A FUNCTIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE NARRATIVES PRODUCED BY KURDISH-PERSIAN BILINGUALS

Mahmoud Elyasi[1], Shahla Sharifi[2], Amir Karimipour[3][39]

Department of Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad,
IRAN.

[1] elyasim@um.ac.ir, [2] sh-sharifi@um.ac.ir, [3] am_ka439@stu-mail.um.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we try to discuss some functional categories and their formal expressions in some Kurdish and Persian narratives, as classified by Berman & Slobin (1994). In order to achieve this goal, four Kurdish-Persian bilinguals narrated Mercer Mayor's book known as "The Frog Story". The collected data were analyzed to see how these concepts are expressed in either language and to see to what extent those functional categories are reflected in children's narratives. Here, we have focused on such functional categories as tense, voice, and focus, reflected in the Kurdish and Persian narratives. Based on our analysis, we concluded that Kurdish and Persian narratives follow specific conventions to express these categories and showed some differences and similarities in this respect; For example present perfect and simple past are more frequently seen in Kurdish narratives while Persian tends to use simple present and present progressive instead. Additionally, the participants used more lexical temporal items in their Kurdish rather than Persian stories.

Keywords: Narration, Functional Categories, Kurdish, Persian, the Frog Story

INTRODUCTION

A narrative is seen as a recapitulation of past experience in which language is used to structure a sequence of (real or fictitious) events (Crystal 2003, p.307). Narrative, as an important language production, is widely used by people with different cultures from every corner of the globe. As Nelson (1989) states "telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity, one of the first forms of discourse we learn as children and used throughout the life course by people of all social backgrounds in a wide array of settings." (p. 3). This is why narrative data can be used as an appropriate basis for typological studies. Although it might be worth noting that typological approach to grammar does not necessarily try to arrive at a universal set of syntactic primitives and categories, since "grammatical categories are language specific, and can be mapped in different ways onto conceptual space" (Croft 1990, p.231). There is also some reason to believe that only very basic properties of syntactic structure are genuinely universal across languages (Croft 2001).

Croft (1990) remarks that typology is closely related to functionalism and that "linguistic structure should be explained primarily in terms of linguistic function" (p. 2). In the process of narrative development, children know that linguistic forms are multifunctional and the use of any particular form must be multiply defined. Berman (1997) has also explored what preschool children know about language structure and language use. He believes that by the age of five, children are adept at combining clauses and have mastered a great deal of complex syntax. They can also construct sequentially well-organized narratives and express different perspectives on events.

---

[39] Corresponding Author: Amir Karimipour, am_ka439@stu-mail.um.ac.ir

Berman and Slobin (1994) also maintain that in the light of a cross-linguistic developmental approach, and with an emphasis on the functional categories and their related forms in different languages, we might get to a more justifiable framework for theoretical grounds in typology, and to a better understanding of principles of language universals. In this article, we have made use of Berman and Slobin's (1994) framework which focuses on the relationship between functional categories and their formal expression. We analyzed the narratives produced by four nine-year-old Kurdish-Persian children to show the way different linguistic categories are produced.

Narrative production is a popular topic discussed by many scholars. Tannenbaum, et al (2007) conducted a study with a Jewish community in Jerusalem, Israel. They stated that the racial segregation within the community was manifested in their language. In other words, this group used only Yiddish in daily communication, while they referred to Hebrew, as a sacred official language. The participants were asked to write a story in Hebrew about a good event that had happened to them. Their analysis revealed developmental changes in most of the linguistic measures examined — text length, language productivity, and lexicon in the narrative text production. Kaderavek & Sulzby (2000) believe that narrative ability is an important predictor of school success for older children with language impairment. The authors extended the inquiry to preschool children by analyzing oral narratives and "emergent storybook reading" (retelling of a familiar storybook) by two groups of children (half with, and half without language impairment) age 2; 4 (years; months) to 4; 2. Comparative analyses of the two narrative genres using a variety of language and storybook structure parameters revealed that both groups of children used more characteristics of written language in the storybook readings than in the oral narratives, demonstrating that they were sensitive to genre differences. The children with language impairment were less able than children developing typically to produce language features associated with written language. Kaderavek, et al (2004) examined aspects of self-assessment, a metacognitive ability, and oral narrative production in 401 children between 5 and 12 years of age. Analysis of the data demonstrated that older children were more accurate than their younger peers in their ability to self-evaluate narrative performance. Blavin (2000) discusses developmental aspects of the ellipsis of core lexical argument in Warlpiri children's narratives. Analysis of the stories showed a high percentage of null arguments in the youngest children's stories. The lowest percentage of null arguments was from the seven-year- to eight-year-olds. The older children showed greater flexibility in the ellipsis or overt expression of lexical arguments. Ordonez (2004) took a first general look at the effects of a type of bilingual education on the Spanish and English oral narrative proficiency of fifteen-year-old adolescents.

An Introduction to Kurdish

Kurdish as a new western Iranian language has speakers dispersed within broad regions of Iran, from west (Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam) to the east (Khurasan), (Gunter: 2004, xxv-xxvi). This language has two main dialect groups. The northern group spoken from Mosul, Iraq, into the Caucasus, is called Kurmānji; in Turkey, Hawar (Turkized Latin) characters are used in the written form (Britannica).

Ilami, a less studied dialect, is one of the Kurdish varieties, and is widely spoken in Ilam, a small mountainous city located in the west of Iran. Ilami shares some features with Kermanshahi and Kalhori, unlike most Kurdish varieties, this dialect has no ergative system (Kalbassi, 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to get to some objective criteria for a narrative, and to be able to have a better assessment of narrative discourses and thereby to get to a more comprehensive definition of a proficient narrator, Berman and Slobin (1994) focus on 'form' and 'function', stating that form and function interact in development. They emphasize that the development of linguistic forms has to be studied within a functional framework. (Elyasi 2006)

This aforementioned framework consists of several components. Berman & Slobin (1994, p.19) enumerated and explained these elements as:

Temporality

It refers to the expression of the location of events on the timeline, temporal relations between events, and temporal constituency of events by means of such tools as tense/aspect marking on verbs, lexical marking of aspect (particles, verbs, adverbs), and temporal conjunction and subordination.

Event Conflation

It is the encoding of components of events in relatively compact or expanded expressions by means of such instruments as verbs and satellites (especially verbs of motion and locative particles), ad positional phrases, and nonfinite verb forms (participles, gerunds).

Perspective

It is the choice of topic and focus, foreground and background, agent-patient relations by means of such tools as voice alternations of verbs (active, passive, middle), pragmatic word-order variation, reference form (NP, pronoun, zero), and topic markers.

Connectivity

It refers to "knitting the fabric" of narrative discourse by means of such instruments as syntactic conjunction and subordination (subordinating conjunctions, relative clauses), nonfinite verb forms, nominalization, and topic ellipsis.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, four Kurdish-Persian bilinguals (9 year-old) participated. It should be noted that Kurdish is the first language of these bilinguals, and they have learnt Persian in school as the second language. Having reviewed the pictures for five minutes, participants started narrating the story in Kurdish and Persian, respectively. A small tape recorder was used to record their productions. The next step was to transcribe the texts by using IPA symbols. Finally, these transcriptions were analyzed based on the four above-mentioned components.

The instrument used in this study was Mercer Mayor's wordless story known as "The Frog Story" consisting of 24 wordless pictures, published in 1960. According to Berman and Slobin (1994), this pictorial storybook has rapidly become a 'worldwide research tool'.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, the relevant Kurdish and Persian examples elicited from the children's narratives are presented. For more convenience, English literal and exact translations are given for each statement. Then we discuss and compare these instances within different functional framework components. It should be noted that, the analysis of Kurdish data is based one of the authors' linguistic intuition.

Temporality

As it was mentioned, tense, aspect and lexical items showing time are classified in this category. Here, we want to know which tenses, aspects and lexical items are mainly used in the children's narratives.

Tense/Aspect

As we analyze the data, we can see that the basic tenses used in Kurdish narratives are present with perfect aspect, simple past and less remarkably present with progressive aspect:

Present perfect: jæ jegəlæ kɔr bijæ, je gəlæ qurwaqæ daʃtəgæ əmd͡ʒa qurwaqæ gɔmaw bijæ.

This one boy been has, one frog   has   have then   frog lost been have.

> *There have been a boy with a frog, he has lost his frog.*

Simple past: deræ kɔræ dæ banə daræ kæftæ xwɑr.

> Here boy the from on tree fell   down.
> *Here the boy fell down.*

Present progressive: deræ kɔræ dere t͡ʃu ta bənuregæ namə kwənagæ

> Here boy the is going to see inside hole the.
> *Here the boy goes to see inside of the hole.*

While analyzing Persian versions, we can figure out that, simple present and present progressive tenses are the most frequently used tenses/aspect seen in bilinguals' stories:

Simple present: ind͡ʒa pesære mire piʃe ɢurbaɢe.

> Here boy the goes next to frog the.
> *The boy goes toward his frog.*

Present progressive: bæd ind͡ʒa pesære dare ba sægeʃ bazi mikone.

> Then here boy the is with dog his playing
> *The boy is playing with his dog.*

Lexical Markings

Sometimes lexical/functional items can show temporality. In Kurdish and Persian narratives, some adverbs were used to play this role:

Adverbs: [bæd], [əmd͡ʒa], [egəl]= Then
> [wæxtegə]= when
> [ʃuwæki]= morning
> [ʃɑw]= night
> [hæjægə]= as soon as

a. bæd: ʃuwæki kɔræ dæ xaw æɭəsagæ **bæd** qurwaqæ nijæse

    Morning boy the from sleep woken has then frog the not is.
    In the morning, the boy gets up and cannot find his frog.

b. əmd͡ʒa: ....**əmd͡ʒa** hæ   fere   kərdənæ.

    Then everywhere searched have.
    They search everywhere to find the frog.

c. egəl: **egəl** nɑnæ ʃunə sægæ.

Then chased   dog the.
They (bees) chased the dog.

d. wæxte: **wæxte** nure dine kæ|əgæ.

When look he see he deer is.
When they look carefully, they understand that it is a deer.

e. ʃuwæki: **ʃuwæki** kɔræ dæ xɑw æ|əsɑgæ bæd qurwaqæ nijæse.

Morning boy the from sleep woken has then frog the not is.
In the morning, the boy gets up and cannot find his frog.

f. ʃɑw: **ʃɑw** bijæ sæg u kɔræ xæftənæ.

Night been have dog and boy the slept have.
At night, the boy and his dog are asleep.

g. hæjægə: **hæjægə** dəratən sægæ wɑj.

As soon as come out dog the fled.
As soon as they come out, the dog fled.

Persian narratives are not as rich as Kurdish productions (in terms of variation):

[bæd] (then), [ʃæb] (night), [tɑ] (as soon as) are the only temporal items seen in Persian stories.

a. bæd: **bæd** ind͡ʒa pesære ʃiʃæro æz sære sægeʃ mikeʃe

Then here boy the glass the from head of dog the draw
Here, the boy draws the glass to help the dog.

b. ʃæb: **ʃæb** ke miʃe ɢurbɑɢe færar mikone

Night become frog   flee
The frog fled at night.

c. tɑ: **tɑ** zæmburɑro did færar kærd.

As soon as bees saw fled.
As soon as it saw the bees, ran away.

Event Conflation

Event conflation deals with satellite-framed or verb-framed constituents. We will see that which one is more commonly used in Kurdish stories. It seems that bilingual children tend to use compact expressions in their narratives more significantly than verbs:

a. sægæ dæ dæsə zæmburelæ **wɑj.**

Dog the from hand of bees fled.
The dog could escape when it saw the bees.

b. deræ kɔræ dere **t͡ʃu** ta bənuregæ nɑmə kwənɑgæ.

Here boy the is going to see inside hole the.
Here the boy goes to see inside the hole.

As it is clear, a bundle of information like, temporality, manner and direction is packed into the verbs.

wɑj: a. simple past
     b. to flee rapidly
     c. to flee straight

t͡ʃu: a. simple present
     b. progression

It does not mean that, no satellite is seen in Kurdish stories. In the following example [**dær**] adds locative/directional information to the verb.

c.   zæmburelæ dæ nɑmə lɑnæ **dərɑtənæ dær**

    Bees the from hive the came out.

    The bees came out of hive.

Unlike Kurdish, expanded expressions are more significantly used in the Persian narratives. Have a look at the following examples:

d.   ind͡ʒa sæge æz deræxte **mi-re** bala

    Here dog the from tree the climb.

    The dog climbs the tree.

e.   pesære **mi-j-ofte** pajin

    Boy the the fall down.

    The boy falls down

It should be noted that, [**mi**] in the examples mentioned above is used to express progression and Kurdish lacks this inflectional morpheme as a satellite. Furthermore, [**bala**] and [**pajin**] add locative information to the Persian verbs.

Perspective

Perspective is concerned with the focalization of the agent(s) and patient(s) in "The Frog Story". We try to represent how sentences are ordered in the narrated stories to focalize these thematic roles. Several strategies have been found for focalizing different items in the Kurdish and Persian narratives

Voice

We recognized that bilinguals used relatively more passive sentences to focalize patient and experiencer when the code was Kurdish:

a.   kɔræ (= patient) zæxmijɑw bi.
     boy the wounded became.
     The boy was injured.
b.   zæmburelæ (= experience) æsæbɑnijɑw bin
     bees the angry became.
     The bees got angry.

In these sentences [kɔræ] and [zæmburelæ] are focalized, because they are mentioned at the beginning of the sentences. Examples found in Persian are a mixture of active and passive sentences too:

c.   ind͡ʒa(= location) pesære zæxmi miʃe.

Here boy the injured become.
The boy is injured.

d.   zæmbura(= agents) beheʃ hæmle mikonæn.

bees   the   to him attack.
The bees make an attack on the boy.

In (c) and (d) location and agents are focalized respectively by coming first.

Word Order Variability

It should be mentioned that both Kurdish and Persian make use of the same word order pattern, i.e. SOV. Kurdish, however, permits a much greater degree of flexibility in basic word order which can be observed in the frog stories narrated by the participants:

a.   kɔræ ɑxər sær **dijɑw** qurwɑqægæ (kɔræ qurwɑqægæ ɑxər sær dijɑw).

boy the finally found frog the.
Finally, the boy could find the frog.

It is obvious that, this sentence is grammatical, but we should know that it is considered as a marked structure in which [**dijɑw**] is in the center of attention.

The same justification is true about Persian:

b.   pesære **nega kærd** suraxæro ta ʃajæd ɢurbɑɢæro pejda kone. (pesære nega kærd suraxæro ta ʃajæd ɢurbɑɢæro pejda kone).

boy the saw hole the to perhaps frog the find.
The boy helplessly searched the hole to find the frog.

In the example above, basic word order is scrambled resulting in a marked structure, consequently [nega kærd] has been focalized. It is natural that this Persian structure is partially affected by the Kurdish word order rules.

Focus Marker

[xu] is a widely used focus marker, found in Kurdish narratives. If we look at the following instances, we can figure out that the agent has been focalized and is more prominent:

a. kɔræ (FOC) (xu) sæge dine xwɑze nəd͡ʒɑte be.

 boy the (FOC) dog the see want help it.
They boy want to help his dog.

We could not find any specific focus marker in the Persian narratives.

Connectivity

It is important to know, how sentences are connected and lengthened in Kurdish narratives. In order to focalize these strategies, we will highlight the connectors i.e. conjunctions, in children's productions.

Conjunctions

As we were analyzing Kurdish samples, we could find several different conjunctions in these versions:

Kurdish conjunctions: [kə] (that), [tɑ] (to), [ærejæ] (because), [u] (and).

It was also seen that bilinguals used different conjunctions when they switch to Persian language. [O] (and), [tɑ] (beacuse), [t͡ʃon] (because).

Embedding

The frequency of embedded clauses was much higher in Kurdish narratives. When subjects switch to Persian, their sentences were mostly simple:

a. Kurdish: kɔræ gə qurwaqæ gom kərdəgæ nijæzane t͡ʃæ bəke.

   boy the that frog the lost no know what do.

   The boy, who has lost his frog, does not know what he should do.

b. Persian: ind͡ʒa pesære ɢurbaɢæro gom kærde.

   here boy the frog the lost has.

   The boy has lost his frog.

As it can be seen, the sentence produced in Ilami dialect (of Kurdish) is a complex sentence while the Persian equivalent has preferably a simple structure.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we tried to analyze the narratives produced by four bilinguals. In order to narrow down our analysis, we used a framework previously proposed by Berman & Slobin (1994). We aimed to show how such functional categories as voice, focus, and conjunctions are reflected in either language. We found some similarities and differences between Kurdish and Persian narratives. Generally, it can be said that Kurdish tends to use present perfect and simple past more frequently than simple present or present progressive in storytelling. On the other hand, simple present and present progressive are the basic tenses used in Persian narratives. Additionally, the participants used more lexical temporal items in their Kurdish stories like [bæd], [əmd͡ʒa], [egəl], [wæxtegə], [ʃuwæki], [ʃaw] and [hæjægə]. Kurdish and Persian use both verbs and satellites (to different degrees though). More verb-framed expressions were found in the Kurdish stories as in the case of [wɑj] and [t͡ʃu]. Persian expressions seem to be more expanded as in the case of [mi] expressing progression. The sentences used in Kurdish and Persian are an amalgam of active and passive sentences. It seems that bilinguals tend to passivize the sentences in Kurdish. Flexible word order in Kurdish and Persian allows bilinguals to produce more marked sentences like: "kɔræ ɑxər sær **dijɑw** qurwaqægæ" (= kɔræ qurwaqægæ ɑxər sær dijɑw) and "pesære **nega kærd** suraxæro ta ʃayæd ɢurbaɢæro pejda kone" (= pesære suraxæro nega kærd ta ʃayæd ɢurbaɢæro pejda kone) in Persian. A specific focus marker found in Ilami dialect was [xu] used to focalize the topic of the sentence "kɔræ", however, we could not find any focus marker in Persian narratives. Bilinguals used some conjunctions like: [kə], [tɑ], [ærejæ] and [u] in Kurdish and [o], [tɑ], [t͡ʃon] in Persian. It was also shown that Kurdish sentences are more complicated than Persian sentences and it can be as a matter of proficiency. Bilinguals have a better command of Kurdish than Persian. This is why they produce more complicated sentences in Kurdish rather than Persian. We should not forget that these conclusions cannot be generalized to all Persian or Ilami structures, since our analysis is exclusively based on the narrated stories.

REFERENCES

Bennett, K.T. (2002). The "frog story" narratives of Irish-English bilinguals. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, *5* (2), 131-146.

Berman, R.A. (1997). Preschool knowledge of language: What five-year-olds know about language structure and language use. In C. Pontecorvo (ed.), Writing development (pp. 61-76). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Berman, R.A. and Slobin, D.I. (1994). *Relating events in narrative: A cross-linguistic developmental study*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Blavin, E. (2000). Ellipsis in Warlpiri children's narratives: An analysis of frog stories. *Linguistics: 38* (3), 569-589.

Croft, W. (1990). *Typology and universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Croft, W. (2001). *Radical construction grammar: Syntactic theory in typological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. (2003). *A dictionary of linguistics & phonetics*, 5th ed, Oxford: Blackwell Press.

Elyasi, M. (2006). Language proficiency and academic achievement of monolingual Persian-speaking and bilingual Turkish- Persian-speaking primary school children in Quchan. (an unpublished Ph.D thesis). University of Wales, Bangor, UK.

Gunter, M. (2004). *Historical dictionary of the Kurds*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc..

Kaderavek, J. N., Gillam, R. B., Ukrainetz, T. A., Justice, L. M., Eisenberg and Sarita, N. (2004). School-age children's self-assessment of oral narrative production. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*. *26* (1), 37-48. doi: 10.1177/152574010 40260010401

Kaderavek, J.N. and Sulzby, E. (2000). Narrative production by children with and without specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *43*, 34-49.

Kalbassi, I. (2010). *A descriptive dictionary of linguistic varieties in Iran*, Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies.

Kurdish language. (2012). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from http://www.britannica. com/EBchecked/topic/325225/Kurdish- language.

Mayer, M. (1969) *Frog, where are you?*, New York: Dial Press.

Nelson, K. (1989) *Narratives from the Crib*, Harvard Cambridge: University Press. MA, in K.C. Reissman, (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, California: SAGE Publications.

Ordonez, C. (2004). EFL and native Spanish in elite bilingual schools in Colombia: A first look at bilingual adolescent frog stories. *International Journal of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism*, *7* (5), 449-474.

Tannenbaum, M., Abugov, N. and Ravid, D. (2007). A developmental perspective on Hebrew narrative production in an ultra-orthodox population*, 347–378. DOI: 10.1075/pc.15.2.07tan