STORY GRAMMAR AS A STRATEGY
FOR ENHANCING NARRATIVE SKILLS IN THE CASE OF
L2 ROMANIAN ADULT LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT. *Story Grammar as a Strategy for Enhancing Narrative Skills in the Case of L2 Romanian Adult Learners.* The present study analyses the storytelling abilities of L2 Romanian learners, students enrolled in the Preparatory Program for Foreign Citizens at Babeş-Bolyai University. It aims to give an interpretation across Story Grammar (SG) episodes of three stories from Mercer Mayer's *Frog Stories* to track the development of the L2 Romanian oral productions, namely the macrostructure of the Story Grammar (SG) constituents and the microstructure of the temporal, causal, and additive cohesion markers. The spoken corpus, a small L2 Romanian corpus of pictured-based oral productions, was the data source for the research. The stories were assessed progressively, from level A2 to level B2, and the scoring model and methodology focused on the macrostructure of the L2 oral productions and the overall organisation, at the same time, aiming to outline the milestones reached by students as evidence that made possible the provision of sufficient granularity to the data assessment. The results showed that teaching narrative strategies to students who learn a second language is a necessary step if one aims to impact the development of their ability to tell and retell and give them (self)assessment instruments that can foster access to SG strategy in L2 and provide tools for optimising structural organisation when producing oral or written texts in L2.

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The results regarding their narrative skills became valuable for improving teaching methods that enhance storytelling strategies in L2 Romanian.

Keywords: *L2 narrative skills, L2 adult learners*, *Story Grammar constituents*, *macrostructure*, *cohesion markers*, *microstructure*

REZUMAT. *Gramatica Poveștii (GP) ca strategie de îmbunătățire a abilităților narative în cazul adulților care învață limba română ca limbă străină (L2).* Studiul de față analizează abilitățile narative ale studenților care învață limba română ca limbă străină (L2), studenți înscriși în Programul de An Pregătitor pentru Cetățeni Străini de la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai. Scopul acestuia este de a interpreta datele extrase din înregistrarea a trei povești din seria *Frog Stories,* de Mercer Mayer, pentru a urmări modul în care sunt procesate unitățile narative, specifice GP, în raport cu progresul în limba română ca L2, punând accent pe elemente de macrostructură, cum ar fi constituenții GP, și microstructură, prin analizarea elementelor care marchează coeziunea în textele produse de către participanții la studiu, de la un nivel de limbă la altul. Sursa datelor a fost un corpus oral redus, alcătuit din producții orale bazate pe imagini. Poveștile au fost evaluate progresiv, de la nivelul A2 la B2. La nivel macrostructural, producțiile orale au vizat organizarea generală, urmărind totodată să evidențieze și etapele semnificative atinse de către studenți, astfel încât să ofere suficientă granularitate în evaluarea datelor. Rezultatele au demonstrat că exersarea strategiilor narative în cazul studenților care învață limba română ca limbă străină este necesară pentru dezvoltarea abilității lor de a povesti și de a repovesti, pentru a le oferi instrumente de (auto)evaluare care să faciliteze accesul la strategiile GP în L2 și pentru a le furniza instrumente eficiente în vederea optimizării modului de organizare la nivel de structură narativă în L2. Concluziile privind abilitățile narative ale studenților s-au dovedit valoroase pentru îmbunătățirea metodelor didactice și pentru eficientizarea strategiilor narative în limba română ca L2.

Cuvinte-cheie: *abilități narative în L2, L2 adult learners, Constituenții Gramaticii Poveștii (GP), macrostructură, markeri ai coeziunii, microstructură*

1. Introduction and overview

The study approaches Story Grammar (SG) models from first (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition research and adopts the core components of this conceptual framework, namely Setting and Characters, Initiating Event, Internal Response, Attempt, and Outcome. The methodological approach aimed to observe how such schemes manifest in the case of L2 learners enrolled in an intensive one-year-long academic program at the university level. The participants in the study produced oral texts based on three *Frog Stories* published by Mercer

Meyer that resulted in a small oral corpus of L2 Romanian. The CEFR - Companion Volume (2020) descriptors were used in assessing the proficiency level of the oral productions for the Waystage (A2), Threshold (B1), and Vantage (B2) levels. The goal was to see how or if the results showcased a possible path to structure complexity from one story to another. The interpretation of the results could lead to specific measures that could impact future teaching strategies, task-based activities for SG constituents, and formative assessment tools. Such initiatives aim to monitor the progress across levels and to support the development of the narrative competence with teaching tools. In this undertaking, the main challenges that could have factored into the process were considered, such as possible cultural differences in approaching the oral text, the impact of L1 SG patterns on the L2, the limits imposed by the lexical inventory available to the students at each CEFR level, the complexity of the temporal, causal, and additive markers that could affect the correlation between story sequences, as well as the complexity of the story elements and the episodes, in the progression from one story to the other. The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides a brief description of the participants in the study and of the corpus used for the investigation; Section 3 presents the core concepts that create the theoretical framework, namely the SG models and the studies conducted on monolinguals and bilinguals; Section 4 deepens the quantitative and the qualitative investigation of the data collected from the corpus and describes the methods used to interpret the results and elaborate the preliminary findings at the (4.1.) macrostructure and (4.2.) microstructure levels; and Section 5 concludes the study.

2. A brief description of the oral corpus

There were 21 participants in the study, all students enrolled in the Preparatory Program for Foreign Citizens at the Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. The group is characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity. Most students have completed high school or university studies (bachelor's or master's degrees) in their home countries. Two of the most common goals expressed by the respondents were to continue their university studies and to integrate professionally into the Romanian workforce. The students represented 16 countries. The most common L1 languages in the corpus were Spanish, French, Arabic, and Burmese, with one representative for each of the following languages: Thai, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Hebrew, German, Persian, and Greek. Most of the participants were adults between 20-25 years old.

The oral corpus includes the audio recordings in L2 Romanian of 21 participants. The oral productions had as support picture prompts in the form of three wordless picture books: *A Boy, a Dog and a Frog* (Mayer 1967), *Frog Goes*
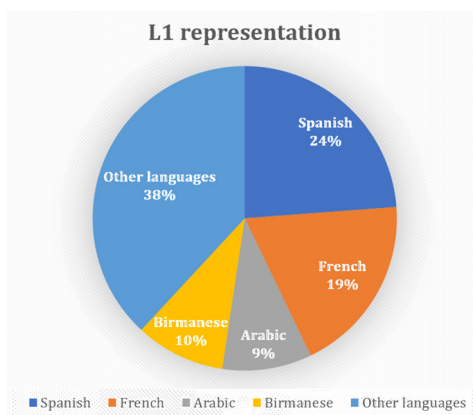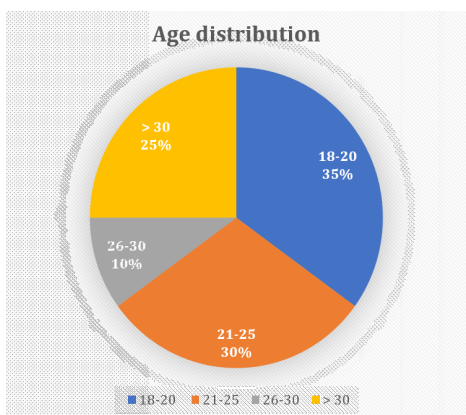
Figure 1. L1 representation

Figure 2. Age distribution

to Dinner (Mayer 1969), *and Frog on His Own* (Mayer 1974). The first recordings occurred after the students were examined at the A2 level, the second book recording was conducted after level B1, and the third after level B2. For the SG interpretation, the three stories were divided into episodes. The first story was segmented into three episodes, and the second and the third stories were each divided into five. As mentioned above, the core SG units selected for tracking the sequences were Character and Setting, Initiating Event, Internal Response, Attempt, and Outcome. As such, the story format was used to elicit oral responses in L2 Romanian and served as a framework for the present data assessment. The macrostructure components scored 0 to 3 points each. The picture-based tasks targeted the overall progression and complexity of the storytelling abilities in L2 Romanian as well as the quality of the narrative range to investigate and assess the macrostructure (the overall organisation) together with the microstructure (the relationship generated between event sequences by the cohesion markers as discourse units) of the oral productions of adult learners of L2 Romanian.

3. The conceptual framework

The core concept of the SG model is *schema* and was used in cognitive psychology, linguistics, and discourse analysis to demonstrate that the story's coherence consists of shared sets of elements and must be understood as a universal underlying design (Rumelhart 1975). The frameworks consisting of settings and sequences of events became what was accepted as underlying schema, a set of cognitive structures contributing to comprehension and production in

general (Rumelhart 1975). The concept was associated with mental frameworks that allowed individuals to access information and organise thoughts sequentially and cohesively. It was posited that knowledge exists a priori and, as a result, can be retrieved, in this case, by using a narrative format in first and second language. Under this framework, the underlying patterns, or the grammar of the story, are organised into sets or units, and the succession of episodes is the result of segmentation and functions based on underlying patterns cross-linguistically. The theoretical proposal includes the setting and episodes divided into events, reactions, and actions, with goal-attempt-outcome constituents (GAO) representing the main components used in studies and experimental data processing. Model proposals included comprehension and production, with a focus on coherence and cohesion, and the role played by *working memory* and the organisation of the information to be retrieved by L1 and L2 learners due to a priori experience and knowledge (Kintsch and Dijk 1978; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). The schema-based models were used frequently to observe how children understand, process, and recall stories (Stein and Glen 1979) and to analyse how individuals with different language backgrounds and of varying age groups could process and construct texts in L1 and L2. The research was prolific in first and second language acquisition, and it was adopted as an instrument in language learning theories, following methodologies that employ the conceptual framework. In teaching storytelling strategies to children and L2 learners, it was argued that the personal or emotional response, based on prior knowledge and experience, had to be grounded in the underlying SG model (Stein and Glenn 1979, Stein and Albro 1997, Stein and Albro 2012). Hierarchy in the organisation, with high and low levels from a structural perspective, working memory, and the role of mental schema required the retrieval of prior information or knowledge and was indispensable in telling and retelling stories, as well as recalling schemes to make sense of new stories (Thorndyke 1977).

Studies on the narrative development of monolingual, bilingual, and SLI children also impacted the research on L2. Factors such as language proficiency, complexity, and SG units changed the perspective on the interpretation, respectively, the macrostructure and the microstructure elements, proving that such abilities work cross-linguistically and are critical to literacy development in schools. The assessment was conducted in several languages, and the elicitation tasks focused on the ability to tell and retell stories under an SG model (Gagarina 2010; Gagarina et al. 2015; Gagarina et al. 2016; Gagarina and Lindgren 2020). The investigation of SG components and the proficiency level in L2 were examined in second language acquisition (SLA), and the research on oral corpus connected literacy and its development to such skills in children, their ability to organise their thoughts, namely planning and organising coherently a discourse (Gagarina and Lindgren 2020).

The focus was on narrative competence and how that could be mapped and monitored in the oral productions. Studies on monolingual and bilingual children with specific language impairment (SLI) provided insight into children's cognitive competence and the internal response terms in processing the structure (Greenhalgh and Strong 2001; Paradis et al. 2011; Pearson 2001; Tsimpli et al. 2015). The ability to use cognitive skills and express the characters' thoughts and feelings pertains to the *Theory of Mind* (ToM). The models were associated with language domains and how such a theory could contribute to a better understanding of comprehension and production in learners. This theory is essential as it relies on understanding other individuals' mental states and perspectives. The assessments were performed on monolinguals and bilinguals, depicting the underlying abilities positing that the construction based on the underlying structures in L1 and L2 might differ (Tsimpli et al. 2015). Qualitative analyses using fables as production tasks proved that in the case of adolescents, the results led to higher complexity at the syntactic and narrative levels (Nippold 2005, 2014). Language literacy was linked to SG and ToM in the case of SLI children to understand how other perspectives work and to explain the need for intervention to improve such a layout, specifically the ability to connect sequences of events to lead to academic success (Westby 1991, 2005, 2014, 2021).

The research became more relevant as the assessment targeted comprehension, production, and knowledge of the narrative at the structural and organisational or coherence level (Mandler and Johnson 1977). Moreover, for L2 learners, it is argued that the cognitive strategies might differ, especially if there is a degree of familiarity with the content (Mandler 1980). On the same note, research on the role played by associative memory in understanding how storytelling and retelling work is relevant for L2 learners as studies have shown that information retrieval works cross-linguistically in the case of bilinguals (Gillund and Shiffrin 1984). The SG constituents integrate schema and the cognitive processes involved in the comprehension and production of stories in L1 and L2, with applicability across languages, influencing different research domains from linguistics to cognitive psychology, teaching, etc. In conclusion, research was prolific in the domains of first and second language acquisition and highly relevant in empirical studies on L2 acquisition and L2 learning, offering insight into how narratives work in L2 in terms of complexity and cohesion, cross-linguistically. The educational implications for L2 learners in instructional settings were also significant as the research results contributed to proposals for improving the skills via efficient practices and curriculum adjustments.

4. Corpus Analysis

The methodological approach to analysing SG units and cohesion markers collected from an L2 Romanian spoken corpus employs a mixed-methods design grounded in Stein and Glenn's (1979) theoretical framework. The theoretical model, based on schema theory, provides the foundation for the interpretation of hierarchical narrative components and the predictability of structural patterns in L2 Romanian narrative structures. The standardised instruments used as theoretical frameworks for control were the CEFR - Companion Volume (2020) and the Minimal Description of Romanian for Levels A1, A2, B1, and B2 (Platon et al. 2016). The aim was to observe and describe how SG units and episodes develop across proficiency levels, from level A2 to level B2, and to trace specific patterns of cohesion marker usage. In conducting the quantitative analysis, the occurrences were counted manually. The counting and assessment system included binary scoring for the presence or absence of elements and weighted scoring for the completeness of each component. The premise was the existence of the internal structure of the stories, which follows predictable patterns and mental schemas, hence controlling the spoken productions to see if frequency and complexity patterns could be traced. The qualitative analysis included an analysis of the Internal Response and its representation across proficiency levels. The in-depth analysis gave insight into the difficulties encountered by the participants, the problematic manifestation from one level to the other and the problems encountered by the students in mastering the narrative structure in L2 Romanian. Based on the corpus findings, new teaching materials could be created to develop students' narrative competence in L2 Romanian. The validity of the study is supported by the alignment with the SG model and with the descriptors from the CEFR -Companion Volume (2020) and the Minimal Description of Romanian (Platon et al. 2016). The results helped identify problematic areas in the development of L2 narrative competence. They contributed to the foundation for developing evidence-based and targeted teaching materials, possibly scaffolded activities to improve narrative abilities in students, and assessment tools for narrative structures in L2 Romanian.

The examples provided by the spoken corpus represent a rich data source in a natural context that is available for inquiry. The students did not have previous training on the topic, and the qualitative and quantitative analyses of SG units and cohesion markers aimed to get insight into the students' proficiency levels and observe how the structures develop from one text to another, from a macrostructure and microstructure perspective. The following elements were selected: Setting (Place and Time), Initiating Event, Internal Response, Attempt, and Result/Outcome to get an insightful look at how narrative

features work progressively in the case of L2 learners of Romanian. The data was collected from a corpus of texts, transcribed oral stories, three *Frog Stories* recounted in L2 Romanian, progressively, at the levels A2 (*A Boy, A Dog and a Frog*), B1 (*Frog Goes to Dinner*), and B2 (*Frog on His Own*) levels. Three criteria were taken into account: completeness, whether all the proposed constituents could be identified; cohesion, as part of determining if all the components were presented and logically connected, and given that the data were collected progressively, at the levels A2, B1 and B2, according to CEFR levels; and the complexity of the SG components which were identified by segmenting each episode with its parts. However, there were a few variables that could have impacted the predictions, such as L1 influence, cultural differences regarding the norms of storytelling, and how they organise their narratives in L1, as opposed to L2, as well as the load on the cognitive abilities when it comes to operating with L2 structures. Still, such variables were not directly investigated at this point. Given that the exposure to picture prompts was done progressively, from A2 to B2, another prediction was that the performance would improve from one story to another. However, specific patterns identified in the process challenged the data interpretation. Some of the considered variables were: linguistic limitations, lack of awareness at a given moment, lack of exposure to such exercises in L2 Romanian before this task, and, possibly, cultural differences. In the first story, simplified structures specific to level A2 were predominant. Sequences were less organised, and few cohesion markers were used to show logical connections. The omission of episodes was predominantly observed in Story 1. At the same time, some SG constituents were skipped in all the stories, but overall, the data showed that the participants faced challenges in completing the tasks.

4.1. Macrostructural features

The assessment included a qualitative and a quantitative section. The data evaluation used as input the visible evidence in the productions at the macrostructure and the microstructure levels. The picture prompts were selected to allow them to produce more complex texts from one level to the other. As the essential elements of the SG model adopted for this study were the Setting and Characters, the Initiating Event, which marked the Goal, the Internal Response, the Attempt, and the Outcome, the premise was that the episodes were based on underlying universal patterns that operate cross-linguistically (Rumelhart 1975, Mandler and Johnson 1977, Stein and Glenn 1979). The three stories corresponded to all the criteria envisioned, including the Internal Response of the students, which was also part of the scoring rubric to see the evidence of

ToM in the L2 oral narratives. After collecting the data, the decision was to mark the presence of the Goal-Attempt-Outcome sequencing (GAO) for each production and separately select the most relevant qualitative data for the Internal Response segment, which seemed challenging for the students based on the results. For the global assessment, the SG components were scored per presence or absence of episodes in the sequence for each of the three stories. For Story 1 (*A Boy, A Dog and a Frog - 3 episodes*), 20 out of 21 participants identified the correct number of episodes. There was only one subject that missed episode 2 of Story 1. In the case of Story 2 (*Frog Goes to Dinner* – 5 episodes), all 21 subjects could identify the 5 episodes, even though some episodes were more difficult for them and insufficiently explored, as will be shown in the following sections. In Story 3 (*Frog on His Own* – 5 episodes), all the subjects identified and talked about all the 5 episodes, but generally, there was difficulty in recognising the Internal Response in some episodes.

In the review of the Setting and Characters, the scale adopted was 0 to 3 points (0=absent, 1=minimal/unclear, 2=adequate/basic but clear, 3=elaborate/well-developed). For Story 1, the following elements were expected. Episode 1: Setting – 'vara' [summer], 'ziua' [day], 'la amiază' [noon], 'în pădure' [in the woods], 'lângă un lac' [near a lake]; Characters – 'un băiat' [a boy], 'un câine' [a dog], 'un cățel' [a puppy], 'o broască' [a frog], 'o broscuță' [a little frog]. Episode 2: Setting – 'în pădure' [in the woods/forest], 'lângă lac' [near a lake], 'pe un lemn' [on a piece of wood], 'copac' [tree], 'buștean' [log]; Characters – 'un băiat' [a boy], 'un câine' [a dog], 'un cățel' [a puppy], 'o broască' [a frog], 'o broscuță' [a little frog]. Episode 3: 'în pădure' [in the forest/woods], 'acasă' [at home]; Characters: 'un băiat' [a boy], 'un câine' [a dog], 'un cățel' [a puppy], 'o broască' [a frog], 'o broscuță' [a littel frog], 'o broască țestoasă' [a turtle].

The results showed two situations when the time and place were not named. Still, it could be understood from the context of these two situations. A score of 1 was given for 'foiaj', a word transferred from French expressing the right reality for the expected answer 'în pădure' [in the woods], 'lângă lac' [near a lake], 'pe un lemn'/'copac'/'buștean' [near a piece of wood/tree/log]. A score of 2 was given for a missing element, commonly the time or the word 'pădure' [forest]. The word 'piscină' [pool] was used instead of 'lac' [lake], and the word 'fluviu' [river] was used instead of 'lac' [lake]. For the character identification, 2 was given if a character was missing or the speaker did not use the correct word. For example, 'bărbat foarte tânăr' [very young man] instead of 'băiat' [boy], what was the expected word. In the case of the last episode, the subjects usually named only the previous place, 'acasă' [home] and/or 'baie' [bathroom], and 'cadă' [bathtub], omitting the word 'pădure' [forest]. Probably, considering it was the same place as in the previous episode.

For the second story, the predictions were as follows: Episode 1: Setting – 'acasă' [at home], Characters - 'băiat' [boy], 'câine' [dog], 'broască' [frog], 'broască țestoasă' [turtle], 'mama'' [mom], 'tata' [dad], 'sora' [sister], 'familia' [family]. Episode 2: Setting – 'restaurant' [restaurant] 'cina' [dinner], Characters – 'mama' [mother], 'tata' [father], 'băiat' [boy], 'soră' [sister], 'broască' [frog], 'chelner' [waiter], 'muzician' [musician] 'saxofonist' [saxophonist]. Episode 3: Setting - 'restaurant' [restaurant] 'cina' [dinner], Characters - 'chelner' [waiter], 'broască' [frog], 'femeie' [woman] 'doamnă' [lady]. Episode 4: Setting - 'restaurant' [restaurant] 'cina' [dinner], Characters – 'broască' [frog], 'chelner' [waiter], 'cuplu' [couple], 'familie' [family], 'clienţi' [clients]. Episode 5: Setting – 'maşina' [car], 'acasă' [home], Characters – 'familie' [family], 'copil' [child], 'broască' [frog], 'câine' [dog], 'broasca țestoasă' [turtle].

As shown, there were many situations when the time and place were not named in the second story (45 instances). Most of these involved the restaurant, probably considered not necessary to repeat the place since the previous episode/episodes happened in the same setting. Additionally, there was a tendency not to indicate the time; when it was stated, it was 'într-o zi' [one day]. Usually, the characters were named, but there were a few cases when one was omitted. Subject 21 omitted mentioning the family and the turtle, but he used the word 'toţi' [all].

For the third story, the predictions were as follows. Episode 1: Setting – 'parc' [park], Characters – 'băiat' [boy], 'câine' [dog], 'broască' [frog], 'broască țestoasă' [turtle]. Episode 2: Setting – 'parc' [park], 'picnic' [picnic], Characters – 'broasca' [frog], un cuplu' [couple], 'bărbat şi femeie' [man and woman]. Episode 3: Setting – 'parc' [park], 'lac' [lake], Characters 'broasca' [frog], 'copil' [child], 'mama copilului' [child's mother]. Episode 4: Setting – 'parc' [park], Characters 'broasca' [frog], 'femeia' [woman], 'bebeluşul' [baby], 'copilul' [child], 'pisică' [cat]. Episode 5: Setting – 'parc' [park], Characters – 'broasca'[frog], 'pisică' [cat], 'copil' [child], 'câine' [dog], 'broasca țestoasă' [turtle]. For the use of 'în alt loc/ în altă loc' [in another place] the scoring was 1. The parc was not mentioned, but it was specified in the beginning. What was added is 'la picnic' [at the picnic], 'fac un picnic' [they have a picnic] or 'lângă lac' [near the lake], 'la lac' [at the lake]. For these occurrences 2 points were given. Another instance was the use of a general term, 'natură' [nature] instead of 'parc' [park]. In Episode 4, the setting was specified only in 3 instances. 'În pod' instead of 'pe lac', because S16 confused the two words as it can be seen from the answer 'Profesor: ai folosit aici, ai spus podul, podul. Te referi la acesta?" (arată imaginea) [Teacher: you used here, you said here bridge. Is this what you are referring to? (The teacher shows the student the picture)] S16: 'Da, la apă' [Yes. The water].

For the quantitative segment of the study, numerical methods were used to count the components of the narrative structures. The investigation started with the setting and the characters; a segment marked almost entirely by the participants in all the stories. In the case of the Goal-Attempt-Outcome relationship, each constituent was assessed individually as well (0 to 3 points). A close look at the percentages on the structural presence of the Initiating Events across episodes and the three stories, as presented in *Figure 3, Figure 4*, and *Figure 5*, reveal that in Story 2, 52% of the participants scored the highest possible (3 points), followed by Story 1 and Story 3. However, the percentage of participants that scored 2 or 3 points is higher in Story 1 and Story 2, as opposed to Story 3, where a downward trend was observed. Also, the number of students who did not identify the Initial Event grew from 2% in Story 1 to 9% in Story 2 and 17% in Story 3, a significant increase. A curve is observed in the case of the participants who scored 1 point as well.
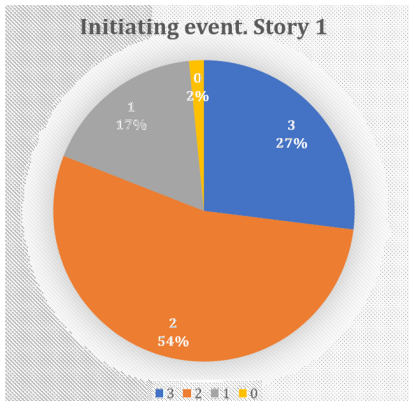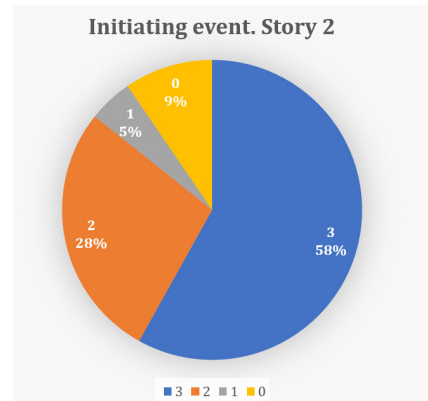

Figure 3. Initiating Event. Story 1

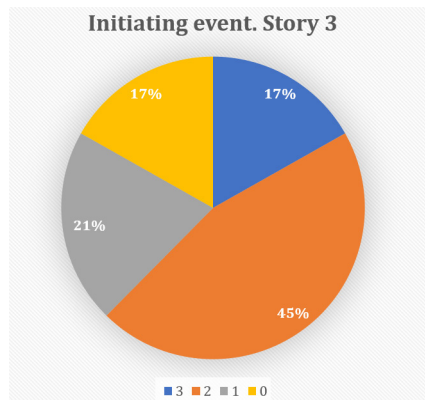**Figure 4**. Initiating Event. Story 2

Figure 5. Initiating Event. Story 3

The distribution of the percentages for the Attempt occurrences in the three stories are presented in *Figure 6*, *Figure 7*, and *Figure 8,* with the highest scores (3 points) for Story 2 and similar scores for Story 1 and Story 3. Interestingly, 38% of the students did not present the Attempt in Story 2, while 39% did. In Story 1 and Story 3, only 3% of the participants failed to identify it. Once again, it was difficult to mark significant changes from one story to the other regarding structural complexity or sophistication.
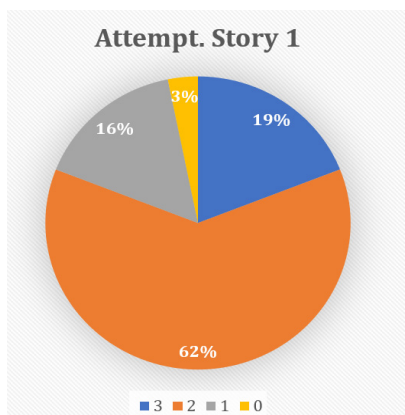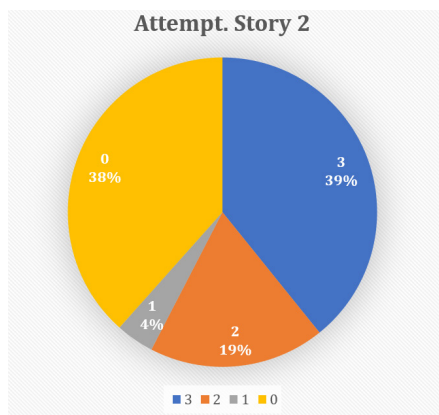

Figure 6. Attempt. Story 1
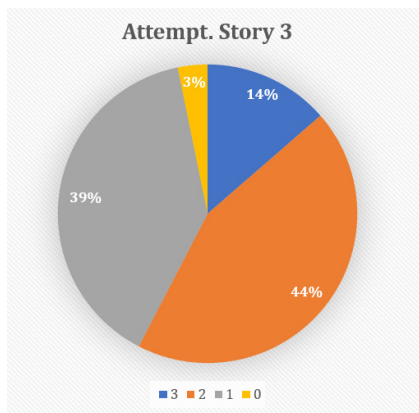

Figure 7. Attempt. Story 2

Figure 8. Attempt. Story 3

A curve is also observed in the data analysis of the Result segment. Story 2 registered 35% of students with the highest score (3 points), and a 10 per cent difference is noticeable when comparing Story 1 (27%) with Story 3 (17%). Also, if the percentages of the students who scored 2 or 3 points are summed up, it

can be noted that there is a downward trend from Story 1 to Story 3. Relative
to Story 1 and Story 3, where the participants scored low on missing results, a
quarter of the participants could not ground the results in the narrative of Story 2.
Overall, the participants better integrated the components in Story 1 and Story 3
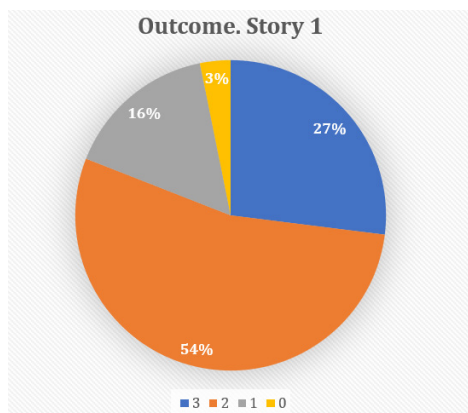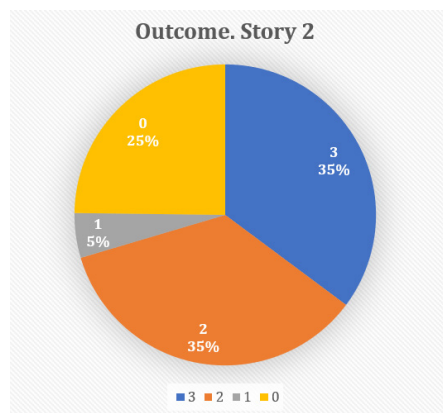than in Story 2.

Figure 9. Outcome. Story 1

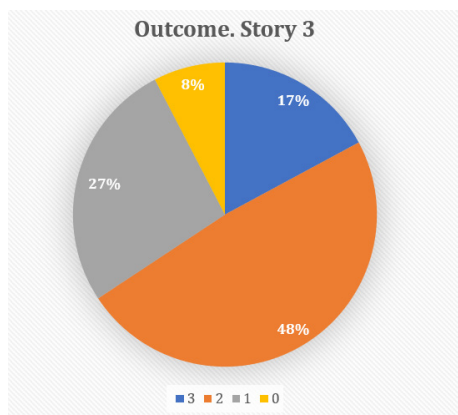**Figure 10**. Outcome. Story 2

Figure 11. Outcome. Story 3

As part of the SG model, the interpretation of the data included the
Internal Response to incorporate the emotional process and the ability to
emotionally present the character's perspective (Stein and Albro 1997, 2012;
Gagarina et al. 2016). The communicative function was the main driving force,
but, at this point, the analysis did not offer satisfactory results on the types of
inferences and repair strategies that could have been employed by the students

across narratives (Berman and Slobin 1994), but rather some qualitative results on metacognitive verbs referential to what the characters are thinking and the expression of emotion (Gagarina et al. 2016, Nippold et al., 2005; Westby, 2005). Book narration tasks in school-aged children analysed under a ToM approach how children understand and use mental-state and emotional-state terms (e.g. *be hungry, be ashamed, be envious*), and the differences between comprehension and use of the metacognitive and metalinguistic terms (Grazzani and Ornaghi 2012: 358). It could be observed that, in this case, the Internal Response segment was omitted by the participants quite frequently. As it can be observed, for the most part, the Internal Response segment is absent in the three stories, showing that the students failed to map the understanding of the SG unit in the productions.

From a qualitative perspective, for the most part, the same phrases were used repetitively to express the mental states of the characters: 'a-i fi frică' [to be scared], 'a-i fi foame' [to be hungry], 'a-i fi rău' [to be sick], 'a se simți rău' [to feel sick], 'a se simți bine' [to feel good], 'a se simți rău' [to feel bad]; however, in Romanian the expression does not have this meaning, it was transferred from English, 'a fi enervat' [to be annoyed], 'a fi nervos' [to be angry], 'a se supăra' [to get upset], 'a fi puțin/foarte supărat' [to be a litte/very upset], 'a se simți supărat' [to feel upset], 'cu față supărată' [with an upset face], 'a deveni supărat' [to become upset], 'a arăta supărat' [to look upset], 'a fi fericit' [to be happy] was used the most, 'a se simți fericit/bucuros' [to feel happy], 'a fi nefericit' [to be unhappy], 'a fi enervat' [to be annoyed], 'a se enerva' [to get annoyed], 'a se simți plictisit' [to feel bored], 'a fi trist' [to be sad], 'a se simți plictisitor' [to feel boring] there were situations when the phrase was not used appropriately, the students opted for [to be boring] instead of the correct form [to be bored], 'a fi singur' [to be alone], 'a se simți singur' [to feel alone], 'a fi trist' [to be sad], 'a se simți trist' [to feel sad], 'a se enerva' [to get annoyed], 'a se simți obosit' [to feel tired], 'a se simți singur' [to feel lonely], 'a fi singur' [to be alone], 'a se speria' [to get scared], 'a fi șocat' [to be shocked], 'a fi liniștit' [to be calm], 'a fi surprins' [to be surprised], 'a fi iritat' [to be irritated], 'a fi amuzat' [to be amused], 'a fi amuzant' [to be amusing] used sometimes inappropriately with the meaning [amused], 'a fi curios' [to be curious], 'a fi relaxat' [to be relaxed], 'a deveni gelos' [to become jealous], 'a avea teamă' [to have fear/to be fearful], 'a se gândi' [to think]. The terms expressing mental or emotional state and the metacognitive verbs were not frequent in the corpus. It was also noticed that the participants omitted the internal response quite frequently.

From a qualitative perspective, the same phrases were used repetitively to express the characters' mental states. These included expressions such as 'a-i fi frică' [to be scared], 'a-i fi foame' [to be hungry], and 'a-i fi rău' [to be sick]. The participants also used 'a se simți rău' [to feel sick], 'a se simți bine' [to feel good], and 'a se simți rău' [to feel bad]. However, in Romanian, this last expression does

not have this meaning. It was transferred from English. Phrases for annoyance and anger included 'a fi enervat' [to be annoyed], 'a fi nervos' [to be angry], and 'a se supăra' [to get upset]. For expressing varying degrees of upset, the candidates used 'a fi puțin/foarte supărat' [to be a little/very upset], 'a se simți supărat' [to feel upset], and 'cu față supărată' [with an upset face]. The students also used 'a deveni supărat' [to become upset] and 'a arăta supărat' [to look upset]. 'A fi fericit' [to be happy] was used most frequently, followed by 'a se simți fericit/bucuros' [to feel happy], and the opposite 'a fi nefericit' [to be unhappy]. Expressions such as 'a fi enervat' [to be annoyed] and 'a se enerva' [to get annoyed] were also used in various contexts. For boredom, the most common were as 'a se simți plictisit' [to feel bored]. There were situations when the students opted for 'a se simți plictisitor' [to feel boring] instead of the correct form, 'a se simți plictisit' [to feel bored]. For loneliness and sadness, the most common were 'a fi singur' [to be alone] and 'a se simți singur' [to feel alone], 'a fi trist' [to be sad] and 'a se simți trist' [to feel sad]. Other emotional states included 'a se simți obosit' [to feel tired]. Less frequent expressions included 'a se speria' [to get scared], 'a fi șocat' [to be shocked], 'a fi liniștit' [to be calm], and 'a fi surprins' [to be surprised]. Students also used 'a fi iritat' [to be irritated], 'a fi amuzat' [to be amused], and 'a fi amuzant' [to be amusing]. The latter was sometimes misused with the meaning of [amused]. Occasional expressions included 'a fi curios' [to be curious], 'a fi relaxat' [to be relaxed], 'a deveni gelos' [to become jealous], 'a avea teamă' [to have fear/to be fearful], and 'a se gândi' [to think]. The terms expressing mental or emotional state and the metacognitive verbs were not frequent in the corpus. It was also noticed that the participants omitted the internal response quite frequently.
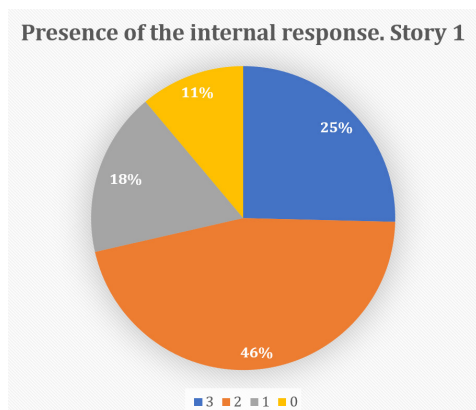

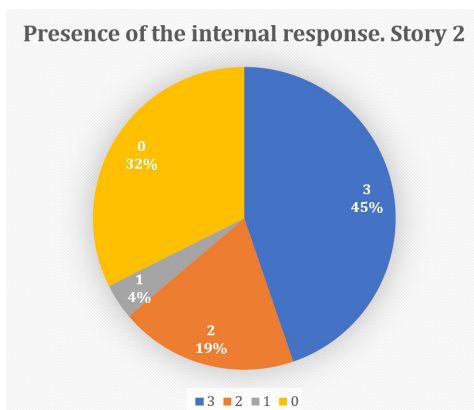**Figure 12.** Presence of the internal response. Story 1

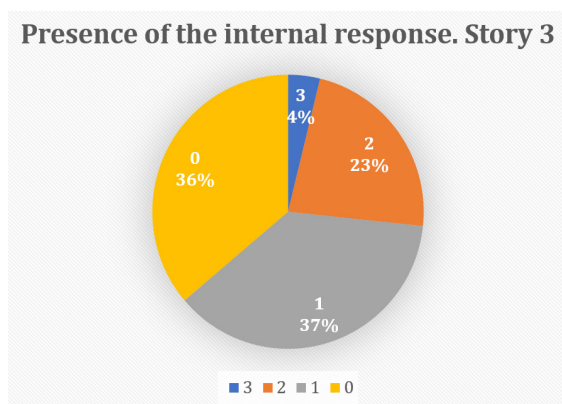**Figure 13.** Presence of the internal response. Story 2

Figure 14*. Presence of the internal response. Story 3*

        The presence or absence of Internal Response led to interesting results. As mentioned above, the participants tended to skip this segment. As reflected in *Figure 12, Figure 13*, and *Figure 14,* there was a downward trend from Story 1, where only 11% of the participants scored 0 points, to Story 2 with 32% and Story 3 with 36%. The results are valuable even though the participants faced challenges with the production of the Internal Response, proving that it was one of the more vulnerable categories. At the macrostructure level, the Internal Response component was included to see how L2 adult learners can incorporate in the speech productions the characters' perspective under a ToM framework, with a focus on how the metalinguistic and the metacognitive a priori knowledge can be observed in the speech productions of the students.

        At the macrostructure level, the results are significant and give a perspective on how the students cope with the production of SG units in L2 Romanian and how to incorporate more narrative-based tasks in teaching Romanian, both for oral and written productions. After processing the data, a closer look was taken at the Q&A section between the teacher and the student after recording each story. When asked if they understood the story, the students responded affirmatively. When addressing the question *Which was the most difficult thing for you in telling the story?* some of the most common answers included not having in their active lexical inventory specific words or not being able to explain the particular relationships between the sequences, which, consequently, affected the quality of their story, not being able to access some words determined them to produce a simpler version of the story. Some students stated they had more difficulty processing a new input and creating a coherent text. As expected, the participants indicated that they had an understanding, respectively knowledge, of the story and the meaning behind the sequences of events but struggled with the mapping in the oral productions.

4.2. Microstructural features

The data collected led to an insightful display of the cohesion markers in L2 Romanian at the microstructural level. The prediction was that with every production, the cohesion markers would increase in number and complexity and contribute significantly to developing complex and coherent oral stories from the A2 level to level B2. With increasing L2 proficiency of the participants, progression of narrative complexity was expected. There was awareness regarding the progressive complexity of the three stories and the possible challenges that could have been faced in the activation of working memory for an L2 story. Also, given that they had the chance to activate and exercise the schema in the A2, further practice of the strategies in the following stories was expected to be natural, the prediction that there would be significant progress with the second and third story seemed sound. The data processing on the corpus was limited to temporal, causal, and additive markers for this study. The assessment focused on their role in episode linking and whether consistency and complexity could be traced from one level to another. Moreover, frequency and appropriate use of the temporal, causal, and additive markers were among the criteria selected from the corpus. To better illustrate the reasoning behind the assessment of the cohesion connectors in the three *Frog Stories,* in the case of Romanian L2 adult learners, the descriptors for cohesion and coherence from the Companion Volume (2020) were selected. The scales for communicative language, namely the pragmatic competence descriptors for coherence and cohesion, indicate what was predicted before the analysis and distribution of data. The cohesion markers play an essential part in the macrostructure of the story as they connect SG units in the stories and work as cohesive devices for the narrative as a whole. The results were assessed against another instrument designed for Romanian L2, which presents a Minimal Description of Romanian for Levels A1, A2, B1, and B2. In the assessment of the cohesion markers, the description was also aligned to the contents for expressing time circumstances on categories such as time placement, anteriority, simultaneity, posteriority, frequency and duration, as well as adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases and conjunctions (Platon et al. 2016).

At the A2 level, in the oral productions of the students, a preference for the following temporal connectors was observed: 'când' [when], 'apoi' [then], 'şi apoi' [and then], 'atunci' [at that time], 'după' [after], 'după ce'/'după aceea' [after that]/[afterwards], as well as 'într-o zi'/ 'dimineaţă' [one day/morning]. Other connectors were also used but with much lower frequency. To be more specific, some of the temporal connectors used with less frequency were: 'după acest moment/această ocazie' [after this moment/occasion], 'acum' [now], 'din

nou' [again], 'în acest moment' [at this moment], 'la început' [in the beginning], 'într-o zi/dimineață' [one day/morning], 'în timp ce' [while], 'în sfârşit/la final/în final' [finally/at the end/in the end], 'şi apoi' [and then], 'deja' [already].

Coherence and Cohesion (*CEFR – Companion Volume*, 2020: 141)	
A2	"Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points.
	Can link groups of words/signs with simple connectors (e.g. "and", "but" and "because").
	Can link words/signs or groups of words/signs with very basic linear connectors (e.g. "and" or "then")."

**Figure 15*.* Temporal markers for A2 level (A Boy, A Dog and a Frog)

At level B1, despite the more advanced level of proficiency, the frequency of temporal connectors remained somewhat similar, with a preference for the same connectors as the previous level: 'când' [when], 'apoi' [then], 'şi apoi' [and then], 'atunci' [at that time], 'după' [after], 'după ce'/'după aceea' [after that]/ [afterwards]. Other connectors are also used, but only once per production or less frequently: 'după acest timp' [after this time], 'în momentul în care' [at the moment when], 'şi mai departe' [furthermore], 'în continuare' [continuously], 'odată' [once].

Coherence and Cohesion (*CEFR – Companion Volume*, 2020: 141)	
B1	"Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points.
	Can link groups of words/signs with simple connectors (e.g. "and", "but" and "because").
	Can link words/signs or groups of words/signs with very basic linear connectors (e.g. "and" or "then")."

Figure 16. Temporal markers for B1 level (A Boy, A Dog and a Frog)

Even at the B2 level, the results show that the same temporal connectors were preferred: 'apoi' [then], 'şi apoi' [and then], 'când' [when], 'după aceea' [after that], 'şi după aceea' [and after that], 'după ce' [after], 'acum/ acuma' [now/right now], 'din nou' [again], 'iarăşi' [once more]. However, phrases were also derived from the following preferred elements, such as 'după această întâmplare' [after this incident], 'după ce s-a întâmplat' [after what happened]. Some phrases were built around the word 'moment' [moment]: 'în acelaşi moment' [at the same moment], 'într-un moment' [in a moment], 'în primul moment' [at first], 'după nişte momente' [after a few moment], 'a mumon dat' the correct form being 'la un moment dat' [at some point]. Other examples include, 'în primul rând' [firstly], 'la final' [in the end], 'într-o zi' [one day], 'în continuare' [furthermore].

Coherence and Cohesion (*CEFR – Companion Volume*, 2020: 141)	
B2	"Can use a variety of linking expressions efficiently to mark clearly the relationships between ideas.
	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link their utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.
	Can produce text that is generally well-organised and coherent, using a range of linking expressions and cohesive devices.
	Can structure longer texts in clear, logical paragraphs."

Figure 17. Temporal markers for B2 level (A Boy, A Dog and a Frog)

As an interesting fact to note, in Story 1, out of the 644 occurrences of connectors, 'şi' [and] accounts for 346 of these occurrences, making it the most frequently used connector in the productions of all subjects. *Figure 18* shows a clear pattern, as the number of temporal markers remains constant in the three stories. Variation can be observed regarding other connectors used in the three stories. However, although increased values and an upward trend are observed when comparing Story 1 to Story 2, the values decrease slightly from Story 2 to Story 3, and a downward trend is noticed. The graphics in *Figure 19* illustrate the use of the three categories of cohesion markers selected for the analysis. In the case of temporal markers, as stated before, there are no noticeable differences between the stories, and a similar trend applies to the causal markers, which are the least frequently used out of the three categories of markers. Increased values are observed in the case of additive connectors, with a peak in Story 2, followed by a slight downward trend in Story 3.
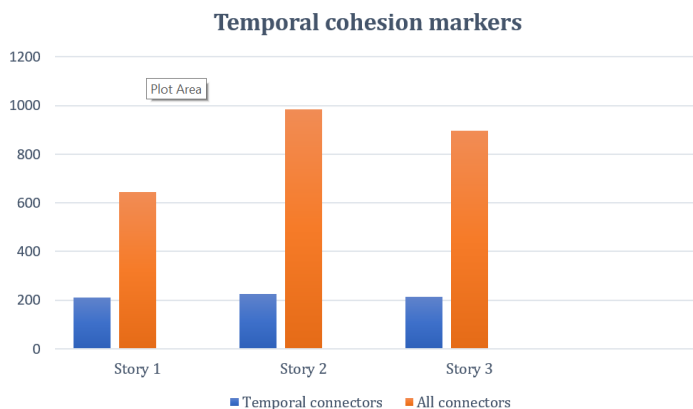
Temporal cohesion markers

Figure 18. Temporal cohesion markers in the 3 stories

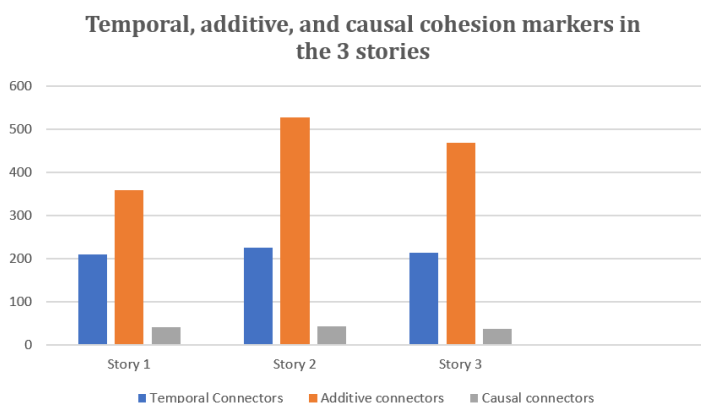**Temporal, additive, and causal cohesion markers in the 3 stories**

Figure 19. Temporal, additive, and causal cohesion markers in the 3 stories

Another noticed aspect was that the A1 temporal connectors were the most frequently used. For an oral corpus, one explanation could be that they lacked awareness of using A2 connectors in real time, and they likely relied on habitual usage. One question that could be addressed in future research is what would happen with the cohesion markers in written productions regarding distribution, frequency, appropriateness, and complexity.

In the case of the additive connectors, it was noticed that the conjunction 'şi' [and] was the most frequent element, even when compared to the entire range of connectors. There were minimal situations (under 5 occurrences) when 'iar' with the meaning [and/and also] was used with additive value. Otherwise,

other additive connectors could not be identified, even though the expectation was to find in the corpus instances of 'în plus' [in addition] or 'mai mult' [moreover] in the corpus, which are more complex markers of additive value.

The results on causal connectors showed that this category of elements was not used extensively. There were productions without causal markers, and even when present, they were represented by 'pentru că' [because], which is the most commonly used in speech. The use of 'fiindcă' [because], 'din cauză că' [due to the fact that/since] or 'din cauza' [because of] was rarely identified in the productions.

5. Conclusions

The overarching objective was to observe how the respondents' level of proficiency in Romanian was supported by the SG model in each of the three elicited tasks. The purpose was to see how the participants' proficiency level affected or benefited their narrative abilities and strategies to organise their discourse. The selected tasks aimed to demonstrate that language proficiency impacts development in the case of adult learners of Romanian as L2. The presumption was that, by the time the B2 level is reached, the respondents would be able to mark in speech all the units and organise them cohesively by establishing interrelations in the stories (Mandler & Johnson 1977), given that they have knowledge of story patterns and can cohesively organise the information (Applebee 1978).

As presented in the section on the conceptual framework, SG models support cross-linguistic influence and a transfer of L1 schema into the L2 narrative for bilinguals and L2 learners. The goal was to see if the students could produce progressively well-formed, complete episodes according to the language level reached; however, the results show that it was quite challenging, and the structure complexity was not reflected from a descriptive standpoint from one level to another. Reviewing the three tasks involving elicited productions led us to start with quantitative patterns by documenting the frequency of the patterns in the three stories and the presence or omittance of episodes, so the SG units were scored to see if the results were soundly based on our predictions. The interpretation yielded some results but did not offer sufficient insight into the narrative data processing and organisation in L2. A written corpus and scaffolding activities should be created to continue the inquiry into progressive storytelling, especially when episodes or SG segments are missing or poorly represented.

At the microstructure level, cohesion markers, such as temporal, causal, and additive, were tracked based on frequency, appropriateness, and complexity in the three stories. The narratives' coherence was affected, as the markers function as

links between sequences. The results did not reflect, for the most part, the predictions made, as the structure patterns were repetitive from one story to the other, with very few occurrences that marked higher complexity in Story 2 and Story 3. Another objective was to provide a qualitative description of the terms used for the Internal Response to show how the students could express in L2 Romanian the characters' intentions, feelings, and mental states. A closer look at the data showed that the internal response was omitted in many episodes. In the instances when it was present, the patterns were somewhat repetitive, with mentions of emotional-state terms that did not gain in complexity from one story to the other, proving that this cognitive operation was challenging for the students.

The present analysis had teaching implications as well. After conducting a more detailed analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, it could be noticed that there is a need to work on these strategies in teaching Romanian to enhance the narrative abilities of the students. More explicit instruction is required, and awareness should be raised regarding including the internal responses as inferential elements to improve the quality of storytelling, help organise the text, and cope better in real-time with factors such as cultural background and language proficiency. The SG model was used to see how L2 Romanian learners can process and produce oral texts and further develop teaching strategies in the classroom that will help them be more proficient. From a teaching perspective, the data showed areas that needed improvement if the goal was to train the above-mentioned capacity of students in L2 Romanian. As such, during formative assessment and when planning to practise in the classroom, the focus should shift to metacognitive processes by supporting the students in training and improving their ability to use the metacognitive processes and storytelling strategies more efficiently in L2 Romanian. Also, the teaching and research process should continue with a written corpus and exercise metacognitive abilities in a written format. The research offers insight into how specific skills develop and improve in L2 learners. It can be an instrument for assessing narrative proficiency and incorporating new content into the academic curriculum.

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