

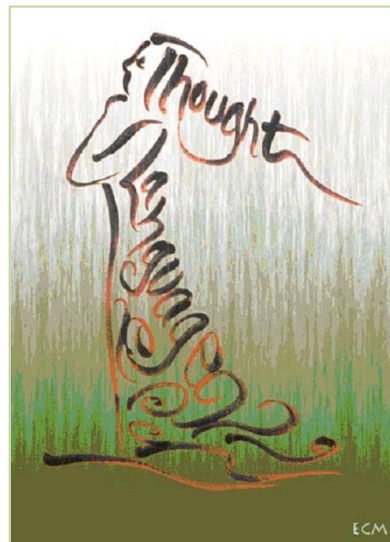
# Cross-Linguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition: A Study on Event Conceptualization Patterns

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“We dissect **nature** anlong lines laid down by our **native language** [...] the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the **linguistic system** in our minds.”



Whorf (1956: 213)



Does our language influence the way we think and see the world?

Do speakers of different languages conceptualize events differently?

Do second language learners adapt to target-language like conceptualization patterns?

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## **1 Linguistic Relativity and Event Conceptualization**

Linguistic Relativism

Aspect and Event Conceptualization

Research Questions

## **2 Empirical Study**

Design and Method

Results and Discussion

## **3 Conclusion**



**Renewed interest** in linguistic relativism since 1950ies has led to a vast amount of research conducted in **various research areas** (e.g. gender and object perception (cf. Phillips & Boroditsky 2003; Vigiliocco et al. 2005); spatial reasoning (cf. Levinson 1996; Pederson et al. 1998; Li & Gleitmann 2002))



**contradictory evidence and conclusions**

Problem of **circularity**: **cause** and **effect** of cognitive differences are interpreted differently (cf. Härtl 2009; Handwerker 2012; Gleitmann & Papafragou 2013):

- **Sources of cognitive differences** are often confounded with linguistic differences
- If cognitive difference only shows through **linguistic performance**, line of argumentation becomes **circular**

**Solution:**



**separation of linguistic and non-linguistic tasks**



Cross-linguistic event conceptualization: Do **differences in lexicalization patterns of motion events** lead to differences in **event perception**?

Analysis of attention allocation in linguistic and non-linguistic task:

- Language-specific attention allocation during **linguistic** task (speech planning while watching the clip)
- No differences in **non-linguistic** task of freely inspecting the clip

English habitually codes **manner** in the verb and path in particles



Greek habitually codes **path** in the verb and manner through optional devices (e.g. gerunds)

Results point to *Thinking for Speaking* effects

# Thinking for Speaking



“‘Thinking for Speaking’ involves picking those characteristics that (a) fit some conceptualization of the event, and (b) are readily encodable in the language. **I propose that, in acquiring a native language, the child learns particular ways of thinking for speaking.**” (Slobin 1996: 76)



(a) The dog *ran* into the house.

Main-verb slot for  
manner verbs



*satellite-framed* (path encoded in a PP)



(b) Le chien est entré dans la maison *en courant*.

‘The dog entered the house *by running*.’



*verb-framed* (path encoded on main verb;  
manner of motion encoded in adjunct)

Manner of motion is a **salient category** in these languages which **affects event conceptualization** (cf. Slobin 2000; 2003)



- We want to investigate **language-specific effects** (here: grammatical aspect) on **event conceptualization** patterns
- We aim to examine conceptualization patterns in both a **verbalization** (*Thinking for Speaking*) and a **memorization** task (“beyond” a purely verbal task)
- With respect to **German learners of English**, we want to examine how they proceed in applying an aspectual perspective on events as regards **information selection**

“And, further, once our minds have been trained in taking particular **points of view** for the purposes of speaking, it is exceptionally difficult to be retrained.” (Slobin 1996: 91)

# Aspect and Event Conceptualization



Research paradigm: **Aspect and Event Conceptualization**

According to a variety of studies:

- **English** speakers focus on the progression of an event and mention a possible endpoint rarely ('phasal decomposition')  
*"a car is driving along the road"*
- **German** speakers conceptualize an event through a 'holistic perspective', including a possible endpoint  
*"ein Auto fährt zu einem Dorf"*  
a car drives to a village



Stutterheim et al. (2012)

# Aspect and Event Conceptualization



phasal decomposition ↔ holistic perspective on motion events

Explanation: nature of **aspectual system** of a language

English

- Aspect is **obligatorily** marked in present tense (*-ing*)
- Only **progressive aspect** is grammaticized; simple forms are unspecified

German

- Aspect is **optionally** marked in all tenses (**periphrastic construction**; *Rheinische Verlaufsform*)
- Finite verbs are obligatorily marked only for **tense**

Stutterheim et al. (2012); Comrie (1976); Klein (1994); Krause (2002)



Do **second language learners adapt** to target-language like principles of information selection?

- **General consensus** lies with respect to the **difficulties** L2 learners display when speaking in the TL both at a microstructural and a macrostructural level of information organisation and selection
- Even very **advanced L2 learners** apply **native-language like preferences** in encoding event components
- In the specific case of **motion events** with an **inferable endpoint** (goal), German learners have been shown to uncover English perspectivation strategies

cf. Stutterheim (2003); Stutterheim & Carroll (2006); Stutterheim et al. (2003)



## Method

**Elicitation study** based on short, silent video clips (film retelling)  
with two test conditions

- **Verbalization task**  
Answering *What is happening?*  
**during** information intake
- **Memorization task**  
Answering *What is happening?*  
**after** information intake and after  
movie has finished



## Participants:

- 2 **native** reference groups (English and German)
- 2 **learner** groups of different levels of proficiency (8th and 12th grade at school)



## Material:

- 45 animated video clips containing animate and inanimate entities (6 seconds)
- 12 critical items displaying motion events with inferable endpoints
- 27 distractor items displaying everyday situations



# Empirical Study: Design



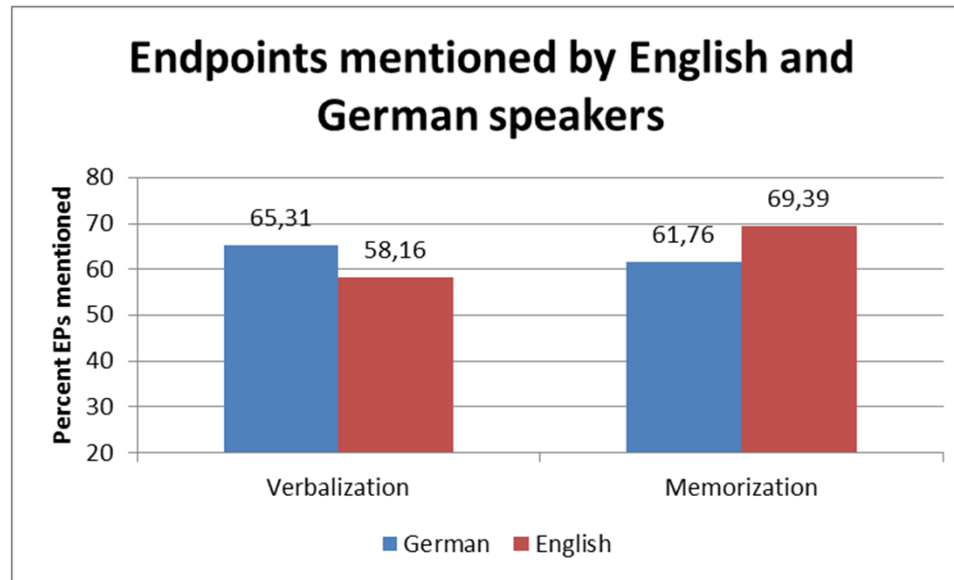
Critical item





## Crosslinguistic comparison

- We do **not** find a significant **relativist** effect in crosslinguistic comparison

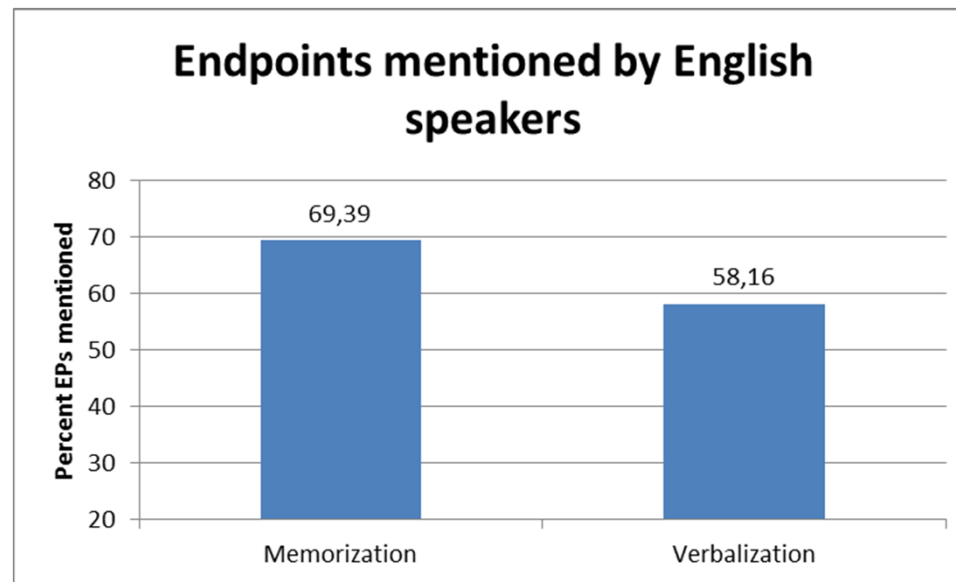


*not significant*  
n = 396



## Within-language comparison

- However, we find a **tendency** for **English** speakers to encode **less EPs** in verbalization (V) than in memorization (M)

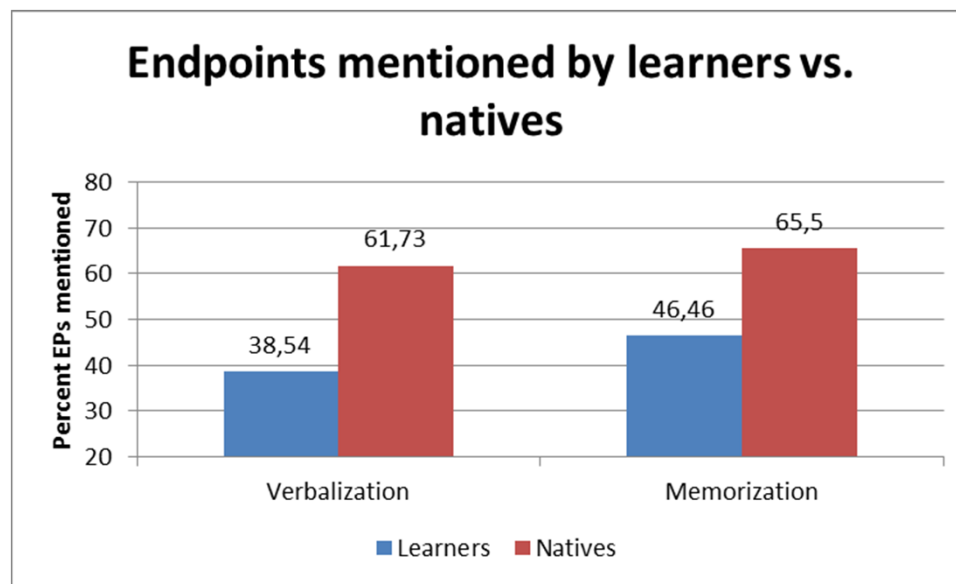


$p = .10$   
 $n = 169$

# Empirical Study: Results



## Comparison learners vs. native speakers



$p = .002$  (M)  
 $p < .001$  (V)

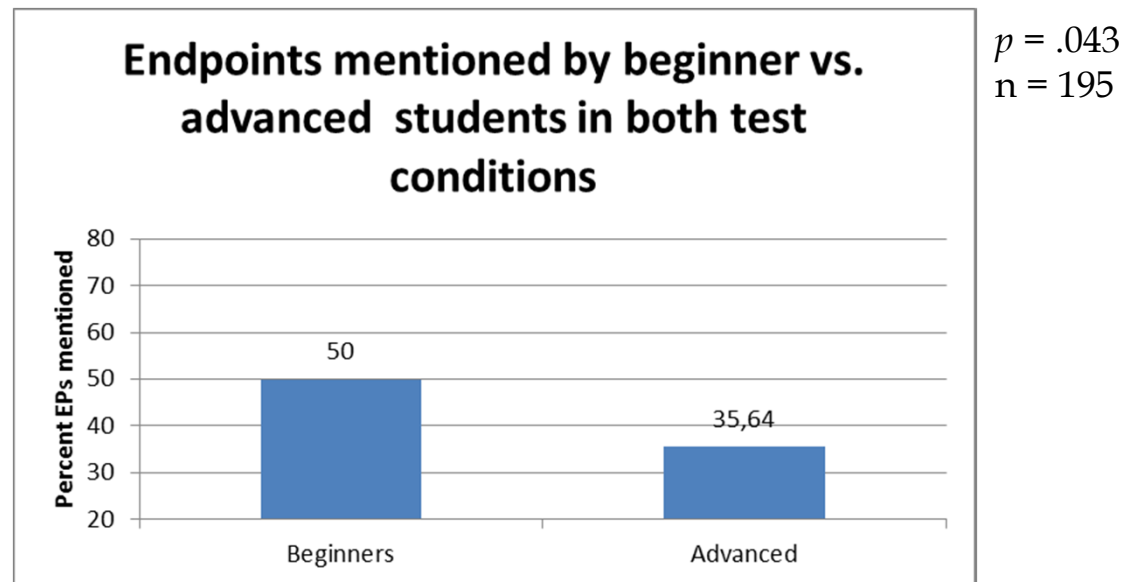
$n$  (natives) = 369  
 $n$  (learners) = 195

- **Learners** mention significantly **less endpoints** than both native groups in both test conditions (and show a **tendency to omit EPs in V** more frequently than in M)
- Possible **explanation**: since **aspectual marking is not yet habitualized** and automatized, learners have to “fill” the “aspectual slot” with **increased cognitive costs**

# Empirical Study: Results



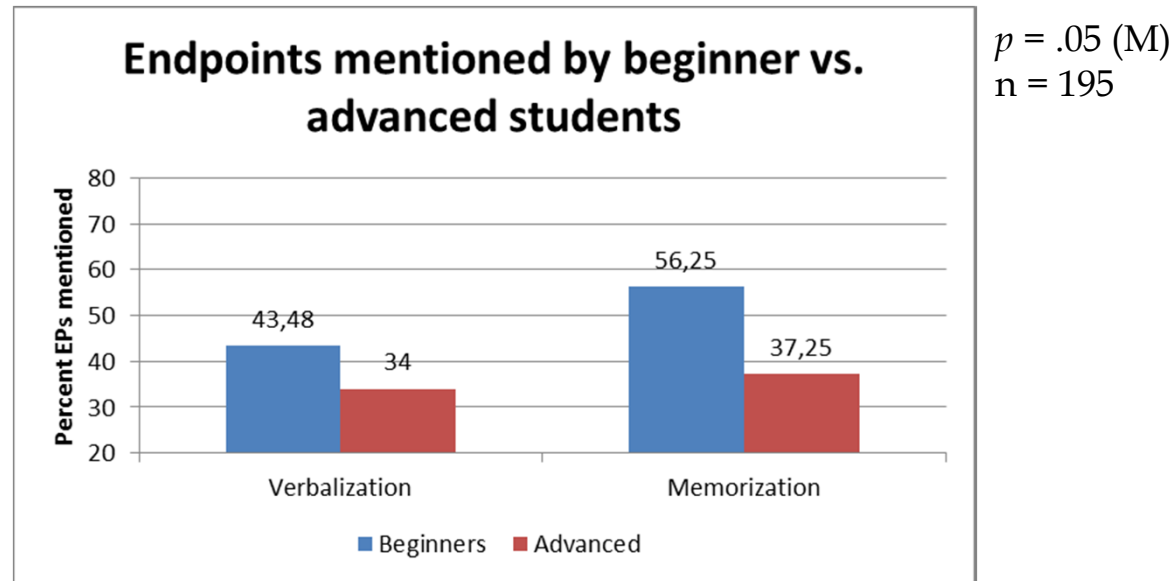
## Comparison learner levels



- Beginners mention **more EPs** than advanced students; this notably shows in the **memorization** task



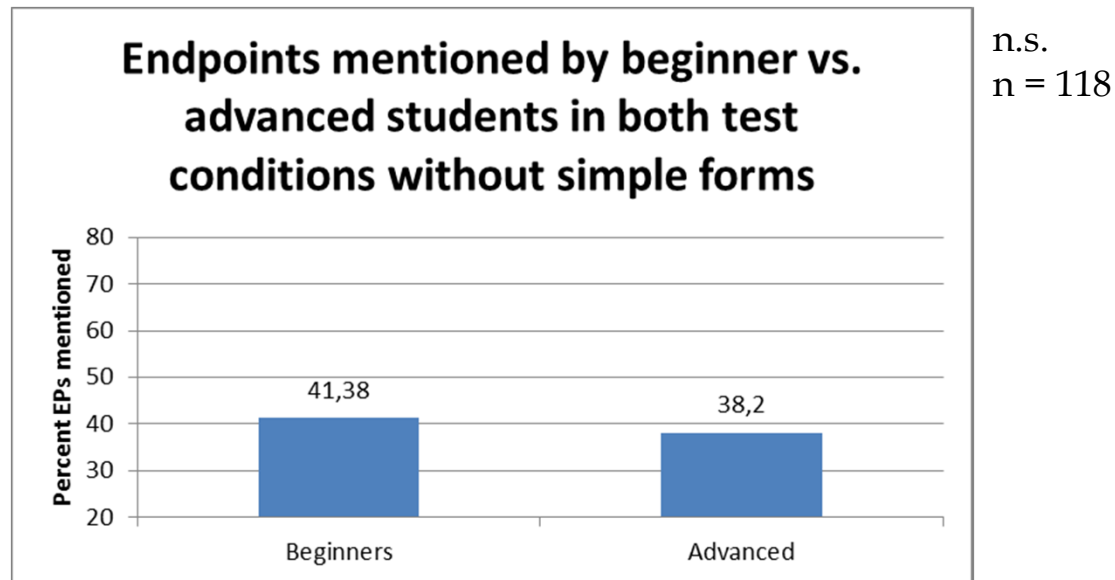
## Comparison learner levels



- Beginners show a tendency to mention **more EPs** than advanced students; this notably shows in the memorization task
- Assumption: This correlates with the usage of **simple aspect** that beginners frequently apply



## Comparison learner levels without simple aspects

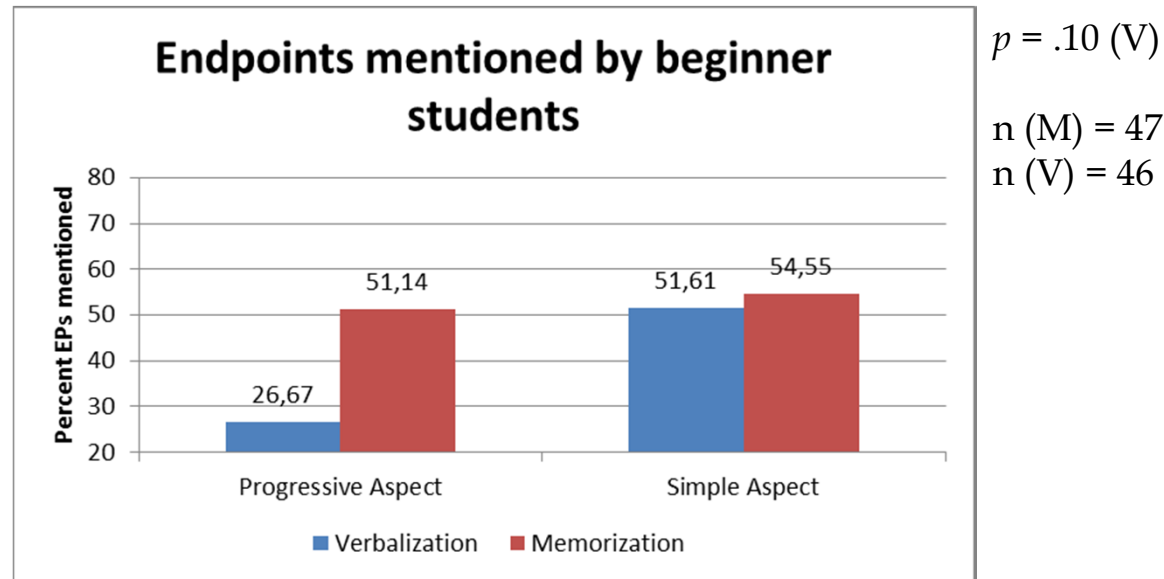


- Assumption: It seems to be easier for learners to not mark aspect and stick to the **German strategy** of including endpoints

# Empirical Study: Results



## Aspect marking and EP encoding at beginner level



- Beginners tend to encode **less EPs** when **marking aspect**, which notably shows in the verbalization task
- Assumption of increased **time-pressure** of filling the aspectual slot in verbalization seems to be further confirmed



- We found **no cross-linguistic effects** of grammatical aspect on event conceptualization
- However, we found a **tendency** for English native speakers to encode **less endpoints in the verbalization** task; we interpret this as a *Thinking for Speaking* effect with respect to English: **During the speech planning process**, those categories that are obligatorily encoded in a language draw the speaker's attention to **relevant event components**
- With respect to **learner** languages, we found a **significant main effect** in that they encode **less endpoints** than English native speakers
- We argue the **increased cognitive costs** associated with the additional, non-habitualized grammatical slot to be responsible for the **decreased endpoint encoding** in learners

Thank you.



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