

Narrative Coherence in Mandarin-speaking Children: Evidence from the Frog Story

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Children express themselves and build up connections with others through narratives which consist of not only individual events but also a network of associated events. To elaborately interpret a narrative, a narrator needs to attend to both local and global aspects of the narrative. At the local level, the narrator must verbalize relevant components of a single event and should be able to infer the interrelatedness of a complex chain of events; at the global level, the narrator should attend to the gist of the narrative. The present work focus on children's developmental progression in relating narrative events in terms of global and local structures, for the ability to make proper connections between events is crucial for constructing a coherent narrative.

Developmental psychologist endeavor to probe the local and global processing abilities in various cognitive domains. They believe that such abilities not only involve in visual perception and pattern recognition, but also motivate different levels of representations in drawing experiments. In explaining children's advances in relating narrative events, Berman and Slobin's four-phased developmental framework suggests a local-to-global progression. Karmiloff-Smith's and Sah's earlier works detects a trade-off between globally coherence-motivated organization and locally detail-motivated linguistic expressions during children's narrative development.

To further explore the developmental progression in maintaining narrative coherence, the present study, based on a cross-sectional protocol, included twenty Mandarin-speaking 5-year-olds, twenty 9-year-olds and twenty adults as subjects. The narrative data were elicited on the basis of a well-known wordless pictured book *Frog, where are you?* Three core components of the story were considered as criteria to assess subjects' ability in maintaining global coherence; several complex chains of events were chosen to examine subjects' ability in interpreting local chains of events.

Age main effect is yielded through our analysis, but no gender effect is detected. Our 5-year-olds are inadequate in maintaining coherence in both global and local levels. The 9-year-olds, however, are more advanced in enhancing narrative coherence. Almost all of them can coherently present gist of the story and over half of them can provide proper links for the chains of events at the local level. The adults, as the standard of comparison, can maintain narrative coherence at both levels; they not only successfully interpret the overarching thematic structure but also provide appropriate connections between events.

Berman and Slobin's four-phased developmental framework, Karmiloff-Smith's

three-phased model, and related explanations in cognitive psychology are considered in our discussion. The outcome of this work not only advances our understanding of children's ability in maintaining narrative coherence, but also unveils the complex of linguistic and cognitive capacities that underlie children's narrative ability. More significantly, this study contributes to the sample pool of studies on the frog story some valuable narrative data from Mandarin-speaking children.