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**Narrative as a method of studying the speech
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of Georgian bilingual and Greek monolingual
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Narrative as a method of studying the speech characteristics of bilingual children (On the example of Georgian bilingual and Greek monolingual juniors)¹

ABSTRACT

The present article: "Narrative as a method of studying the speech characteristics of bilingual children (On the example of Georgian bilingual and Greek monolingual juniors)" aims to study the nature of narrative and to establish narrative skills in school; also the purpose of the study is to define the importance of narrative as an effective method of research. The first part of the paper presents a brief overview of the theoretical material around the narrative. The second part of the article is based on empirical material. In particular, it is based on the analysis and results of my research which I have conducted at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece). The article presents a study of children's narratives and a comparison of narratives during bilingualism; In particular, the use of narrative-based research method in the case of Georgian bilinguals and Greek monolinguals, the use of which is quite common in the modern field of psycholinguistics.

Keywords: *narrative and its meaning; Narrative as a research method in bilingual and monolingual juniors; A study of children's narratives; Comparison of narratives during bilingualism.*

Introduction

Any scientific paper aims to study and analyse of a specific research theme. It is very important to select an adequate research method for the analysis of the problems raised around the research theme. In our case, we considered the study of children's narratives to be an effective method. Its use and comparison of narratives in bilingualism is quite common in the modern field of psycholinguistics. So, we consider the problem of bilingualism in general, and in this case the narrative as a research method in bilingual and monolingual juniors and the present thesis:

The meaning of the narrative

The phenomenon of narrative is studied in a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, sociology, literature, history, and philosophy.

Different types of narrative offer a platform for exploring a wide range of linguistic possibilities in the context (compare with: Hughes et al., 1997). These capabilities relate to story structure, discourse features (e.g., consistency and interrelationship), morphosyntax, syntax, vocabulary, and uniquely bilingual phenomena such as code switching and cross-linguistic interference. Children's narrative is also an index of their cognitive, semantic, and social abilities (Liles, 1993).

The researchers considered the analysis of the narrative as a viable way to examine communicative competence (Botting, 2002) and which should be less biased towards bilingual children than the normative assessment tools (Paradis et al., 2011). Oral narratives provide a rich resource of data (source of information) about a child's use of language in a relatively natural context. Finally, narrative analysis allows researchers to evaluate many linguistic features in context - including macrostructure, story grammatical categories, objectives, attempts, and outcomes, as well as microstructure characteristics, e.g. vocabulary diversity, relational and referential apparatus - using relatively short language patterns (Heilmann et al., 2010a, 2010b).

Narrative skills are important for further success in school, e.g. in literacy and in understanding the language of mathematics (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Bliss et al., 1998; McCabe, 1996; McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Walach, 2008; Westby, 1991). They form a bridge between the oral language and literacy, by providing exposure and a wide experience in the use of (extensive use of experience), as well as through the contextualized and cohesive discourse units and the abstract texts which children are suddenly faced with the written texts (Hadley, 1998; Westby, 2005).

Interventional studies have shown that teaching directly narrative skills improves comprehension and production of oral narrative as well as understanding, conceptualizing and interpreting reading (Hayward & Schneider, 2000; Swanson et al., 2005).

Research

The aim of my research at the University of Athens was to use a narrative-based method, which included the following: a) Georgian bilingual children have to describe pictures in Georgian and Greek twice, at one-week intervals; b) and a description of the same pictures by Greek monolingual children once, only in Greek. Meeting with each narrator was held individually. For the narrative I used the story "Frog, where are you?", from which I had 15 pictures selected for the description. For the visuals, a few episodes from the above story are shown in Picture 1 below:

Picture 1.



In this study Georgian junior bilinguals and Greek monolingual juniors of the same age living in the Attica region have participated. We need to compare the monolingual Greek and Georgian bilingual children's narratives. At this stage, our goal was to: a) identify and make further analyses what specific mistakes each bilingual child would make, namely: under the influence of the Greek language, what specific mistakes could be identified in the Georgian language; b) work out the modern methods of language assessment (measurement) of each language.

Participants: The total number of narrators (TLD²) participating in the study is 20. Of these, there are 14 Georgian bilinguals (namely, 11 boys and 3 girls) and 16 Greek monolinguals

(namely, 9 boys and 7 girls) juniors. The bilingualism of Georgian children is conditioned by their living in Greece from birth, which is why the dominant language for them is the Modern Greek language.

Only one child participating in the study was born in Georgia, who studied in one of the Public schools of the city Kutaisi (Georgia), until the age of 8. The parents of all fourteen bilingual children are Georgians. Their age range varies from 6 to 11 years and they are the students of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th grades of the public schools located in the central districts of Athens, in particular, in Ambelokipoi and Zografou. The mean age of the narrators in both groups is 8.5 years.

Analysis and research results

During the research analysis we used 2 approaches: *functional and structural*. The first refers to the content of how many episodes the narrative is divided by the child. The structural approach involves the lexical, morphosyntactic and code switching (CS) comparison.

1. The *lexical comparison* is defined by the formula **Ttr**, where the capital **T** is a total number of words in the text, the small **t** is the sum of words used once, and the **r** is the comparison of these two (see Table 1 and Table 2).

2. The *morphosyntactic comparison* can be conditionally determined (defined) by several points:

a) the length of the sentences; b) N-V i.e. comparison of syntactic constructions; c) Whquestions - which are the interrogative sentences; d) tenses of the verb; e) number of pronouns; f) spatial relations (verbs derived from preverbs/verb prefix) (the relevant Table 3 see below, which presents only the indicators of Georgian bilingual children's narratives, which will be compared with Greek monolingual children's narratives in the next stage of the research).

3. *Code switching (CS)*, which refers to the number of involved words. That's how many times has a Georgian bilingual child included the Greek word (s) in the narrative?

Table 1. Lexical comparison with Georgian bilingual narrators

Ttr				
Narrative	Narrator	T - total number of words	t – the number of words used once	– comparison of T and t

<i>Bilingual children (typical language development - TLD)</i>				
Georgian	Alex (8 ages)	211	24	187 (difference)
	Tazo (9 ages)	162	16	146 (difference)
Greek	Alex (8 ages)	244	10	234 (difference)
	Tazo (9 ages)	178	11	169 (difference)

Table 2. Lexical comparison with Greek monolingual narrators

Ttr				
Narrative	Narrator	T - total number of words	t – the number of words used once	r – comparison of T and t
<i>Monolingual children (typical language development - TLD)</i>				
Greek	George (8 ages)	199	14	185 (difference)
	Magia (9 ages)	257	20	237 (difference)

Table 3. Morphosyntactic comparison with Georgian bilingual narrators

Morphosyntactic comparison							
Narrative	Narrator	Length of sentences	N-V syntactic construction	'WH' Questions (interrogative sentences)	Tenses of the verb	Number of pronouns	Spatial relations (verbs with prefix)
<i>Bilingual children (typical language development - TLD)</i>							
Georgian	Alex (8 ages)	6-7 words	31	0	Present/ Past 80%20	2	7
	Tazo (9 ages)	6-7 words	26	0	Present/ Past 50%50	0	6
Greek	Alex (8 ages)	6-7 words	22	0	Present/ Past 60%40	0	3
	Tazo (9 ages)	6-7 words	24	0	Present/ Past 60%40	0	1

For our study, we compared the narratives of 2 Georgian bilingual children and, consequently, 2 Greek monolingual children. We defined 8-9 years old respondents as comparable age. The total data on the number of children, their gender, age limit and average age are shown in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: Georgian bilingual narrators

Language	Number of children	Gender	Average age by years and months
<i>Bilingual children (typical language development - TLD)</i>			
Georgian	2	Male	8 ages (104 months) 9 ages (117 months)
Greek	2	Male	8 ages (104 months) 9 ages (117 months)
Total	2		8.5 ages (110.5 months)

Table 5: Greek monolingual narrators

Language	Number of children	Gender	Average age by years and months
<i>Monolingual children (typical language development - TLD)</i>			
Greek	2	Male & Female	8 ages (103 months) 9 ages (112 months)
Total	2		8.5 ages (107.5 months)

Conclusions

As the above tables show, Georgian bilingual children did not use interrogative sentences at all during the narrative, and we have only 2 cases of using pronouns; As for the length of the sentences, there is an abundance of 6-7 word sentences; All four bilingual children have most of the narrative in the present tense, however, they use it in the past tense as well; In terms of morphosyntactic constructions, noun- verb (N-V) pairs are used more often by Georgian bilingual children during narratives in Georgian. As for the frequency of code switching (CS) with bilinguals, in the texts of the narrative we obtained there was recorded the only case of code switching with twice repeating.

As a brief overview shows, the results of the analysis of research data were mainly focused on monolingual-bilingual differences, however, we also focused on the similarities, which showed the following:

- a) In general, bilinguals are better able to convey their message in Greek than in Georgian;
- b) monolingual-bilingual differences are of course, confirmed in terms of vocabulary, but not in terms of comprehension of the story;
- c) there is a monolingual-bilingual similarity in terms of syntax (the length of the

sentence), but not in terms of vocabulary and morphosyntax, in which the result of bilinguals was much worse than that of monolinguals;

d) in small doses, but there is a side effect of bilingualism - Code switching (CS) with bilinguals;

e) there are noticeable differences between the monolingual and bilingual narrative possibilities; With bilinguals - delayed narration, but clarity of content.

NOTES

1. 1 The research was conducted under the Erasmus+ program at National and apodistrian University of Athens (Greece) (2019-2020 & 2020-2021 academic years).
2. 2 TLD - typical language development (Walters et al., 2012: 11)

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