

CBS Research Seminar

Development of narrative skills in bilinguals

Presented by

Prof. Natalia Gagarina

Professor

Leibniz-Center for General Linguistics and Humboldt University

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ABSTRACT

"The beauty of children's narrative as a research tool <...> lies in their richness and their universal appeal" (Reese et al., 2012: 134).

Narrative skills are crucial for the adequate functioning in the society (McCabe, 1996; Wallach, 2008). They have an impact on social abilities and are important for communication (Bliss, McCabe, & Miranda, 1998; McCabe, 1996). Furthermore, the ability to construct cohesive and coherent narratives is predictive of children's literacy and reading abilities and is crucial for later school success (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Bliss et al., 1998; Torrance & Olson, 1984; Wallach, 2008). While monolingual narrative discourse has been extensively discussed in the last decades (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Peterson & McCabe, 1991), studies on bilinguals were more seldom (Pearson, 2002; Fiestas & Pena, 2004; Uccelli & Paez, 2007; Gutierrez-Clellen, Simon-Cerejido, & Wagner, 2008; Iluz-Cohen & Walters, 2011; Special Issue of Applied Psycholinguistics (Gagarina et al. 2016)). Even less research on narratives, elicited by means of controlled pictorial stimuli has been conducted.

In this talk I report on the results from a large-scale comparison of narrative skills elicited via the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives MAIN (as a part of the Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual Settings – LITMUS, Gagarina et al. 2012, 2015). Elicited narratives were analyzed at two levels representing two distinct areas underlying discourse: macrostructure and microstructure (Liles et al., 1995). Macrostructure is a higher-order hierarchical organization such as episodic structure and story grammar components (Heilmann et al., 2010). Microstructure can be defined as the internal linguistic structures establishing coherence on the sentential and intra-sentential levels, such as referential and relational devices. Production and comprehension of narratives have been investigated in more than a dozen languages in simultaneous, early and late successively bilingual children.