

***DISTINGUISHING OBLIGATORY AND NON-
OBLIGATORY GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES
WITH REGARD TO 'THINKING FOR
SPEAKING'***

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LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

- Edward Sapir: “no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality”
 - To investigate the influence words have over individuals and groups
- Benjamin Lee Whorf
 - The world conveys the basic impressions but language, by creating specific divisions and foci, helps mould the way speakers view the world

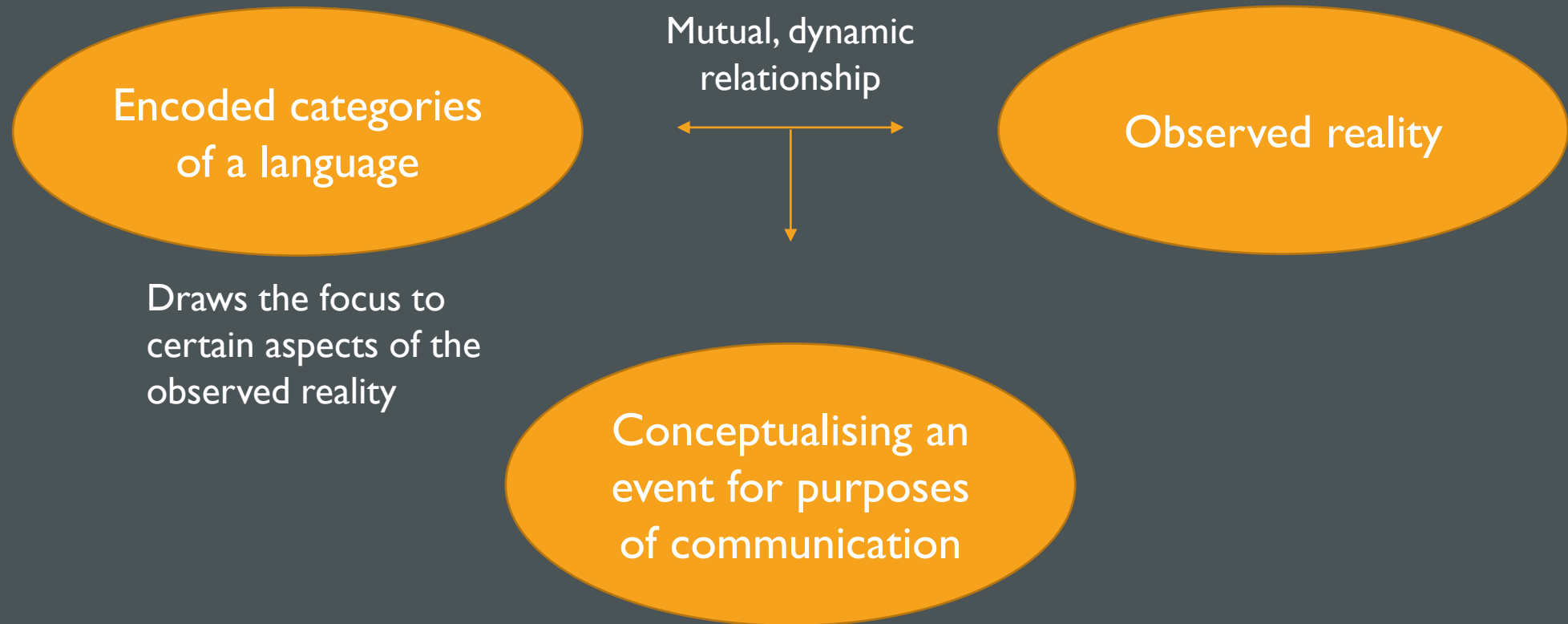
THE WHORFIAN HYPOTHESIS

- The strong version claims that language determines thought and cognition.
 - **Linguistic determinism**
- The weak version claims that linguistic categories of a language **influence** a speaker's thought patterns.
 - **Linguistic relativity**

'THINKING FOR SPEAKING'

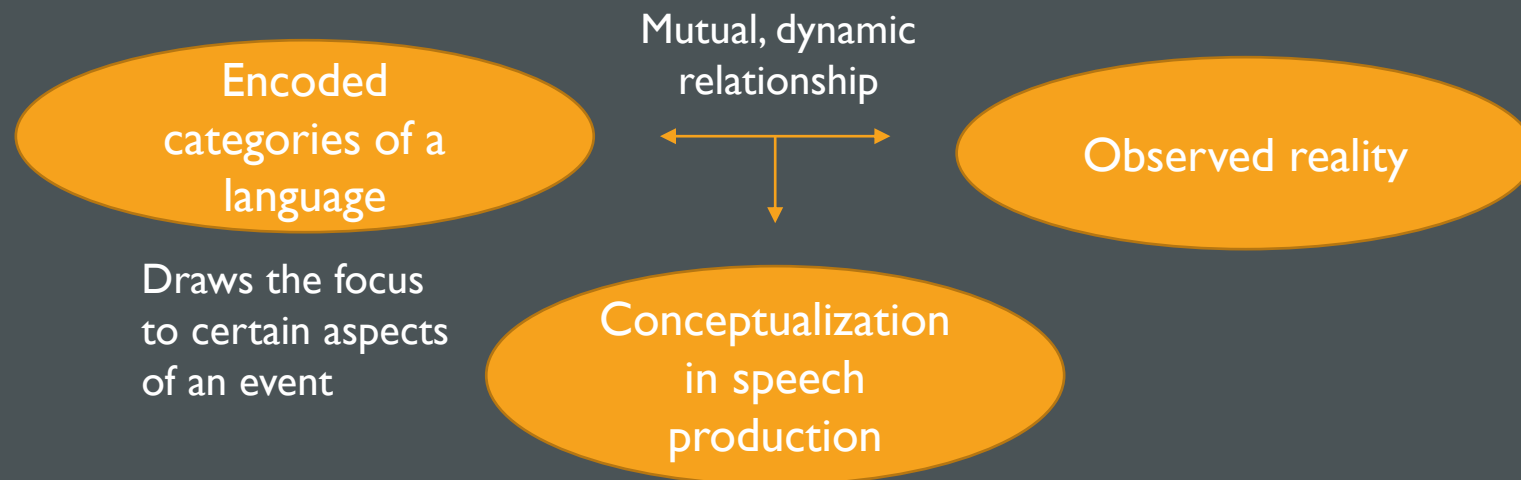
- Slobin
- A specific thinking process during the formulation of an utterance
 - The connection between language and thought
- **Grammatically encoded** categories direct speakers to attend to certain categories in the 'thinking for speaking' process

'THINKING FOR SPEAKING'



‘THINKING FOR SPEAKING’

- Flecken : “conceptualization processes that take place during the organization and selection of content for expression”



'THINKING FOR SPEAKING'

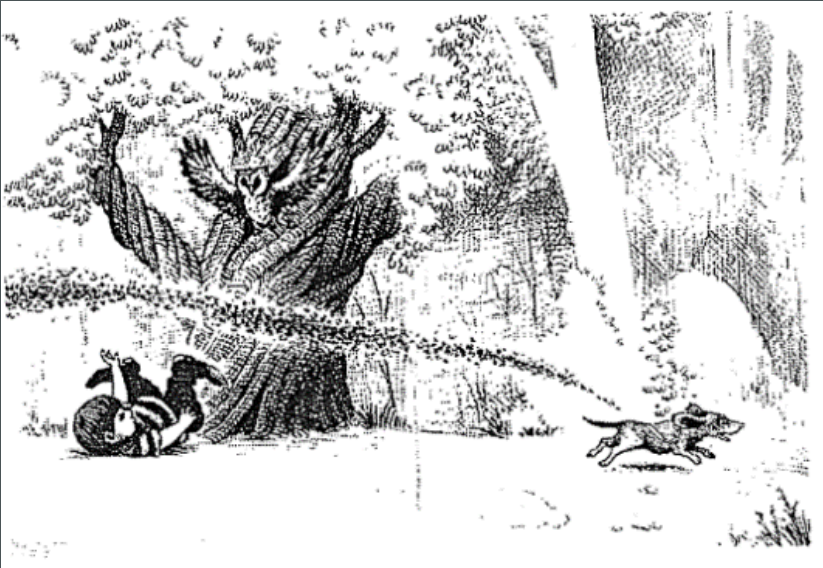
Slobin's hypothesis:

- Speakers attend to encoded grammatical categories and not to non encoded

Grammatical category:

- Progressive aspect

SLOBIN'S EXPERIMENTS



- Collected narrations
- Different native languages
 - English, Spanish, German and Hebrew
- Encoding of progressive aspect

PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

- A subcategory of imperfective aspect
- A grammatical category which denotes an action that is dynamic
 - an action or event in progress
- English
 - Encoded (and obligatory)
 - Continuous: to be + present participle
 - *He is playing.*
- Not encoded in German? (according to Slobin)

SLOBIN'S EXPERIMENTS



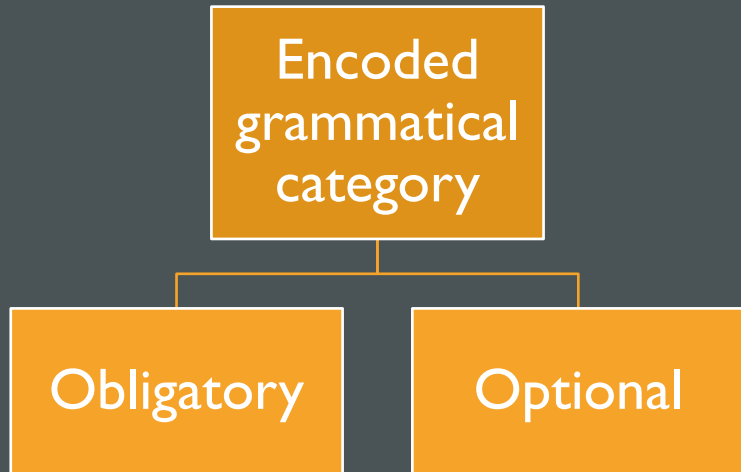
- English
 - “The dog is running (away).”
- German
 - “Der Hund läuft (weg).”
 - ‘The dog runs (away).’

Findings confirm his claim:

Categories which are encoded (‘grammaticalized’) are generally expressed while categories which are not are generally ignored.

(Slobin, 1996; 2003; 2008)

OBLIGATORY AND OPTIONAL CATEGORIES



- Both are encoded form-meaning pairings in a language's grammar
- Only the obligatory category *must* be used in speech in specific contexts.
- The progressive in English is a grammatically encoded category which is also obligatory

THE PROGRESSIVE IN DUTCH

- Two main constructions encode progressive aspect:
 - the '*aan het* construction'
 - '**Posture / motion verb** construction'

‘POSTURE/MOTION VERB CONSTRUCTION’

- The posture verb cx: posture verb + *te* + infinitive
 - Used with either one of the following verbs:
liggen ‘lie’, *zitten* ‘sit’, *staan* ‘stand’ or *hangen* ‘hang’
- The motion verb cx: *lopen* ‘run’ + *te* ‘to’ + infinitive
 - (1) *Ze staan te praten.*
‘They are talking.’ (Lit: ‘They stand to talk.’)
 - (2) *Ik loop te piekeren.*
‘I am worrying.’ (Lit: ‘I run to worry.’)

THE ‘**AAN HET** CONSTRUCTION’

- A prepositional periphrastic construction
- Often combined with the verb *zijn* ‘be’
- Consists of the locative preposition *aan* ‘at’/‘on’, the definite article *het* ‘the’ combined with an infinitive form of the verb:

(1) De hond is **aan het** lopen.

‘The dog is running.’ (Lit.: ‘The dog is at the run.’)

THE PROGRESSIVE IN DUTCH

- Two main progressive constructions
 - Both **Encode** progression/ ‘ongoingness’
 - **Both are optional**

THE PROGRESSIVE IN DUTCH

DUTCH:

- (1) *Zij speelt piano.*
'She plays/is playing the piano.' (Lit.: 'She play-PRES.3sg piano')
- (2) *Zij is piano aan het spelen.*
'She is playing the piano.' (Lit.: 'She is at the play-INF')

English:

- (1) She is playing the piano. [in progress]
*She plays the piano. [does not convey progress]

THE PROGRESSIVE IN DUTCH

- Both are optional grammatical categories which encode progressive aspect
- Posture verb construction is less prevalent
- the '*aan het* construction'
 - Use is prevalent in descriptions of change-in-state situations with **highly dynamic changes**
 - Used to describe activities

RESEARCH QUESTION: TWOFOLD

1. Do six year-old Dutch-speaking children spontaneously express continuity despite the fact that progressive aspect is a non-obligatory grammatical category in Dutch?
2. Is there evidence that speakers use a non-obligatory construction that grammatically encodes progressive aspect in Dutch?

PARTICIPANTS

- Native (Flemish) Dutch speaking children
 - between five and six years old
 - Two schools in West-Flanders
- Informed consent
- 34 correctly conducted elicitation tasks

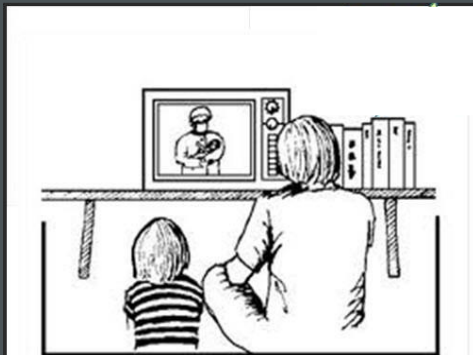
ELICITATION MATERIAL



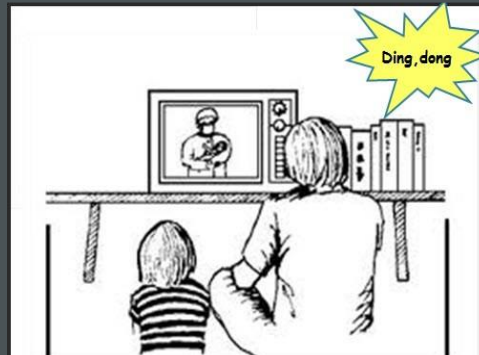
A



B



C



D

(A). Ongoing activity

(B). Ongoing activity accompanied by completed action

(C). Ongoing activity

(D). Ongoing activity accompanied by completed action

ELICITATION PROCESS

- Condition 1
 - Spontaneous answer
- Condition 2
 - Elicitation
- Control condition
 - Priming

ELICITATION PROCESS

- **Eliciting** = pointing out that the first activity is ongoing
 - E.g. De twee meisjes/Ze zijn al even bezig met deze activiteit
'They've been doing this activity for a while'
- **Priming** = using the 'aan het construction' in a question
 - E.g. Wat zijn deze kinderen aan het doen?
'What are these children doing'



A



B

First pair of drawings AB

spontaneous use of the '*aan het* construction'

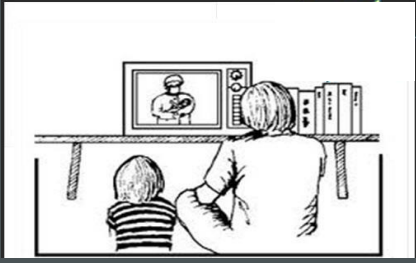
no spontaneous use of the '*aan het* construction'

Condition 1

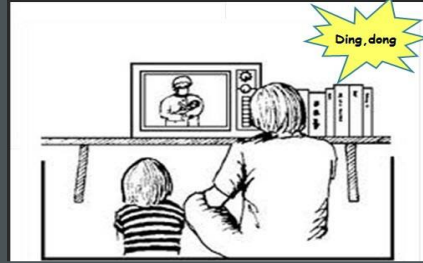
use of the construction after elicitation

no use of the construction after elicitation

Condition 2



C



D

Second pair of drawings CD

spontaneous use of the 'aan het construction'

no spontaneous use of the 'aan het construction'

use of the construction after elicitation

no use of the construction after elicitation

Condition 1

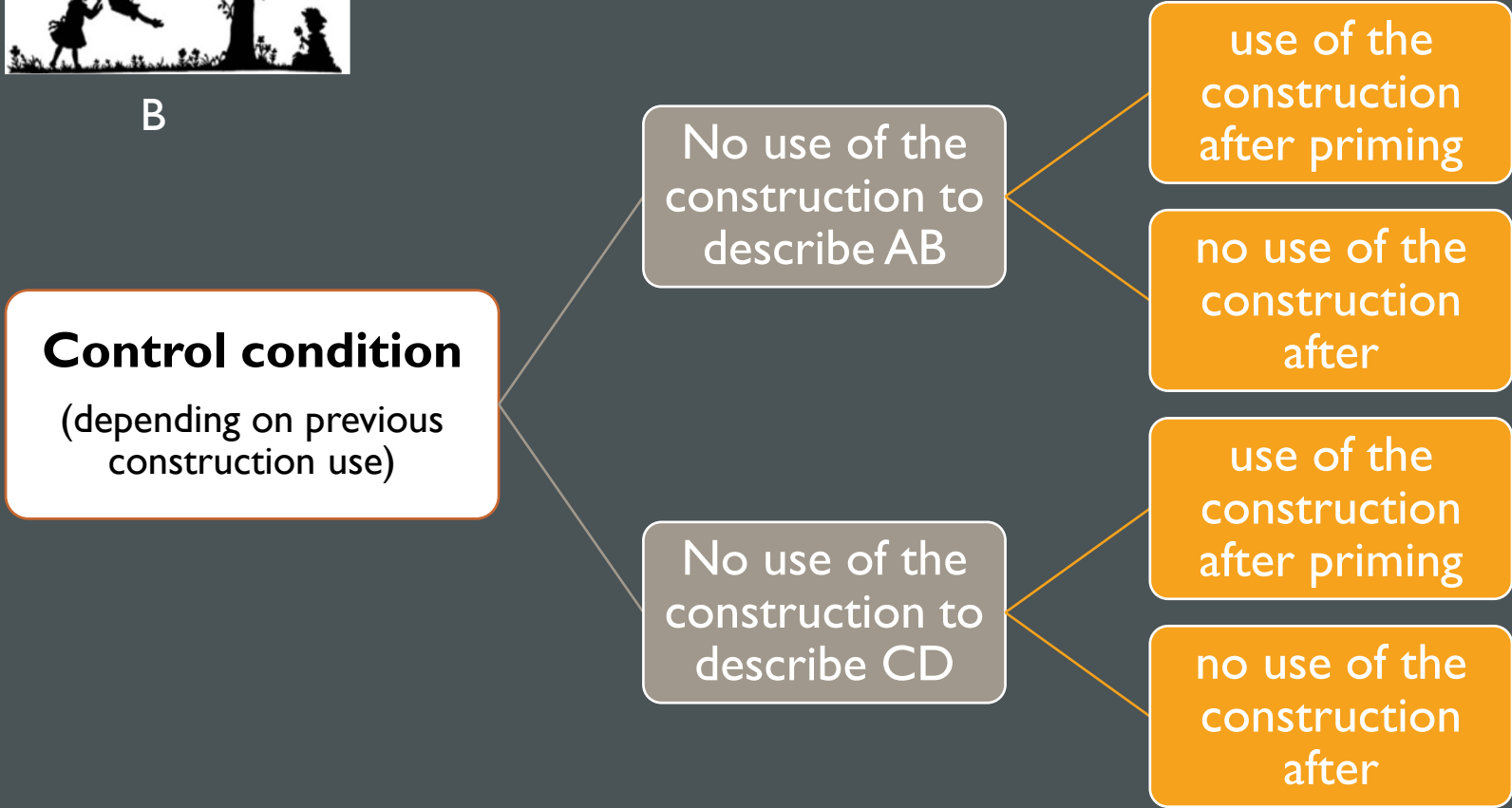
Condition 2



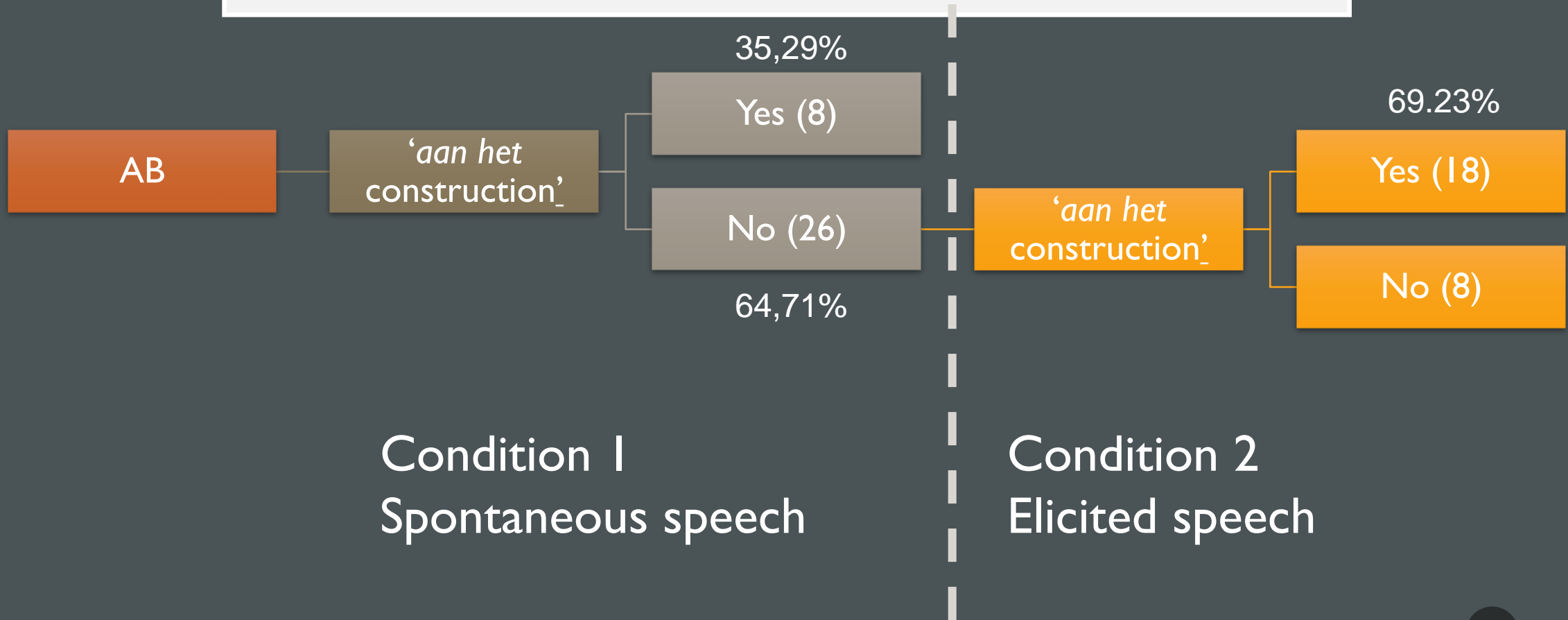
A



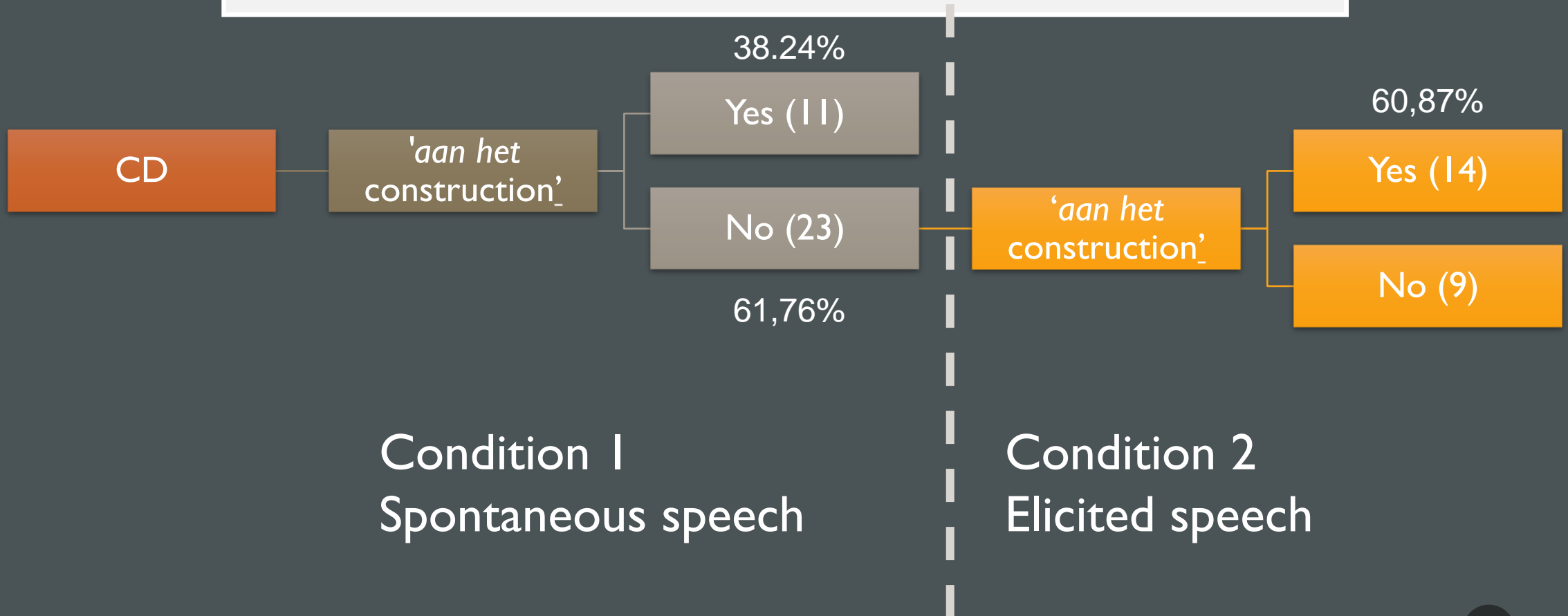
B



RESULTS: FIRST PAIR OF DRAWINGS



RESULTS: SECOND PAIR OF DRAWINGS



FINDINGS

- Most participants initially do not focus on the continuity even though they have a construction at their disposal that encodes continuity in Dutch grammar
 - At variance with Slobin's claim
- Most participants use the optional grammatical category after elicitation
 - optional encoded categories can also be shown to have a bearing on 'thinking for speaking' **under specific conditions**
- Refinement of Slobin's account (1996; 2003; 2008)
 - Being a **grammatically encoded** category is a necessary but **no sufficient** condition for 'thinking for speaking'. The encoded category must **also be obligatory**.

CONCLUSION

- Categories which are **encoded and obligatory**
 - Generally expressed
- Categories which are **encoded and optional / non-obligatory**
 - Generally more ignored
- Encoded grammatical categories that are obligatory
 - direct the speakers attention to certain aspects of an event in TFS
- Encoded grammatical categories that **are optional**
 - direct the speakers attention to certain aspects of an event to a much **lesser degree** in TFS

LIMITATIONS

- Drawings (CD) contained written text
- Low number of participants
- Difficult to elicit child speech

FURTHER RESEARCH

- Replication study
 - Inter-subject variation (age)
- Comparative study
- Eye-tracking study
 - speakers have been shown to pay more attention to things which they verbalise during a language task

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