

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATION ABILITY AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Narration or Story-telling is one of the important areas of research in children's language and literacy development. The present study intends to: a) explore the development of narration ability among Oriya speaking preschool and school going children, and b) identify the different styles and types of narratives used among them. The sample comprised of 45 school going children, selected randomly from middle socio-economic status group, residing in urban areas, out of 15 children were taken from each of three age groups 3+, 4+, and 5+ years respectively. They were asked to narrate a story. The Oral Composition Rating Scale (which is the modification of Planned Composition Rating Scale of Das & Ashman, 1990), Classification of children's discourse (Michell & Lambourne, 1979; Michell & Peel, 1977; Peel, 1971) and types of Narratives (Riessman, 1991) were used to analyze the narratives. The findings indicate that with increase in age the ability to narrate complex text increases.

INTRODUCTION

Research in development of narration has emerged as a new field of research in developmental psychology. It is an important area of studying linguistic expressions among children. Narration is a universal human form of depicting or reporting events. According to Merleau Ponty (1989) "language is communication of anything other than itself". Narration seems to require little thought about what to narrate, where to narrate and how to narrate. According to Bruner (1986) "Narrative thought is story-like, connective, specific, personally convincing, imagistic, and interpersonal and includes characters, settings, intentions, emotions and actions". While other researchers have emphasized narratives, as an important form of mental representation. Literature suggest that narrative thought develops through the ages because of the improved communication skill, language skill and memory ability.

Present research tries to examine the development of narration among children from a psycholinguistic perspective. This paper provides a synthesis of what narration thought is and how such thought develops during childhood.

The study of narratives has its ups and downs in the field of psycholinguistics. It has witnessed a change from being focused on the act of narration (Piaget, 1926) to the assessment of the narrator through the narration product (Vigotsky, 1962). But this assessment of the narrator has been limited to those elements which differentiate narrator in terms of their age groups. Recent works on memory (Chi, 1978) have, however emphasized the dangers of ignoring subjective elements which the narrator brings to his narratives. The change in research on narratives consists of looking for age related differences as well as subjective features. Most theories of the relationship between thought and language put much emphasis on expression rather than limitations of understanding. Researchers emphasize that narratives may help to shape the child's own attitude towards self and others, sharing memory in linguistic form can serve as a reinstatement of the experience.

Narration is regarded as created story; it is not the original one. According to Aristotle a narration has a beginning, middle and an end. Ever since, scholars agree that sequence is necessary if not sufficient for narratives (Cronon, 1992; Polyani, 1985). Labov (1972) in

particular, assumes all narratives are stories about a specific past event and they have common properties.

Story grammarians propose that story telling is an art through which the culture and heritage of a society are transmitted. Story telling in most cultures is used to teach important social and moral lessons. Stories are told in order to understand social events. During the narration, people have the opportunity to recognize their personal experiences.

To study narratives there are different structural approaches. The Labov's structural approach have focused on the function of formal properties of narratives which are, an abstract (summary of the substance of the narrative), orientation (time, place, situation and participants), complicating action (sequence of events) evaluation (significance and meaning of the action, attitudes of the narrator), resolution (what finally happened) and coda (returns the perspective to the present). According to Labov that with these structures, a narrator constructs a story from the primary experience and interprets the significance of events in clauses and embedded evaluations. Burke's (1945) structural approach emphasized on the grammatical resources that individuals apply to narrate stories are consisted of terms like act(what was done), scene(when or where it was done), agent(who did it), agency (how he/she did it) and lastly purpose (why they do). And Gee's structural approach (1986), emphasized on the oral aspect, where he analyses the changes like, pitch, pauses and other features that punctuate speech which allows the interpreters to here group of lines together. Through this he shows, how organized, coherent and successful the speech is (Gee, 1991).

Before talking about the development of narratives we must know about the components and types of narratives are there. Narratives have two components. They are text-centered component which refers to the structural aspect of narratives and it gives the picture of the narrator and narrator-centered component which reflects the subjective features of the narrator and tells us something about the narrator's personality to understand the dynamics of narration. Therefore, narration is a two step process consisting of cognitive and linguistic operations. The study of narrative is perhaps one of the most effective means for providing the total psycho-linguistic profile of an individual.

Not all the types of narratives are stories in the linguistic sense of the term. According to Riessman (1991) individuals relate experiences using a variety of narrative genres. The genres include habitual narratives, hypothetical narratives and topic-centered narratives. Habitual narratives refer to that when events happen repeatedly there will be no peak in the action. Hypothetical narratives are that which depicts event that did not happen. And topic-centered narratives are the snapshots of past events that are linked thematically. Genres of narratives, with their distinctive styles and structures are mode of representations that narrators choose. Different style persuades differently, they make us care about a situation to varying degrees as they pull us into the narrator's point of view.

In Hudson & Shapiro (1991) study, they compared different types of narratives produced by preschool children, first graders and third graders. Each child was asked to produce either scripts, personal experiences or make- believes stories. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the development of general narrative skills as well as the development of skills relevant to each particular style. In addition they also examined how the given topic influenced children's ability to produce different types of narratives. They concluded that even though the development of narrative structure in scripts and personal narratives is relatively complete by the third grade, the narrative structure in children's stories continues to develop.

Earlier researchers suggest narrative as apart of language. Producing narrative is a language task that has its own demand characteristics and its own developmental course (Nelson, 1986; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). But current researcher views narrative is one of the cognitive instruments for coherently structuring chaotic substance of past experiences (ONG, 1982). Within this emerging arena, the present study is an attempt to explore the development of narratives among preschool children.

The development of narratives in children has usually been studied from three perspectives like; narration of past events (Bennet-Kaston, 1986; Peterson, 1990), narration of a known or familiar story (Kemper, 1984; Benson, 1993) and plotted narratives that is construction of stories (Kuczaj and Mc Clain, 1984; Benson, 1993). Telling stories about past event seems to be an universal human activity, one of the first form of discourse we learn as a children (Nelson, 1989) and used throughout the life course by people of all social backgrounds in a wide array of settings.

Various research findings indicate that language plays an important role in development of narration. Learning language requires experiencing it as it is used in the discourse. From the beginning as the child learns language, it has implications for both cognitive and communicative functions. Much development in the language like, grammatical, pragmatic, conversational narrative, semantics takes place over the years from 2 to 5 years of age. The two year child still relies primarily on action organization through the use of experience based scripts. There are huge gaps in our knowledge of the effective functions of language from 2 to 5 years. Language is not much in use as a representational mode until the child has attained at least the linguistic competence typical of three years old.

The development of narratives varies from culture to culture. The amount of variability in the amount of exposure to adult-produced narratives, story-telling and book reading are also influenced the development of narratives. Opportunities for development of extended discourse skill provided in preschool settings are limited but there is considerable variability in the amount and type of exposure to narratives. Result shows that those children, who get exposure to narratives, they perform better in school and classroom discourse.

Evidences mounting that the narrative language skills are particularly relevant to children's later school achievement (Ilson, 1984; Snow, 1983). Narrative skills can influence school achievement by the help of narrative mode of information presentation in classroom. Children who understand and produce narratives will participate effectively in classroom discourse. According to Snow (1982, 1987) good narrators are relying on a variety of skills such as analyzing their own verbal productions, taking into account the listener's perspective and planning. Narrative has also been identified as one of the logical systems within which humans make sense of their world (Bruner, 1986), these perhaps suggesting a relation between narrative skills and thinking and problem-solving.

Narrative analysis takes its object of investigation the story itself. The purpose is to see how respondents in narrative impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant's story and analysis how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on and how it persuades a listener of authenticity. Interpretations are inevitable because narratives are representations. Human agency and imagination determines what gets included and excluded. In the process of narrativization, how events are plotted and what they are supposed to mean. Story plots vary in type: tragedy, comedy, romance and satire. There are five levels of representations- attending to experience, telling about experience, transcribing experience,

analyzing experience and reading experience. Individuals construct different narratives about the same topic.

Narrative analysis is not useful for larger samples. The methods are slow and painstaking. Our ultimate goals as social scientists are to learn about substance, make theoretical claims through method and learn about the general form particularly. Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning how events have been constructed by active subjects.

So far most of the research work on this area has been carried out in western setup. In India children are exposed to folk tales right from a very tender age which may play a major role in developing narrative skills among children. The present study was undertaken to examine the developmental trend on narration among school going children of different age groups and to identify the styles and types of narratives they used in their age groups.

Objectives: The present study intends to examine the following objectives:

To investigate the developmental growth of narration among preschool and school going oriya speaking children, and

To identify various styles and types of narratives developed among them.

METHOD OF STUDY

Sample: The sample comprised of 45 Oriya speaking preschool and school going children of which 25 are girls and 20 are boys. They were selected from three different age groups like; 3 years, 4 years and 5 years with 15 from each age group. Samples were taken from two different schools of Bhubaneswar. All the factors such as, parent's income, education and occupation were kept controlled as far as possible.

Tools: The tools are used in this experiment are follows:

Oral Composition Rating Scale (which is the modification of Planned Composition Rating Scale of Das & Ashman (1990)). Classifications of children's discourse (by Michell & Lambourne, 1971). Genres of narratives (by Riessman, 1991). Tape recorder.

PROCEDURE

Naturalistic observation as well as experimental investigation method was employed to meet the various objectives of the study. First a rapport was established with the children. After some days (approximately 25 hours) of interaction with them in their mother tongue they were considered for the final Research. They were asked to produce a story or describe an event which they feel comfortable to talk about or whatever they feel like to speak. The narratives were recorded through a tape recorder. Before doing analysis the narratives were transcribed. A seven point scale which was modified, was used for assessing the produced narratives under five dimensions like; expression, organization, wording, mechanics and individuality. The style of narratives was judged through genres of narratives like; habitual, hypothetical and topic-centered narratives. These narratives were a judged by three different raters using above scale and classifications. After analyzing these narratives, one-way ANOVA were applied to know whether there exists any difference or not.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The produced data or narratives were analyzed through narrative analysis which ultimately refers to content analysis. For narrative analysis, we used the seven point Oral Composition Rating Scale. The raters judged the narratives of the children by using the scale under five

dimensions like; Expression, Organization, Wording, Mechanics and Individuality. So, data were analyzed on the basis of their contents in the narratives.

The results indicate that there is a significant difference between three different age groups. The mean of three age groups in narration were calculated to see whether there exists any difference among them in development of structure of narratives. The mean and SD of narratives are given below in the Table No. 1:

Table-1

Mean and SD of Narratives of Different Age Groups

Age	Mean	SD
3 years	15.60	3.82
4 years	19.13	6.68
5 years	23.00	7.62

The result shows that the mean score and SD of 3 years is 15.60 and is 3.82, 4 years is 19.13 and 6.68 and 5 years is 23.00 and 7.62 respectively. This clearly indicates that there is a developmental trend among the different age groups of children. Our result also supports the story production researchers finding who propose that there is a qualitative difference between 3 and 5 year old, with 4 years old showing evidence of being in transition.

ANOVA for all the three groups was determined to see whether exists any difference among the groups in the development of narration or not. ANOVA result shows significant effect of age ($f(2,42)=5.07$, $p<.05$) on narration development. This also clearly indicates that the children start to produce narratives around 3 years of age.

The same result was found while the narratives were categorized into different styles like; confused, descriptive, interpretive or complex. With the increase of age, the styles of narratives also changed. The result also suggests that 3 year old children were not able to produce complex narratives. This can be easily known from frequency table given below:

Table-2

The Frequencies of Occurrence of Different Styles of Narratives in Each Age Group

Age Group	Confused	Descriptive	Interpretive	Complex
3 years	5	5	5	0
4 years	3	2	7	3
5 years	3	3	5	4

From the frequency table, it is known that, the more confused style of narratives are found at the age of 3, where as more complex and interpretive stories are found at the age of 5 years. The result suggests that with the increase of age, the styles of interpretive narratives and complex narratives frequent among the older children in comparison to the confused and descriptive narratives. The gradual increase in the structural complexity of children's narratives can be attributed to an age related growth in cognitive capacities.

When the narratives were categorized into different types of narratives, it also shows same result as we find in other aspects. The result can be clearly known from the frequency table given below:

Table-3

The Frequencies of Occurrences of Different Types of Narratives in Each Age Group

Age Group	Habitual	Hypothetical	Topic-centered
3 years	8	4	3
4 years	3	4	8
5 years	1	6	8

From the Frequency table it was clear, that the child at the age of 3, able to produce more habitual type of narratives in comparison to hypothetical and topic-centered narratives. The result suggests that with the increase of the age the habitual type of narratives decreasing while topic-centered narratives are increasing. Actually the child at the age of 4, starts to narrate topic-centered narratives which were based on the theme of the event or stories. It gains its maturity with the age and exposure.

At a very early age, 2 to 3 years old children produce simple narratives and understand them. These narratives are relatively short, script like and describe observable actions and other physically perceptible items like: locations, peoples and objects. A typical narrative might contain just two or three sentences or phrases. At about this same age, children can understand longer narratives, but their productions are constrained by memory limitations, lack of language skill and lack of conceptual representational skill. Finally we can say that narration ability between 3 to 4 years of age but it is not yet complete by the end of 4 years. It develops as the age increases.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Present study intends to explore the development of narration among preschool and school going oriya speaking children. And to identify the styles and types of narratives they are using. Obtained data of the present research were analyzed through narrative analysis.

Findings of the present study indicate that as the age increases, the developmental trend of narration increases among children. With the gain of maturity and experience, the child learns to speak topic-centered narratives. Our result also supports the view that those children who got more exposure to narratives, they perform better in school and classroom discourse.

Obtained results suggest that 3 years old are able to produce narratives without having any clear idea of narration. But 3 year old produce simple narratives based on simple scripts which are general in terms. While older group of children produce complex type of narratives based on scripts which are episodic in terms. At the time of narration the younger group of children put much emphasis on the aspect what they heard earlier and trying to accumulate those at the time of requirement. While older children tries to mess-up their past experiences with the story. This narrative ability and style develops through the ages. As the age increases the ability of narration gets matured and well organized.

It can be concluded that the children at the early age learns the art of narration which gets its original shape through the increase of age. It is clear from the results and research findings that children develop the narrative ability at the age of three.

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