The study of markers in the narration of children's short story

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Abstract

Discourse markers (DMs) are linguistic elements that index different relations and coherence between units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987). Most research on the development of these forms has focused on conversations rather than narratives and furthermore has not directly compared children narratives (both sex between 10-12). This article examines various discourse markers in oral Persian narratives of short story in 60 Iranian children (both sex between 10-12), and shows that their functions within the oral narrative context follow neither from their usual meanings nor from their usual discourse functions in other contexts. These markers just help to continue the narrative procedure. Narrative experts illustrate how "well" and "but" initiate and conclude narrative action, how they guide listeners following their interruption and sequence of narrative elements. The results showed that frequency and functions of markers in girls and boys are different. Overall, the findings of this article showed that how girls use other factors such as the repetition of previous phrase or word to guide listeners back to the main sequence of narrative elements, while boys do not use these factors and just rely on the markers "then" and "and". They also use "pause" and silence as new marker elements.

Keywords: functions of discourse markers, narrative development, Persian, levels of discourse, sex, age

Introduction

During everyday communication, speakers use "linguistic, paralinguistic, nonverbal elements that signal relation between units of talk...." (Schiffrin, 1987, p.40). These elements are called discourse markers (DMs). Research on discourse markers (DM) in the last few decades has become an important topic. Verbal DMs are elements such as oh, well, but, ok, now, etc. that organize discourse coherent units and structure social interaction among the participant at different levels. Most research on DMs has focused on the dynamics of everyday conversation and analyzed how adults use DMs in these context (Fraser, 1996; Louwrese, & Mitchell, 2003; Schiffrine, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2002). The few studies conducted on how children learn to mark different levels of discourse. The studies have also shown that the functions of DMs used can change over time in development. However, these studies have focused mostly on conversational rather than narratives.

Narrative is, simply put, the art of "telling back" what has been learned. It is an integral part of the Charlotte Mason method, and is often used by Classical educators and other homeschooling families who employ a "living books" approach to education, rather than a textbook approach. A living book can be defined as one that captures the imagination, makes its subject matter come alive, and becomes a beloved and formative influence in a young person's life. The art of narration begins early, before a child has learned to read. Even a preschool child can "tell back" the favorite stories read over by parents. When our young children "read" their favorite books, turning the pages lovingly and repeating the stories to their dolls, that is an unprompted narration. Later, as the words of the Bible, litera-

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ture, history, and biography, become a part of our educational curriculum, narration becomes more structured. Through narration, a child learns to think, to sift information and to choose what is important to remember and what is not.

As the subject matter of the narration becomes more complex, so does the narration itself. Instead of just "telling back" the story, the details and underlying themes of a reading can be drawn forth. The topic 'children's narratives' covers many sub-branches such as "oral, written, and oral face-to-face", "oral 'removed', oral face-to-face and one-to-many", and "oral, face-to-face, and one-to-one". Differences may cause the same teller to tell utterly different kinds of narratives.

Minami (1998) demonstrates that Japanese storytellers employ particular linguistic devises as specifically narrative discourse markers keyed on the verse/ stanza organization of Japanese oral personal narratives. Our argument is focused on how girls and boys, in addition to "well" and "but" employ particular linguistic devises as specifically narrative discourse markers to continue narrative procedure.

The significance of the study

Storytelling is a type of talk with its own structural conventions and interactional relevance. Storytelling differs significantly from regular turn-by-turn conversation in its sequential implications, so that we might expect it to invest DMs with special organizational functions not found in other forms of talk.

Discourse markers (DMs), according to Fraser (1990, 1996), are pragmatic markers which provide a commentary on the following utterance; that is they lead off an utterance and indicate how the speaker intends its basic message to relate to the prior discourse. Hence, DMs are ambiguous due to homophony with a lexical item representing a traditional part of speech, though their functions as DMs do not follow from the sense of the homophonous lexical items in any linear way. In the case of well, this would mean that the DM function is unrelated to any of the adjectival or adverbial meanings; in the case of but, it would mean that the DM function would not bear any necessary connection to the adversative meaning of the adverbial conjunct. DMs orient listeners, but they do not create meaning; therefore, DMs can be deleted with no loss of meaning, though the force of the utterance will be less clear. In realizing sequentially determined functions obviously distinct from

the meaning of their homophonous lexical counterparts, as traditionally described, narrative DMs provide particularly clear evidence of an independent DM function. In this regard, this research has focused on how children use different DMs.

The statement of the problem

Discourse markers tend to occur most prevalently in impromptu oral speech (Ostman 1982, as cited in Miracle, 1991). Research on discourse markers (DM) in the last few decades has become an important topic. Numerous studies deal with definitions and different functions of discourse markers by native speakers (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Miracle, 1991).

Research questions

There are also two significant questions that lead our research to its proper interpretation, and are going to be answered:

1. How many markers are used by girls and boys in this study?

2. Is there a significant difference between male and female in using the number of English markers?

3. Is there a meaningful relationship between age and the number of using markers by male and female?

Methodology

Participants

Sixty native Persian students between 10-12 years old participated in this study including thirty girls and thirty boys.

Materials and procedures

In order to do the present study, first, sixty native Persian students between 10-12 years old participated in this study. Then, a suitable story geared toward the children's age was selected, and narrated by teacher for them. In the next step, children's narration were recorded using a tape recorder by the teacher and written by themselves separately for a second time. Finally, all children's narrations were transcribed and then their markers were separately identified.

Results and Discussion

Our results were reported in two main categories. First, the frequency and percentage of demographic

variables were presented by table. In the second part, the results were presented by taking the questions of the study into account.

Before analyzing the data based on the research questions, the frequency of participants were calculated according to gender. Table 1 indicates the results.

Table 1. Frequency distribution and percentage of participants according to gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	30	50
Female	30	50
Total	60	100

As can be seen in table 1, from 60 samples under study, 30 persons were girls (50%) and 30 were boys (50%).

Now, in order to answer the research questions, the data were analyzed as follow:

Q1: How many markers were used by children in this study?

Table 2. The distribution of average number of English markers.

Marker	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Then	8.9000	2.52244	2.00	20.00
Stop/pause	11.8333	4.30280	6.00	21.00
Repetition	6.2333	5.55517	0.00	15.00
And	23.2667	12.97830	10.00	88.00

As Table 2 indicates, each participant has used the marker "then" approximately 9 times, "stop/pause" for 12 times, "repetition"for6 timesand the marker "and" for 23 times in the present study.

Q2: Is a significant difference between male and female in using the number of English markers?

In order to see whether there is any significant difference between male and female, paired-sample t-test was used for data analysis. Table 3 indicates the results.

As table 3 shows, the significant amount of stop/pause and repetition is less than 0.05. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between male and female in terms of using markers such as stop/pause and repetition. In addition, by looking at table 4, we can see that men used the marker "stop/pause" more than women used (4.52 vs. 2.37) while men used the marker "repetition" less than women did (2.30 vs. 2.66).

However, there is no significant difference between gender male and female in using the marker "then" and "and".

Table 3. The result of paired-sample t-test to compare the number of markers used by male and female

Marker	df	T	P
Then	58	-0.407	0.686
Stop/pause	58	5.077	0.000
Repetition	58	-15.328	0.000
And	58	-0.914	0.365

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of male and female in using markers.

Marker	Gender	Number	Mean	SD
Then	Male	30	2.35	8.76
	Female	30	2.70	9.03
Stop/pause	Male	30	4.52	14.20
	Female	30	2.37	9.46
Repetition	Male	30	2.30	1.30
	Female	30	2.66	9.46
And	Male	30	6.05	21.73
	Female	30	17.35	24.80

Table 5. The result of correlation coefficient between age and the number of using markers under study.

Marker	Pearson correlation	Sig
Then	-0.088	0.506
Stop/pause	-0.007	0.955
Repetition	-0.136	0.299
And	-0.370	0.004

Q3: Is there a meaningful relationship between age and the number of using markers by male and female?

In order to answer this research question, Pear-

son's coefficient correlation was used as table 5 indicates the results.

As it can be seen in table 5, there is only a relationship between age and using the marker "and" because correlation coefficient between age and using the number of "and" is significant (0.370).

Conclusions

The current study identified and analyzed the discourse markers of narrating short story among sixty Iranian students aged 10-12. The average age in this study was about 11 years old. Each participant used approximately 9 times "then", 12 times "stop/pause", 6 times "repetition", and 23 times "and". As the significant amount of the markers stop/pause and repetition is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between gender groups in terms of using the marker stop/pause and repetition. However, there is no difference between gender groups in terms of the using the marker "then" and "and". Also, no difference was observed between male and female in terms of the mean use of the marker "then" and "and". Further, the men's mean using numbers of stop/ pause is less than women. The women's average using numbers of repetition is less than men. Finally, there is a significant relationship between age and using the number of "and" because the correlation coefficient between age and the number of using "and" is big and meaningful.

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