

# Acquisition of tense and aspect in L3 Italian

This poster presents the results of interlanguage analyses carried out on a corpus of written narratives (N=152), collected from L3 learners of Italian. The data show that tense and aspect marking in L3 Italian is influenced by factors such as lexical aspect and discourse grounding. The influence of both factors increases alongside proficiency. This research outcome is congruent with the results of recent studies on the acquisition of tense and aspect in Romance languages (e.g., McManus, 2013; Rastelli & Vernice, 2013; Salaberry, 2011).

## Research question

To what extent is the acquisition of tense and aspect marking in L3 Italian influenced by lexical aspect and discourse grounding?  
How does the effect of these factors change with the development of L3 proficiency?

## Theoretical background

The most influential hypotheses about the development of tense and aspect marking in the interlanguage are the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Shirai & Andersen, 1995) and the Discourse Hypothesis (Bardovi-Harlig, 1994, p. 43).

Both hypotheses predict that prototypical combinations of lexical aspect, discourse grounding and verbal morphology are acquired earlier than non-prototypical combinations. However, recent studies (e.g., Salaberry, 2011; McManus, 2013, Rastelli & Vernice 2013) contradict both hypotheses, and claim that the use of prototypical combinations increases with more developed proficiency. In order to recognise semantic prototypes, learners have to map the perfective/imperfective distinction into verbal morphology, and acquire the lexical aspectual properties of target-language predicates.

## Methodology

### Data collection: personal and impersonal narratives

Little Red Riding Hood (N=58)      The Day of my School Leaving Examination (N= 92)



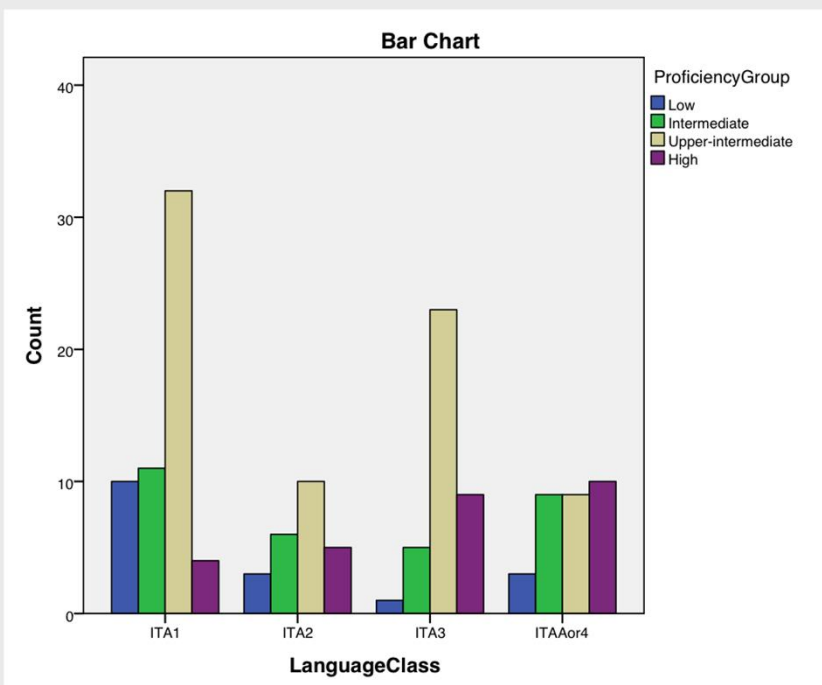
**Participants:** Students learning Italian at the Institute of Romance Languages at the University of Vienna, enrolled in the bachelor courses Italian 1, Italian 2, Italian 3, Italian 4; and in the master course Italian A

### Data analysis

- 1. Step: Coding for grounding and obligatory occasion analysis (OOA)  
-foreground clauses: context for perfective past  
-background clauses: context for imperfective past
- 2. Step: Identification of proficiency groups according to studentsø accuracy score in OOA
- 3. Step: Frequency analysis (FEA)  
Examination of the linguistic devices used by learners in foreground and background contexts.
- 4. Step: Coding for lexical aspect  
States, e.g., *vivere (nel bosco), essere, dovere, volere*  
Activities, e.g., *festeggiare, lavorare, ripassare, studiare*  
Telic predicates, e.g., *alzarsi, dimenticare, incontrare, trovare*

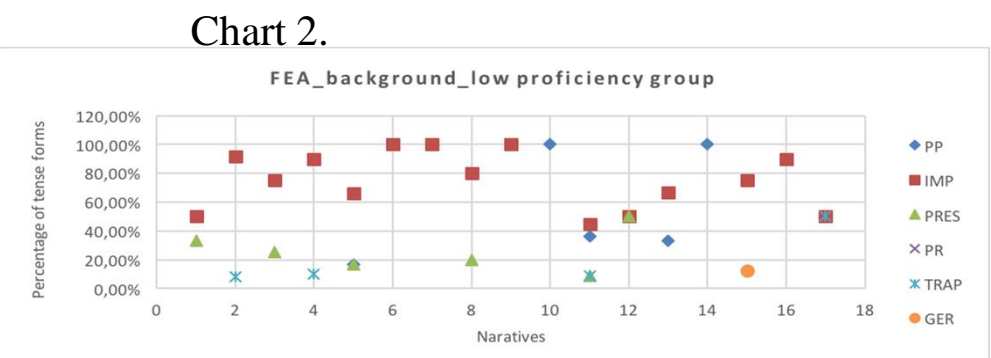
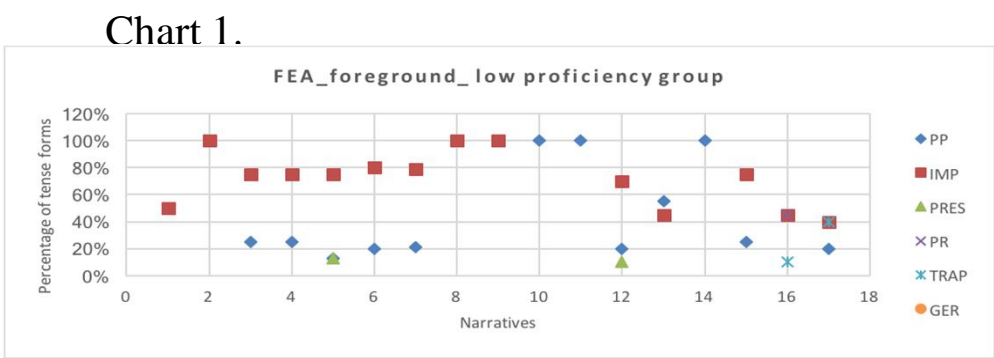
## Proficiency groups on the basis of OOA

OOA was adopted as a criterion for grouping students according to their proficiency in tense/aspect marking.

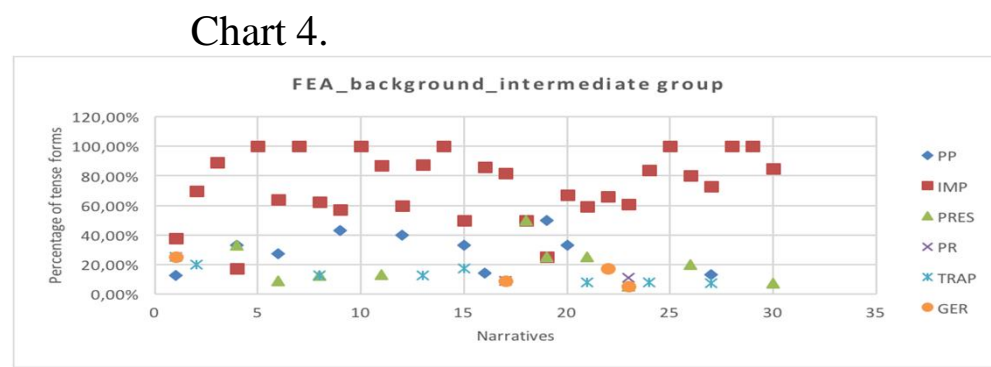
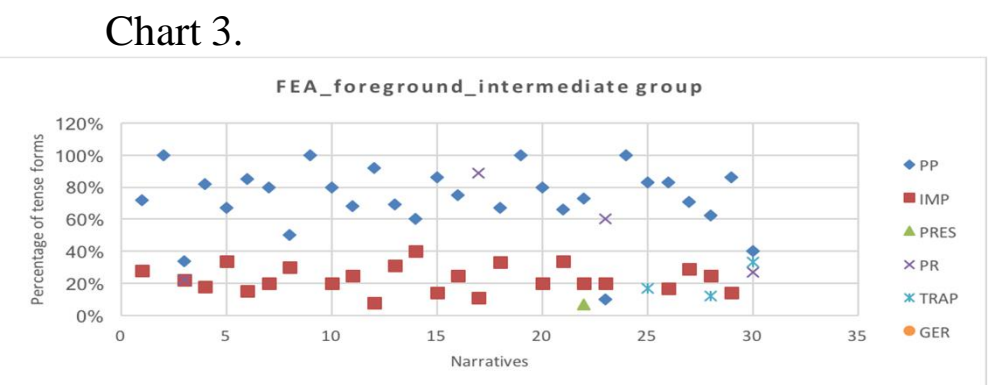


## Results

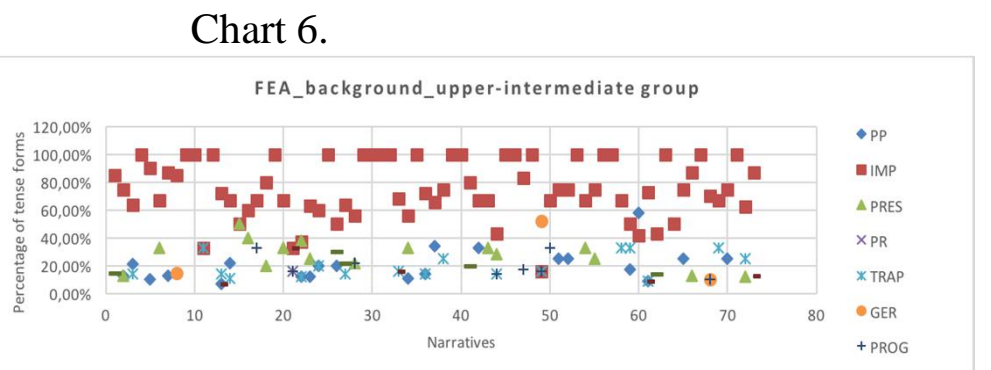
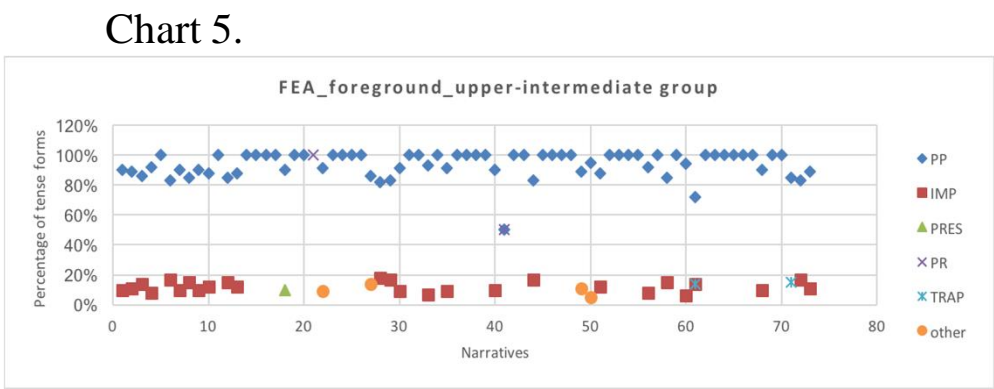
Low proficiency texts (N=17) display tense marking, but no aspect marking. Past tense morphology is used regardless of discourse grounding (observable in Chart 1 and 2), and across lexical aspectual classes (observable in Excerpt 1).



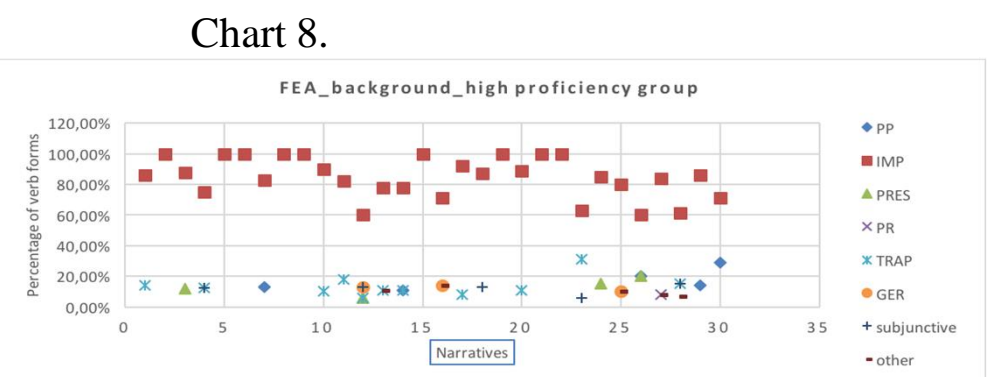
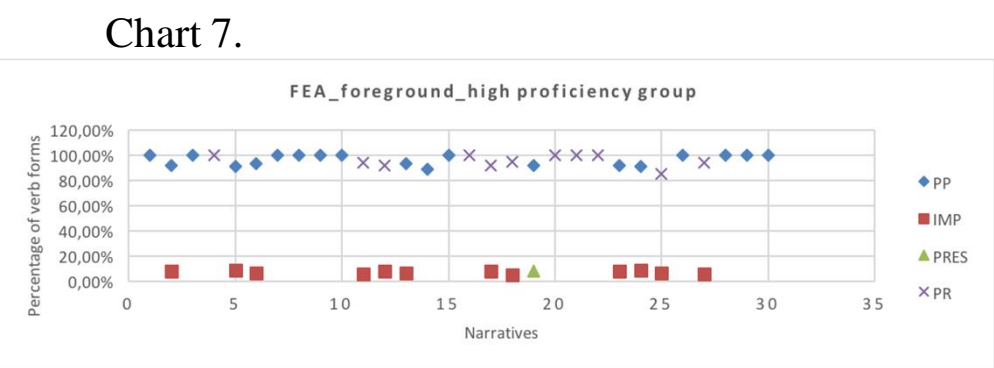
Intermediate proficiency texts (N=32) are characterised by a tendency to use telic predicates marked with perfective morphology in the foreground, and statives marked with imperfective morphology in the background. However, this tendency is not stable: imperfective morphology is likely to be overextended to the foreground (Chart 3), while the background displays a large variation of tense forms, observable in Chart 4 and Excerpt 2.



Upper-intermediate proficiency texts (N=73) present a categorical association between telicity, perfective morphology and foreground, observable in Chart 5 and Excerpt 3. The association between stativity, imperfective morphology and background is evident but not absolute, as illustrated in Chart 6 and Excerpt 3.



High proficiency texts (N=30) display a categorical association between telicity, perfective morphology and foreground (Chart 7); stativity, imperfective morphology and background (Chart 8).



## Narrative excerpts

### ➤ Excerpt 1

[Bg1] C’era una volta la mamma di Cappuccetto Rosso  
[Fg1] mandava<sub>1</sub> lei per portare una cesta colmato con alimenti alla sua nonna.  
[Fg2] Nel bosco Cappuccetto Rosso incontrava<sub>2</sub> un lupo.  
[Fg3] Loro diagolavano<sub>3</sub>  
[Fg4] e [cancellation] Cappuccetto Rosso lo raccontava<sub>4</sub> (...)

### ➤ Excerpt 2

[Bg1] C’era una volta il Cappuccetto Rosso  
[Bg2] che attraversava il bosco  
per arrivare da sua nonna  
[Bg3] Andandoci  
[Fg1] incontrava un lupo  
[Fg2] che le ha chiesto  
[Bg4] dove va.  
[Fg3] Il Cappuccetto Rosso ha risposto  
[Bg5] che sta andando dalla nonna  
per portarla ~~sua da bere~~ il vino a un dolce  
[Bg6] dato che è in malattia

### ➤ Excerpt 3

[Fg1] Al mio giorno di maturità mi sono alzato alle 6 di mattina.  
[Fg2] Ho fatto la colazione  
[Fg3] e poi ho preso il treno alle 6:30  
[Fg4] Arrivato ~~alla~~ [cancellation] scuola  
[Fg5] ho incontrati i miei compagni di classe.  
[Bg1] Tutti erano nervosi  
[Bg2] e stavano tremando.

## References

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