

Age Related Changes in Children and Adult's Multimodal Narratives

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As in all forms of speech acts and spoken discourse, narratives involve the use of both auditory (linguistic + prosodic) and visual (kinetic) communication means. It is sufficient to observe someone who is in the process of telling a story to realise that their voice, their face or their hands move during the narration act (Bouvet, 2001; Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 2005).

How is this manifest in children? A previous study on spontaneous narratives of events experienced by children between the ages of 6 to 11 years in the francophone context was conducted (Colletta, 2004, in review). The study showed that towards 9 to 10 years, the narrative accounts of children appear to be similar in most respects to those of the adults. This study also showed that a child of this age begins to use gestures, similar to the adult, to represent the narrated events, to mime the attitudes of characters, to maintain the internal coherence of the narrative, to mark the transitions between the account of events and the speaker's commentaries, as well as to guide the narrative activity in line with a defined socio-pragmatic purpose.

Our observations on spontaneous narratives thus led us to hypothesize an evolution of multimodal narrative performance with age. However, this needed to be reduplicated with a more controlled task. Moreso, the relationship between linguistic acquisitions and changes in the use of gestures remained to be investigated.

To respond to these questions, we asked six groups of 20 subjects: two groups of 6 years old children, two groups of 10-years old children and two groups of adults, to narrate from a short cartoon that was previously showed to them. We opted for a speechless video clip as the stimulus.

The 120 video files were transcribed and annotated using *ELAN* software (Colletta, Venouil, Kunene, Kaufmann & Simon, 2008). Both linguistic and kinetic annotations were done by independent coders. We focused our analysis on linguistic data (words, type of clauses, subordinators), discourse (clauses, connectives, anaphoras), narration (episodes, background and foreground, commentaries) and gestures (function, relation to speech). Among other variables, we investigated age, genre and language efficiency effects.

The results show major differences related to age and confirm our initial claim that narrative development induces changes in the use of both linguistic and kinetic signals. We also studied more precisely the latter, to trace these changes in representational vs. discourse gestures, and among the representational, gestures of the concrete vs. gestures of the abstract. The results of this study will be discussed in the perspective of language and cognitive development.

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