not answering		
18	Fireman answering the phone	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 12)	*Questa volta il pompiere RISPONDE al telefono* ('This time the fireman DOES ANSWER/ ANSWERS the phone')
22	Arrival of fire engine		
24	Rescue net: Mr Green not jumping		
25	Mr Red not jumping		
26	Mr Blue jumping	II: different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24/25)	*Il Signor Blu invece SALta* ('Mr Blue on the other hand DOES JUMP/JUMPS')
27	Mr Green jumping	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24)	*Il Signor Verde alla fine SALta* ('Mr. Green eventually DOES JUMP/JUMPS')
28	Mr Red not jumping		
29	Mr Red jumping	III: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 28)	*Alla fine il Signor Rosso SALta* ('Finally Mr. Red DOES JUMP/JUMPS')
31	The happy end		

* This table illustrates just the segments our analysis is concerned with; **TE = Topic Entity = one of the protagonists; TT = Topic Time = the time span to which a specific event is anchored

As to the first information structure (cf. segments 4, 5 and 8 in table 1), this is the prototypical configuration for setting up a contrast in the domain of protagonists (Topic Entities or TE in our terminology, for which cf. section 2), since it involves a shift in the domain of topicalized entities but maintenance of the levels of polarity and predicate. So, considering the types of means available in Italian, we expect informants to use additive particles (It. *anche, pure:* Engl. *also, too, as well*;):

    (1)   It.a: Il   Signor Blu va   a letto
                    The Mr Blue   goes to bed
                    'Mr Blu goes to bed'
            It.b: *Anche* il Signor Verde va   a letto
                    Also   the Mr Green   goes to bed
                    'Mr Green *also* goes to bed'

or to exploit a prosodic prominence on the entity:

    (2)   It.a: Il Signor Blu va a letto
                    'Mr Blu goes to bed'
            It.b: *Il SiGNOR VERde* va a letto
                    'MR GREEN goes to bed'

It is also possible to employ verbal periphrases (It. *fare la stessa cosa:* Engl. *to do the same thing*):

    (3)   It.a: Il Signor Blu va a letto
                    'Mr Blu goes to bed'
            It.b: Il Signor Verde fa lo stesso
                    'Mr Green *does the same*'

For Configuration II (cf. segments 9 and 26 in table 1), speakers have to convey that a situation applying for the first two characters (Mr Green and Mr Red) does not apply for the third one (Mr Blue), since we have a change in the TE domain, an opposite polarity but the maintenance of the predicate. For this configuration speakers can either mark the contrast on the TE or highlight the change of polarity. If speakers opt for the TE contrast, they can apply means such as lexical modifiers (It. *invece, in compenso, diversamente da Mr X* etc.: Engl. *on the other hand, instead, differently from Mr X*) or restrictive particles (It. *solo, solamente, soltanto:* Engl. *only, just*):

    (4)   It.a: Il Signor Verde continua a   dormire
                    The Mr Green   continues to sleep-INF
                    'Mr Green keeps on sleeping'
            It.b: Anche il Signor Rosso continua a   dormire
                    Also   the Mr Red   continues to sleep-INF
                    'Mr Red also keeps on sleeping'

It.c: *Solo* il Signor Blu non dorme / Il Signor Blu *invece*[3] non dorme
Only the Mr Blue   not sleeps / The Mr Blue instead not sleeps
'Only Mr Blue *does not* sleep / Mr Blue *instead* does not sleep'

Polarity can be seen as *the strength of assertion*, and in Italian it is supported by negation, auxiliaries and/or prosody. For the change from negative to positive assertion, it can be marked, theoretically, by the pitch accent on the lexical verb (cf. ex. It. 5c).

(5) It.a: Il Signor Verde non vuole saltare
     The Mr Green not wants jump.INF
     'Mr Green does not want to jump'

It.b: Neanche il Signor Rosso vuole saltare
     Neither Mr Red wants to jump
     'Mr Red does not want to jump either'

It.c: Il   Signor Blu *SALta*
     The Mr Blue   JUMps
     'Mr Blue *DOES* jump / *JUMps'*

As the comparison between the Italian (c) utterance in 5 and its English translation shows, in Italian it is not possible to separate the finite component of a lexical verb (*Mr Blue does jump*). For the contrastive stress on the lexical verb, theoretically, the latter can be exploited to mark information structure both in Romance and Germanic languages, but intonational prominence plays a greater role in Germanic languages (cf. Féry 2001; Dimroth *et al.* 2010; Andorno / Interlandi 2010). Furthermore, for Romance languages this is not a common strategy and a contrastive accent on a light verb (auxiliary, copula, modal), seems even more uncommon[4]. Still theoretically, in Italian the change of polarity could be relatively highlighted by appropriate lexical means, that is *proprio, effettivamente* (Engl. *actually*) as in the following *ad hoc* example:

(6) Il   Signor Rosso non si lancia   //
     The Mr Red   not.. himself launches //

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[3] The Italian adverb *invece* normally has scope on entities.
[4] Although it is known that Romance languages mark both narrow and contrastive focus with a pitch accent (cfr., for example, Avesani / Vaira 2003), there is no systematic study dealing with the prosodic marking on the assertion component of a finite verb in this type of language.

il Signor Verde neppure   si   lancia //
the Mr Green   neither   himself   launches
il Signor Blu   *effettivamente* si   lancia
the Mr Blue   actually   himself   launches
'Mr Blue does not jump // Mr Green does not jump either //
Mr Blue *actually* jumps'

Nevertheless, these means are not to be considered as true assertion related markings, since they do not entail a real contrast of polarity but rather they signal the actual realisation of the event as opposed to a hypothetical event, and so have no real implication for the assertion.

Both for the first and second configurations, Italian has a specific syntactic strategy according to which the subject is placed after the verb in order to cotextually highlight its focus or contrastive status (for an overview of the parameters influencing Italian V-S structures, cf., for instance, Andorno 2012):

(7) a. Il   Signor Rosso va   a dormire
         The Mr   Red   goes to sleep.INF
         'Mr Red goes to sleep'
         Va   a dormire anche il Signor Blu
         Goes to sleep.INF also   the Mr   Blue
         'Mr Blue also goes to sleep'
     b. Il   Signor Rosso non vuole saltare
         the Mr Red   not wants jump-INF
         'Mr Red does not want to jump'
         salta invece il Signor Blu
         Jumps instead the Mr   Blue
         'Mr Blue instead jumps'

If there is a switch from a positive to a negative polarity, the means commented above are of course combined with negation.

As to the third configuration, speakers can either mark the change of polarity or the shift in the time span an event is anchored to (Topic Time or TT in our terminology) or both.

(8) Il Signor Rosso non vuole saltare
     'Mr Red does not want to jump'

> *Finalmente* il Signor Rosso *SALta*
> '*Finally* Mr Red *does* jumps'

As a matter of fact, time shift linking markings (temporal adverbs such as It. *finalmente, alla fine* etc.: Engl. *eventually / finally / at last*) are crucial for the third information configuration since, ideally, they are the only alternative to the polarity change devices that speakers can use to mark the contrast.

1.2. *The picture story*

The picture story consists of a sequence of thirty pictures forming a story about two characters, Mr Blue and Mr Red, who perform several actions, some of which are aimed at the liberation of a princess from a castle she is imprisoned in (we shall call this task "picture task"). The same task was used by Benazzo *et al.* (2004) to analyze children's narrative productions in French, German and Polish L1. The story is summarised in table 2, where cases correspond to the content of pictures; boldface letters and shades mark the contexts under focus. All the information configurations that we shall consider have an *additive meaning*.

Table 2. The picture story: content of the pictures

Nr	Picture	IS wrt antecedent segment	Utterances with IS marking
1 / 2 / 3 / 4	introduction "street", "princess", "Mr Red", "Mr Blue"		
5	R & B are in front of the church		
6	B leaves; R stays in front of the church		
7	R leaves	I: Different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED wrt 6	*anche / pure il Sign. Rosso se ne va* ('Mr Red *also* leaves')
8	R drinks an orange juice at the bar		
9	R drinks a 2nd orange juice at the bar		
10	R drinks a 3rd orange juice at the bar		
11	R leaves		

12	B walks along the street		
13	B smokes a cigarette		
14	B leaves by bus		
15	R is sitting on a bench 15.00		
16	R sleeps on the bench 15.30		
17	R sleeps on the bench 16.00	IV: Different and Continual TT, Same TE, same POL, same PRED wrt 16	*Il Sign. Rosso dorme ancora / sempre* ('Mr Red is *still* sleeping')
18	R is sitting on the bench and reads a newspaper 16.30		
19	R sleeps on the bench 17.00	V: Different but Not Continual TT, Same TE, same POL, same PRED wrt 18	*Il Sign. Rosso dorme ancora / di nuovo* ('Mr Red sleeps *again*')
20	R goes into the hardware store		
21	R comes out of the store with a ladder		
22	R walks to the hill		
23	B arrives with the bus		
24	B walks to the bar		
25	B drinks an orange juice	I: Different TT, different TE, same POL, same PRED wrt 8	*anche / pure il Sign. Blu beve un succo d'arancia* ('Mr Blue also drinks an orange juice')
26	B goes into the hardware store	I wrt 20	*anche / pure*
27	B comes out of the store with a ladder	I wrt 21	*anche / pure*
28	B walks to the hill	I wrt 22	*anche / pure*
29	B goes up the hill to the castle R is beside a tree		
30	B approaches the castle R picks up some apples		

In terms of referential flow, the segments in question involve contrasts of entities (segments 7, 25, 26, 27, 28) or of time spans (segment 19) or also temporal continuation (segment 17).

Pictures 7 and 25-28 correspond to the first information configuration commented on for *The Finite Story* stimulus, so we shall not focus on them longer. Conversely, pictures 17 and 19 involve new information structures (we marked them by IV et V, respectively), since the same actions are continued or repeated by the same character, a sequence which should lead informants to mark an additive relationship in the temporal domain (the same action is continued in IV and reiterated in V). So for these new configurations contrasts are concerned with time spans.

> (9) Configuration IV
>> a. Il Signor Rosso dorme sulla   panchina
>>   the Mr   Red   sleeps on-the bench
>>   'Mr Red is sleeping on the bench'
>> b. Il signor Rosso   *dorme ancora/sempre* sulla   panchina
>>   the Mr   Red   sleeps still / always   on-the bench
>>   'Mr Red *is still sleeping* on the bench'

> (10) Configuration V
>> Il Signor Rosso dorme *ancora / di nuovo / sempre*
>> the Mr   Red   sleeps *still   / again /   always*
>> 'Mr Red is (*still*) sleeping (*again*) '

With respect to these two configurations, it is necessary to remark that the Italian adverb *ancora* can have several functions. Two of them – the ones in question here – have a temporal meaning (cf. Engl. *still,* in ex. 9, and *again,* in ex. 10); the third function is quantitative (corresponding to Engl. *another / some more*: *Ne voglio ancora* = I want some more). The iterative and continual meanings of *ancora* can be clearly separated if the speaker chooses to employ the iterative expression *di nuovo* in alternation to continuative *ancora* (ex. 10). As to the adverb *sempre* (always), it can also take on a continuative or iterative temporal meaning, as emerges from examples 9 and 10.

The following table sums up the functions of Italian additive (quantitative, iterative or continual) expressions; the numbers *1, 2, 3* will be useful to distinguish specific functions for the same item.

Table 3. Additive particles in Italian

Languages	Non-Restricted Addition	Restricted Addition		
	Entities / places / processes	Entities	Time spans	
			Iterative Events	Continous Events
Italian	*anche* ('also, as well, too')	*ancora1* ('more')	*ancora2, di nuovo, sempre1* ('again')	*ancora3, sempre2* ('still')

For some of the episodes in the story, informants may exploit chronological expressions instead of additives, since a clock marks the temporal progression (cf. pictures 15-19).

During the task, the interviewer commented on the first four pictures, which introduce the set, the characters and the objective of the narrative (to discover who released the princess from the castle where she was imprisoned). On the basis of this introduction, the interviewee built his story picture by picture.

2. *The framework of analysis*

Configurations I, II and III have been studied by Dimroth *et al.* (2010) and Giuliano (2012b) with respect to adult native speakers of four languages: Dutch, German, French and Italian. As to configurations IV and V, they are discussed in Benazzo *et al.* (2004), both for adults and children, in relation to French, German and Polish.

For the first two studies, the authors state that the stimulus The Finite Story leads them to the identification of two typological perspectives: an assertion-related perspective and an entity/time-related perspective. As a matter of fact, when a polarity contrast from negative to positive assertion is involved in an information structure, Dutch and German native speakers mark the contrast on the assertion level, either by a contrastive stress on the finite lexical verb or auxiliary or by what Dimroth *et al.* (2010) call "assertion related particles", namely *doch/schon* (for German) and *toch/wel* (for Dutch)[5] (whose translation is relatively possible into French, by Fr. *bien* but not into Italian and English). For the same information configurations,

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[5] The highlighting function of these particles is comparable to that of the auxiliary *do* in English: Germ. er *doch* steht auf! = Engl. he does stand up!

native speakers of Romance languages and English prefer to mark the contrast by anaphoric means acting on the topic component of the utterance, at the levels of time or entities (cf. Dimroth *et al.* 2010; Giuliano 2012b) (for examples, cf. section 1.1, configurations I, II and III).

As to the study by Benazzo *et al.* (2004), it suggests that children are expected to cognitively follow the sequence provided below, referred to addition of entities, temporal iteration and continuation:

Scheme 1
    the function of *also* > the function of *more, again* > the function of *still*

The acquisitional and cognitive path that scheme 1 illustrates could however be specific to the acquisition of the languages the authors focus on.

The various considerations from studies above contribute to the debate about the specific "perspective-taking" to which a certain language "forces" its native speakers, both from the viewpoint of the semantic concepts and the formal means they select, whenever their thought is aimed at linguistic production. This is the theory of the *thinking for speaking* by Dan I. Slobin (cf., among his works, those of 1987 and 2003).

From the point of view of children learning their mother tongue, as is the case in our study, we shall evaluate both the hypothesis that younger children are still relatively far from the perspective that the language that they are acquiring "imposes", and the hypothesis that since early childhood they already select content and linguistic means corresponding to the choices made by adult speakers of the same language (cf. Bowermann 1996a/b; Choi *et al.* 1999; Hickmann / Hendriks 2009, 2010).

All the studies quoted in this paragraph will be reference points during our research, along with the *Quaestio* model of textual analysis by Klein / von Stutterheim (1989, 1991). According to the *Quaestio* theory, a text is shaped and informationally organized with respect to an unconscious question individuals learn to formulate since early childhood. The prototypical question, or *Quaestio*, concerned with a narrative text is *what happened to the protagonist in time X?*, where the event is the information segment to specify, or focus, and the protagonist and the time span the segments in topic. But the *Quaestio* is influenced by the formal and conceptual patterns a certain language has available, which explains the possibility for individuals of different native languages to conceive, for the

same type of text, relatively different *Quaestiones* (for instance, *What happened to the protagonist* <u>and why</u>*?, What happened to the protagonist <u>after</u> time X?* etc.)[6].

In Klein' and von Stutterheim's opinion, the *Quaestio* guides the speaker's formal and content choices while building the information structure of a text (introduction, maintenance, shifting and reintroduction of referents)[7], or *referential movement.* On the whole, this internal question dictates the discourse principles coherence and cohesion are based on.

We suggest that the *Quaestio* mentally internalized through the acquisition of the mother tongue during childhood is difficult, if not impossible, to restructure, as studies about adult second language acquisition prove.

3. *The informants*

The data we collected consists of 80 interviews for *The Finite Story* and 40 for the picture story. The informants are all native speakers of Italian. From a cultural and sociolinguistic viewpoint, the groups are quite homogenous, since all informants come from a middle class milieu, most of the adults have a university degree and the children's parents have an educational level ranging from high school to a university degree.

Table 4. The informants

The picture story			The Finite Story		
Category of Informants	Number of Interviews	Geographic Origins	Category of Informants	Number of Interviews	Geographic Origins
4	10	Naples	4	20	Naples 19; Rome 1
7	10	Naples	7	20	Naples 19; Milan 1
10	10	Naples	10	20	Naples 17; Milan 3
Adults from 23 to 31	10	Naples	Adults from 22 to 35	20	Naples

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[6] Giuliano / Di Maio (2007) show that different pragmatic ways of conceiving interaction across cultures also influence the selection of linguistic and conceptual preferences.

[7] The *Quaestio* shaping a whole text is said to be *global* by contrast to an incidental or *local Quaestio* a speaker can answer during his textual production, and that he can abandon immediately afterwards. So, with respect to our stimulus, a narrator could focus on a protagonist instead of the event, answering by that a *local Quaestio* such as *Who else jumps?*.

4. *Research questions*

Our analysis aims at the exploration of the following points:
a. the cognitive processes guiding the Italian child, at different ages, in order to report the content he watched (The Finite Story) or observed (the picture story), and consequently the comprehension that he or she has of the communicative tasks that we proposed;
b. the conceptual domains that the child selects and the linguistic means that he uses to build textual cohesion with respect to the five information structures commented on in the previous sections, evaluating the child's potentially increasing ability to master more and more specific means and contents as regards the typological features of the Italian language, an entity/time-oriented language;
c. the possible differences between Italian children's narrative productions and the ones of children learning a different mother tongue (which is possible only with respect to the picture story).

As to point (b), Dimroth *et al.* (2010) and Giuliano (2012b) have shown the more or less marked peculiarities by which adult speakers of typologically different languages (Italian, French, German, English, Dutch) select semantic domains and linguistic means for textual cohesion in a narrative text. It is possible to hypothesize that these means have been only partially acquired by very young subjects, whose cognitive and linguistic development is still in progress.

5. *The Finite Story data*

The four-year-old subjects show problems with focusing on the proposed task and, even if at the beginning of the experiment they state that they have understood the instructions (*"watch each short scene and tell me what happened"*), they have not really grasped them. As a result, while watching the video clip, they often interrupt by anticipatory questions such as *but what is he doing?, why is there fire here?, why do they wake up? why do not they want to wake up?* etc. interruptions outside the task are also very frequent (*has it finished?*, *do you have just this cartoon?* etc.).

(11) Elena, 4
*SBJ[8]:

Adesso quale   si   sveglia?
Now   which-one himself wakes.up?
Che cos' è? Un fuoco! [during the scene][9] //
What   is? A fire! //
Che vuole bruciare la casa?
that wants burn-INF the house?
'Now which one wakes up? What's that? A fire! //
that want to burn the house?'
*INV: [she nods]
*SBJ:
Si   svegliano?
Themselves   wake.up-3rd.PL
'Do they wake up?'
*INV:
Vediamo
See-1st.PL
'Let's see' […]
*SBJ:
Ha detto   di no
Has said [PP] of no
'He said no'
*INV:
Che cosa no?
'What no?'
*SBJ:
Che non vuole saltare…
That not wants jump-INF
'That he doesn't want to jump […]'
*SBJ:
Perché non vogliono   tutti   saltare?
Why   not want-3rd.PL all-PL   jump-INF?
'Why don't all of them want to jump?

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[8] The acronyms *SBJ and *INV stand for: interviewee and interviewer, respectively. The two slashes (//) mark the border between different scenes (cf. the *Symbols and abbreviations* section at the end of the work).
[9] Brackets enclose the comments of the analyst or implicit elements.

Four-year-old children do not interpret the task as a narrative task, so they often limit their observations about scenes to single words or to monotonous repetitions of the same utterance without any clear identification of the various characters, as the following extracts show:

> (12) Anna, 4
> *SBJ: terremoto… // cacca //
> 'Earthquake [= the roof of the building catches fire] […] //
> shit [= the fireman goes to the
> bathroom //'
> Telefono […] // Si   è seduto //   dice "no" // dice "no" //
> Telephone   // himself is sat-down [PP] // says no   // says no //
> 'Telephone   [= the telephone rings…] he sat down //
> he says "no" [referred to Mr Green] //
> he says "no" [referred to Mr Red] //'
> *INV:
> e poi?
> 'And then?'
> *SBJ:
> è   sceso   giù   // Si   è buttato   giù //
> has come.down [PP] down // himself is launched [PP] down
> 'He came down [referred to Mr Blue] //
> he jumped down [referred to Mr Green] //'
> Dice no // Si   è buttato   giù
> Says no // himself is launched [PP] down
> 'He says "no" [referred to Mr Red] // He jumped down'
>
> (13) Roberta, 4
> il camino ##   con il fuoco // Si   è svegliato //
> the fireplace ## with the fire //   himself is woken-up //
> Si   è svegliato […] //
> himself is woken-up […] //
> 'the fireplace ## with the fire // he woke up [referred to Mr Red] //
> he woke up […] [referred to Mr Green] //'
> sta saltando giù   // sta saltando giù //
> is jumping down // is   jumpimg down //
> 'he is jumping down [referred to Mr Blue] //
> he is jumping down [referred to Mr Green] //'

> non vuole saltare   giù   // sta saltando giù   // ha saltato
> not wants jump-INF down // is   jumping down // has jumped
> 'He doesn't want to jump down [referred to Mr Red]' //
> he is jumping down // he jumped'

The absence of any explicit reference to the characters – very frequent in the passages above – can be justified, at least theoretically, by the fact that the interviewer watched the scenes along with the young informants[10]. Nevertheless, these failures seem typical of four-year-old subjects independently from the stimulus used (for a similar result but a different elicitation methodology, cf. Hickmann 1995, 1996; Hendriks 2000). Paradoxically, the characters can be reintroduced to the listener as anonymous entities:

> (14) Pasquale, 4
> uno che dorme sul   letto
> one who sleeps on-the bed
> 'someone who sleeps on the bed'
> un altro che dorme   sul   letto
> a   other who sleeps   on-the   bed
> 'another one who sleeps on the bed'

The examples show the scarce textual cohesion of four-year-old subjects' narrations. Very crucial information such as the characters' refusal to jump are left at an inferential state (cf. ex. 11: *ha detto di no*; ex. 12: *dice no*). The information produced are often completely unlinked with respect to what comes previously or after, since any explicit motivation about the protagonists' actions is lacking. So the logical and causal links between the events are not grasped by the subjects in question, for example the link between Mr Blue's call to the fire brigade and the fireman who does not answer because he's in the bathroom (ex. 15), or the link between Mr Blue who calls the fire brigade again and the fireman who finally answers (ex. 16).

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[10] For the first configuration, for example, the characters are made explicit just in 6 contexts out of 60.

(15) Federica, 4

stanno   sparando i   fuochi d'artificio //
are.3rd.PL shooting   the   fireworks   //
m: sta parlando vicino al   telefono //
m: is   speaking   close   at-the telephone //
'they are shooting fireworks // m: he is speaking close to the phone //'
Sta chiamando una   persona //
is calling   a   person //
'he is calling a person//'
un pompiere che fa   la   pipì
a   fireman   who does the pipi
'A fireman who is peeing'

(16) Cristina, 4

sta   chiamando // sta   chiamando anche lui
is   calling   // is   calling   also   he[11]
'he is calling [referred to Mr Blue] //
he is calling too [referred to the fireman]'

It is difficult to establish the reasons why four-year-old children do not make motivations explicit: do they take them for granted or conversely do they not perceive them at all? A question such as *perché non vogliono tutti saltare?* ('why don't all of them want to jump?'), in ex. 11, lets us suppose that in many ways children of this age have problem with making inferences. The same explanation can be furnished for *sta chiamando anche lui* ('he too is calling') in ex. 16, where the additive particle *anche* ('too') creates a fake cohesion with what comes before since neither the actors of calling nor the reasons why they do it are cleared up.

Table 5 illustrates the conceptual domains and the linguistic means four-year-old children exploit for configurations I, II and III.

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[11] The Italian pronouns *lui, lei* etc. are theoretically object (direct or indirect) pronouns but in spoken Italian they are normally used with the subject function as well; the subject forms (*egli, ella* etc.) are used just in the written language. In our glosses we shall translate *lui* as *he* or *him* according to the syntactic status it has got in the context under analysis.

Table 5. Configurations I, II and III: 4-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS III	Means	
TT	Adverbs	*Un'altra volta* 3 ('another time')	TE	Additive Particles	*anche* 1 ('also')
TE	Additive Particles	*anche* 3; *pure* 5 ('also')	TT	Adverbs	*Due volte* 1 (twice')
	V-S	3		Other	*Non si mette più paura*[12]1 ('he's not scared any more')
	Other	*Un altro* 1 ('another one') *tutti dormono* 1 ('everybody sleeps')			
Same PRED	Anaphoric SV	*fa lo stesso* 1 ('he does the same') *sono tutti uguali* 1 ('they're all the same')			
	Other	Lo stesso 1 ('the same')			
Total		**19**			**3**

As to configuration I, some of the attempts to express the repetition of the same action by two different characters are given by the following passages:

(17) Désirée, Configuration I
Il   bambino che stava a letto e   ha spento   la luce […]
The child   that was at bed and has switched.off the light
'the child that was in bed and switched the light off
[referred to Mr Red]'
È andato a letto e   il   bambino ha spento
Is   gone at bed and the child   has switched.off
un' altra volta la luce //
a   other time the light
'He went to bed and switched the light off *again*
[referred to Mr Green]'
tutti   sono uguali // È andato a letto a spegnere
all-PL are equal // is gone   to bed to switch.off

---

[12] The implicit meaning of the utterance is that Mr Green jumps down because "he's not scared anymore", which explains its insertion in the table.

la   luce *anche* […] //
the light also […] //
'all of them are equal // he went to bed to switch the light off *too*
[referred to Mr Red]'
e: ha fatto   un rumore //
e: has made a noise //
'e: he made a noise [the scene where Mr Green keeps on sleeping] //
Ha   fatto un rumore *anche*
Has done a noise   also
'He made a noise *too* [the scene where Mr Red keeps on sleeping]'

(18) Anna, 4, Configuration I
       è andato a letto il   Signore Verde
       is gone   to bed the Mr   Green
       'Mr Green went to bed'
       è andato a letto il   Signor Rosso
       is gone   to bed the Mr   Red
       'Mr Red went to bed'

Despite the clear attempts to mark anaphoric links, the last passages show strong failures both for the lexical selection of some items and for their position in the syntactic chain. The expression *un'altra volta* ('another time = again', ex. 17) prompts us to state that the young informant has not grasped the change in the entity domain; and yet, immediately afterwards, she adds, with respect to the three protagonists, that *tutti sono uguali* ('all of them are equal'), which shows her being conscious as to the existence of three different characters. The source of the mistake could lie not in the lexical choice but rather in the fact that the subject confuses the intratextual relations with deictic relations: so *un'altra volta* would refer to the repetition of a scene similar to one she has already watched, and consequently to the stimulus rather than to the action of a specific protagonist. The same informant employs the additive particle *anche* in a syntactically ambiguous way in *è andato a letto a spegnere la luce anche* ('[he = Mr Red] went to bed to switch the light off *too*'), since *anche* cannot normally be placed at the end of the sentence (except in very rare and pragmatically very marked contexts), and certainly not if it has scope over the subject – as it seems the case for this passage –, a type of scope which demands a structure such as '*anche* Mr X[13] VP'; the subject is otherwise

implicit, which makes the interpretation of *anche* even more difficult.

As to the passage *ha fatto un rumore anche* ('[he] made a noise too'), still in ex. 17, here the scope of *anche* is clearer (= *anche in questa scena si è sentito un rumore*: '<u>in this scene</u> too you heard a noise'); nevertheless, the predicate *ha fatto* and the position of *anche* at the end of the utterance puzzle the listener.

In example 18 we find the Verb-Subject order, a strategy which can be used to highlight the focus status of the protagonists, but when used by four-year olds it seems to be more by chance than on purpose. As a matter of fact, several authors have remarked that children begin discovering the importance of adult syntactic strategies between 5 and 7 (cf., for instance, Tomasello 2000; Guasti 2002).

Here are some more attempts to mark textual cohesion with respect to configuration I, this time by the use of anaphoric (explicit or implied) predicates (ex. 19) and the particle *anche* (ex.s 20 and 21):

> (19) Camilla M., 4, Configuration I
> *Lo   stesso* di quello Blu *ha fatto* il   Verde //
> The same of that   Blue has done the Green //
> Il   Rosso *lo   stesso* [...] //
> The Red   the same [...] //
> 'The Green man *did the same thing* as the Blue man //
> the Red man *the same* //'
> Poi il Verde si   è buttato   giù   *come* il Blu
> Then the Green himself is launched down like   the Blue
> 'then the Green man jumped down *like* the Blue man'
>
> (20) Pasquale, 4, Configuration I
> Devono   far   cadere uno sopra […] //
> Must-3rd.PL make fall   one on   […] //
> è caduto […] &pecché il fuoco stava dentro […] //
> is fallen […] because   the fire was inside […] //
> 'they have to make someone fall on [the fire escape net …]
> [referred to Mr Blue] // he fell […] because the fire was inside […] //'
> *anche* a lui
> also   to him
> 'him *too* [= Mr Green must jump too]'

---

13 The underlining marks the element the particle has scope over.

(21) Francesca, 4, Configuration I
Ha chiuso la   porta // Sta telefonando di nuovo //
Has closed the door // is telephoning again   //
Anche questo sta telefonando
also   this   is telephoning
'He closed the door // he is phoning again // This *too* is phoning'

In the last extract, the use of *anche* distorts the content of the scene in question (cf. segment 18 in table 1, section 1.1).

For configuration II, it is never marked by the four-year-old group of informants, whereas configuration III is marked rarely: by *anche* (1 occ. for the topic entity), *due volte* ('twice', 1 occ. for the topic time, cf. ex. 22 below) and *non si mette più paura* ('he's not afraid any more [so he comes down]', 1 occ. still for the topic time). In the following extract Camilla refers to two *different* characters who jump, in contrast with what the expression *so' caduti due volte* ('[they] fell twice') lets us suppose.

(22) Camilla, 4, Configuration III
So' caduti *due volte*
Are fallen two times
'they fell *twice* [referred to segments 27 e 29 of table 1]'

In conclusion, our results show that configurations II and III are the most complex to mark, cognitively and/or linguistically.

It is also necessary to remark that four-year-old children's narrations are full of fanciful interpretations, such as the one in the following passage:

(23) Elena, 4
s'   è fatto la barba // pure lui s'   è fatto la barba
himself is done the beard // also him himself is done the beard
'he shaved himself [referred to scene where Mr Green looks scared because of the fire] // he too shaved himself [referred to Mr Red who is scared as well]

The fanciful interpretations sometimes seem to arise from the young speakers' incapacity to infer crucial elements from the scenes in order to create links with what came previously or will follow, which could partly result from their scarce encyclopedic knowledge about life (for instance, the typical actions in case of fire).

Table 6 below illustrates the results for the first, second and third configurations in The Finite Story retellings of seven-year-old children.

Table 6. Configurations I, II and III: 7-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS II	Means		IS III	Means	
TT	Adverbs	*Un'altra volta* 2 ('another time')	TT	Advs	*Poi* 1 ('then')	TE	Add Part	*Anche* 11, *pure* 5 ('also')
	Part	*Ancora* 3 ('still / also'); **sempre* 1 ('also')					V-(anche)-S	3
TE	Sress NP	*Il Signor ROsso* 1 ('Mr RED')	TE	Restr Part	*Solo* 1 ('only')	TT	Adverbs	*Adesso* 2, *ora* 1, *mo*[14] 2 ('now'); *poi* 2 ('then'); *a un certo punto* 2 ('at a certain point'); *alla fine* 1 ('in the end')
	Add/Excl Part	*Anche* 7, *pure* 4 ('also'); *manco* 1; *nemmeno* 1 ('neither')						
	Adverbs	*Invece* 2 ('instead')		Advs	*Invece* 7 ('instead')			
	V-S	2						
Same PRED	Anaphor VP	*è lo stesso* 1 ('it's the same'); V **sempre* 1 ('V also')	POL	Part POL	*Sì* 1 ('yes')			
	Other	*stessa cosa* 3 ('same thing'); *lo stesso* 1 ('the same')						
				Generic Means	*Però* 1 ('but')			
Total		**30**			**11**			**29**

[14] The Neapolitan adverb *mo*, frequent in Neapolitan speakers' colloquial Italian, stands for It. *ora, adesso*.

The interviews to seven-year-old subjects show relevant differences with respect to the younger group from several points of view: on the whole their narrations are much better organised; they definitely pay more attention to the first configuration and greater concentration on the third one; the second information structure, never marked by four-year-old subjects, emerges, as in the following extracts:

> (24) Francesca, 7, Configuration II
> E   *invece* questo Blu   ha   visto il   fuoco […] //
> And instead this   Blue has seen the fire   […] //
> Manco l' omino   Rosso voleva   saltare   //
> neither the man-DIM Red   wanted.3rd.PAST.IMPF jump.INF //
> Lui *SÌ*   voleva   saltare
> he   YES   wanted.3rd.PAST.IMPF jump.INF
> 'And *instead* the Blue man saw the fire… //
> The Red little man didn't want to jump *either* // he *did* want to jump'

> (25) Camilla, 7, Configuration II
> *solo* quello Blu   si   è svegliato
> only   that   Blue himself is woken.up
> '*only* the Blue one woke up'

Example 24 contains both a marking scoping on the entity, *invece* ('instead'), and a polarity marking, *sì* ('yes'). The latter phenomenon is completely lacking in Italian adults' retellings (cf. section 7). Example 25 shows the use of the restrictive particle *solo*.

The third configuration is generally marked by additive particles and/or the temporal adverbs *adesso* and *poi*[15], but we also found some more sophisticated expressions such as *a un certo punto* ('at a certain point') and *alla fine* ('in the end'). Furthermore, it can happen that the subjects use more than one marking simultaneously.

> (26) Carla, 7, Configuration III
> E   lui si   è buttato   // *E: pure è sceso* //
> And he himself is launched // And: also is come.down //

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[15] Temporal adverbs such as *poi, adesso, ora* were considered as markings of contrast just if the informants expressly used them to contrast a scene to a previous one, in other words they were never calculated if the speakers insistently used them to simply mark the passage from one scene to the other one.

'and he jumped down [referred to Mr Blue] // and: he jumped down *as well* [referred to Mr Green]

E   lui non vuole scendere   // *Poi* è sceso
And he not wants come.down // then is come.down
'and he doesn't want to jump down [referred to Mr Red] // *then* he jumped down

(27) Sebastiano, 7, Configuration III
Che *ora* il   pompiere si   accorge del   telefono
That now the fireman   himself realizes of-the telephone
'*now* the fireman realizes [that] the phone [is ringing]'

Outside the configurations that we analysed, we also found the structure *è l'unico che...* ([he] is the only one who…'), which together with the restrictive particle *solo* ('only') actualize the *uniqueness strategy*, appearing in Italian adults' retellings (cf. section 7). As to the use of prosodic means, it is exceptional, and as a matter of fact we identified just one occurrence, for the first configuration, replacing a lexical marking such as *anche*:

(28) Giacomo, 7, Configuration I
poi il Signor *ROSso* e: va   a letto spegne
then the Mr   RED   e: goes to bed switches.off
la luce si   mette le coperte e va   a   dormire
the light himself puts   the covers and goes to sleep-INF
'then Mr *RED* e: goes to bed he turns the light off he covers himself and goes to sleep'

On the whole, seven-year-old children's retellings show many cohesive elements, several of which never appear in the younger group: *neanche / nemmeno / manco* ('neither / nor'), *già* ('already')*, ancora* ('still / also / more')*, di nuovo* ('again')*, sempre* ('always, still, *also'[16]) and the iterative verb prefix *ri-*. These elements can show up outside the configurations we considered. Here are some passages:

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[16] The use of *sempre* as *also* is not grammatical, neither it appears in adult retellings.

(29) Simone, 7

si è fatto più grave l' incendio // *Ha visto pure quello Verde //*
itself is done more grave the fire   // has seen also that Green //
'the fire became bigger // the Green man also saw [it] //'
Ha visto pure il Rosso //
Has seen also the Red //
'the Red man also saw [it]'
Ha detto non va bene // *neanche* là va bene
Has said not goes right // neither there goes right
'he said "it is not ok there // it is not ok there *either*"'

(30) Rossella,7

Il signor Verde si è steso   *sempre* sopra al letto
The Mr Green himself is lied.down *always on at-the bed
'Mr Green *also* lied down on the bed'

(31) Roberto, 7

Chiama i pompieri // Sta *GIA'*   chiamando … //
Calls the firemen // is ALREADY calling   … //
Ritornava *di nuovo* alla porta
returned again at-the door
'he calls the fire brigade // he is *ALREAdy* calling […] he went back to
the door *again*'

The seven-year-olds' narrations can still show failures as regards the referential movement of the protagonists and ambiguities in relation to the use of some anaphoric items:

(32) Simone, 7

si   hanno   messo *un'altra volta* a letto … //
themselves have-3rd.PLU put [PP] a other time at bed … //
Si   è messo   *un'altra volta* a letto
Himself is put [PP] a other time at bed
'they went to bed *once again* … [referred to Mr Red] // he went to bed
once again [referred to Mr Green]

(33) Benedetta, 7

nella casetta   verde sta facendo una musica che lo
in-the house-DIM green is doing   a   music that him

sta facendo spaventare //
is making scare-INF //
'in the little green house there's music which is scaring him //'
Nella casetta   rossa sta facendo un'altra musica uguale a quell'altra
In-the house-DIM red is doing   a other music equal to that other
'in the little red house there's music equal to the other one'
che lo   sta facendo *ancora* spaventare
that him is making still   scare-INF
'which is *still* scaring him'

In 32 the informant uses the expression *un'altra volta* similarly to four-year-old speakers (cf. ex. 17 above), so he has not grasped the functional and discourse peculiarities that this expression involves, namely the fact that it necessarily refers to two different actions of the *same character*. For the same reasons, the employment of *ancora,* in 33, is also ambiguous.

By the age of ten, as emerges from table 7 below, we observed a continued progression, which is nevertheless concerned with the quantity of the means ten-year-old children use rather than their typology. Inappropriate means such as *un'altra volta* et *ancora* with reference to actions of different characters have completely disappeared.

Table 7. Configurations I, II and III: 10-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS II			IS III	Means	
TT	Advs	*Ancora* 2 ('still, also')	TT	Advs	*A questo punto* 1 ('at this point')	TE	Add Part	*Anche* 12 ('also')
							V-S	4
TE	Add/Excl Part	*Anche* 31, *pure*: 7 ('also') *nemmeno*: 1 ('neither')	TE	Rest Part	*Solo* 1 ('only')	TT	Advs	*Allora* 1 ('then'); *dopo* 2 ('after'); *alla fine* 1 ('in the end'); *questa volta* 3 ('this time'); *ora* 1 ('now'); *al terzo invito* 1 ('at the 3rd invitation')
	Advs	Invece: 1 ('instead')		Advs	*Invece* 10 ('instead')			

IS I	Means		IS II			IS III	Means	
	V-S	2	Other	*Per primo* 1 ('as first')				
Same PRED	Anaphor SV	*Fare /succedere lo stesso* 6 ('do / happen the same')	Generic Means	*Però*/*ma* 4 ('but')				
	Other	*Stessa cosa / lo stesso* 5 ('same thing / the same')						
Total		55		17				25

From a global viewpoint, the retellings of this group are very cohesive, which is demonstrated by the explicit reference to characters (for the first configuration, for example, 17 speakers out of 20 always mention the various protagonists) and the very frequent resort to additive and temporal strategies, which the informants resort to outside the analysed information structures as well. As to additive devices (*anche, pure, ancora, neanche, nemmeno, manco*[17] 'neither / nor'*, (fare) la stessa cosa* '(do) the same thing'), they employ them 156 times (103 occ.s for seven-year-old children and 18 occ.s for the four-year-olds). With respect to temporal strategies (*sempre* 'always / still, /also'*, già* 'already'*, mai* 'never'*, non… più* 'not… any longer'*, ancora, di nuovo / nuovamente* 'again'*, un'altra volta* 'once again'*, un altro po'* 'a bit more'*, continuare a* 'to continu*e*'*, ri-*Verb 'iterative prefix-Verb'), the relevant difference is between four-year-old children, who resort to them 16 times, and seven or ten-year-old ones, who employ them, respectively, in 51 and 65 contexts.

It is necessary to point out some more points of contrast as regards the type of items the different groups use. Once again, the crucial difference lies between the four-year-olds and the seven-year-olds, since the former never employ *ancora* but they use iterative *un'altra volta* when marking an iterative function; they do not use additive negative items except one occurrence of *nemmeno*. Between 7 and 10 continuative *ancora* and additive negative items appear; *ancora* with quantitative function, *anche*

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[17] The expression *manco* is typical of colloquial Italian.

with scalar meaning[18] and contrasting means such as *invece, solo, è l'unico che…* show up as well. The real difference between these two groups lies in: the very frequent use, at ten, of *anche/pure*, the higher frequency of the negators *neanche/nemmeno/manco*; the non standard employment, at seven, of *sempre* with an additive function (cf. ex. 30 above).

To sum up, the narrations of four-year-old children show these informants' incapability to organize the content of the film using a holistic perspective, even though the information to narrate are furnished in a slow and progressive way as is the case for The Finite Story stimulus. So from a cognitive viewpoint, their conceptualization of the task proposed is rather *atomistic* and *deictic*, with no clear inferences about characters' actions and no or very few logical links between episodes. The absence of markings for the second configuration – concerned with contrasting actions of two different characters – and the very scarce attention for the third one – implying temporal contrasts – clearly demonstrate that children of this age have problems with focusing on this type of contents. As a matter of fact, the third configuration is conceptualized as "two similar actions" of different or equal entities (cf. ex. 17), which distorts the content of the film, showing the four year old concentration on the *entity dimension* rather than the temporal one. At seven, children's retellings are more cohesive and coherent, with richer and more pertinent observations for each scene, which shows a better understanding of the narrative task proposed. They make more explicit inferences and are certainly more sensitive to the creation of contrasts, including temporal contrasts and opposed actions of different protagonists. At ten, finally, children clearly highlight the conceptual domains of both entities and time when building anaphoric linkage.

6. *The picture story data*

The elicitation of data by the picture stimulus was more difficult than with The Finite Story, in particular with four-year-old subjects, who often needed to be supported by the listener intervention. The pictures could have been perceived by very young children as less stimulating than the video clips composing *The Finite Story* or probably they found the instructions relative to the picture story more complex to put into practice (cf. section 1.2).

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[18] Scalar expressions involve scales in their interpretation. The scalar meaning of *ancora*, for instance, correspond to that of Engl. *even*.

In the following we furnish some passages for configurations I, IV and V (cf. *ibid.*):

(34) Andrea, 4, Configuration I
      E   poi sta correndo // e   poi sta correndo *pure* l' uomo Blu
      And then is running // and then is running also the man Blue
      'and then he is running // and then the Blue man is *also* running'

(35) Claudio, 4, Configurations IV + V
      E   qua sta *anche* dormendo […] // e   *anche* dormendo
      And here is also sleeping […] // and also   sleeping
      'and here he is *also* sleeping […] // and *also* sleeping'

The following table shows the conceptual domains and linguistic means the four-year-old subjects exploit for configurations I, IV and V[19]:

Table 8. Configurations I, IV and V: 4-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS IV	Means		IS V	Means	
TE	Add Parts	anche, pure 7 ('also')	Picture	Parts	Anche, pure 3 ('also')	Picture	Parts	Anche 1 ('also')
	V-anche / pure-S	6				Iter TT	Advs	di nuovo 1 ('again'); ancora* di più 1 ('even more'); un'altra volta 1 ('another time')
			TE	altro	Un altro uomo 1 ('another man')	Ri-Verb	1 (ritornare)[20]	
			Cont TT	Advs	ancora 1, sempre 1 ('still')			
			Same PRED		Lo stesso 1 ('the same')			
Total		13			7			5

[19] The expression *picture*, in the tables, refers to the fact that some additive particles have scope over the stimulus itself (cf. ex. 35). As to the acronyms *Cont TT* and *Iter TT*, the former stands for *Continual Topic Time*, namely a continual temporal relationship, whereas the latter stands for *Iterative Topic Time,* that is to say an iterative temporal relationship.

[20] Just in one context there appears a verb with the iterative suffix *ri-*, namely *ritornare* ('return, come back'), for which the identification of the prefix could not be noticed by children since the root *tornare* is iterative by itself.

The first configuration is the most marked one (13 occ.s, ex. 34), confirming the hypothesis that the entity contrasts are cognitively and linguistically simpler for very young speakers to perceive and express (cf. previous paragraphs). Still in agreement with what has been observed for *The Finite Story* retellings, four-year-olds have problems with temporal relations of any kind (iterative or continual time spans), so instead of focusing on the temporal link between the scenes, they deictically mark the analogies between them: ex. 35, for instance, refers to the fact that Mr Blue goes on sleeping but the informants underline the analogy between the two pictures in question rather than the continual action of the protagonist, which explains the use of *anche* (= 'in this picture too') instead of *ancora / sempre / di nuovo*. In other words, the subject seems concentrated on extra-textual and deictic relationships rather than on intra-textual cohesion. This switch of focus could be partly justified by the nature of the task – a sequence of pictures that the child can point at with a gesture –, nevertheless, as we saw in the previous section, very young children tend to focus on deictic, extra-textual relations when watching *The Finite Story* as well, which demonstrates the childish character of this type of logical correlation. It also happens that a temporal link (*Mr Blue is still sleeping*) is conceptualized as an entity contrast, as in the following:

> (36) Clara, 4, Configuration IV
> E   qui l' uomo che dorme //
> 'and here the man   who sleeps [referred to Mr Red] //
> e   *un altro uomo* che dorme
> and *another man*   who sleeps [still referred to Mr Red]'

The use of items such as *sempre* and *ancora* to mark continuation is not completely lacking in the retellings of these informants, but *ancora*, in particular, is used just once and along with *di più* ('more'), a quantitative expression which cannot mark temporal relations:

> (37) Riccardo, 4, Configuration IV
> Poi sta dormendo *ancora* // poi   sta dormendo *ancora* *di più
> The is sleeping   still   // then is sleeping   still   of more
> 'then he is *still* sleeping // then he is sleeping *even more*'

The following table is concerned with seven-year-olds' retellings:

Table 9. Configurations I, IV and V: 7-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS IV	Means		IS V	Means	
TE	Add Parts	Anche, pure 8 ('also')	Picture	Parts	Anche 2 ('also')	Iter TT	Advs	Di nuovo 2 ('again')
	V-anche-S	2					Ri-Verb	4
			Cont TT	Advs	Sempre, ancora 4 ('still')			
			Same PRED	Anaphor V	1			
Total		10			7			6

With respect to the configurations in question (I, IV e V), there is no big difference between this group and the four-year-old one, but if we look at the whole texts, they show a better mastering of anaphoric linkage: the seven-year-olds mark the distinction between continuation and iteration more frequently, using *sempre* / *ancora* for the former and *di nuovo* for the latter; still for iteration, the verbal prefix *ri-* is more frequent (*riandare*: 'to go again', *riaddormentarsi:* 'to fall asleep again', *ritornare:* 'to go back', *rincontrarsi:* 'to meet each other again'). Here are some passages:

> (38) Cristina, 7, Configurations IV + V
> E   dorme *ancora…* // e   si   addormenta   *di nuovo*
> And sleeps still   // and himself fall.asleep-3rd.SING again
> 'and he *still* sleeps… // and he falls asleep *again*'

> (39) Miriam, 7, Configuration IV
> Sta *sempre* coricato
> Is   always lied.down
> 'he is *still* on the bed'

In some contexts, *anche* can deictically refer to a link between two pictures but in a less ambiguous way:

(40) Giorgia, 7, Configuration IV

L' uomo Rosso sta dormendo sulla   panchina //
The man Red is   sleeping   on-the bench
l' uomo Rosso sta dormendo sulla   panchina *anche* <u>qua</u>
the man Red is   sleeping   on-the bench   also   here
'the Red man is sleeping on the bench // the Red man is sleeping on the bench <u>here</u> *too*'

As far as ten-year-old informants are concerned, their texts are more cohesive – as is shown by the higher frequency of additive items within the whole texts –, including the emergence of the verb periphrasis *continuare a + Verb* ('to continue…'). Furthermore, the deictic use of additive items is very rare.

As a matter of fact, with the progression of age some pictures are connected to each other in a chronologically more complex way and enriched with causal explanations. The following passages are concerned with the last segments of the retellings of a four-year-old and of a ten-year-old respectively:

(41) Laura, 4

il Signor Blu va   a liberare   la principessa
the Mr   Blue goes to set.free-INF the princess
'Mr Blue goes to set the princess free'
Il   Signor Blu va   a liberare   la principessa
The Mr   Blue goes to set.free-INF the princess
'Mr Blue goes to set the princess free [referred to a different scene where Mr Blue keeps on going up the hill]'
Il   Signor Rosso va   a raccogliere le mele
The Mr   Red   goes to pick-INF   the apples
'Mr Red goes to pick the apples'

(42) Francesco, 10

E   si   dirige   anche lui verso il   castello
And himself addresses also he to   the castle
'and [Mr Blue] also goes to the castle'
E   ora Signor Blu e   Signor Rosso si   incontrano
And now Mr   Blue and Mr   Red   themselves meet-3rd.PL
'and now Mr Blue and Mr Red meet'

Signor Rosso… mette la scala   vicino a un albero di mele
Mr   Red…   puts the ladder close to a   tree   of apples
'Mr Red… puts the ladder against an apple tree'
e   quindi si   capisce   vuole raccogliere delle mele
and so   IMPS.PRO understands wants pick-INF   some apples
'and so you understand that he wants to pick some apples'
Mentre Signor Rosso raccoglie   le mele   Signor Blu
While Mr   Red   pick-3rd.SING the apples Mr   Blue
si   dirige   verso il castello
himself addresses to   the castle
'while Mr Red is picking some apples Mr Blue goes to the castle'

The following table is concerned with ten-year-old children's retellings:

Table 10. Configurations I, IV and V: 10-year-old children

IS I	Means		IS IV	Means		IS V	Means	10
TE	Add Parts	anche, pure 20 ('also')	Picture	Parts	Anche 1 ('also')	Iter TT	Advs	Un'altra volta 2, di nuovo 4 ('again')
	V-anche /pure-S	16					Ri-Verb	5
			Cont TT	Advs	Sempre, ancora 2 ('still')			
				Cont a+V	1 ('continue to V')			
Same PRED	Anaphor V	1						
			Same PRED	Anaphor V	1			
Total		37			5			11

On the whole, the comparison between the different age groups shows a remarkable progression with respect to cohesion and the mastering of specific additive and temporal means. By the age of ten these means are well integrated into a holistic perspective of the narrative text. Although these results are in agreement with the ones we ascertained for *The Finite*

Story task, a slight difference emerges probably due to the diverse features of the two stimuli: temporal means are lacking in the four-year-olds' retellings of *The Finite Story* but not completely in their picture story narrations, which could be – at least partly – a reflex of a greater memory effort and dispersion of attention that the sequence of video clips may involve for very young children with respect to a sequence of pictures they can stare at.

7. *Adults and children: a comparison*

The following table is concerned with adult native speakers' retellings and illustrates the results for the configurations we analysed for *The Finite Story* task.

Table 11. Configurations I, II and III, The Finite Story: adults

IS I	Means		IS II			IS III	Means	
TT	Adverbs	Infine 1 ('finally')	TT	Adverbs	Finalmente, infine 2 ('finally')	TT	Adverbs	Infine, questa volta etc. 33 ('finally, this time..)
TE	Add Part	Anche, pure 34 ('also')	TE	Restr Part	Solo 2 ('only')	TE	Add Part	Anche, pure 22 ('also')
	Excl Part	Nemmeno, neanche 4 ('neither')		Primacy / Uniqueness strategies	È l'unico/il primo che 4 (it's the only one/the first who)		Primacy strategies	Il primo.. è 1 ('the first one.. is')
	V-(anche)-S	1		Adverbs	Invece 11, mentre 1			
Same PRED	Anaphoric V	5		Generic Means	Però 1			
	Other	(così) come 3 ('like')						
Total		**48**			**21**			**56**

The comparison with ten-year-old children's retellings of *The Finite Story* demonstrates a great analogy between the means the latter employ and those exploited by adults. Otherwise, the ten-year-old group shows a

relative sensibility for the *uniqueness and primacy strategies* (*è l'unico/il primo che…*: '[he] is the only/first one who…'; *solo il Signor X:* 'only Mr X'), which makes them similar to adults, and by which the action of a specific protagonist is chronologically highlighted. The only relevant difference lies in the lesser attention that children pay to the third configuration, since they mark it much less frequently (56 markings by adults *vs* 25 by ten-year-olds).

From the viewpoint of the means exploited, the data of the seven-year-olds does not show any significant difference with respect to adults but rather quantitative discrepancies, since the three configurations in question are marked more rarely. As to the type of markings, the peculiarity of this age group is the fact that they exploit *sì* ('yes') as polarity marking (1 occ.), the expression *il Signor ROsso* ('Mr RED') with a prosodic emphasis (1 occ.), and quantitative *sempre*, means lacking both in adult's retellings and the other age groups', and that we interpret as typical of children's narrations rather than of adult standard Italian.

The retellings of four-year-old subjects are obviously the most distant from adults' ones both for the scarce frequency of cohesion markings and the many mistakes with respect to concepts of iteration and continuity.

As far as the picture story is concerned, we furnish below the table concerning adults' retellings.

Table 12. Configurations I, IV and V, the picture story: adults

IS I	Means		IS IV	Means		IS V	Means	
TE	Add Parts	Anche, pure 31 ('also')	Picture	Parts	Ancora 1 ('still')	Iter TT	Part	Ancora 1 ('still')
	V-anche -S	13					Adv	Di nuovo 4 ('again'); un altro po' 1 (a bit longer')
			Cont TT	Parts	Ancora 3		Ri-Verb	3
				Cont a+V	5 ('continue to + V')			
Total		44			9			9

For the picture story also, what seems to distinguish adults' retellings from the ten-year-olds' is the slight greater frequency of cohesive items, scalar *anche* and the more sophisticated vocabulary. The presence even in adults' retellings of one deictic use of *ancora* – that for *The Finite Story* retellings completely disappear from the age of seven on – demonstrates that it is induced by the type of stimulus, namely tangible pictures that the speaker can constantly see, touch and point at.

On the whole, with respect to adults' narrations, Italian children's sketch an acquisitional path for referential contrasts as the following, which is confirmed – with some little variations – by both the elicitation methodologies we used:

Scheme 2. Contrasts: conceptual level
    addition of entity contrasts > contrasts of actions / temporal contrasts
    (with continuity more frequent than iteration)

Entity contrasts focusing on addition (cf. configuration I) show up in a precocious way, whereas the ones opposing *different actions* by *different characters* appear by the age of seven (cf. configuration II), together with temporal contrasts (cf. configurations III, IV and V).

From the viewpoint of the linguistic means children exploit, quantitative addition is precociously marked by *anche / pure*; nevertheless, the seven-year-olds also exploit *sempre* with this function, which corresponds to a non grammatical employment of this (temporal) item. Negative additive items begin to emerge just at seven. As to temporal addition, continuity and iteration means show up according to the different task but children have troubles with iterative *ancora*.

The *Quaestio* theory that we have adopted lets us interpret the results obtained for the two tasks in the following way: in terms of textual organisation, four-year-old children are not capable of planning a global narrative perspective such as the one intervening when the *Quaestio* principle has definitively been elaborated by the cognitive system. This perspective is just "sketched", so to speak, and it matches the concept of *script* proposed by Fayol (1985), by which he refers to a banal sequence of actions with no hierarchical organization and purpose, which explains the incomplete character of utterances but also the incompleteness of the retellings altogether. As a consequence, very young children cannot build

a solid holistic perspective of the narrative text in question. This result could partly be due to their inability to select the conceptual domains pertinent for the *Quaestio* a certain task requires, which demonstrates four-year-old children's dispersion of attention and their focus on details of little or no importance for the dynamics of the story. Furthermore, in "local" terms, the comparison with the other age groups shows that four-year-olds' retellings are very weak with respect to the way new or focused information is matched to linguistic markings, in other words subjects of this age take crucial information for granted differently from seven and ten-year-old informants, despite the fact we used the same data elicitation methodologies.

Between the ages of 7 and 10, our results show the increasing ability of Italian children with the conceptual and linguistic specificities the task in question demands in their mother tongue, namely their aptitude to contrast *entities, actions and temporal spans* in agreement with the increasing holistic planning of the narrative text. (cf. the concepts of *plan* and *schema* by Fayol 1985). For the contrast of assertion, it appears just once at seven (cf. ex. 24) and plays no role for all the other age groups, as in agreement with the entity/time perspective "imposed" by the Italian language.

8. *Typological and crosslinguistic considerations*

With respect to the two tasks we proposed, adults' narrations show that Italian speakers are definitely oriented to entities and temporal contrasts, differently from what happens for languages such as German and Dutch (cf. Dimroth *et al.* 2010), whose native speakers also highlight polarity contrasts very strongly. The absence in Italian of any highly grammaticized means to express the strength of positive assertion (or polarity) could justify these results, although the highlighting of positive polarity is not impossible in the language in question (cf. the section 1.1).

Concerning Italian children, the linguistic means that four-year-old subjects select already show a high specificity with respect to the language they are acquiring (cf. the employ of *anche* and *pure*), at least in the conceptual domain to which the Italian child appears to be sensitive, namely the contrast of entities. From a cognitive viewpoint, the precocious

emergence of entity contrasts has also been ascertained for French, Polish and German children (cf. Benazzo *et al.* 2004). It is otherwise in agreement with what Givón (1995: 380) maintains with respect to nominal referents: they are perceptually and cognitively more salient, they are acquired early in ontogeny and evolve early in phylogeny, they are culturally central entities, in particular those that are subject-agent (human, active, conscious, wilful) or object-patient (concrete, compact, manipulable, usable). For all of these reasons we hypothesize that young children could, at the same time, combine linguistic specificities of their mother tongue with age cognitive restrictions independent from their L1. Future studies about children learning assertion-oriented languages could, nevertheless, narrow or enlarge the validity of this cognitive path.

From the age of seven on our children are more and more oriented to temporal contrasts besides the contrasts of entities and by the age of ten the "perspective" imposed by the language they are acquiring – a perspective markedly oriented to temporal and entity contrasts – has been consolidated.

From a crosslinguistic viewpoint the comparisons with children learning French, Polish and German (with respect to the picture story) show that, for the Italian child, the relationship between iteration and continuity implies some peculiar difficulties, since in Italian these conceptual distinctions are complicated by the semantic and functional complexity of the particles *ancora* and *sempre*, which can charge themselves with quantitative (just *ancora*), iterative and continual functions and consequently sound ambiguous to very young speakers – as otherwise also happens with L2 adult learners of Italian (cf. Giuliano 2012a). Furthermore, the implicational acquisitional pattern *continuation > iteration* suggested by Benazzo *et al.* (2004) is not confirmed by our data.

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Symbols and abbreviations

IS	information structure
TE	topic entity
TT	topic time
POL	polarity
PRED	predicate
*SBJ	interviewee
*INV	interviewer
//	mark the passage to a different scene
…	mark the elimination of a passage
[ ]	enclose the comments of the transcriber
#, ##	short pause, long pause
:	vowel lengthening
B	Mr Blue in the picture story table
R	Mr Red in the picture story table
Adv/s	adverb/s
Part/s	Particle/s
Add	additive
Excl	exclusive
Restr	restrictive
Cont	continual
Iter	iterative
DIM	diminutive
INF	infinitive
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
IMPS	impersonal
PRO	pronoun
PL	plural
PP	past participle
SING	singular
It.	Italian
Ger.	German
Engl.	English

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