

Addressee-specific narratives in older age

A qualitative study of narratives from
two different groups of older speakers

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Outline

- Background
 - MAIN as an assessment instrument
 - Study design
 - Analysis: Macrostructure (general)
 - Qualitative case study
 - Discussion
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- Research question: How can we systematically investigate narrative skills in general and addressee-specific pragmatic skills in particular?

Background

- Working memory & age (cf. e.g. Archer et al. 2018, Brockmole/Logie 2013, Fabiani et al. 2016, Klencklen et al. 2017)
- Working memory & language (Gathercole/Baddeley 1993, Baddeley 2003, Alatorre-Cruz et al. 2018, Schuh 2011)
- Narrative skills
- Research on narrative skills
- Narrative skills of older people
 - Biographical narratives (cf. Gerstenberg 2011, Dittmann o.J.)
 - Structurally complex narratives by 80-year-olds (Kemper et al. 1990)
 - Not systematically varied

Background: Conditions of narrations

- Narrator
 - Linguistic background
 - Stage of life
 - Cognitive state
- Narration
 - Biographical/imagined (“uncontrolled”)
 - Elicited (“controlled”)
- Addressee
 - Adult
 - Child



MAIN (cf. Gagarina et al. 2019)

main.leibniz-zas.de

Based on a multidimensional model of story organization (Story Structure, cf. Stein/Glenn 1979)

- Narrative consists of components: Setting + Episode(s)
 - Episode consists of several components:
 - 1) Initiating component
 - 2) Reaction
 - 3) Goal
 - 4) Attempt
 - 5) Outcome
- } = Internal State (IS), Frame
- } = „Core“ (GAO)
- Verbalizing of GAO as an indicator of the story's complexity and as an evidence of the ability to tell a coherent story
 - Cross-linguistic

MAIN story Baby Birds

Setting

Internal State

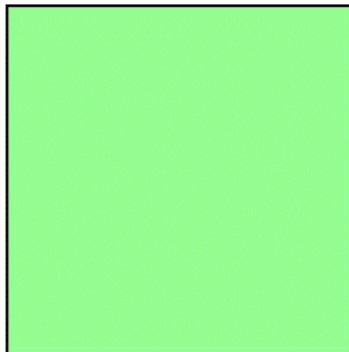
Goal

„One day there was a mother bird who saw that her baby birds were hungry. She flew away because she wanted to find food for them. [A hungry cat saw that the mother bird was flying away and meowed: "Mmm, nice, what do I see here in the nest?"]

The mother bird came back with a big worm for her children, [but she did not see the cat.] She was happy about the juicy worm for her babies. [...]

Attempt

Outcome



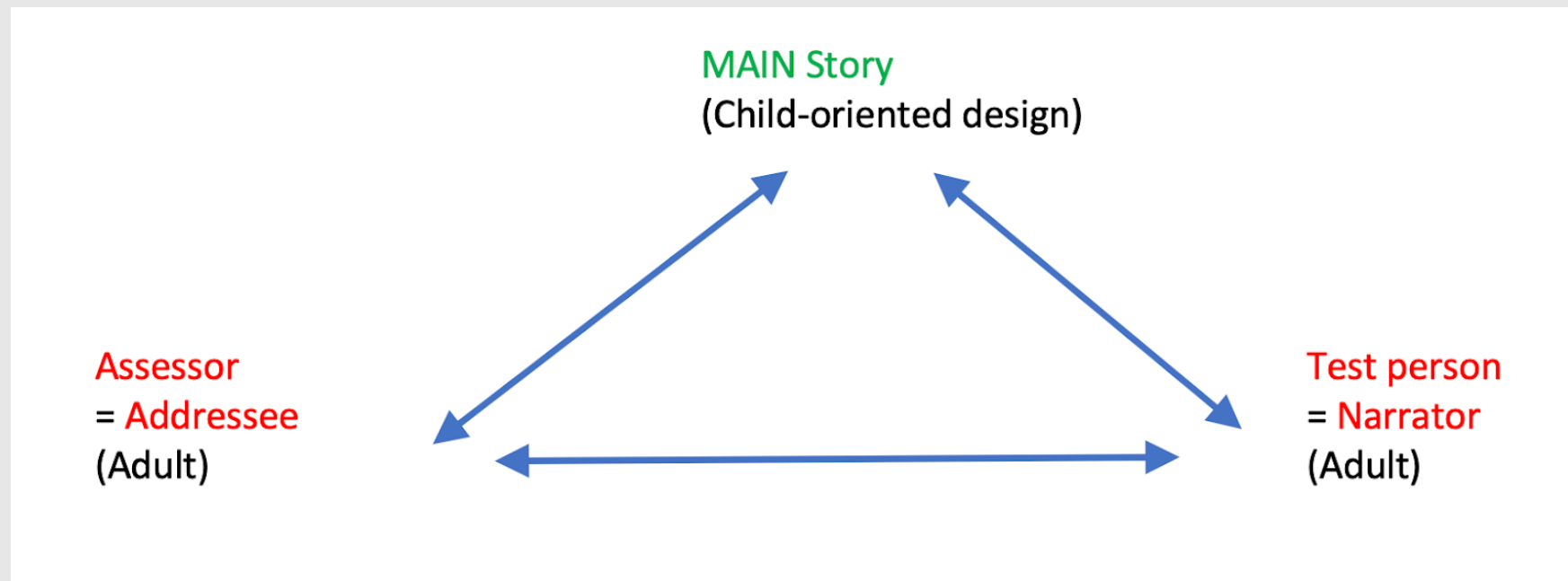
Study Design (whole project)

Interviews with monolingual speakers of Russian, Polish and German, different age groups, without diagnosed cognitive impairment, ongoing project

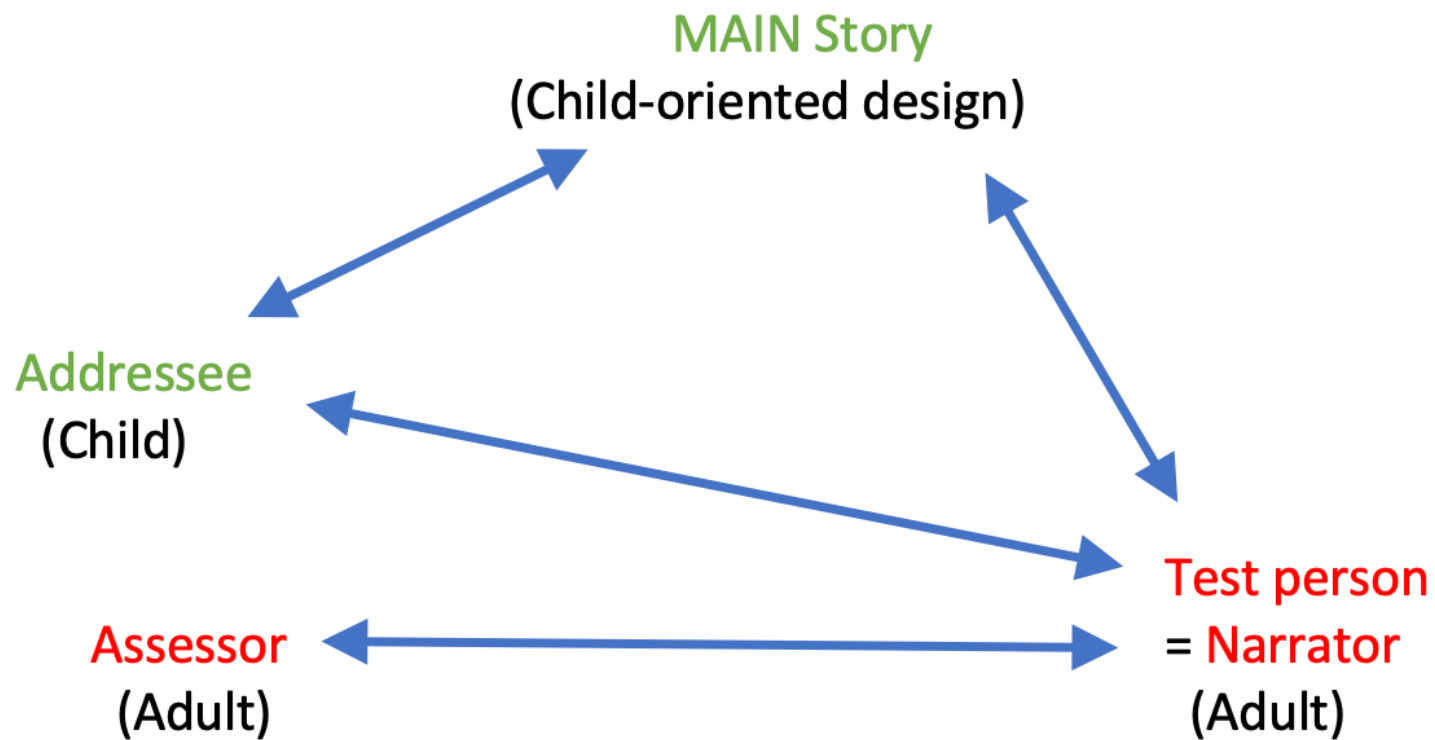
Group (age)	German	Polish	Russian	Total
G1 = 20-25	5	5	5	15
G2 = 45-50	5	5	5	15
G3 = 70-82	8	-	-	8
Total	18	10	10	38

- Questionnaire
- Interview (remote or in-presence), duration 50-90 Minutes, including:
 - Cognitive tests: Screening of executive functions, Month-Ordering task (working memory, verbal), Benton test (working memory, visual spatial)
 - Telling of two MAIN-Stories (in Telling-mode)

Narrations in a testing situation

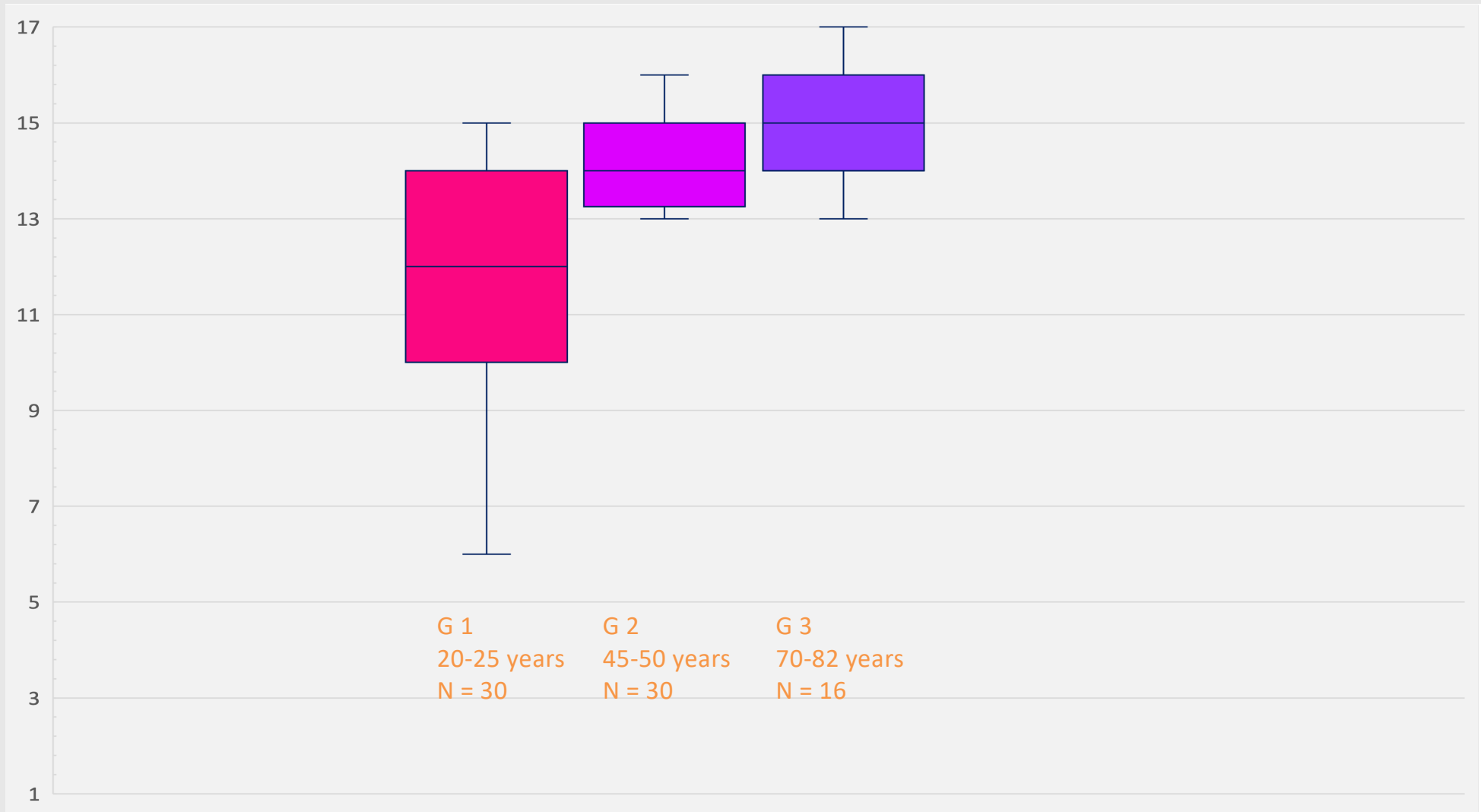


Narrations in a testing situation



Macrostructure (scores) total

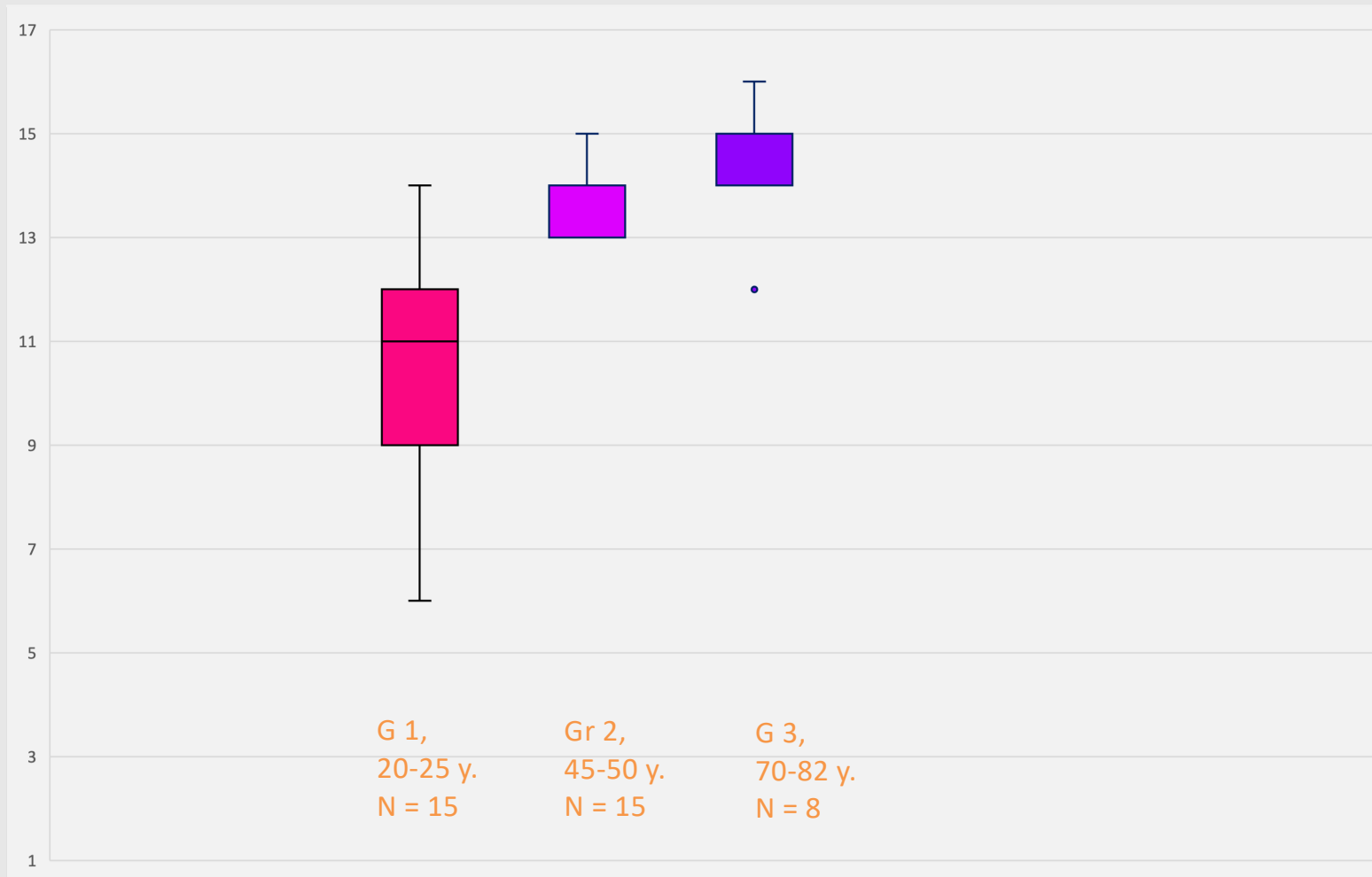
Score



Macrostructure (scores) Addressee

Score

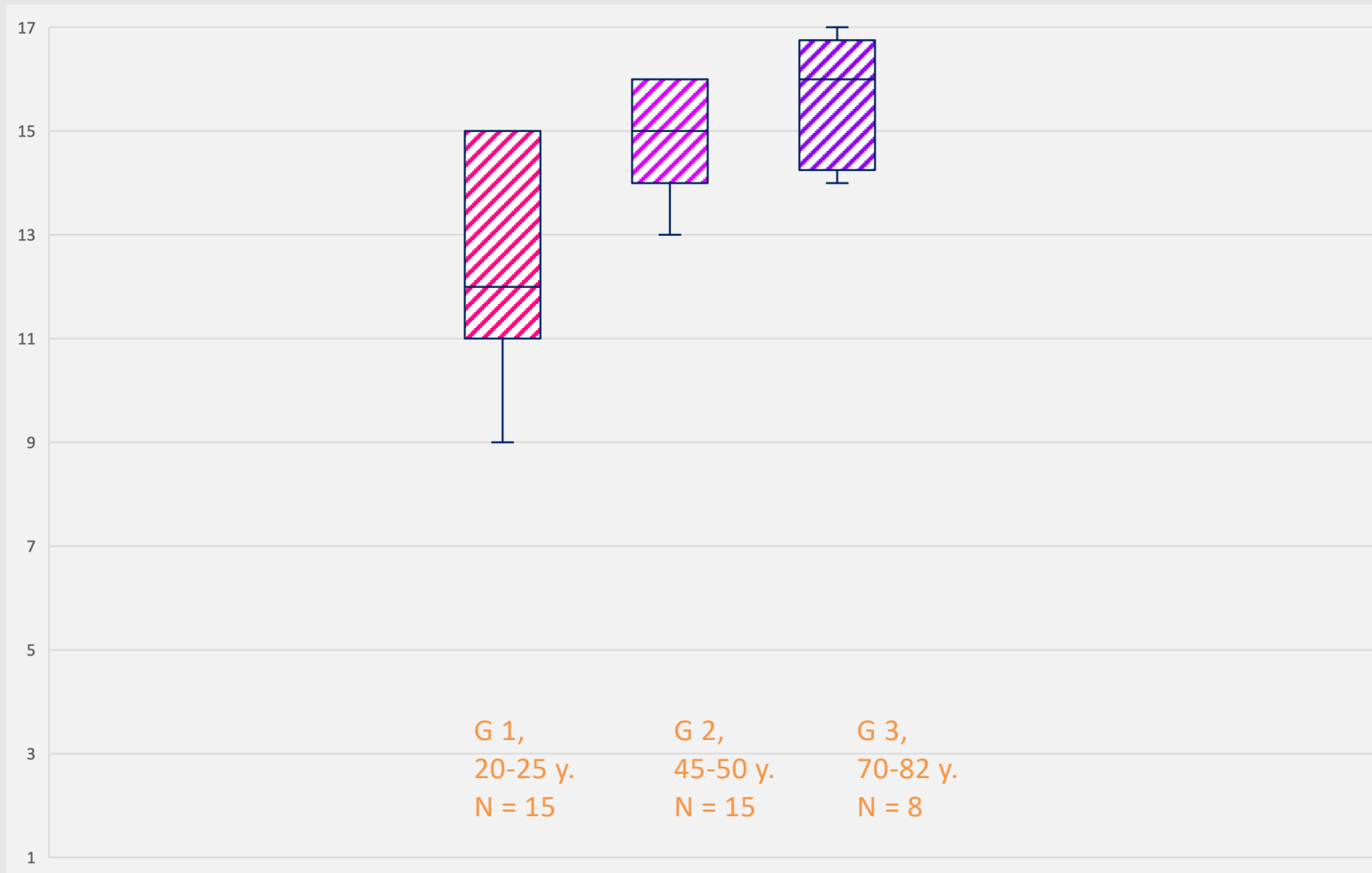
Addressee: Adult



Macrostructure (scores) Addressee

Score

Addressee: Child

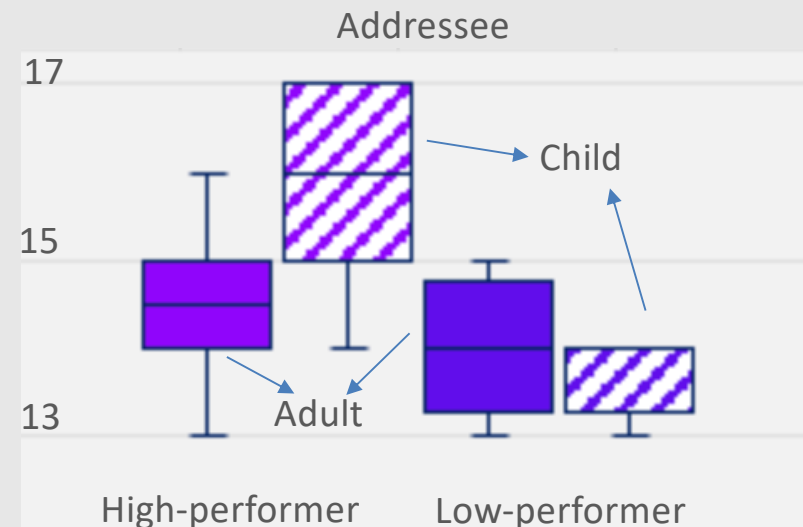
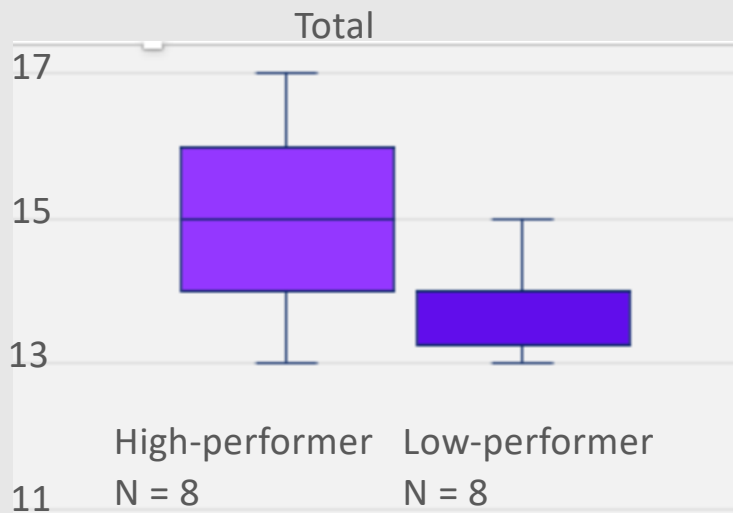


Interim conclusion

- Possibility to assess narrative skills
- Possibility to vary the design systematically and to test pragmatic skills (by changing the addressee)
- Addressee-specificity given in all groups
- Narratives addressed to children are more explicit and structurally more complex

Case study: Group 3

- 8 test persons, subdivided by their performance in the working memory tests:
 - 4 high-performer (2 female, 2 male, 70-82 years, with partnership)
 - 4 low-performer (3 female, 1 male, 72-78 years, without partnership)



Where are the differences?

- Scores for the „Core“, the Goal-Attempt-Outcome-cluster in total: 9
 - given in both groups: No difference in story complexity!
- Scores for Internal States and Frame in total: 8
 - Low-performers: 4-6 (mean 5) for both stories
 - High-performers:
 - Addressed to an adult 4-7 (mean 5,5)
 - Addressed to a child: 5-8 (mean 7)
 - Intraindividual difference between the stories
- Incorporating of the story

Summary

- High-performers show an intraindividual difference between the stories:
 - Lower scores for stories addressed to an adult
 - Higher scores for stories addressed to a child (cf. other age groups)
- Low-performers show no difference regarding the addressee
 - Similar stories
 - Comparable to the stories addressed to an adult of high-performers
 - Loss of intraindividual variety

Conclusion

- Main differences in incorporating the story and verbalizing the Internal States = opportunity to make the story more accessible or comprehensible for the addressee
 - Loss is parallel to the findings of loss of pragmatic subtleties (ability to empathise with others) in MCI/dementia (cf. Hamilton 2020, Guiterrez-Rexach/Schatz 2016)
- Changing the addressee as a possibility to systematically assess intraindividual pragmatic variety in storytelling
- Limitations (small group, ongoing project)
- Need for further studies

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Thank you for your attention!

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