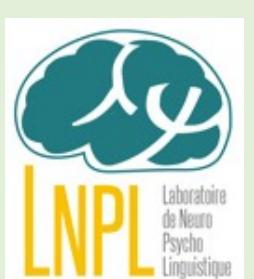


# New insights into the conceptualisation of events in a second language: focus on agentivity in ditransitive constructions



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## Introduction

- Conceptualisation and linguistic encoding differences are partly imputable to the structural properties of languages
- Grammar provides a set of options to schematise the experience (**Thinking for Speaking Hypothesis** (Slobin 1996))
- Influence of patterns acquired as members of the same discourse community (**Conceptual Transfer Hypothesis** (Jarvis 2011, Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008, Bylund and Jarvis 2011))
- Undeniable influence of L1 on information processing (**Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis** (Thierry, 2016))
- L1 organisational patterns influence L2 use : Advocates of the **Grammatical Aspect Hypothesis** have shown the role of grammatical aspect even at very advanced stages (Carroll et al., 2004; Carroll & von Stutterheim, 1997, 2003; von Stutterheim et al., 2002, 2012; von Stutterheim & Nüse, 2003)
- Focus mostly on event construal and expression of motion.

➤ Need to investigate other conceptual categories

## Objective and research questions

To investigate other conceptual categories that might be important for event construal, like entities' selection, argument structure and agentivity:

- Do Syrian speakers of French show similar information selection and construction preferences in their narratives in Syrian Arabic (SAL1) and in French (FRL2)?
- Are their preferences different from those of French native speakers (FRL1)?
- Does L1 Syrian Arabic influence L2 French and how?
- Are Syrian speakers' preferences in L2 affected by their L2 proficiency ?

## Methodology

- Film retellings from the SOFRA\* corpus
  - 34 Syrian adults in French L2 then Syrian Arabic L1
  - 9 French native speakers in FRL1

\* Task : French : *Qu'est-ce qu'il s'est passé dans cette vidéo ?*  
Syrian arabic: *šu ellî sâ:r bilfilm min šway ?*

The video stimulus was divided into sequences /situations :

Focus on 2 of them where the protagonist undergoes actions of another entity : trash scenes

- Oral retellings were transcribed and divided into utterances (CLAN)

- + in each narrative, we coded the following :
  - Selected situations of the movie extract
    - First (1) then second scene (2)
    - (1) or (2) or both
    - None
  - Selected predicates for every trash scene retelling
    - 1 predicate
    - 2 or more predicates referring to the same scene : the predicate selected for analysis is the last one containing most arguments (AGENT – INSTRUMENT – PATIENT)

Example : &-ah &-ahm fi: 'avil marra tillit &-ah 'imra'a min alšiba:k / la première fois une dame est apparue à la fenêtre zattit azibale (1) / Elle a jeté des déchets aju 'ala 'awa:lh (1) / Ils sont tombés sur ses vêtements &-ah waba'den kaman rjjit wahde taŋya min ſibbak / et après une autre femme est apparue à la fenêtre ta:ni: zattit 'alih (2) / Elle a aussi jeté (les déchets) sur lui

3) Voice : Active (Agent-perspective) vs Passive (Patient-perspective)

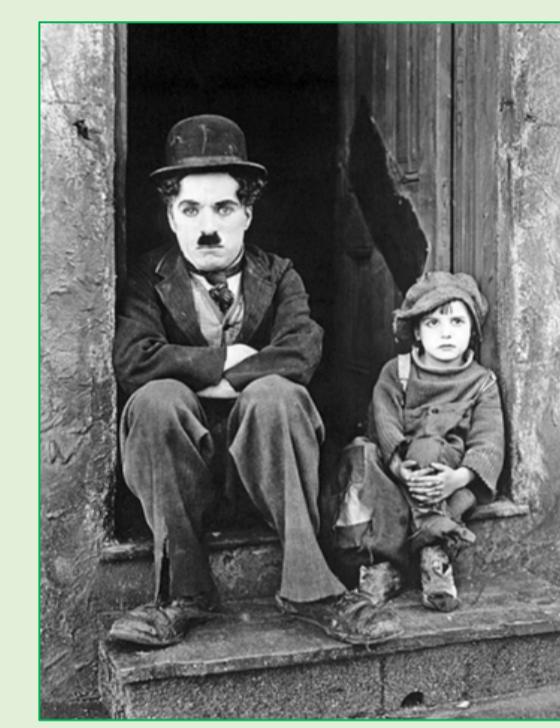
4) Argument structure of the trash scenes X throw Y on Z

- C-Test scores (M = 33) => 2 proficiency groups

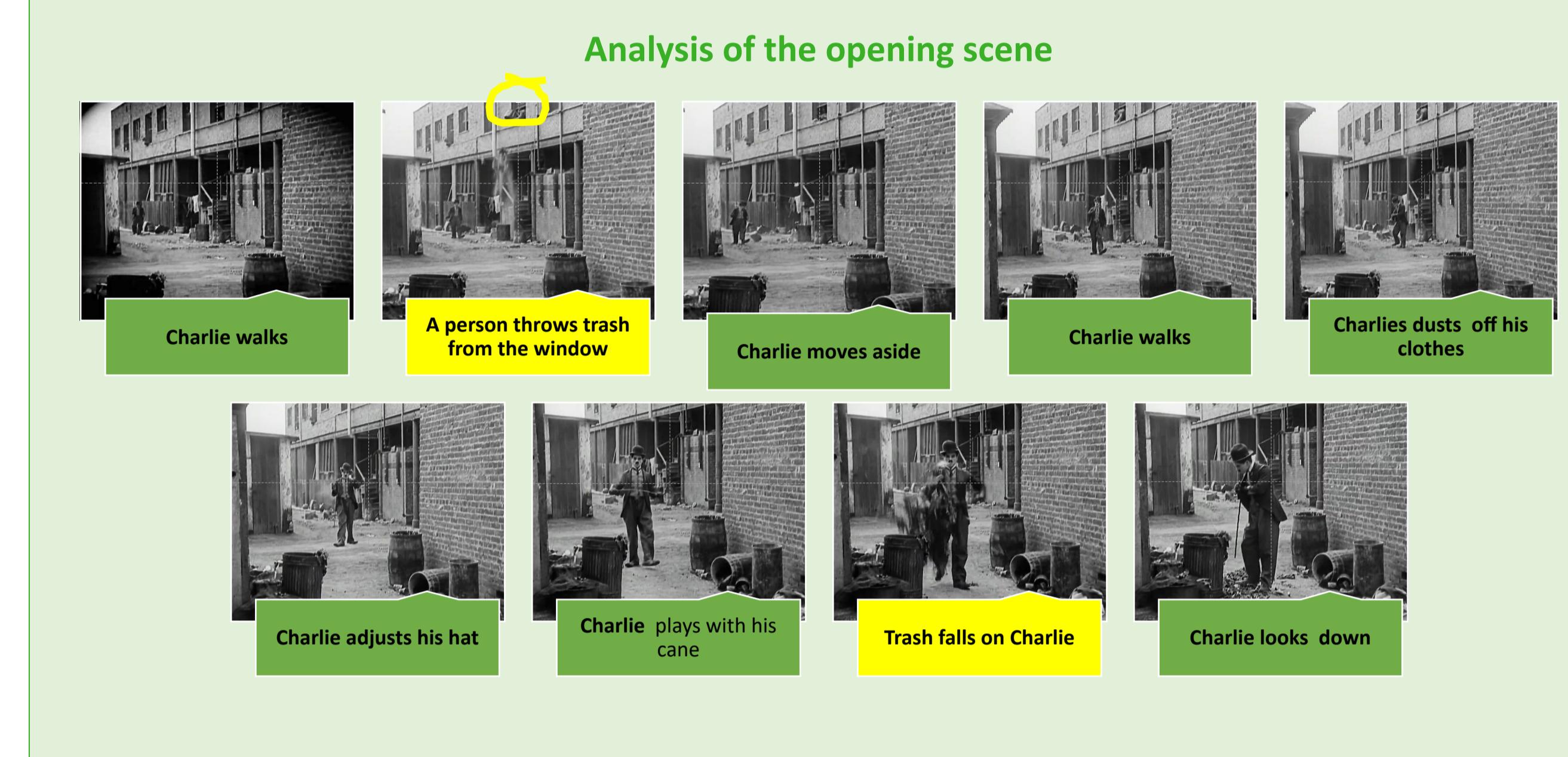
Group A (n= 18, M = 22,5)

Group B (n= 16, M = 42)

\* Approche SOcioculturelle et psychologique de l'acquisition du FRAnçais langue seconde par des demandeurs d'asile syriens (Project supported by la Région Occitanie, 2019-2022)



Extract from The kid (Chaplin, 1921), 4'



Analysis of the opening scene

## Discussion and conclusions

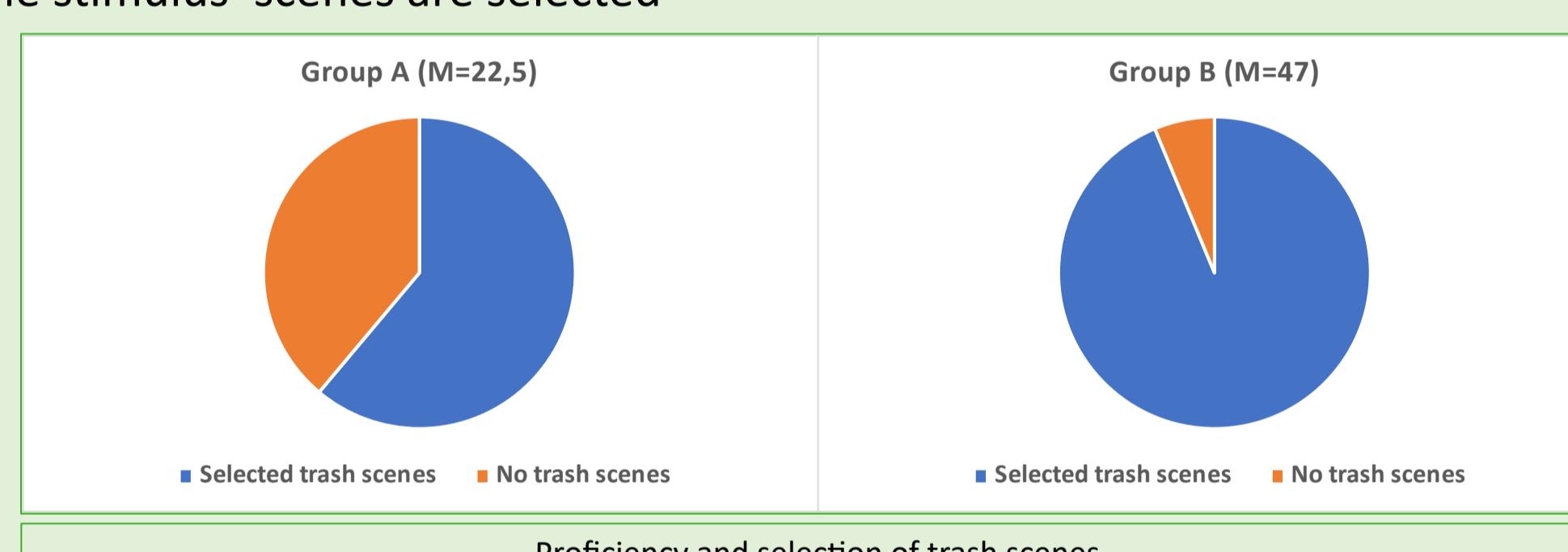
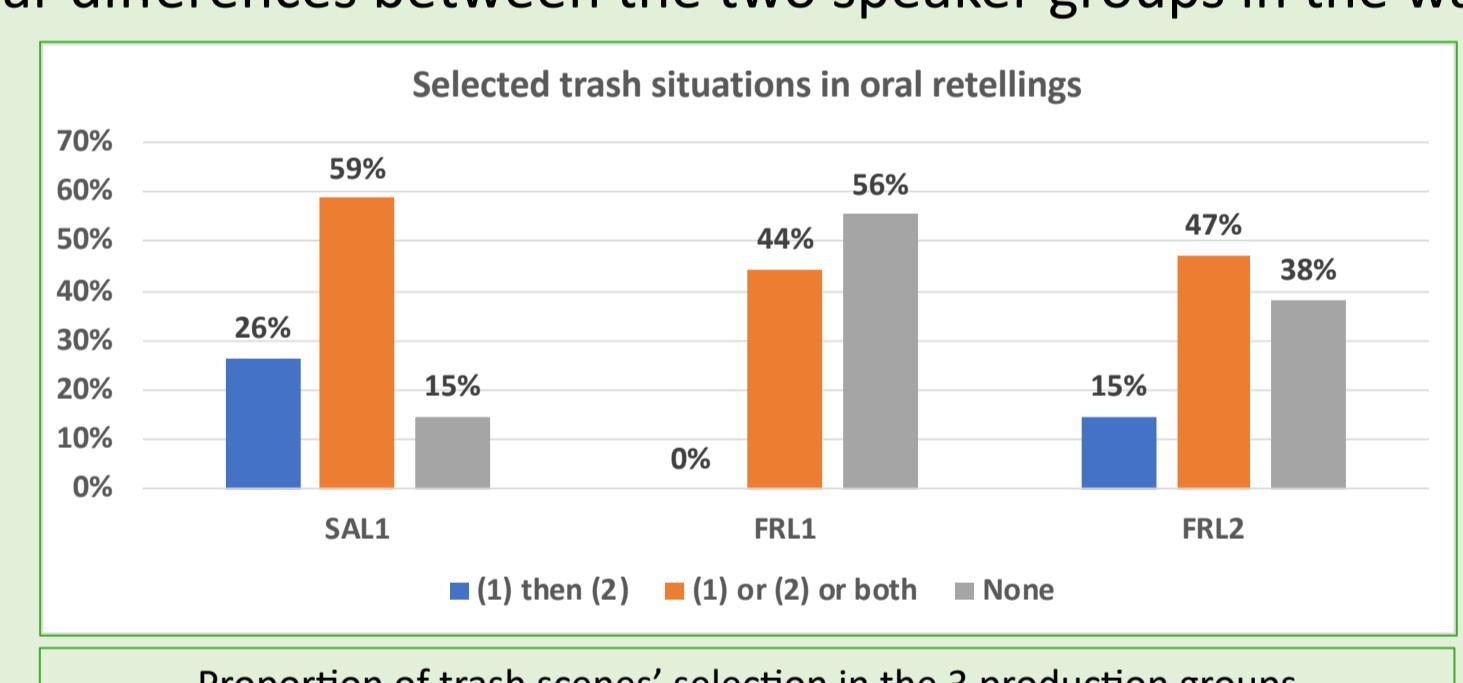
- Information selection (trash scenes) is affected not only by speakers' L1 but also their L2 proficiency as already attested by a number of studies
- Even though both active and passive voices are possible options in event construal in both Syrian Arabic and French, we notice a clear preference for passive voice in French L1, an exclusive use of active voice in SAL1 and a clear preference for agentive constructions in FRL2
- Argument structure is the same in SAL1 and FRL2, and proficiency does not seem to be a determinant factor in the types of constructions used

## Results

Film retellings reveal clear differences between the two speaker groups in the way the stimulus' scenes are selected, perceived and encoded

### 1) Information selection

Clear differences between the two speaker groups in the way the stimulus' scenes are selected



- Trash scenes are more frequently selected by Arabic speakers in both L1 and L2 than by French L1 speakers

- They are more selected in SAL1 than in FRL2

- This selection seems to be influenced by proficiency in L2 = the more proficient the learner, the more likely the selection of the trash scene

### 2) Voice selection (in utterances relating trash scenes)

- Syrian Arabic productions are all in the active voice

=> Whereas French speakers clearly prefer passive constructions to relate the trash scene in French L1, Syrian speakers only use active constructions in Syrian Arabic and almost the same in French L2.

SV2, active voice, use of an animate then inanimate agent  
zattit azibale  
throw&3PS&PERF DET-trash  
She threw trash  
aju 'ala 'awa:lh  
comes&3PP&PERF on clothes-him  
They fell on his clothes

SV16, active voice, animate agent  
ils ont jeté les poubelles sur lui et tout  
AUX throw&PP DET trash on him and everything  
They threw trash on him

### 3) Argument structure (in FRL2 and SAL1)

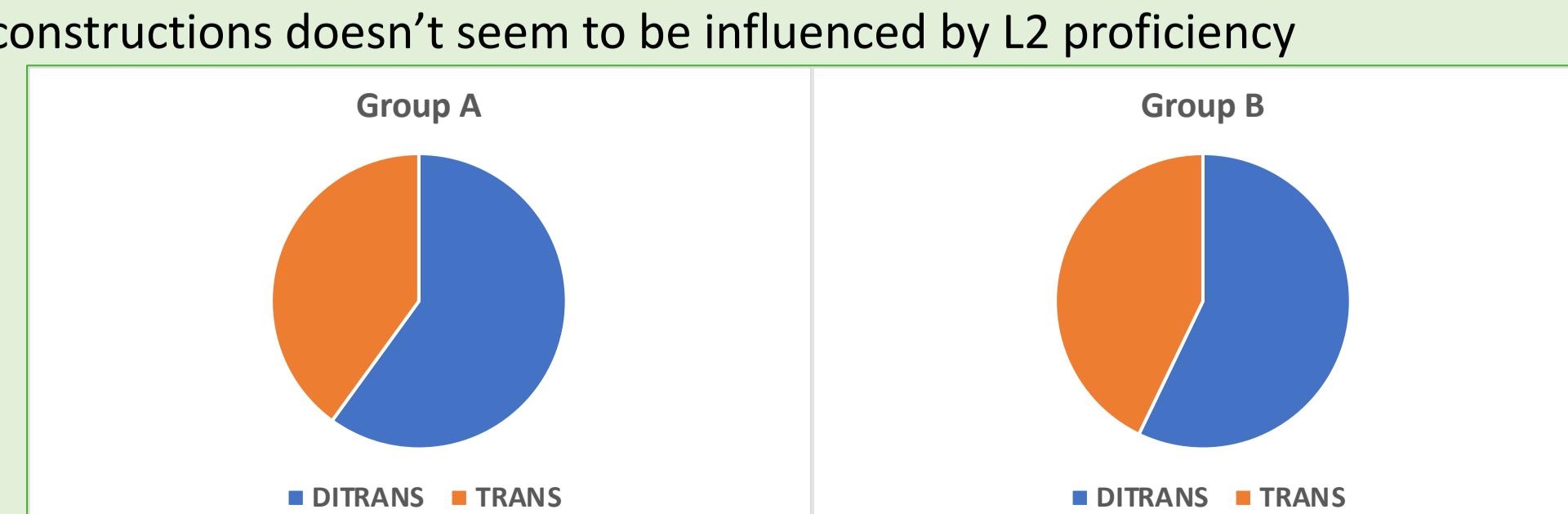
DITRANS, SY34  
Il a@u 3ate@u du poubelle sur lui  
He throw trash some trash on him

TRANS, SY06  
Et une femme d'autre qui a jeté aussi quelque+chose  
par la fenêtre.  
And DET woman other who AUX throw also something  
by DET window

DITRANS, SY19  
winas 'am bitkub 'alih wasax.  
and people AUX 3PP&spill on-him litter.  
And people are throwing litter on him

TRANS, SY32  
Wu ejji:ra:n 'am biyubbu wasax min alba:ku:n  
And DET-neighbours AUX spill dirt of DET-balcony  
And the neighbours are spilling trash from the balcony

- Comparable distribution patterns in L1 and L2 in Syrian speakers' productions
- Frequent use of ditransitive constructions (majoritarily using verbs like *jetter, ramasser*: (throw))
- The use of ditransitive constructions doesn't seem to be influenced by L2 proficiency



Use of ditransitive constructions in the two proficiency groups (Group A n=18, Group B n=16)

## Perspectives

- Analyse more FRL1 data
- The methodology used does not account for variable ways of segmenting the scenes to be retold (some retold using multiple utterances with different perspectives taken on agents).
  - Some speakers retell trash scenes using different constructions that show different ways of retelling the same scene
  - Choosing one only of them does not allow to account for the way event units are identified and information about segmentation sheds light into discourse complexity
- The differences of preferences in selecting the trash scenes may be interpreted in terms of L1 influence (the limited use of passive voice to constructions where agents are unknown or defocalised)
- But other phenomena like attention to other protagonists (persons at the windows) in building a narrative (SYL1 and FRL2) vs focusing on the main protagonist (Charlie) in FRL1 may be imputable to other possible factors:
  - Cultural relativity and its interplay with linguistic relativity (as suggested by Slobin in a note in his famous article of 1996)
  - Social conventions that may be « culture-specific », as suggested in the conclusion of Klein & Stutterheim (2002: 65-66)
- Agency offers new insights into language and cognition interface
  - Interplay with other conceptual components : causality and intentionality

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