L2 Greek narrative abilities in refugee children

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Studies on narrative abilities in bilingual and monolingual children have shown that bilinguals may even outperform monolinguals in some narrative measures. However, a major factor that can affect narration is the linguistic abilities in the target language, with low grammatical knowledge for example entailing an even reverse pattern from the one above (e.g., Andreou, 2015; Rodina, 2017). In the present study we focused on children with a refugee background, as the population is underexplored in narrative research and carry characteristics that largely differ from populations previously investigated (e.g., see Govindarajan & Paradis, 2019; and Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

Forty-eight children with a refugee background participated in the present study. They all attended reception classes in Greek primary schools for less than a year on average, while their L1s were Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish. The main task administered was a story retelling task (MAIN; Gagarina et al., 2012), based on which we explored their L2 Greek narrative abilities on a macro- and micro-level. They also completed other tasks to map their profile and explore potential effects of background characteristics on the narrative abilities. A group of 48 L1 Greek peers also participated in the study for control purposes.

According to the results, the control group outperformed the experimental group in most of the narrative measures on both a macro- and micro-level. However, the two groups showed similar patterns on some of the target-levels, indicating that, besides their short school attendance in Greek schools and their low L2 proficiency level (i.e., between A0-A1 according to the results), the refugee children show some strengths. An important finding was also that performance on the placement test significantly influenced the refugee children's performance on both a macro- and micro-level. The findings from the present study and their implications will be discussed in relation to previous studies.

References

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