

Narrative Discourse in Bilingual Children

Language and Task Effects

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Purpose: This study investigated the effect of language on Spanish-English bilingual children's production of narrative samples elicited in two ways.

Method: Twelve bilingual (Spanish-English-speaking) children ranging in age from 4;0 (years;months) to 6;11 who were fluent speakers of English as a second language produced two narratives—one elicited by using a wordless picture book and another by using a static picture. The children produced stories for each task in each language, for a total of four stories. For the book task, the story complexities were compared across both languages. Stories were scored for complexity of story grammar and the inclusion of specific narrative elements. Both stories in each language were further analyzed for productivity (total words, number of C-units, and mean length of C-unit). The grammaticality (proportion of grammatically acceptable C-units) and the proportion of utterances influenced by the nontarget language was compared across each language and story task.

Results: Children produced narratives of equal complexity for the book task regardless of language. However, children used more attempts and initiating events in Spanish, while producing more consequences in English. The picture task yielded mixed results, and these were not compared quantitatively. There were differences in the two task conditions with respect to the children's use of Spanish influenced English and English-influenced Spanish. Although children were equally productive in both languages, they used proportionally more Spanish-influenced utterances in the book task.

Clinical Implications: The results demonstrate the importance of considering the test language when eliciting narratives from bilingual children and the type of the narrative task for eliciting a productive and complex narrative.

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