

Development of early child narratology



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Aims:

I aim to evaluate how the structure and composition of early child narratology develops and evolves with age.

To conduct this evaluation I will approach local primary schools for examples of short narrative texts written by Key stage 1 pupils (4-7), to serve as empirical data.

I will assess these texts by employing the six part Labovian narrative model and analysing the presence and frequency of narrative components, evaluative temporal indicators and markers.

Background:

This study builds on many other works as the Labovian model is now frequently used to assess narratology in children, (see Kernan, 1977; Eaton, Collis and Lewis, 1999). The idea of linguistic and narrative development in children is also a popular issue. One study that specifically charts the evolution of child narrative with age is “ Telling stories of experiences: Narrative development of young Chinese children” a study by Chien-JuChang in which young Chinese children were visited in their homes at age 3 years and 6 months and then at 3 month intervals for the next 9 months. Their individual development in three key areas (narrative structure, evaluation, and temporality) was evaluated with the conclusion that “ Chinese children, generally speaking, include more narrative components, evaluative information, and temporal markers in their narratives over time. However,

the growth patterns and rates of change for each child on each narrative measure vary.”

Hypothesis:

My hypothesis is that as a child is introduced to more narrative texts, and comes to identify narrative components, that he or she will employ them more frequently and more readily in their own narratives.

Thus, I hypothesise that there will be a marked increase both in the inclusion of these features in individual narratives and in the cohesion between the narratives of the evaluated children (their similarity to each other) in the older age ranges, as they adapt and adhere to literary and narrative norms. I believe that there will be a greater proliferation of linguistic devices and conventions, as well as more narrative components, in the older children’s narratives.

Although I will not specifically be studying the effects of ethnicity or socio-economic background I believe that these factors will skew the data slightly as my hypothesis centres on the fact that the children will have been exposed to similar volumes and types of narrative material. This may well not be the case for pupils from a different cultural background or a less affluent family environment.

Data:

The data I will use for this investigation will be collected from local and, hopefully, schools which are more widely distributed throughout the country, to give a representative sample of empirical data.

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I will approach the schools to provide short texts from every early years age group so that I have approximately 50-100 short texts from pupils aged from 4 to 7 with a similar number for each age group.

I will specify that I would like work from a cross section of abilities, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds so as to have a representative sample of narratives for an age range. I will also request that the gender, ethnicity and socio-economic group be specified for each child included in the study as, although I am not directly studying the consequences of these factors on the narratives, it would be informative and useful to see if they affect the cohesion of the data in any way.

All texts will be included as an appendix to the final extended essay and the appropriate permissions will be obtained from the schools and, if necessary, from the parents of the children whose work is used.

Methodology:

As previously defined I will employ the Labovian 6 part narrative model to assess the texts.

This will be both a quantitative and qualitative analysis as it will deal not only with the evolution in the number of narrative components in each text but also their function and type.

The results of the analyses will be presented in tabulated form. Initially I will fill in a table to give the main characteristics of each narrative and then tabulate the overall results.

An example of a narrative text and a simplified table are given as an appendix.

My work so far:

I have investigated a number of studies covering similar subject areas and approached schools in my local area to see if they would be willing to provide samples of work. The response so far is encouraging.

I have also obtained some examples of writing from neighbourhood children and analysis of these texts seems to back my hypothesis thus far. Naturally I will be unsure until I study the larger volumes of empirical data foreseen by my study.

Timescale:

Owing to the complexity of obtaining the data and analysing it, this project will be quite time consuming. I believe I will require one month to obtain the work and the various permissions and a further month to analyse the texts and tabulate the results. I will then need a further two weeks to present my conclusions, draft and check the final copy.

Annotated Bibliography

Applebee, Arthur 1978. "The Child's Concept Of Story: Ages Two To Seventeen". Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This book defines the "interaction of children and stories". Various chapters discuss the stories told by primary school children, their organisation and motivation as well as children's responses to stories and story telling. It also
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contains a number of appendices giving information about the methods for data collection and analysis employed by Applebee throughout his investigations.

Chang, Chien-Ju 2004: “ Telling stories of experiences: Narrative development of young Chinese children” *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 25: 83-104 Cambridge University Press

This presents a study in which young Chinese children were visited in their homes at age 3 years and 6 months and then at 3 month intervals for the next 9 months and their individual development in three key areas (narrative structure, evaluation, and temporality) assessed.

Gutierrez Clellen, V. F., & Quinn, R. (1993). Assessing narratives of children from diverse cultural/linguistic groups. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* , 24, 2-9.

This article discusses the issues surrounding cultural and ethnic background and the impact on a child’s narrative development. This supports my claim that linguistic and narration conventions are learnt and states “ narrative contextualization processes are culture-specific”

Kernan, K. T. (1977). Semantic and expressive elaboration in children’s narratives. *C. Mitchell-Kernan and S. Ervin-Tripp (Eds.), Child Discourse*. New York: Academic Press, 91-102.

This paper was presented at the Child Discourse Symposium at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (Mexico City, Mexico, November 1974) and presents a theoretical and ground breaking discussion
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of children's narrative discourse and the acquisition of discourse competencies.

Labov, William., and Waletzky, Joshua. 1967. " Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience." *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts* , ed. June Helm, 12-44. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Seminal and scholarly text discussing the basics of narrative analysis detailing the six point model, etc.

Pena E. D., Gillam R. B., Malek M., Ruiz-Felter R., Resendiz M., Fiestas C., and Sabel T. : Dynamic Assessment of School-Age Children's Narrative Ability: An Experimental Investigation of Classification Accuracy *J Speech Lang Hear Res* , October1, 2006; 49(5): 1037 - 1057.

This article provides useful and information about analysing the " macrostructural and microstructural aspects of language form and content" (in this case in narratives given by first and second grade students describing a picture book.)

Appendix one – example narrative (direct transcript)

On Saturday, Daddy, Mummy, Jamie and me went to the park to go on the swings. It was really cold so Daddy bought me and Jamie a hot chocolate to warm us up. It was really funny because Jamie dropped his down his jumper and had to wear Daddy's jumper. It was to(sic) big for him and he looked really funny. I went on the swings and the roundabout and the slide and then Jamie and me sat on one side of the sea(sic) saw while Daddy sat on the other. Mummy took pictures of us. Then we went to the sweet shop and

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bought some jelly babies. They are my Mummy's favourite and I like them to(sic). Then we went home and watched ice age 2 and then we had tea. Then we went to bed. We all had a lovely day and Daddy said it was nice that me and Jamie didn't shout at each other.

Jenny, age 6

Example tabulation

Table 1 – Labovian concepts

	Began the narration by giving
ABSTRACT	the day/charac ters/locatio n/purpose
ORIENTATION	Gave details about who was on the trip, where they went and when and described

a
chronologi
cal
sequence
of events.

COMPLICATION Gave the
complicatio
n of the
spilt hot
chocolate.

EVALUATION Said that
Jamie
looked “
funny”.
Everyone
had a “
lovely”
day.

RESOLUTION Gave the
resolution
of the hot
chocolate
situation –
wearing

Daddy's
 jumper -
 and the
 resolution
 of the day
 - going to
 bed.

Ended the
 day with
 going to
 bed and
 ended the
 narrative
 with an
 evaluation
 of the day
 and the
 opinion
 given by
 another
 character.

CODA

Table 2 Common markers Used by the child in her narrative

Functions Examples

Temporal, “ On Saturday”,
order the
narrative “ then”

“ and” (“ They
are my

Link ideas Mummy’s
favourite and I
like them too.”)

“ so” (“ It was
really cold so
Daddy bought

Showing me and Jamie a
logical hot chocolate to
conclusion warm us up”), “
s and” (“ It was to
big for him and
he looked really
funny”)