

A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN NARRATIVE DISCOURSE OF KANNADA-ENGLISH BILINGUAL NORMAL ADULTS

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Abstract

The linguistic relativity hypothesis suggests that bilinguals may actually have different thought patterns when speaking different languages, this study, which examines the narration told by individuals in two different languages, sheds further light on the validity of the hypothesis. The current study particularly explores how, when telling narratives, bilingual individuals express verbal notions through the use of the tense, aspect, and voice forms available in each of their two languages. Particularly the past tense is often used in oral narratives, specifying the typical series of events taking place in a particular sequence such as going on a trip or journey to a place. This was the target task of the present study. Here 20 normal bilingual adults were the participants and had to narrate in Kannada and English languages separately. These discourse samples were video recorded using digital handycam DCR-DVD 908. The objective was to compare and see the differences in Kannada and English language narrative discourse. The narrative discourse of these participants were subjected for T-unit analysis; the parameters included were number of clauses, number of T-units, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit. Thus the participant's Kannada and English narrative discourse were quantified separately. The statistical results showed significant differences for the parameter number of clauses, number of T-units and number of words per T-unit of Kannada narrative discourse when compared to English narrative discourse. These similarities and differences in their narrative discourse are further discussed in detail.

Key words: *Linguistic relativity, T-unit, clauses, journey*

One of the long-standing critical debates in language studies involves the relationship between language and thought processes which leads to a question- how does a particular language influence the way its speakers perceive the world. The linguistic relativity hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) claims that speakers of different languages think differently, and that they do so because of the differences in the languages they speak. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on this topic. Some studies (Brown & Lenneberg, 1954; Bloom, 1981) have offered strong evidence in favour of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, whereas others (Berlin & Kay, 1969) have resulted in findings that did not support the hypothesis, and still others (Au, 1983) have even provided evidence challenging its validity of linguistic relativity.

The study reported in this paper represents an attempt to combine some aspects of narrative studies and bilingual studies against the background of the linguistic relativity hypothesis. Studies of language acquisition and language development have focused increasingly on the structural aspects of narrative discourse (Peterson, 1990; Reilly, 1992). Learning the skills for narrative discourse is especially complicated for bilinguals to the extent that the schema (the organization of knowledge), which provides a cultural framework of events and actions and which affects memory encoding and retrieval, differs for each of the languages used. The human mind, which is influenced by a

schema of pre-packaged expectations or interpretations, seems also to be under the influence of the specific linguistic systems used. The linguistic relativity hypothesis suggests that those who speak more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) may actually have different thought patterns while speaking in different languages. This study, which examines the narration by individuals in two different languages, sheds further light on the validity of this hypothesis.

This study, which compares the linguistic form/function relations in narrative discourse in two different languages, examines whether: "Bilinguals possess relatively separate linguistic rule systems for each of the two languages" or whether: "There is a common underlying rule system in a bilingual's mind." By analyzing the relationship between linguistic forms and their functions, the study attempts to bring to light specific characteristics in the narratives of bilingual individuals using the means that they have at their disposal in two different languages. The present study basically adopts Berman and Slobin's (1994) definition of "form/function." Form includes a broad range of linguistic/expressive devices. Function includes the purposes served by the forms used in narrative discourse. The current study particularly explores how, when telling narratives, bilingual individuals express verbal notions through the use of the tense, aspect, and voice forms available in each of their two languages. For instance, the present tense is often

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used in script narratives, specifying the typical series of events taking place in a particular activity such as going to a restaurant or going to a birthday party.

In picture-book narrations, on the other hand, if the task is regarded as a narrative activity (i.e., recounting of events spatially as well as temporally distant from the speaker), the past tense may be predominantly used. And the past tense is often used in oral narratives, specifying the typical series of events taking place in a particular sequence such as going on a trip or journey to a place. The narrator uses tense systematically when he or she refers to events and temporally relates them with each other. In this way, the tenses that narrators use reveal their subjective attitude towards a particular event.

Narration draws on some of the most sophisticated language skills in a person's repertoire like the use of an array of temporal, spatial, and logical relationships; the use of complex linguistic elements to refer to objects, characters and situations already mentioned or new in the story; and the use of varied linguistic mechanisms revealing the narrator's personal point of view (Labov, 1972; Karmiloff-Smith, 1980; Hickman, 1990; Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991; Berman & Slobin, 1994). Narrative discourse also lends itself well to the study of the ways in which subjects use the formal linguistic devices in their repertoire to serve specific functions in communication (e.g., Berman, 1993; Hickman, 1990, 1991; Karmiloff-Smith, 1981). One main area of narrative called the syntactic complexity was examined. The measure considered for recording was the total number of syntactic units. The definition used for this measure was taken from Norbury and Bishop (2003). A single syntactic unit was classed as a full main clause and any subordinate clauses belonging to it. Simple and complex sentences were counted as one syntactic unit (e.g. 'When I was driving, others were sleeping') and compound sentences were counted as two syntactic units (e.g. 'I was driving and others were sleeping'); total number of complex sentences comprised subordinate clauses, complement clauses, verbal complements and passive constructions.

This study specifically analyzes narratives by Kannada-English bilingual adults. Comparing Kannada and English, as a matter of fact, offers an interesting study for cross-linguistic analysis, because they are such distinctly different languages. To begin with, Kannada is one of the major Dravidian languages of India and is spoken predominantly in the state of Karnataka. Numbering roughly 38 million population makes it the 27th most spoken language in the world.

Kannada having its own script is a highly inflected language with three genders (masculine, feminine, neutral or common) and two numbers (singular, plural). It is inflected for gender, number and tense, among other things (Prakash & Joshi, 1995). In case of Indian English, it comprises several dialects and is evolved during and after the colonial rule of Britain in India. English is one of the official languages of India with about ninety million speakers according to the 1991 Census of India. Clauses in English language have a subject and a verb. There are three main types of dependent clauses like noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverb clauses, so-called for their syntactic and semantic resemblance to nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, respectively. Here, a noun is the head of the phrase. These differences make comparison of English and Kannada of great potential interest for those who research cross-linguistic development.

One of the critical requirements in this bilingual study, however, is that the degree of competence in each of the languages be equal. Many bilinguals tend to be more fluent in one language than the other. Differences in the degree of proficiency can confound the obtained results and consequently preclude meaningful comparisons. This study, after controlling for the potential problem of differing linguistic levels, addresses the following two key questions: Are there any similarities and differences used in narratives of Kannada and English discourse sample of normal bilingual adults? And what do the similarities and differences suggest about narratives told in each of the two languages? This means that either (or not) transfer of knowledge from the first language to a second language or vice versa is likely. Thus an attempt is made to check the same.

Aim

The present study aimed to compare the narrative discourse abilities between Kannada and English speaking normal bilinguals.

Method

Participants

A total of 20 neurologically intact adults in the age range of 24 to 30 years were considered for the study and were further divided into two groups each consisting of 10 individuals. Language Kannada (L1) was the native language of all the participants and learned English as L2 when they were 4 years old. Group I considered were one half of the total participants narrating in English first and then in Kannada and Group II were the other half narrating in Kannada first and then in English. These all were qualified with post graduation in Speech-Language Pathology

and Audiology. They all belonged to a middle/high socioeconomic status confirmed from readapted version of National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Socioeconomic Status Scale, (Venkatesan, 2009). All the participants were screened using Mini Mental Status Examination for visual perceptual and neuropsychological deficits. The language proficiency of all the participants' L1 (Kannada) and L2 (English) was closely described as vocational proficiency on administration of International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) - Wylie and Ingram (2006) scale.

Procedure

The target task was oral narration on a topic "Journey to a place". Verbatim instruction provided was to narrate on a topic "Journey to a place" for a particular duration of 3-5 minutes using only L1. Recording was done during the same time. And later subsequent to 15 days, same participants had to repeat the same task using only L2. An important point here was, because the same participants were narrating in both Kannada and English, counter-balancing was achieved by having one half of the participants narrating in English first and then in Kannada (Group I) and the other half narrating in Kannada first and then in English (Group II). This counter-balancing was used to help cancel any effect of order of presentation. The narration was recorded using a WaveSurfer 1.5.7, computer software program. The participants were aware that their speech was being recorded. All the recordings were carried out in a quiet room with no distraction during or in between the recordings. The discourse samples of each participant were verbatim transcribed using International Phonetic Alphabet (2007) and then were evaluated using T-unit analysis as a syntactic measure (one participant's sample is presented in Appendix II). The T-unit analysis

includes a few sub-sections like number of T-units, number of words per T-unit, number of words per clauses and number of clauses.

Results

The objective of the study was to compare the narrative discourse sample across Kannada and English languages among twenty normal bilinguals. Total participants were divided into Group I and Group II to achieve counter balancing and their language samples were collected separately. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each parameters of discourse in Kannada and English among Group I, Group II and the total participants. The Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of both the groups and both the languages for the parameters: number of clauses, number of T-unit, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit separately. The major findings of the present study is, the English language narrative samples of total participants (Group I plus Group II) showed higher mean for the parameter number of T-unit, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit. But the Kannada language narrative samples of total participants showed higher mean for the parameter number of clauses when compared to English language narrative samples. In Group I, it is observed that the English language sample data showed greater mean value for the parameter number of clauses, number of T-units, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit when compared to Kannada language sample data. In Group II, it is observed that the English language sample data shows greater mean value for the parameter number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit. And show similar mean value for number of T-unit and lesser mean value for number of clauses when compared to Kannada language sample.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Group I, Group II and Total participants for Kannada and English discourse parameters

Parameters	Total participants (20 participants)		Group I (10 participants)		Group II (10 participants)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	Clauses- K	76.55	21.54	63.50	16.37	89.60
Clauses- E	73.65	21.77	70.20	24.77	77.10	18.98
T-unit- K	9.20	1.39	8.60	1.34	9.80	1.22
T-unit- E	9.70	1.83	9.60	2.11	9.80	1.61
Words/ Clauses -K	5.45	0.77	5.45	0.76	5.45	0.83
Words/ Clauses- E	7.33	0.97	7.52	1.01	7.15	0.94
Words/ T unit- K	42.22	11.85	36.60	8.64	47.85	12.30
Words/ T unit-E	52.30	15.81	46.70	11.89	57.90	17.80

The statistical analysis was carried in various steps; initially mixed ANOVA was administered to study the effect of language (Kannada and

English) and group within each parameter of T-unit analysis of discourse. Since there were significant interactions in mixed ANOVA, to

study these interaction in detail MANOVA was administered for the effect of group within each language and each parameter. Following this, paired t test was done to compare language within each group.

Language- Group and their interaction

Mixed ANOVA was administered for comparison of languages with group as independent factor. And to see the significant differences between the Kannada and English language narrative samples irrespective of the group and also to find the differences between the groups and to check the interaction between language and the group. From Table 2, results showed there was a significant difference at 0.001 level between the languages for the parameter, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit. And results also show a significant difference at 0.05 level between the two groups for the parameter number of clauses and number of words per T-unit respectively. There is significant interaction shown at 0.05 level between languages and the groups for the number of clauses parameter only.

Table 2: Results of Mixed ANOVA

Source	F (1, 18)
No of clauses	
Language	0.54
Group	4.30 *
Language * Group	5.92 *
No of T-units	
Language	3.75
Group	1.07
Language * Group	3.75
No of words per clause	
Language	68.25 **
Group	0.31
Language * Group	0.65
No of words per T-unit	
Language	13.31**
Group	4.73 *
Language * Group	0.00

(* indicates significant difference at 0.05 level and ** indicates significant difference at 0.001 level)

Effect of group within Kannada and English language for each parameter

Since there was significant interaction between languages and the group in one of the parameters, MANOVA was administered for the effect of group within each language and each parameter of discourse to study these interactions in detail. From Table 3, the results showed significant differences at 0.05 level for the parameter number of clauses, number of T-units and number of words per T-unit respectively in

Kannada language narrative samples when compared to English language narrative samples.

Table 3: Results of MANOVA

Parameters	F (1, 18)
Clauses- K	11.32 *
Clauses-E	0.48
T unit-K	4.32 *
T unit-E	0.05
Words/Clauses -K	0.00
Words/Clauses- E	0.71
Words/T unit- K	5.59 *
Words/T unit-E	2.73

(* indicates significant difference at 0.05 level)

Difference between languages in Group I

Paired t-test was used to check the differences between languages and to see the significant differences between English and Kannada language samples in Group I (Kannada- English order of sample collection). In Table 4 statistical results showed no significant difference for only number of clauses but a significant difference was found for number of T-unit, number of words per clause and number of words per T-unit at 0.05 level.

Table 4: Group I results of paired t test

Pairs	t (9)
clak - clae	1.10
tunitk - tunite	2.53*
nwpck - nwpce	6.68*
nwptk - nwpte	4.07*

(* indicates significant difference at 0.05 level)

Difference between languages in Group II

Paired t-test was used to check the differences between languages and to see the significant differences between English and Kannada language samples in Group II (English- Kannada order of sample collection). In Table 5 statistical results showed no significant difference for number of T-units and number of words per T-unit but showed a significant difference for number of clauses and number of words per clause at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 5: Group II results of paired t test

Pairs	t (9)
clak - clae	2.48*
tunitk - tunite	0.00
nwpck - nwpce	5.07*
nwptk - nwpte	2.03

(* indicates significant difference at 0.05 level)

Discussion

The basic analysis of narration as discourse comes from research on the development of linguistic skills and its assessment using T-unit analysis in English. To check the developmental changes of any individual's narrative discourse, T-unit analysis can be used as an objective

research method. One such study is by Gutiérrez-Clellen and Hofstetter (1994); they studied syntactical complexity in the Spanish oral narratives of Puerto Rican and Mexican-American children from 5 to 9 years of age. Significant developmental differences were revealed across ages in number of words per T-unit (a main clause with all its subordinate clauses and modifiers), index of subordination (average number of clauses in a T-unit), and average frequency of relative clauses and prepositional phrases. Developmental changes were also observed in the children's ability to use complex syntax to achieve coherence in their narratives. For example, proficiency in the use of relative clauses to clarify referents and in the use of adverbial clauses to recapitulate background information is increased.

The present study reports an average length of 76.5 clauses in the Kannada narration and 73.5 in adult English narration. The results indicate that the adult bilingual narrations are correlated with T-unit analysis, as well as richness and sophistication of vocabulary, narrative marking such as the use of the past tense in a sequence of individual events, cohesive devices such as the appropriate use of nouns and pronouns as referencing devices. The study identifies cross-linguistically common, possibly universal or quasi-universal features and linguistically or culturally specific features of good narration. It has been shown that in both Kannada and English, narrating an event are expected to be told in the past tense, and should be extensive and use a large number and variety of words. Similar to the present study, Berman and Slobin (1994) produced descriptions of the skills of proficient narrators in English and Spanish which show that good "frog story" by Mayer (1969) (Appendix I) narration in both languages share some characteristics in varying degrees. Proficient story-tellers, for example, use a specific anchor tense and introduce multiple variations in time from the anchor tense by indicating anteriority, durativity and simultaneity in different ways. Furthermore, proficient frog stories in both languages contain ideas richly connected in temporal, causal and concessive relations and in relations of subordination, allowing the packaging of events in blocks rather than the narration of sequences of individual events. Berman and Slobin (1994) report an average length of 45.0 clauses in the English stories and 50.8 in the Spanish stories of 9-year-olds. They show these lengths growing into 75.3 clauses in adult English stories and 91.3 in adult Spanish stories.

On observation of the narrative task of both the groups, the component functional elements of a

narrative can be analyzed into two basic ones: referential, those elements that relate events to the listener and orient him/her as to who and what was involved in those events and when and where they occurred; and evaluative elements, those that demonstrate the specific perspective the narrator takes on the events. The other is referential elements provide the basic organizational structure of the narrative, in the form of different types of appendages introducing and ending the stories, complicating action and resolution (composed of the basic sequence of events that makes up the story), and orientation to characters, place and time. Thus, both Kannada and English languages followed the same pattern of narrative elements. This could also be probably because of equal language proficiency in the two languages. It would be interesting however, to study these in bilingual speakers with unequal proficiency in the two languages.

Conclusions

The analysis of the measured variables showed that there was an interaction effect for one variable that is number of clause, between language and the group. The English language narrative samples of total participants showed higher mean for the parameter number of T-unit, number of words per clauses and number of words per T-unit. But the Kannada language narrative samples showed higher mean for the parameter number of clauses when compared to English language narrative samples. This could be because; in Kannada a single word can also be a clause. Apart from this, there is no difference seen between Kannada and English narrative discourse. This could also be due to the fact that all the bilingual speakers had equal proficiency in the two languages of the study. On observation and having analyzed, in a fairly detailed way, the employment of tense (and some other linguistic) forms in these bilingual adult's narrations, we can deal with questions that touch on regarding similar use of verb forms in different languages. On the one hand, a similar choice of tense forms signals that, irrespective of the language used, consecutive clauses are connected in similar ways. The form-function mapping appears to differ in different languages. In other words, we may be able to claim the following: (1) When comparable proficiency and forms are available in the two languages (e.g., the present and past tense), bilinguals deploy a similar organizational strategy in the use of tense forms. Thus all the participants used past tense to narrate the topic 'journey to a place'. (2) When comparable proficiency and forms are not available or less frequently used, bilinguals access different linguistic systems in their minds and organize

their narrations accordingly. Finally, 'journey to a place' topic narration standardizes input to the narrators, providing a kind of stimulus likely to minimize effects of culture and allowing for reliable comparisons of language use across participants and languages. As a clinical implication this narrative discourse demands control of only oral register and not involves any written or academic language register.

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Appendix I

Story Script for Frog, Where Are You? by Mercer Mayer, 1969.

- There once was a boy who had a dog and a pet frog. He kept the frog in a large jar in his bedroom.
- One night while he and his dog were sleeping, the frog climbed out of the jar. He jumped out of an open window.
- When the boy and the dog woke up the next morning, they saw that the jar was empty.
- The boy looked everywhere for the frog. The dog looked for the frog too. When the dog tried to look in the jar, he got his head stuck.
- The boy called out the open window, "Frog, where are you?" The dog leaned out the window with the jar still stuck on his head.
- The jar was so heavy that the dog fell out of the window headfirst!
- The boy picked up the dog to make sure he was ok. The dog wasn't hurt but the jar was smashed.
- The boy and the dog looked outside for the frog. The boy called for the frog.
- He called down a hole in the ground while the dog barked at some bees in a beehive.
- A gopher popped out of the hole and bit the boy on right on his nose. Meanwhile, the dog was still bothering the bees, jumping up on the tree and barking at them.

- The beehive fell down and all of the bees flew out. The bees were angry at the dog for ruining their home.
- The boy wasn't paying any attention to the dog. He had noticed a large hole in a tree. So he climbed up the tree and called down the hole.
- All of a sudden an owl swooped out of the hole and knocked the boy to the ground.
- The dog ran past the boy as fast as he could because the bees were chasing him.
- The owl chased the boy all the way to a large rock.
- The boy climbed up on the rock and called again for his frog. He held onto some branches so he wouldn't fall.
- But the branches weren't really branches! They were deer antlers. The deer picked up the boy on his head.
- The deer started running with the boy still on his head. The dog ran along too. They were getting close to a cliff.
- The deer stopped suddenly and the boy and the dog fell over the edge of the cliff.
- There was a pond below the cliff. They landed with a splash right on top of one another.
- They heard a familiar sound.
- The boy told the dog to be very quiet.
- They crept up and looked behind a big log.
- There they found the boy's pet frog. He had a mother frog with him.
- They had some baby frogs and one of them jumped towards the boy.
- The baby frog liked the boy and wanted to be his new pet. The boy and the dog were happy to have a new pet frog to take home. As they walked away the boy waved and said "goodbye" to his old frog and his family.

Appendix II

Single Participant's Narrative Discourse Sample on a topic 'Journey to a Place'

- At present I am at the institute. I will have to travel to Bangalore tomorrow so I have to take permission for that, since I have to apply for leave. So, once I get the permission I will go home and pack whatever is necessary. Since I will be staying in Bangalore for at least 2 to 3 days, I need to pack cloths and other necessary things. Then I should finish all the work by evening itself. So since, I have to start, early morning tomorrow. So, since I have to travel early morning tomorrow I have to sleep early tonight.
- Once I am planning to get up around 5:30, so, I have to catch a bus at around 6:30 and once I get up, I will quickly get ready. I will take my stuff, since I would have already finished packing. Then I will start at around 6 'o' clock and I will catch an auto to the bus stand.
- Once I reach the bus stand. I will go to the ticket counter. I will buy the ticket and I will wait for my bus.
- I would have taken something to eat before it and some books to read on the way and some music to listen so I won't feel bored during the journey. Hopefully, the journey will be around two and half to three hours.
- And once I get on to the bus. I hopeful to find a comfortable seat and then comfortable seat, in the sense it should be in the front not too back, because if it is in the back the journey will be very terror-some, since the roads are bad, so then I am also hoping to find a seat beside a window.
- So then, I will again buy something on the way then once the journey begins. I am hopeful that journey will be smooth. There won't be any bus breakdown because I want to reach early.
- Then I will, since, I would have taken my books I have stuff to eat. Once I start my journey, I will have to usually look out of window, and since I have already got books to read, music to listen I won't be bored. I will have to listen to music and read books and in between when I feel hungry I will eat something probably, I would have got some chocolates, bread, and jam.
- By that time and they will also give a break in between/stops, since I will be sitting for almost one and half hours, I would go down and take a walk and then come back.
- Once the journey starts again and throughout the way, probably I will speak to the person next to me to just pass the time, then if there is a TV in the bus I would watch movie.
- Then by doing all these the time passes very quickly and I will reach Bangalore by around 9:30 if possible 9.

*(T-unit analysis of narrative discourse-
Number of clauses: 74, Number of T Units:
11, Number of words/clauses (avg): 8,
Number of words/T unit: 49)*