

Assertive strategies in English and Spanish: a new contribution to the debate on assertion in Romance and Germanic languages

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Abstract

Our paper analyses the way English and Spanish speaking informants build textual cohesion in a narrative task involving a non-prototypical information flow. The results are compared with those of Dimroth *et al.* (2010) in order to enlarge the debate about the “assertion oriented” and the “non-assertion oriented” languages. We shall demonstrate that a strict distinction between the Romance non-assertion oriented pattern, on the one side, and the Germanic assertion-oriented pattern, on the other side, is not possible and that this opposition, as for other phenomena, it is to be interpreted as a continuum rather than a contrast. Furthermore, we shall satisfactorily explain this result by an enunciative framework of analysis, thanks to which the semantic and linguistic choices that an enunciator makes are not simply seen as the expression of grammaticalization processes but rather as the reflex of (unconscious) decisions motivated by his/her communicative needs with respect to a specific co-enunciator

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the way English and Spanish speaking informants build textual cohesion in an oral narrative task involving a non-prototypical information flow, namely referential maintenance or contrast² with respect to entities, events, time spans and sentence polarity. We shall focus both on the semantic domains and the linguistic means speakers select in order to highlight such referential flow and will compare our results with those of Dimroth *et al.*³ in order to enlarge the debate about the “assertion oriented” (German and Dutch) and the “non-assertion oriented” (Italian and French) languages (for this debate cf. § 1).

The data were collected using the video clip *The Finite Story*⁴ (cf. § 1 for a discussion of this stimulus). With respect to the subjects interviewed, our results will show that:

a) English, despite its Germanic origins, is not an “assertion oriented language”, differently from what Dimroth *et al.* have stated for Dutch and German, since its native speakers do not normally emphasize cohesion on the sentence polarity (namely the assertion) level;

b) Spanish, in its turn, is an “assertion oriented language”, for its native speakers tend to focus their attention on the assertion level (by means of *si* and *si que*);

c) as a consequence of points (a) and (b), English native speakers take on a cohesive perspective much closer to what Dimroth *et al.* describe as the Romance pattern of textual coherence with respect to the Germanic one, since they prefer to mark contrasts at the level of the protagonist and/or the time and/or the semantic content of the predicate just like Italian and French informants do; conversely, Spanish native speakers select a perspective based on the highlighting of positive assertion and because of that their narrations turn out to be much more similar to the German and Dutch ones (that is to say to the Germanic pattern) than to the Italian and French retellings.

I

Stimulus and previous studies

The video clip *The Finite Story* is about three men, Mr Blue, Mr Green and Mr Red, living in three different flats but in the same building, which one night catches fire. It is subdivided into several segments, the content of which is illustrated in table 1. We shall focus on two information structures (IS: I and II), each of which is repeated two or three times during the story (they are in bold in table 1).

As to the first information structure (segments 9 and 26), speakers have to convey that a situation applying for the first two characters does not apply for the third one, since we have a change in the domain of the protagonists, an opposite polarity and the maintenance of the predicate. For this configuration, speakers can either mark the contrast on the protagonist or highlight the change of polarity. If they contrast the protagonists, they can apply means such as lexical modifiers (Engl. *on the other hand, instead, differently from Mr X*; etc.) or restrictive particles (Engl. *only, just only Mr Blue...*). As to the change of polarity, in English it can be marked by an auxiliary highlighting the finite component of the verb (*Mr Blue DOES jump*) or by a pitch accent on the lexical verb (*Mr Blue JUMPS*); in Spanish too, the change of polarity should be marked, theoretically, by a prosodic stress on the lexical verb (*Al final el señor Verde SALTA*) and by *si (que)* (*El de verde SÍ salta*).

As to the second configuration, speakers can either mark the change of polarity or the temporal shift. As a matter of fact, the temporal shift linking devices are crucial for the second information structure since, ideally, they are the only alternative to the polarity change markings that speakers can use to mark the contrast and they can do that by adverbials such as Engl. *this time, eventually*, etc; Spa. *ahora, esta vez*, etc.

TABLE 1*

 The *Finite Story*: information configuration in segments selected for analysis

Nr	Film segment	IS wrt antecedent segment	Example utterances with corresponding IS marking
1/2	<u>Introduction protagonists / flats</u>		
3/4/5	<u>Mr Blue going to bed, sleeping; Mr Green going to bed, sleeping; Mr Red going to bed, sleeping</u>		
6	<u>Fire on the roof</u>		
7/8	<u>Mr Green sleeping; Mr Red sleeping</u>		
9	<u>Mr Blue not sleeping</u>	I: Different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 03/04)	<i>Only Mr. Blue does not sleep; El hombre de azul sí se levanta.</i>
11	<u>Mr Blue calling fire brigade</u>		
12	Fireman in bathroom, not answering		
18	Fireman answering the phone	II: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 12)	<i>this time the fireman DOES ANSWER/ ANSWERS the phone; ahora el bombero Sí QUE contesta al teléfono.</i>
22	Arrival of fire engine		
24	Rescue net: <u>Mr Green not jumping</u>		
25	<u>Mr Red not jumping</u>		
26	<u>Mr Blue jumping</u>	I: different TT, different TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24/25)	<i>Mr Blue on the other hand DOES JUMP/JUMPS; El de color azul SÍ/SÍ QUE SALTA</i>
27	<u>Mr Green jumping</u>	II: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 24)	<i>Mr. Green eventually DOES JUMP/JUMPS; El de verde AHORA SÍ QUE SALTA/ ACABA SALTANDO</i>
28	<u>Mr Red not jumping</u>		
29	<u>Mr Red jumping</u>	II: different TT, same TE, opposite POL, same PRED (wrt 28)	<i>finally Mr. Red DOES JUMP/ JUMPS; El de rojo AHORA SÍ QUE SALTA/ ACABA SALTANDO</i>
31	<u>The happy end</u>		

*The table illustrates just the segments our analysis is concerned with

The two configurations just commented have been studied by *Dimroth et al.* with respect to native speakers of four languages: Dutch, German, French and Italian. By virtue of their results (oral narrative data), the authors state that:

when a potential polarity contrast is involved in an information structure, Dutch and German native speakers mark contrast on the assertion level, either by a contrastive stress on the finite lexical verb (ex. 1) or auxiliary or by what they call “assertion related particles”, namely *doch/schon* (for German; cf. ex. 2) and *toch/wel* (for Dutch), as in the following German examples:

(1) Information Structure I

Der hat sich dann entschieden, *doch* zu springen, obwohl er eins höher
 he has himself then decided, PART to jump, even-though he a higher [flat]
 wohnt lives
 “he has decided to jump, even though he lives in a higher one [flat]”

2) Information Structure II

und deswegen *IST* er dann wohl auch gesprungen
 and because – of-that is he then well also jumped
 “and because of that he also has jumped”

for the same information structures, French and Italian native speakers prefer to mark the contrast by anaphoric devices acting on the topic component, at the levels of entity or time, rather than on the assertion level, as in the examples below:

3) Information Structure I

3a. Signor Blu *invece* è l'unico che accetta di saltare / *Solo* il Signor Blu salta
 “Mr Blue instead is the only one who accepts to jump”

3b. M. Bleu *lui* il saute
 “Mr Blue him he jumps”

4) Information Structure II

4a. I vigili del fuoco *finalmente* hanno risposto
 “The firemen finally have answered”

4b. *Cette fois-ci* le pompier décroche
 “This time the fireman picks up [the phone]”

Examples 3a and 3b show that the cohesion strategies selected by Italian speakers, on the one side, and French speakers, on the other side, are not the same, though all of

them act on the entity component of the utterance: Italian speakers exploit means such as the adverb *invece* (“instead”), the restrictive particle *solo* (“only”) and the uniqueness structure *è l'unico che* (“is the only one who”); French speakers use the strong pronoun *lui* (“him”), also acting on the level of the protagonists. As to examples 4a and 4b, speakers of both languages select temporal markings. It's not impossible, of course, for German or Dutch speakers, to have recourse to means comparable to It. “*invece*”, “*è l'unico che*” (for IS₁), or to temporal expressions (for IS₂), but the first two means are not the preferred ones whereas the temporal devices go along with the highlighting of the positive polarity.

On the basis of their results for Italian, French, German and Dutch, Dimroth *et al.*⁵ state that there is a Germanic way versus a Romance way of building textual cohesion in narrative texts such as the ones elicited⁶. The Germanic way is based on the highlighting of assertion and that is why German and Dutch can be described as “assertion oriented languages”⁷. By stating that, the authors enter the debate on the different way speakers of languages build perspective when organising information to produce an oral text. All the authors taking part to this debate have crucially contributed to define the “grammar of discourse” for some languages, namely the cohesion strategies that the native speakers of the latter select when faced to an oral cognitively complex task such as that of narrating, describing etc. (cf. the works by Carroll⁸, Giuliano, Lambert⁹, von Stutterheim¹⁰, Nüse¹¹, Murcia Serra¹², Rossdeutscher, Slobin¹³).

According to these scientists, the cohesion specificities observed for each language are strictly connected to the type of phenomena a certain language has or has not grammaticized and/or lexicalized: so grammatical and lexical facts are seen as the keys to interpret data.

2

Our theoretical framework

Our objective is to compare Dimroth *et al.*'s results to what emerges from our data in order to test the validity of their Germanic assertive *vs* Romance non-assertive model. Nevertheless, differently from these authors (working in the domain of the theoretical framework described in § 1 and in that of the *Quaestio* theory¹⁴, we shall adopt an enunciative framework, according to which we shall interpret our results by taking the enunciator as the absolute origin of locative operations, since every enunciative operation is located with respect to him/her¹⁵. As a consequence, in our opinion, the cohesive perspective selected by an enunciator while producing an oral text is the result of his/her communicative needs with respect to a specific co-enunciator, and not simply a selection of the most accessible linguistic means made available by one's mother tongue *via* the grammatical and lexical processes the latter has developed.

As first, we want to understand and not just describe the functioning of the operators used by our informants. In order to do that, we shall start from the conviction that operators such as Engl. *do*, Ger. *doch*, Du. *toch*, SP. *sí / sí que* etc. are traces of an operation constructing the predicative relationship and that this metalinguistic operation is in many ways unconscious and directed to a specific communicative strategy. So the interpretation of the operators will mostly depend on what the enunciator decides to take on while uttering his statement.

3

The informants and the data¹⁶

Our data are retellings of the video clip *The finite Story* produced by English native speakers and Spanish native speakers (20 subjects for each group). As to the English-speaking group, fourteen out of twenty have always lived in USA and never spent a long period abroad (they were interviewed in Italy during a two-week holiday). For the other six subjects, five come from England and one from Ireland: the five English speakers have been living in Italy (where they were interviewed) for several years but they use English daily for their job; the Irish informant was in Italy thanks to the Erasmus project. Concerning the Spanish native speakers, all of them are from Madrid, where they also live and were interviewed. All subjects of both groups have a university education.

Confronting the languages of our two groups, we can state that none of them has a highly specialized group of assertive particles at its disposal such as the ones available for the German or Dutch speaker (cf. § 1). In this respect, English is comparable to Romance languages including Spanish. As far as prosodic contrastive stress is concerned, it can be exploited to mark information structure in both Romance and Germanic languages, but intonational prominence plays a greater role in Germanic languages. With respect to German and Dutch, Dimroth *at al.*¹⁷ point out that contrastive stress on the finite verb or auxiliary can have a function that is very much related to the function of the assertion-related particles. As to English, it is possible to highlight the finite component of a verb phrase by *do/does/did*; it is also possible to prosodically stress the finite lexical (or auxiliary or copula) verb. A contrast on a finite light verb (auxiliary, copula) seems, conversely, very uncommon in Romance languages¹⁸, including Spanish, which does not mean that it is impossible to highlight the assertive polarity in the latter but rather that that does not happen by a close category of assertive particles as in Dutch and German. The possible means for some Romance speakers are the holophrastic particle *sì* (It. *Signor Blu sì che salta*; SP. *el señor Azul sí salta*: “Mr Blue yes that [he] jumps”) and the adverb *bien* (Fr. *M. Bleu il a bien sauté*: “Mr Blue he has well jumped”).

4

The analysis of the data

With respect to the configurations we decided to focus on (cf. § 1), the analysis of the data show that our two groups of informants have recourse to three different strategies.

By the first strategy, the enunciator focuses on the subject of the predication (one of the protagonist entities); the second strategy highlights the content of the predication; the third strategy points out the relationship between the subject of the predication and the predication itself, namely the notional nexus or assertion.

In what follows, we give examples for the first strategy both for English and for Spanish; this strategy is exclusively concerned with configuration I (a situation applying for the first two characters does not apply for the third one):

(5) IS I, English L1: Mr Green... doesn't want to jump //... even he [= Mr Red] doesn't want to jump out onto the blanket // *MR BLUE* though ... jumps straight away

(6) IS I, Spanish L1: El vecino el señor Azul éste sale por su ventana y se da cuenta que la parte izquierda del tejado está empezando a arder +//

“The neighbor Mr. Blue *this one* leans out of his window and realizes that the left side of the roof is starting to catch fire”

The English native speaker can employ the prosodic accent on the protagonist entity for the information structure I (ex. 5), signalling by that that a specific character behaves differently from the other ones. In Spanish, this same meaning is conveyed by the demonstrative *éste*.

As far as the second strategy is concerned, it consists of a prosodic accent on the finite lexical verb, both in English and Spanish, and is once again exploited for the first configuration:

(7) IS I, English L1: Mr Green slept while the fire became stronger and stronger // MR RED slept while the fire became stronger and stronger // Mr Blue *WOKe* up and he *SAW* the fire

(8) IS I, Spanish L1: Y cuando lo intentan con el señor Azul como el fuego está en su casa éste *SALta*

“And when they try with Mr. Blue since the fire is in his house this one *JUMPs*”

For the third strategy, finally, English native speakers have recourse to the auxiliary *do* to highlight the relationship given by the notional nexus; the Spanish native speakers do the same by the means of *sí* or *sí que*. For both groups of informants, the strategies in question are employed just for the second configuration.

The selection of one or the other of these three strategies depends on the expectations that enunciator and the co-enunciator develop about the notional nexus.

Here are some examples:

- (9) IS II, English L1: But *finally* Mr Red *did* jump out of the window
 (10) IS II, Spanish L1: Hay fuego dentro de la casa del azul y él *sí* se tira
 “There is fire in the house of Mr Blue and he *yes* jumps”
 (11) IS II, Spanish L1: Y el señor Azul *sí que* se ha dado cuenta
 “And Mr Blu *yes that* has realized”

Engl. *do* validates a predicative relationship previously negated¹⁹; conversely, SP *sí* is a marker of general validation of the predicative relationship. As to the operator *que*, it refers back to something stated previously so, as a result, when it is combined with the operator *sí*, that gives place to a grammaticized structure equating the function of Engl. *do*.

5

The operators *do*, *sí* and *sí que*: an enunciative interpretation

The English operator *do*

As we said in the previous paragraph, when used with an assertive modality, the English operator *do* refers to an enunciative situation in which the enunciator has deduced that the validity of the notional nexus is object of a controversy. Let's consider a passage of our stimulus (cf. segments 24-29 in table 1, § 1):

- (12) Mr Green does not want to jump // Mr Red does not want to jump // Mr Blue jumps // Mr Green jumps as well // Mr Red still refuses to jump // finally he jumps

For this passage, the enunciator firstly states that Mr Green and Mr Red do not want to jump because they are afraid of the height of the building but that Mr Blue conversely jumps and after him Mr Green does the same; Mr Red conversely persists in refusing to jump, which questions the validity of the new notional nexus:

<Mr Red – jump out of the window>

The enunciator has previously attributed a negative value to the relationship above:

<Mr Red – S NOT – jump out of window>²⁰

So he knows that to simply transform this relationship from positive into negative would not be sufficient to satisfy the expectation of his co-enunciator. An assertive modality such as the one given by:

- (13) But finally Mr Red jumps out of the window

is normally used to introduce some rhematic information, and as a consequence it is not appropriate for an operation with a thematic character such as the one the enunciator needs to convey: as a matter of fact, he must restate the same predicative relationship but with an opposite polarity.

The enunciator could exploit the second strategy we described in § 4 (the prosodic accent on the finite lexical verb), but if he wants to strengthen his statement and avoid any possible misunderstanding, he needs the operator *do*, by which not only he validates the notional nexus but he also asserts that the predicative positive relationship has a thematic value and is opposed to the previous one:

<Mr Red – DO NOT – jump out of the window>

<Mr Red – DO – jump out of the window>

So the enunciator will use the operator *do* whenever he thinks that the predicative relationship is not agreed.

The difference between the several strategies lies in the enunciator's attitude with respect to them, namely in the way he decides to take on the enunciation. By using the operator *do*, the enunciator conveys to his co-enunciator the idea that the validity of the notional nexus is a state of fact and because of that it is incontestable; furthermore, the enunciator's attitude is that of "not being responsible for what he asserts since it is a non-negotiable state of affair".

The operators *sí* and *sí que* in Spanish

The Spanish language has at its disposal two operators which equate Engl. *do*, Ger. *doch* and Du. *toch / wel* in their functioning. It is necessary to point out that a perfect correspondence between operators of different languages is impossible; a correspondence of operations is nevertheless possible.

Spanish has a general operator *sí* that validates the notional nexus and, consequently, the predicative relationship:

(14) A: Has comprado lo que te pedí?

"Have you bought what I asked you?"

B: Sí

"Yes"

By *sí* the enunciator only validates the predicative relationship that follows:

<Tú – comprar lo que te pedí>

"You – to buy what I asked you"

As Solís maintains, the operator *sí* simply indicates that a certain predicative relationship belongs to the bargain of knowledge of the enunciator, who by means of

this operator – deprived of any expectation – is just confirming the information questioned about and declaring that he is acquainted with it.²¹ *Si* validates the nexus in a general way, so in order for it to accomplish the same thematic function we observed for Engl. *do*, it is necessary to combine it with the operator *que*, which refers back to something already talked about or implied. As a matter of fact, the most used strategy by Spanish speakers is *si que*:

(15) Spanish L1: El Señor Rojo no se tira par la ventana // tampoco el Señor Verde // el Señor Azul *si que* se tira
 “Mr Red does not jump through the window // Neither does Mr Green // Mr Blue *yes that* jumps”

In example 15, the negative relationship:

<Señor Rojo/Verde – NO – tirarse por la ventana>
 “Mr Red/Green – NOT – to jump through the window”
 is corresponded by the relationship:

<Señor Azul – SÍ QUE – tirarse por la ventana>
 “Mr Blue – YES THAT – to jump through the window”

Similarly to what commented for the functioning of the operator *do*, in this case too it is possible to simply have recourse to a positive relationship, but that would not take into account the previous perturbation of the notional nexus.

As you can see in the following predicative relationships:

<Señor Verde – NO – tirarse por la ventana>
 <Señor Rojo – NO – tirarse por la ventana>
 <Señor Azul – SÍ QUE – tirarse por la ventana>

the two previous *no* have produced a specific expectation for the co-enunciator, which induces the enunciator to mark the change of polarity by *si que*.

6

General discussion and comparison with other Germanic and Romance languages

In this final section, we shall compare our results with those of Dimroth *et al.*²², trying to outline a more exhaustive view of the functioning of discourse cohesion in the Germanic and Romance languages that have been discussed in our work and theirs with respect to the *The Finite Story* task narrations. We are of course very conscious of the fact that more experiments eliciting different types of oral (and written) narrations are necessary in order to validate the possible existence of preferential textual patterns in languages.

As we said and demonstrated during our analysis (cf. §§ 4 and 5), we adopted an enunciative theoretical framework, which is not opposed to the functional framework proposed by Dimroth *et al.* but rather integrative with respect to the latter. This integration seems essential to bring us to a more exhaustive comprehension of the reasons pushing a speaker to state what he states in a specific communicative situation. On the basis of this integrated framework, we shall join the debate about the assertive oriented *vs* non-assertive oriented languages as described in § 1, according to which Germanic languages would tend to highlight assertion whenever possible in contrast with Romance languages, which would focus on the entity and/or temporal domains.

In what follows we furnish some tables comparing the results of Dimroth *et al.* for German, Dutch, French and Italian with our results for English and Spanish.

Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that English native speakers do not focus on the assertion level as often as we would have expected, despite the fact that, during its history, it has grammaticized the highlighting of positive polarity by the *do auxiliary*. This result brings English far from German and Dutch, whose native speakers, as the tables show, highlight the assertion level much more frequently.

The new tables furnished below are concerned with Spanish, Italian and French.

TABLE 2
Results for IS I: Germanic Languages

Information Structures	Means	English	German	Dutch
Change of time	Adverbs	Finally 1, now 1	-	-
Change of entity	stressed NP/ pronouns	MR BLUE 3	DER 3	HIJ 2
	strong/demon- str. Pronouns	-	dieser 1	-
	cleft sentences	He's the brave one who 1	-	-
	Particles	-	nur 3	-
	Adverbs	-	als einziger 1	-
	Total	4	8	2
Change of polarity	Particles	-	doch 3	toch 2, wel 18
	stressed VP	WOKe up 1	SPRINGT 2, STEIGT 1, IST 1	MOEST 2, SPRINGT 1
	Total	1	7	23
Total markings		6	15	25

TABLE 3
Results for IS II: Germanic Languages

Information Structures	Means	English	German	Dutch
Change of Entity	Additive particles	Also, too, as well		
Change of time	temp. adverbials	This time: 10; finally: 16; at last: 1; once the fire is in Mr Green's room: 1; at the 3 rd time: 1	diesmal 4, schließlich 3, zum Schluß 1, letztendlich 1, JETZT 3, NUN 2, DANN 1	Deze/dit keer 5, uiteindelijk 13, NU/NOU 11
	verbal periph.	2	-	-
	other		-	-
	total	31	15	29
Change of polarity	particles		doch 15	wel 16, toch 12, toch wel 5, alsnog 1
	stressed VP; Engl. do + V	3	ERREICHT 3	SPRINGT
	other			
	total	3	18	35
Total markings		38	33	64

TABLE 4
Results for IS I: Romance Languages

Information Structures	Means	Spanish L1	French L1	Italian L1
Change of time	Adverbs	-	-	Finalmente 2, alla fine 2
	Total	-	-	4
Change of entity	stressed NP/pronouns	-	-	-
	strong/demonstr. pronouns	El signor Azul éste 1	Lui 14, celui-ci 1	-
	cleft sentences	-	-	è l'unico che 3, è il primo a 1
	particles	-	-	Solo 2
	adverbs	En cambio 1 Al contrario 1	par contre 3, en revanche 1	Invece 11, mentre 1
	total	3	19	18
Change of polarity	particles	Sí [que] 14	bien 1	-
	stressed VP	SALta 1	VU 2	-
	total	15	3	-
Total markings		18	22	22

TABLE 5
 Results for IS II: Romance Languages

Information Structures	Means	Spanish L1	French L1	Italian L1
Change of entity	particles	también 6	-	Anche 21, ugualmente 1
	Total	6	-	22
Change of time	temp. adverbials	al final 10, ahora 5, finalmente 6 Esta vez 5 por fin 4 Al fin 1 Por fin 4	cette fois(ci) 8, finalement 12, enfin 4, là 1	questa volta 11 finalmente 4, alla fine 6...
	verbal periph.	Acabar + GER 1	finir par 7	-
	other	-	ça y est 1	-
	total	42	32	33
	Same Predication	Anaphoric VP	-	1
	Total	-	1	1
Change of polarity	particles	Si [que] 6	-	-
	stressed VP		-	SALta
	total	6	-	1
Total markings		48	37	34

Against the expectations of the typological model described by Dimroth *et al.*, Spanish speakers emphasize the assertion level much more frequently than English speakers do, and they do that by means of the general marker *sí*, combined with *que* when underlining a possible controversy, rather than by a range of specific repertoire of particles, that they do not have at their disposal; this fact brings Spanish closer to German and Dutch than to French and Italian.

The apparent inconsistencies we have just remarked for our results in English and Spanish with respect to the typological model proposed by Dimroth *et al.* for Romance and Germanic languages can be resolved if we adopt an enunciative framework of interpretation of the data, by virtue of which the cultural and pragmatic habits carried on by the speakers of a given language are seen as more central and explicative than the only grammatical devices. If grammatical and/or lexical facts could satisfactorily explain the enunciator's attitude to his/her enunciation, we should have had different results for our English and Spanish native narrations, with

the formers focusing less on the assertion level and the latter focus more on this same level, which does not happen.

Final Considerations

In this work we analysed the way English and Spanish speaking informants build textual cohesion in a narrative task (*The Finite Story* task), comparing our results with those of Dimroth *et al.* for French, Italian, German and Dutch (same task). By doing that we contributed to the debate about the “assertion oriented” and the “non-assertion oriented” languages (for this debate cf. § 1; for its limited validity cf. note 6), showing, by our results, that a strict distinction between the Romance non-assertion oriented pattern, on the one side, and the Germanic assertion-oriented pattern, on the other side, is not possible; this opposition, proposed by Dimroth *et al.*, is certainly acceptable relatively to some Romance and Germanic languages but, as for other phenomena, it is to be interpreted as a continuum rather than a contrast²³. As a matter of fact, our results showed that our Spanish speakers are more “assertion oriented” than our English speaking informants.

We could, finally, satisfactorily explain this unexpected result by the enunciative framework of analysis adopted, thanks to which the semantic and linguistic choices that an enunciator makes are not simply seen as the expression of grammatical or lexical processes (the *do auxiliary* is certainly a more grammaticized phenomenon than the generic *si*) but rather as the reflex of (unconscious) decisions motivated by his/her communicative needs with respect to a specific co-enunciator.

Symbols and abbreviations

// marks the border between the comments concerned with the different segments of the video clip

marks a short pause

: marks the lengthening of a phoneme

... refers to the elimination of a passage

[...] contains the analyst's observations or additions

PART (assertive) particle

IS information structure

Wrt with respect to

Notes

1. The two authors have equally contributed to the collection of data and their analysis; despite this; Patrizia Giuliano has written the paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 and Salvatore Musto the paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

2. We shall adopt the definition of the notion of contrast proposed by C. Umbach, *On the notion of contrast in information structure and discourse structure*, in “Journal of Semantics”, 21, 2004, pp. 155-75 which is based on comparability presupposing both similarity and dissimilarity.

3. C. Dimroth, C. Andorno, S. Benazzo, J. Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics. The distribution of contrastive and maintained information in Romance and Germanic languages*, in "Journal of pragmatics", 42, 2010, pp. 3328-44.

4. C. Dimroth, *The Finite Story*. Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistics, 2006 (http://co8rpus1.mpi.nl/ds/imdi_browser?openpath=MPI560350%23).

5. Dimroth, Andorno, Benazzo, Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics*, cit.

6. The statement of the authors can be valid just for the oral experimentation that they carried on, which is also true for our results. More experiments eliciting different types of oral (and written) narrations are necessary in order to validate the possible existence of preferential textual patterns in languages.

7. Dimroth, Andorno, Benazzo, Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics*, cit., p. 3330: «In Dutch and German there is a special group of scope particles that lacks a direct translation equivalent in Italian and French. These are particles like Dutch *toch/wel* and German *doch/schon* (roughly meaning *indeed*) whose stressed variants mark that the utterance in which they appear is in contrast to an earlier, otherwise comparable utterance with opposite polarity ... we will refer to these particles as assertion-related particles... because they evoke a proposition-level comparison of the utterance in which they occur to another assertion given in the *co(n)text*». For the *verum focus* in Italian and French, cf. G. Turco, C. Dimroth, B. Braun, *Intonational means to mark verum focus in German and French*, in "Language and Speech", 56, 4, 2012, pp. 460-90.

8. C. von Stutterheim, M. Carroll, W. Klein, *Two ways of construing complex temporal structures*, in F. Lenz (ed.), *Deictic Conceptualization of Space, Time and Person*, [Cognitive Linguistics Research], Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin | John Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 97-133.

9. M. Carroll, M. Lambert, C. von Stutterheim, A. Rossdeutscher, *Subordination in narratives and macrostructural planning: taking a comparative point of view*, in C. Fabricius Hansen, W. Ramm (eds.) "Subordination" versus "Coordination" in Sentence and Text, Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 2008, pp. 161-84; M. Carroll, C. von Stutterheim, *Typology and information organisation: perspective taking and language specific effects in the construal of events*, in A. Giacalone Ramat (ed.) *Typology and Second Language Acquisition*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin 2003, pp. 365-402; M. Carroll, C. von Stutterheim, R. Nüse, *The thought and language debate: a psycholinguistic approach*, in T. Pechman, C. Habel (eds.) *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Language Production*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin-New York, pp. 184-218; M. Carroll, M. Lambert, *Crosslinguistic analysis of temporal perspectives in text production*, in H. Hendricks (ed.), *The Structure of Learner Variety*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin 2005, pp. 203-30.

10. D. Gleitz, C. von Stutterheim (eds.), [Special issue:] *Perspectives in language production*, in "Linguistics", 41, 5, 2003.

11. C. Von Stutterheim, R. Nüse, *Processes of conceptualisation in language production*, in "Linguistics" [Special issue: *Perspectives in language production*], 2003; pp. 851-881.

12. C. von Stutterheim, R. Nüse, J. Murcia Serra, *Crosslinguistic differences in the conceptualisation of events*, in H. S. Hasselgård, S. Johansson, B. Behrens, C. Fabricius-Hansen (eds.), *Information Structure in a Cross-Linguistic Perspective*, Rodopi, Amsterdam-New York 2002, pp. 179-98.

13. D. I. Slobin, *Language and thought online: cognitive consequences of linguistic relativity*, in D. Gentner, S. Goldin-Meadow (eds.), *Advances in the Investigation of Language and Thought*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2003, pp. 157-92; D. I. Slobin, *Learning to think for speaking*, in "Pragmatics", 1, 1, 1987, pp. 7-25.

14. According to the *Quaestio* Theory, the organisation of information in a text is determined by an unconscious question (or *Quaestio*) that individuals progressively elaborate during their infancy and adolescence according to the lexical and grammatical specificities of their own L1. Cf. W. Klein, C. von Stutterheim, *Referential movement in descriptive and narrative discourse*, in R. Dietrich and C. F. Graumann (eds.), *Language Processing in Social Context*, Elsevier Science Publishers, Amsterdam 1989, pp. 39-76. W. Klein, C. von Stutterheim, *Text structure and referential movement*. «Spracheund pragmatik» 22, 1991, pp. 1-32.

15. A. Culioli, *Stabilité et déformabilité en linguistique*, *Études de Lettres, Langues et Connaissances*, Université de Lausanne, Lausanne 1986, pp. 127-34.

16. The results of our study must be meant as tendencies to be verified by the use of larger corpora. As a matter of fact, the paper is to be intended as an answer to Dimroth *et al.* (2010), and as such it proposes data that are strictly comparable to theirs.

17. Dimroth, Andorno, Benazzo, Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics*, cit. and Turco, Dimroth, Braun, *Intonational means to mark verum focus in German and French*, cit.

18. Dimroth, Andorno, Benazzo, Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics*, cit. state that «we have occasionally observed pitch accents on lexical verbs in our French and [Northern] Italian data. While it is known that Romance languages mark both narrow and contrastive focus with a pitch accent [...] to the best of our knowledge, there is no systematic study dealing with the prosodic marking of the *verum focus* in Romance languages» (ivi, p. 3336, note 18).

19. G. Gagliardelli, *Elementi di grammatica enunciativa della lingua inglese*, CLUEB, Bologna 1999, pp. 75, 117.

20. The S represents the realization of the predicative relationship for the present tense, 3rd person (cf. ivi, p. 74).

21. I. Solís García, *La toma de posición del enunciador por medio de los operadores claro, desde luego y por supuesto*, in "Archivum", vol. LXIII, 2013, pp. 347-9.

22. Dimroth, Andorno, Benazzo, Verhagen, *Given claims about new topics*, cit.

23. Cf. also P. Giuliano, L. Di Maio, *Abilità descrittiva e coesione testuale in L1 e L2: lingue romanze e lingue germaniche a confronto*, in "Linguistica e filologia", 25, 2008, pp. 125-205.