# ΣΟΦΙΑ–SOPHIA

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18634/sophiaj.16v.1i.1008

## Analysis of Narrative Production in Children from the Proposals of Karmiloff, Karmiloff and Owens\*

Análise da produção narrativa em crianças a partir das propostas de Karmiloff, Karmiloff e Owens

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\* This article was written from the practices of the subject of psycholinguistics taught by Professor Diego Arias Cortés at the Universidad del Quindío, to opt for the Degree of Bachelor of Spanish and Literature.

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ISSN (electronic): 2346-0806 ISSN (printed): 1794-8932

Sophia-Education, volume 16 number 1. January / June 2020. English version

Article Information

Received: Nov 29, 2019 Revised: Dec 08, 2019 Accepted: January 12, 2020

How to cite:

Gutiérrez, A.T., Fernández, M.A., (2020) Analysis of Narrative Production in Children from the Proposals of Karmiloff, Karmiloff and Owens. *Sophia*, 16 (1), 110-119.





# Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the oral narrative process of children. The analysis of the narratives was made from the theories of Kira Karmiloff and Annette Karmiloff and Robert Owens. Oral productions with short sentences and restricted use of textual connectors were found. It is concluded that the oral narration of the children presents difficulties in the construction of their stories, with respect to cohesion; in addition, some productions do not have the temporal space structure, the description of the characters is short, for such reasons, it should be noted that the teaching of Spanish is relevant to improve narrative productions by emphasizing grammatical and syntactic aspects, to make the narratives more coherent and cohesive.

Keywords: Language, teaching, Spanish, narrative, learning theories.

## Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é demonstrar o processo narrativo oral de crianças. A análise das narrações foi feita a partir das teorias de Kira Karmiloff, Annette Karmiloff e Robert Owens. Foram encontradas produções orais com frases curtas e uso restrito de conectores textuais. Conclui-se que a narração oral das crianças apresenta dificuldades na construção de suas histórias sobre coesão. Além disso, algumas produções não possuem a estrutura do espaço temporal ou a descrição dos personagens é curta. Por essas razões, deve-se notar que o ensino do espanhol é relevante para melhorar as pro- duções narrativas, enfatizando aspectos gramaticais e sintáticos, para que as narrativas sejam mais coerentes e coesas.

Palavras-chave: Linguagem, ensino, espanhol, narrative, theories of aprendizagem.

# Introduction

Narrating is a process by which humans tell their daily actions, such as commuting to work, the places they visited, the people they frequent, among others; In addition, this is carried out to explain a theory, how an author develops his argumentation, also, to show how a position is defended in a discussion. That is, narrating can be used both for situations circumscribed to the immediate and for processes where there is more abstraction. Bakhtin (1999) asserts that human beings communicate with each other in different ways according to their context and their role, for example, at home, at school, at work there are different ways of doing it, what he calls discursive genres. These are of two types: primary, are those that are delimited by the immediate context, conversations, anecdotes, jokes, they have an oral record; the secondary ones are more detached from orality and demand levels of abstraction far from the situation of immediate communication, such as novels. academic report, periodistic minutes, chronicles. political discourses. conferences, among others.

Now, the oral narrative process exposes the development and the relationship that each individual has with language, because in this different aspects that make up a wellstructured discourse are highlighted. Therefore, to deepen the oral narrative process of children and in search of an approach to cohesive development in it according to their age and the factors that influence this gradual process, it was found that Martha Shiro (2017) in her work "Echar el cuento: hacia un perfil de las niños destrezas narrativas orales en caraqueños" worked with children who were schooling in both public and private schools and asked them for an experienceal narration so that there was greater comfort and fluidity in the process. In the course of the analysis, she was able to observe that 6-year-old children produce narratives in which causal relationships are clearly outlined, however,

they are not properly cohesive; in contrast, older children were the ones who made use of cohesive elements such as ellipsis and conjunction as opposed to lexical cohesion (p. 147), since "Causal organization becomes clearer in the accounts of older children regardless of the socioeconomic level to which they belong" (p. 149) in the case of the oral narrative production of Caracas children.

The narrative process requires cognitive abilities, therefore, the Preschool Education Program of the Ministry of Public Education (2004) states:

> Narrate an event, a story, a real or invented fact, including descriptions of objects, people, places and expressions of time, giving an idea as faithful and detailed as possible. The practice of oral narration develops observation, memory, imagination, creativity, the use of precise vocabulary and the verbal ordering of sequences. (p. 59).

Verbal and oral communication conform to the conception of the text of Calsamiglia and Tusón (2012), who define it as the unity of verbal elements that are organized and related to each other explicitly or implicitly. This organization and interrelation constitutes the texture of the discourse, which gives its name to its concreteness: The text (p. 207).

The oral narration of stories facilitates to evidence the tools that children have to structure their ideas during the speech, since Rosa Montes indicates that in the narrative mode it is not only the temporal chaining that matters, but rather the perception of a chain of relationship, often causal, between the events we narrate (2014: 111).

The acquisition of language is a conventional event that can occur by imitation, since it is the constant contact with language that allows the acquisition of speech, given the need to communicate more effectively, and even determines to a large extent the dialect with which we learn to communicate, among other factors that arise as a result of the environment. This is how children, during their growth, have the possibility to acquire it and gradually perfect it as speech awareness develops, although as mentioned above, there are several contextual factors that hinder the process.

This is evidenced by Ana María Borzone and Luis Granato (2017) in their work "Discurso narrativo: Algunos aspectos del desempeño lingüístico en niños de diferente procedencia social", in which three groups of children from different strata are organized: High (A), medium (B) and low (C). The authors ask each infant to narrate a story, a process in which one of the results was that children A responded adequately with the task, while those of B and C did not want to do it, since they said they did not know any story. This shows the importance of the non-formal educational process that begins from home and its influence on language development.

Similarly, Bernstein (1990) develops the elaborated code for those linguistic constructions that are in accordance with grammar and syntax, cohesive (space - time), unlike the restricted code that allows the construction of short and incomplete sentences, with simple and grammatical syntax.

Both written and oral texts have various linguistic elements, two of the most important are coherence and cohesion; the latter enables the relationship between the parts of a text, either at the orational level or larger segments. The connectors play a decisive cohesive role in texts, since they facilitate the communicative act between speaker and interlocutor as they allow information organized to be progressively. In this regard, Karmiloff and Karmiloff (2005) define cohesion in oral narrative as the specific linguistic means that hold sentences together and link them together (p. 244).

Cohesion for Beaugrande and Dressler (1995), is defined as: "The set of all those functions that indicate relations between the elements of a text" (p.17), such as pronouns, temporal and causal connectors, and ellipsis. Narrative achievement presupposes a major step in children's language, as it allows them to share their personal thoughts, experiences, events, and made-up stories. Through these, the development of narrative production is reached, in which the narrative understanding of an adult is more abstract, but that of a child depends on the literal level that the sentence suggests. The marker of discourse does not involve using new grammatical structures, but requires learning to use existing structures in another way; coherence and cohesion play different roles in the development of the production and understanding of the narrative, although their learning should be together.

This is reiterated by Aranda and Martínez (2012):

The recognition of the cohesive resources of the text is an element that influences the organization, imentation, thematic progression, among other necessary components in the textual construction. The search for ways that promote a greater mastery of these cohesive elements by students, guarantee the development of imprescindible communicative skills. (p. 101-102).

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that the speakers of a language make use of some norms implicitly, but these improve gradually during chronological growth, as evidenced by González and Alvarado, in their research "Niños que narran: aumento en la complejidad discursiva y sintáctica durante la edad escolar". One of the conclusions reached by the authors is that regarding syntactic complexity, (...) it is corroborated that this improves with age and levels of schooling. (2013: 165). For these reasons, the teaching of grammatical and syntactic aspects that are taught in the subject of Spanish is decisive to improve children's communicative skills. The acquisition of these allows them to develop linguistic skills, which are necessary to make more elaborate narrative constructions in which cohesion and coherence are two fundamental aspects.

Appropriating the grammatical norms and syntax of Spanish is decisive in the cognitive development of children, as expressed by Wong, Peña and Falla (2016) when affirming that education is a process by which a human being appropriates knowledge to improve their cognitive abilities and develop their critical attitude, which allows a better understanding of natural, social and cultural phenomena. Therefore, it is essential that in the educational process the essential aspects of biology, chemistry, language, philosophy, physics, ethics, among others, are studied with rigor and systematicity. In addition, one's own and others' reasons are evaluated against the criteria of argumentation and logic.

## **Materials and Methods**

This research was based on the analysis of the narratives of 2 boys, aged 6 and 7, and 3 girls aged

6, 6 and 8 years respectively. The methodology used was analytical-descriptive, taking as theoretical references R. Owens, Karmiloff and Karmiloff (2005). For this, 5 sessions were made in the range of one month. The time of each intervention was approximately 20 minutes with each child in which they were initially presented the book *Frog Where are you?* . After this, they were asked to tell the story, in this way, their interventions were recorded while they told the story in the book.

These narratives were built by 5 children divided into 2 children, one of them (6 years old) who is in the second grade at the Colegio Normal Superior, the other (7 years old) who is in second grade at the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán School, and three girls, one of (8 years old) who is currently in fourth grade at the Amparo Santa Cruz School, and the other two of (6 years old) of first grade in the Teresita Montes Educational Institution and the Zuldemayda Educational Institution, all these located in the city of Armenia, Quindío, which are public institutions and their stratification oscillate between 1, 2 and 3.

#### Results

In the transcription of the narratives of the 5 boys it was found that the two boys made the shorter transcriptions, unlike the three girls who took more time for their interventions about what the characters could be feeling. Likewise, it was also identified that the three girls attributed within the story some kind of feelings to the characters either sadness, fear, joy, among others while the children did not make use of this resource.

Also, it was possible to show that the stories of the 3 girls were more extensive and explanatory, naming characteristics, forms, creating dialogues between the characters of the story, while the children only decided to narrate the story in a more punctual way, only what they saw without intervening in what the characters could feel, speak or think.

It was found that 1 out of the 5 children, used the narrative structure of beginning, knot and denouement. Likewise, only the 2 boys correctly carried out what Owens calls "component of the grammar of stories". It was also evidenced that all children responded adequately to the "reaction sequence".

The use of connectors was a little limited. The one that was used most frequently was the addition conjunction "and". Specifically, the boys applied only such conjunction"and" and the temporality connector "after", while the girls made use of different connectors of addition, temporality and explanation.

# Discussion

For the construction of a pertinent analysis of the previous narratives made by the 5 children, it is appropriate to go to the postulates proposed by Owens (2003) and Karmiloff and Karmiloff (2005).

In the first instance, children's narratives are analyzed under Owens' proposal, because it suggests a content guide that allows classifying and describing the parts with which a children's narrative of a fictional story has, or should have been told. For the above, we will show how the stories constructed by the children contain what the author determines as the "setting of the scene", which allows us to see the way in which the children present the story and the characters, how they describe their actions and the way in which they locate the space-time. Below, the following excerpt gives an example of how children comply with some of the elements mentioned:

"(...) One day at night, the boy and the dog were playing with the frog" (Girl 8 years old)

"One day, a boy was in his room with his dog" (Boy 7 years)

In this case, the girl (8 years old) and the boy (7 years old) only make use of the presentation of the main characters and the context, that is, they indicate their activity. However, the story does not begin with a convencional presentation such as "once upon a time", unlike other children (6 years old) who did make use of this resource to start the story:

"Once upon a time, there was a boy who had a frog and a puppy" (Boy 6 years old)

"Once upon a time, there was a boy who was playing with a dog" (Girl 6 years old)

"Once upon a time, there was a boy and a frog" (Girl 6 years)

In the case of these three children, they make use of this usual beginning given their relationship with traditional tales, so they do use conventionalism to give openness to the narrative, in contrast to the older children who simplify this aspect, since "The narratives reflect the experience of the narrator" (Stephens, 1988 quoted by Owens, 2003: 320). Likewise, it should be noted that once the beginning is given, the 5 children continue with the story giving rise to the next action of the characters without giving detail of their clothing, size of the dog, description of the room, among others, but are limited to the presentation of the characters. However, two of the girls explicitly included the temporal context:

"They were for one night (...1)" (Girl 6 years)

"One day at night (...)" (Girl 8 years)

Instead, the other two children suggest it through the action of the characters:

"the dog and the boy went to bed" (Boy 7 years)

"the boy laid down and fell asleep" (Girl 6 years old)

Only one of them omitted this aspect, narrating the story so that, from "the descriptive sequences" it is understood as a series of "piles". In other words, in the events related there are no causal or temporal links.

Another component that Owens postulates in the narrative production of children in fictional stories is the "initial event". This consists of children presenting in their stories an event that induces the character to act in some way, whether it is a natural event such as an earthquake, the need to look for something, such as a treasure, or the action of one of the characters, such as arresting someone (2003: 324). In this item, the children identify them from the loss of the frog, a reason that undertakes the adventure of the character and the dog; this can be seen in the following fragments:

<sup>1.</sup> Conventions:

<sup>(...)</sup> not understandable – (//) adult intervention – (#) short or prolonged breaks.

"The frog ran away from the jar where he was, then the boy and the dog started looking for him, and at the window they shouted 'frog where are you?' and then, luckily, the dog fell out of the window. The boy jumped out of the window [...] then they started looking in the woods" (Girl 8 years old).

"They went to bed and the frog ran away then the dog and the boy went to (...) and they saw that the frog was gone. Then they started looking everywhere and [...] then they went to look for the yard and then to a forest" (Boy 7 years old).

This is how the two 7-year-old children respond to the initial event by relating the exit to the forest due to the absence of the frog. Likewise, 6-year-old girls relate this act as follows:

"The boy lay down and fell asleep and he, the toad was coming out, (#) and when the child woke up and the dog left, already, the toad was gone. (#) And he looked for it and didn't find it (#) [...]. He, the dog fell because he wanted to look for the toad" (Girl 6 years)

"Then while the child slept the toad escaped and the next morning, [...] He searched all over the room, they looked out the window [...] Then they walked and walked and found a great forest" (Boy 6 years).

This allowed us to observe that, although the situation is narrated in a less direct way, the reason that gives rise to the adventure is identified, that is, the search for the frog. Unlike the 6-year-old boy, who as said in the first point, omits this type of details or narrative elements that constitute the story as such, but the story builds it from events that come together as pieces to tell the global sense of the story.

In the third instance, the "internal response" is analyzed, which consists of the reaction of the characters, for example, emotional responses, thoughts or intentions that take place before the initial events (Owens, 2003: 324). The boys omitted this element and focused on telling the story in a neutral way, narrating exclusively the actions that are illustrated in the album book. However, the girls did establish the actions assertively, as follows:

"The boy jumped out of the window and said 'silly dog, don't do that thing, you scared me'"

"The boy wanted to look to see if the toad was on a log and told the dog to wait, to be silent so that they would not scare him [...] they got happy" (Girl 8 years old)

"They were talking happily for a night [...] a squirrel bit the boy's nose, a (//) a squirrel, angry" (Girl 6 years old)

Identifying mainly the amazement in the characters, because as it can be seen, two of them mention this sensation as an effect of a certain act in some of the characters (the first in the dog and the second in the frog) and the last one does give a different characterization by adding the "happiness" at the beginning of the story, when the main characters are together. It should be noted that this is manifested in a minimal way in the stories, highlighting that the last 6-year-old girl make greater use of this resource than the other children.

In the fourth instance, Owens talks about the "internal plan" that corresponds to the strategies of the characters to achieve some goal (2003: 324). Stating in turn that the little ones do not usually include this element, as is the case of the 5-year-old boy who does not; likewise, this component is directly related to what he calls "attempt" which consists of the actions of the characters aimed at achieving their objectives (p. 324), since the strategies that the characters employ are closely linked to achieving the objective that, in this case, is to find the frog.

Taking into account the above, infants of 6 and 7 years do identify and include this in their narratives, stating:

"The boy looking in a tree, shouting 'frog where are you ' and from the hole came a large owl, [...] then the dog was running and running because the bees were chasing him to bit him. Then the child was trying to escape from the owl, from the dog (#) went up to a rock [...] and there a (#) reindeer took it, the puppy was trying to catch the child scared the reindeer and began to run, [...] after getting out of the water, he told the dog << be quiet, let's see behind that tree>>" (Girl 8 years old).

"Then, they walked and walked and found a big forest, and the dog moved the tree and moved it until the honeycomb fell. Until he knocked him down and the boy was bitten in the nose by a, a (//) an angry squirrel. Then, the boy searched the forest and where to take refuge" (Boy 6 years old).

"He was looking for him but couldn't find him (#) he came out from behind the window, they came out and called him, and the dog was also tucked inside where the toad was. He, the dog fell because he wanted to look for the toad" (Girl 6 years)

Hence, the older children identify the objective that mobilizes the characters of the story and thus undertake the adventure that they begin. This is observed in the process of finding the frog. These elements open the way to analyze in a complementary way with the elements proposed by Owens.

Finally, in the fifth instance, this author mentions the "direct consequence" that deals with the successful or failed consequences of the characters derived from their attempts (2003: 324), from which the "reaction" derives. Reaction is defined as the emotional responses of the characters, as well as their thoughts or actions in relation to the previous outcome (p. 324). This last aspect being little used, since children, mostly recognize the attempts and their failures in the search for the frog as can be seen in the examples cited in the previous point; however, not everyone adds a reaction to the characters at the time of achieving the goal. Endings that omit the reaction are:

"Behind the tree was the frog with a fellow frog and then the little children came out of them. Then they were playing for a moment and the child said 'well it's time for the best:' going home". The dog and the boy said goodbye to their friend, and the frog and the other frogs also told him bye and end." (Girl 8 years)

"And then the frogs were there, ehhhhh two frogs were there and they had like three children, one was big and the other were small and that's it, that's the only thing I understood." (Boy 6 years old).

"They went to look and (//) behind a tree there were some frogs and the frogs had children, and then the child took a little toad and with the dog, and then left it under the trunk and then the mother and father of all the children said goodbye and the children too." (Boy 7 years old).

Thus, 3 out of the 5 children, including the 5year-old boy, finished the story in a timely manner without adding an emotional state to the child and the dog when finding the frog in the company of their family. In addition, the last 2 6-year-old girls and make use of this element, as follows:

"The boy was looking in the tree (#) and they found him, two toads, (#) and others, and they were happy. (#) And that they said to him, bye where? bye who? because they found the toad, the dog looked at the child and the child, whom he looked at? the child, aah, the child said bye to the toads." (Girl 6 years).

"The boy listened to his frog and said to the dog: sshh, I hear my frog (//) my little toad. Then, they found the little frog. So, the child saw that the toad had family, so he decided to take one and they left and lived happily ever after. The end." (Girl 6 years).

Adding a feeling of happiness to find the target, ignoring the fact that the reason for the search could not be recovered, but giving more weight to finally talk about the place where the frog was and like the other three, resign the main character to return home without the frog to discover that it had escaped to return to his family.

Finally, the 6-year-old uses a narrative structure that corresponds to the beginning, knot, outcome in a simple way. On the other

hand, the 6 and 7 year-old boys do it by fulfilling the elements of what Owens calls "components of the grammar of stories" attending in turn the "structural properties of the narratives". Since once the stories are fragmented in order to evidence each element. it becomes possible to observe how the 5 children respond to the "reaction sequence" that corresponds to the setting of the scenario. Likewise, in their narrative production, they obey the "action sequence" that brings together the establishment of the scenario. initial event and attempts. Karmiloff and Karmiloff (2005) describe the above as a rudimentary narrative process, which allows us to deduce that in young children the narrative ability is based mainly on the description of specific events (p. 235). in the same way, the limited lexicon and understanding of the context is a cognitive obstacle that children overcome as their social, psychological and cognitive potential develop.

That is, in terms of simple structures, children manage to include these elements in their stories, but as they become complex, children begin to omit details of the story such as the "abbreviated episode" that involves part of the stage of the scenario, the initial event or internal response and the direct consequence, being the internal response only attended by the girls, since the boys dispensed with including this element in their stories.

Now, in the children's way of cohesion, the use of the conjunction "and" prevails, showing the first sketches or attempts to add and cohere their sentences, giving them a certain order and logic; however, their narration does not comply with other elements of cohesion such as ellipsis and deixis, since these linguistic resources are acquired and developed at a more advanced age. Similarly, it should be noted that the process is different in older children, as shown in the narratives created by boys and by 7 and 6-year olds, given that children in this age group have a richer cognitive and contextual experience; from the cohesive component proposed by Karmiloff and Karmiloff (2005). One of these refers to the use of temporal connectors (after, then), as well as the use of the causal connector "because". These are used by two girls, a 6year-old and a 7-year-old, which shows the great narrative and linguistic development of the older children, since the use of this type of linguistic references gives union to the story and nourishes it with meaning, as follows:

"And he, and since the bees, since the dog was bothering, then the bees ran because, because they wanted to sting him (//) they flew because they wanted to sting him." (Girl 6 years)

"The dog was running and running because the bees were chasing him." (Girl 8 years)

# Conclusions

After analyzing the different linguistic and structural components proposed by Owens and Karmiloff and Karmiloff, present in children's narratives, it is concluded that building stories depends on the cognitive development of children. This process occurs in stages, since the child must first learn a certain number of words of content and connectors to build sentences with a certain complexity and logic. Their stories are texts where specific events are described. In addition, they show difficulties in space-time location. Another aspect that should be highlighted is that the description of the characters emphasizes emotions, relegating their psychological, social and moral behaviors.

In order for oral narratives to make sense and be understood, the infant must interiorize the structural scheme that a story has and learn to present each fact or situation at the right time to provide cohesion and coherence to the story. These elements respond to an evolution that the child has as he enters the narrative world. For children to achieve a high communicative competence, knowledge of grammar and syntax must be taught in the subject of Spanish or Language, because oral narration requires two elements: cohesion and coherence.

For all the above, it is important to note that in the educational process although the school has prioritized practices that emphasize writing and the production of academic texts such as reading reports, essays and written exams, oral narration is one of the competences that must be developed in educational institutions. Through it, children acquire the ability to interact in everyday life, where dialogues, conversations and communicative exchanges are mainly oral.

## **Acknowledgements**

We thank our colleague Valentina Villa Quintero, who participated in the development of the activities proposed in the subject.

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