



Filipino preschool narrative structures: A look into male and female post narrative scaffolding as a reflection of children's communicative competence

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Abstract: A One enduring language skill that is crucial in the development of comprehension that students learn at an early age is telling a story. Although several previous studies have discovered the presence of macrostructures in children's narratives, there is still a need to answer questions pertaining to the role of scaffolding as a reflection of young children's narrative comprehension. Using Labov's (1972 in Chang, 2004, p. 84) determined macro level structures found in narratives, this study aims to identify the common macrostructures found in the transcribed and coded narratives of sixteen male and female Filipino students. The study employed Shapiro and Hudson's (1991) narrative macrostructure categories. Results indicate that children's narrative components are mostly basic and that gender has no particular effect on the construction of children's narratives. Scaffolding questions aided in eliciting the actual level of comprehension of the children. The study confirms Shapiro and Hudson's (1991) findings on how scaffolding is necessary in determining the actual communicative competence of children in terms of narrating stories. Implications of this study will add to the current knowledge on developing young children's communicative competence and will aid educators in designing improved narrative activities that will elicit more effective responses from children.

Key Words: Scaffolding, Macrostructures, Narratives, Language Learning, Communicative Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Developing language skills among young children is crucial in literacy education. Children are expected to use language in various classroom activities to communicate with each other and show competence and mastery of the language. In the process of developing communicative competence, children are expected to improve metacognitive and comprehension skills. Hence, as a constructive process, comprehension is expected to incrementally develop through an elaborate meaning making process (e.g. Beaugrande, 1980; Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Fox & Alexander, 2009; Kintsch, 1998; Pearson, 2009; Rand Reading Study Group, 2001;

Smagorinsky, 2001 as cited in Kucer, 2014, p. 31) which often involves the activation of various language skills. One enduring language skill that is crucial in the development of comprehension that students learn at an early age is telling a story.

1.1 Narratives among children

A narrative is a type of discourse that focuses on "temporally sequenced" fictional or actual events and tells so much of how the person thinks and makes use of the language (Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010). Specifically, children's narrative is useful in understanding different factors from their environment, such as norms, beliefs, and



values that they have adopted from their caregivers or peers (Glee, in Chang, 2004). Children's narratives provide a "window for understanding the process of socialization and enculturation" (Chang, 2004, p. 83).

Narratives can also show children's understanding of different events and how they are able to put together the relationships of these events in a structured manner (Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010). Despite their young age, children have been determined to display their own functioning schema as reflected in the stories they formulate. Consequently, narrative skills are also closely linked to reading and literacy and can serve as a predictor of success in those two areas (Chang, 2004).

Children as young as two years old have already showed narrative abilities (Chang, 2004). However, prior to actual formal schooling, children are found to exhibit minimal competence in producing well-structured narratives (e.g., Bamberg, 1987; Berman & Slobin, 1994; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Nelson, 1989 in Ilgaz & Aksu-Koc, 2005, p. 527) and thus need further guidance and assistance in developing this skill in order to improve comprehension. Studies show that narratives are found to exhibit episodic structures as is typically observed in stories. These episodic structures are usually identified in school as children encounter stories which they analyze with the teacher. A common and well-documented framework in analyzing children's narrative structures is known as the story grammar approach which identifies episodes in children's narratives (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson and McCabe, 1983; Stein, 1988; Stein & Glenn, 1979 in Ilgaz & Aksu-Koc, 2005, p. 527). These episodes were determined by identifying the various macrostructures typically observed in stories produced by young children. Several studies have also confirmed that young children possess the ability to narrate different stories, whether prompted or from their own experiences (Michaels, 1981; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991; Chang, 2004).

1.2 Scaffolding in narratives

Narratives have been found to be a naturally-occurring evidence of literacy among children as they progressively develop their comprehension skills. As comprehension has been widely found to be a constructive process (e.g., Beaugrande, 1980; Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Fox & Alexander, 2009; Kintsch, 1998; Pearson, 2009; Rand Reading Study Group, 2001; Smagorinsky, 2001 in Kucer, 2014, p. 31) it goes to follow that to foster productive learning through narratives, educators

have developed a strategy to structure narratives in a more semantically linear manner. Scaffolding was originally described by Bruner (1975 in Renshaw, 2013, p. 56) as a "social support system for enhancing the development and learning of children within their various cultural contexts," it has been found that scaffolding begins at home through the unconscious efforts of parents to provide a linear learning format for their children. Eventually as the child begins formal education, teachers make use of scaffolding through classroom interaction and recitation. There is no specific set of rules or guidelines in constructing questions that will aid in the scaffolding of children's learning however, what is common is that it is founded with the purpose of aiding the learner in achieving cohesion and coherence. As Silva and Strasser (2014, in press) suggests, the act of questioning greatly affects children's learning even more so since it is found to be a common feature evident at home and in school. Hence, it can be stated that young children cannot be expected to independently produce elaborate stories without external support through elicitation strategies, scaffolding being one of them. Although several previous studies have discovered the presence of macrostructures in children's narratives, there is still a need to answer questions pertaining to the role of scaffolding as a reflection of young children's narrative comprehension. This study aims to address this issue by answering the following research questions:

1. What common macrostructures can be found among Filipino children's narratives?
2. What is the difference in the narrative structures employed by male and female Filipino children?
3. How does scaffolding used post narrative account for Filipino children's comprehension skills?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed qualitative design focusing on descriptive and explanatory analysis combined with a simple quantitative treatment of the data. The qualitative-descriptive design aids in establishing common narrative structures that Filipino female children have been found to practice while story telling. A simple quantitative method of research, using percentages and the mean was also utilized to determine the predominance of specific

narrative macrostructures among the chosen participants. Data was analyzed in a qualitative-explanatory design to provide plausible reasoning behind the narrative structures recorded and their relation to the scaffolding questions utilized during the actual story telling.

2.2 Participants of the study

The study involved a total number of sixteen participants, eight male and eight female students from the Our Lady of Snow Excel School Inc. located in Pinagsama Village, Taguig City, Philippines. The participants were composed of kindergarten students with ages ranging from five to six years old with a mean age of five years and 3 months. All the participants were enrolled in Our Lady of Snow Excel School Inc for the academic year of 2013-2014. The children are classified as developing bilinguals, as typical of a large percentage of the children from the Philippines; they are all in the process of learning how to speak and understand both English and Filipino. However, with most of them belonging to families that are part of the low to middle socioeconomic stratum of society, teachers at the school have described the children as having preference in using the Filipino language more often and most if not all are more fluent in its use as their primary medium of communication. It must be noted though that students are taught both English and Filipino language during class hours and are continually exposed to a bilingual environment.

2.3 Method of Analysis

The first phase of data analysis involved translation of data from Filipino to English and transcription using Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974 in Coates, 1998) transcription conventions. Second level analysis of the data involved the identification of the macrostructures commonly employed by Filipino children in their narratives. Through an initial frequency count, percentages were computed and compared across the two gender groups. The mean was also extracted based on the collated data to determine and compare standard and more notably, deviant results among the groups. A parallel analysis of the macrostructures was then done based on Labov's (1972 in Chang, 2004, p. 84) determined macro level structures found in narratives to identify similarities or differences. Research questions 1 and 2 will be addressed through identification of the predominant macrostructure used by Filipino children. A comparative analysis of the male and female macrostructures will also be undertaken to identify

possible variations. Finally, research question 3 is addressed through the analysis of the participants' responses to the scaffolding questions administered post narrative and its possible implications to the students' individual construction and degree of comprehension of their narratives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Macrostructures in Filipino Narratives

Macrostructures in children's narratives have long been an area of interest among many educational practitioners. As the English language holds such an interest for researchers all over the world, knowledge on the macrostructures of developing bilinguals in the Philippines would aid in expanding current knowledge on the study of the English language.

Table 1
Macrostructures in Narratives of Filipino Female Preschool Children based on Shapiro and Hudson's (1991) narrative macrostructure categories

	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Basic Components		
<i>Character Description</i>	7	43.75
<i>Actions</i>	13	81.25
Episodic Component		
<i>Goals</i>	1	6.25
<i>Internal Response</i>	4	25
<i>Obstacles</i>	7	43.75
<i>Repair</i>	6	37.5

Coding and frequency analysis of the data indicate that all female participants are inclined to indicate action-based events in their individual narratives. All the participants made use of this narrative component while about 40% included character descriptions in their narratives. As previous studies have noted, well-developed narratives are characterized by a "casual coherence between events in a story" (Rumelhart, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979 in Ilgaz & Aksu-Koc, 2005, p. 527) thus it may be suggested that the participants of the study must have made use of the actions in the wordless picture story sequence (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991) to establish connections between and among the events in their narratives thereby creating their own schematic meaning behind the pictures to produce a story. Furthermore, previous studies have found that preschool children's narratives



structurally lack the expected basic components of a narrative but rather present a chronological description of events (Botvin & Sutton-Smith, 1977; Applebee, 1978; Nelson & Gruendel, 1986; as cited in Shapiro & Hudson, 1991, p. 960-961) which is conclusive with the basic macrostructures found in the narratives of Filipino female preschool children. The low percentage of character descriptions in the female preschool children's narrative macrostructures is quite concerning given the age of the participants. It has been posited that five year old children are expected to include characters in relation to the events in the story (Berman & Slobin, 1994 in Lofranco, Pena & Bedore, 2006, p. 30). Although the children were able to identify the action-based events in the story, it seemed like they did not give as much importance to the characters as expected of their age. Perhaps this may be attributed to the children's socioeconomic status which may have affected the development of their storytelling skills. As Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf (2004 in Silva & Strasser, p. 1) noted, in comparison to children with less developed narrative ability, young children equipped with better narrative skills at the onset of preschool studying may have been exposed to better educational advantages and with the participants' socioeconomic status it may be presumed that although their age dictates that they should exhibit a more advanced narrative skills there might have been a delay due to the lack of exposure to the necessary input.

The lack of three of the five basic narrative components may be attributed to various reasons. First, story beginning and endings although typical of traditional American stories is not evident in current Filipino narrative story telling. While the English language typically makes use of the story beginning "once upon a time" and the story ending "the end" Filipino culture does not do so. Yes, old Filipino folktales began with story introductions such as "noong unang panahon" which is equivalent to the Americanized "once upon a time" but stories nowadays are not structured in the same manner. As Kucer (2014 p. 35) noted culture greatly influences the structure of narrative structures and thus variations may be seen across the production of narratives by participants coming from different cultures. The lack of setting on the other hand is conclusive with findings on how young children seldom indicate time in their narratives (Berman & Slobin, 1994 in Lofranco, Pena & Bedore, 2006, p. 30). This shows how children are yet to develop their focus on details when story telling. Finally, lack of

dialogue further supports the description of young children's narratives as being event-focused. As Stein (1979 in Shapiro & Hudson, 1991, p. 961) suggested the inclusion of dialogue in narratives often comes with age and thus may not be evident in the macrostructures of young children. Moreover, previous studies have ascertained that it is typical of five year old children to construct narratives with an incomplete structure (Botting, 2002 in Lofranco, Pena & Bedore, 2006, p. 30).

Among the predetermined episodic components of narrative macrostructures, data shows that more than 60% of Filipino female preschool children are able to formulate a concept of an obstacle in their individual narratives. This suggests that children are able to identify the problem in the episodes of their narratives. One half of the total number of participants were also able to determine the episode when repair was undertaken in reference to their identified obstacle while less than 40% were able to identify the internal response in relation to the events in the story. Data on the frequency of episodic components in the children's narratives show that the almost more than half of the children are able to identify the cause-and-effect pattern between the problem and solution. This is conclusive with Shapiro and Hudson's (1991, p. 961) finding on their study that five year old children begin to exhibit the ability to narrate stories that provide "motivational explanations for characters' actions " thus most of the participants of this study have begun to identify causal reasoning in their narratives as they have perceived from the actions shown in the wordless picture story sequence and as they have inferred from their individual schema. However, several of the participants still lack the skill of identifying the emotions beneath the actions that typically accompanies the development of events in a story which is evident in the results wherein less than half of them were able to pinpoint the internal response as an episodic component. This may be due to the children's tendency to focus on a descriptive, event-focused narrative as previously stated and thus emotional motivations behind the characters' actions are barely considered. The researchers believe however that the minimal occurrence of goal identification must not be taken negatively rather it must be taken into consideration that the evidence of one participant who was able to identify the goal in the story is predictive of the progressive development of the children's individual narrative skills.

3.2 Scaffolding in Filipino Narratives



As children are still in the process of developing their comprehension skills it has been found that scaffolding aids in helping the children create meaningful connections. According to research on cognitive developmental stages, children as young as five years old have shown the ability to answer scaffolding questions in relation to instruction (Hetherington and Parke, 1999).

Table 2
Narrative components from Scaffolding Questions of Filipino Preschool Children as adapted from Silva and Strasser (2014, p. 5)

Story Components	f	%
Characters	12	75
Setting	9	56.25
Initiating Event	11	68.75
Problem	11	68.75
Resolution	9	56.25
Theme	2	12.5

As can be seen from the data, all female participants were able to identify the problem in the story, which is identified by most of the participants as "nasunog" ("it got burnt"), referring to the cookies that the mother and daughter were baking in the story sequence. Also, close to 90% of the participants were able to identify the characters in the story while in the process identifying the relationship between the characters (*mother and child*), except for one, who only replied "dalawang tao" ("two persons"). The initiating event, described an event that is happening in a particular part of the story, as well as the resolution of the problem, received equal distribution of responses with a more than 70% occurrence. Out of all the female participants, more than half were able to identify the correct setting for the story, with "kusina" ("kitchen") as the most common answer. Notably only one participant was able to give a relatively close answer for initiating event, which is "nagagawa" ("making something"). It is possible that the children had no prior knowledge in baking that is why they were not able to give a specific answer that may be coded as the initiating event. Among all of the components in the scaffolding questions data shows that the participants had the most difficult time identifying the theme of the story.

Coded data reveals that among all the scaffolding questions the participants encountered the least difficulty in answering the question that identifies the problem in the story. This may be

attributed to the children's accumulated background knowledge. Studies have confirmed that a child's schema plays a significant role in being able to comprehend stories (Aloqaili, 2011). It is possible that the participants have been exposed to people who are cooking at home, as well as the concept of fire allowing them to make connections between their schema and the problem in the story sequence which shows a picture of flames around the oven. Most if not all of the participants already had the information that an oven (or stove) is used in baking or cooking stored in their schema hence they were able to make an inference. Another possible reasoning may be because the participants saw the child in the story sequence crying which if connected to their personal experience, may be something related to a negative experience. Same goes with the initiating event and the characters. The children already have some schema on cooking, as they may have seen their mother cooking at home.

Children may also already have some background knowledge on problem-solving as majority of them were able to identify that in order to solve the problem in the story the mother just bought the child cookies from the store. They could have had experiences in the past wherein an adult pacified them through a material object. Another plausible explanation is that the scaffolding questions on characters, event, problem, and resolution mostly makes use of identification, which falls on the category of lower thinking skills according to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of cognitive domains. The process of identifying the answer to a specific question falls under the second level of cognitive domain, which is Comprehension. This is conclusive with the children's current age and grade level wherein the lower order of thinking skills are only starting to emerge and develop. Bloom's (1965) theory on cognitive domains may also be the cause behind the low percentage of answers for the scaffolding question pertaining to the theme. Identifying the theme of a story involves drawing a conclusion about the meaning behind the story. Drawing a conclusion is defined as synthesizing meaning from separate but related pieces of information (Bizar & Hyde, 1989 in Aloqaili, 2011, p. 39). According to Bloom's (1965) taxonomy this is classified as a higher order thinking skill that requires the learner to "put parts together to form a whole," similar to Bizar and Hyde's description. Hence, this skill may be beyond the preschool children's current cognitive level set for they have yet to fully develop their full range of higher and lower order of thinking skills.



4. CONCLUSIONS

Post narrative scaffolding gives proof that comprehension of a story should not solely be based on children's narrative formulation. Results indicate that children's narrative components are mostly basic, and scaffolding questions aided in eliciting the actual level of comprehension of the children. The study confirms Shapiro and Hudson's (1991) findings on how scaffolding is necessary in determining the actual communicative competence of children in terms of narrating stories.

The study also aimed to identify how gender could affect the narrative structure of children. While the results would show that there is not much difference in terms of the narrative structures of the male and female participants, it is interesting to note that two of the male participants were not able to make up a story based on the pictures. This slight difference in the results confirms the findings of past studies on gender differences in narratives that females are more expressive and are more capable of telling complete and elaborate stories as compared to males (Gryzman & Hudson, 2013). As evidenced in the study all female participants, despite a low level of familiarity with the researcher were able to produce narratives in contrast to the male participants who expressed more hesitation.

As a whole, the present study confirms the findings of past studies on narrative structures, scaffolding, and gender differences. However, there are some limitations to the present study that could be further considered in future research. One of the limitations of the study is the time given to the researchers to conduct the individual sessions with the participants. It would be interesting to see how children would perform the same task if they did it with someone that they are already comfortable with and in a longer period of time. Several sessions prior to the actual recording could be done in order for the children to ease up to the researchers, as well as to prepare them for the task. Another variable which may be reconsidered is the manner of recording the participants' responses. Since the present study only utilized voice recordings, other factors such as body language and facial expressions could provide more information on the children's communicative competence. Pedagogical implications of the study may be reflected on how teachers of young learners could provide more literacy activities such as storytelling to enhance the students' comprehension and communicative competence seeing as scaffolding

plays an important role in the progressive development of their comprehension skills. Storytelling as a teaching tool is also encouraged especially for young learners, as it can give teachers a sense of what the child is able to do with the language. Various activities that elicit knowledge from the children and activate their innate curiosity should also be done by both parents and teachers to ensure that children achieve their maximum learning capacity.

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