The notion of a construction in the context of extended discourse has been defined in the sense of highly abstract ‘discourse patterns’ (Halmari & Östman, 2001; Östman, 2005). Along these lines, the goal of the present study is to identify constrained and conventionalized patterns of usage (Slobin, 1971; Tomasello, 2003) expressing specific functions in producing narrative texts.

Underlying the study is the assumption that discourse is constructed from inter- and intra-connected segments (see van Dijk, 1982; Grosz & Sidner, 1986; Berman & Slobin, 1994; Matthiessen, 2002). Specifically, the study examines an innovative unit of discourse analysis, “Clause Packages”, as multi-clausal constructions in the context of narrative discourse (Nir-Sagiv, 2006). The notion of Clause Packages [CPs] is based on a typology of clause-combining relations, taking into account semantic and pragmatic criteria such assertion (Cristofaro, 2003), dependency (Lyons, 1968; Halliday, 1994), and integration (Givón, 1980; 1990). These yield a hierarchical taxonomy (Berman & Nir-Sagiv, in press), ranging from (1) Isotaxis – in the form of isolated clauses; via (2) Parataxis – symmetric linking by coordination and asymmetric linking by complementation; to (3) Hypotaxis – by adverbial and non-restrictive relative clause constructions; and to (4) Endotaxis – nesting of one clause inside another. These inter-clausal relations combine to create complex, highly abstract constructions that cannot be specified in terms of their form. Rather, as suggested by Verhagen (2006), the notion of ‘form’ is treated as observable patterns that trigger the inference of something unobservable (i.e., the abstract construction).

The study devolves around a database of 312 authentic texts produced in both speech and writing. All consist of personal-experience narratives (Labov, 1997), produced by native speakers of two languages (Hebrew and English) in different age-groups (schoolchildren, adolescents, and adults) on the shared topic of interpersonal conflict (see Berman & Verhoeven, 2002). And it examines ‘patterns of usage’ in the sense of how deployment of linguistic devices for the purpose of expressing particular discursive functions is constrained by the boundaries imposed by CPs as units of discourse. Specifically, each of twelve architectures of inter-clausal relations identified as the opening sequences of CPs are analysed in terms of whether or not they are resonated (Du Bois, 2007). The notion of resonance relates to the process of activating relationships between comparable linguistic elements through the repeated use of constructions throughout discourse, providing a rhetorical effect of parallelism and thus creating a cohesive texture within the text. As it is used here, resonance means that a particular constellation of clause combining is selected to function as the conventionalized or preferred form in the course of discourse construction, achieving textual coherence by force of ‘cohesive harmony’ (Hasan, 1984) across CPs. Results show that inter-clausal relations are resonated throughout the database, with no effects for modality, language, or age. The bulk of texts show at least one occurrence of constructional resonance, with the proportion of structurally resonating texts rising as a function of age to as high as around 90% in the adult group. Moreover, recurrently resonated patterns constitute more than half of the CPs within any given text on average, with some speaker-writers going so far as to construct an entire text around a single type of repeated internal architecture.

In sum, the study shows that the distribution of form and function inside and across CP boundaries is highly constrained. And it concludes by considering the implications of this finding for the claim that segments of discourse - and possibly, discourse in general - conform to the same organizing principles as more simplex constructions, and should be considered an integral part of the inventory of constructions of any language (Fillmore, 1988; Östman, 2005).