# Introduction

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## 1 Overview of the papers in the issue

This ZASPiL issue mainly consists of papers that reports on results from work done by students. All papers, except the ones by Gagarina, Gey and Sürmeli and Gagarina, Bohnacker and Lindgren, are based on studies conducted by students at the Humboldt-University, Berlin, the University of Potsdam, and the Leibnitz-University, Hannover within the framework of their bachelor, master, or PhD theses supervised by Natalia Gagarina during the last years. From the pool of student theses, those that had produced the most interesting results were selected to be published in the present issue. While the results are worth publishing, the reader should be aware that these papers were written by students, and, while suitable for this working papers' journal, may not live up to the standards of peer-reviewed journals. In many cases, the paper represents the student's first experience with writing a journal paper. The editors have not corrected and substantially improved upon the way the papers are written.

The primary topic of this issue is narrative ability. Narrative ability is a central part of language use, and a child's use of narrative language influences later success at school as it provides a bridge between oral and written language (e.g. Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Different theoretical frameworks exist that describe the structural organisation of narrative texts, for example story grammar (Stein & Glenn, 1979) and such frameworks have been used to study children's narratives. However, there is still a need to better understand the mechanisms of the acquisition of narrative ability and to apply and further develop the theories which explain the organisation of narrative texts.

All nine papers in this issue contribute to our understanding of the narrative abilities of either mono- or bilinguals. They report on empirical studies

investigating data from monolingual and bilingual children with different heritage languages but with a focus on Russian and Turkish, growing up in Germany, and adults speaking German, Russian and Swedish.

With the exception of the paper by Osso, all studies use the picture-based narrative tasks of the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (Gagarina et al. 2012; 2015) and most of the papers report results from analyses of narrative macrostructure, the overarching structure of narratives (see Section 2). The result presented aims at better understanding how narrative structure is expressed in different populations and under different conditions and also show the variety of possibilities for using the MAIN in research. The papers investigate a broad range of topics, including narrative abilities in relation to expressive lexical abilities, the impact of tense and aspect on the choice of verbs used for the narration by bilingual adults as well as the relevant linguistic means (e.g. perfect markers, temporal adverbs, and temporal clauses), the correlation between the (narrative) language skills of children and their socio-economic status, the morphological verb constructions used by bilingual primary-school children, and the investigation of errors, and the comparison of narratives elicited with different stimulus materials.

*Haake* analyses narratives in L2 German collected at three time points (at ages 3–4, 4–5, and 5–6) from 32 Turkish-German and Russian-German bilingual. The hypotheses were that children's narrative abilities in the L2 could be explained by their Age of Onset (AoO) of L2 German, but that the difference in scores between simultaneous and sequential bilinguals would decrease over time. Neither of these two hypotheses could be confirmed.

*Mikhaylina* investigates the influence of tense and aspect on the choice of verb forms in written narratives by Russian-speaking learners of German. The linguistic markers used in their narratives are analysed and compared with German native speakers. The results show that Russian-speaking learners of German differ from German native speakers in the temporal perspective. The findings are interpreted as transfer effects from Russian.

The following two papers examine the relationship between children's language development and their socio-economic status (SES). *Wehmeier* analyses the MAIN narratives of 198 German monolingual pre-schoolers and, in addition to age effects, investigate the influence of SES and the home literacy environment on narrative comprehension and production. Significant effects of age were found, and a positive correlation between the child's story comprehension skills and the father's education, but no further effects of SES or home literacy environment. *Osso* uses the *Patholinguistische Diagnostik bei Sprachentwicklungsstörungen (PDSS*, Kauschke & Siegmüller, 2010), a diagnostic tool for specific language impairment (SLI) which allows an assessment of the size of the German vocabulary in young children. She investigates the correlation between the

language skills of bilingual children and SES. In contrast to earlier studies, no general pattern was found across the different heritage language (Turkish and Russian) groups.

*Sürmeli* investigates the relationship between the development of narrative skills and the production of verbs in L2 German of 87 bilingual children aged 3;9–9;3 with L1 Russian. The study found some positive correlation between verb lexicon and narrative skills, although the results indicate that increasing cognitive abilities in general are more decisive for the development of narrative skills at the macrostructural level.

*Vorobyeva* reports the results of a study of morphological errors in narratives elicited from 37 Russian-German bilingual children. In both languages, Russian and German, the errors were classified and compared to typical mistakes produced by monolingual and bilingual speakers. Verb mistakes were found to decline with age. Despite substantial heterogeneity within the child groups, the results show an increase in majority language (German) proficiency and a reduction of verb errors.

The study by *Weber* shows the effects of the narrative task on children's performance. In this paper, narratives by 27 pre-school children between the ages of 5;1 and 6;9 were analysed, comparing performance on the Baby Birds/Baby Goats stories from the MAIN with the Cat story by Hickmann (2002) and the Fox story by Gagarina and Gülzow (2007) in terms of macrostructure and the production of internal state terms. His findings suggest that the MAIN-narratives make children tell more complex stories.

Next, *Gagarina, Gey and Sürmeli* compared Russian-/Turkish-German preschool children at risk for developmental language disorder (DLD) with their typically-developing peers in German. In addition to narratives, they also tested the children with sentence-repetitions tasks. Results showed that the children at risk performed lower on sentence-repetition, in narrative microstructure and in story complexity. No differences were found in story structure.

The final paper investigates adult speakers. *Gagarina, Bohnacker and Lindgren* report a study of narratives by 69 adults speaking German, Russian or Swedish. No differences in story structure scores were found between the languages, but scores were found to be higher for the Baby Goats story than for the Baby Birds story. Their findings suggest that speakers of different languages produce similar stories, but that there are effects of the specific story used as stimulus.

## 2 The Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN)

Since most of the paper in the present issue deal analyse narratives elicited with the LITMUS-MAIN (henceforth MAIN Gagarina et al., 2012, 2015), we here give

a short overview of the MAIN and include descriptions and pictures for the two MAIN stories used in the studies (see Section 2.1).

The MAIN was designed within Working Group 2 Narrative and Discourse of the project COST Action IS0804 "Language Impairment in a Multilingual Society: Linguistic Patterns and the Road to Assessment" (2009-2013) to assess (bilingual) children's comprehension and production of narratives. It is suitable for children aged 3–10, and is available for a large number of languages, e.g. Afrikaans, Bulgarian, Dutch, English, German, Greek, Hebrew, Polish, Russian, Swedish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

MAIN includes four parallel stories: Cat, Dog, Baby Birds and Baby Goats. Each story contains a picture sequences with six pictures. The stories were specifically designed to control for cognitive and linguistic complexity, parallelism in macrostructure and microstructure, as well as for cultural appropriateness and robustness.

The macrostructure of the MAIN stories is based on the principle of story grammar (e.g. Stein & Glenn, 1979) and on Westby's (2012) decision-tree model of narrative structure. All stories were designed to include three episodes each of which contains the same five macrostructural components in addition to the setting (time and place of the story). The reason for the creation of stories with this relatively complex narrative structure was to give the children the possibility to tell more elaborate narratives, and thus prevent ceiling effects in narrative macrostructure at early ages. Table 1 gives an overview of the macrostructural components.

**Table 1**: Macrostructural components in the MAIN (Gagarina et al., 2012; 2015).

| **Macrostructural component** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Setting | Time and place of the story events |
| Internal State as Initiating Event | The characters emotions/thoughts that sets the story events in motion |
| Goal | The characters aim/plan |
| Attempt | The character's actions to try to reach the goal |
| Outcome | The result of the events |
| Internal State as Reaction | The character's emotions/thoughts in response to the outcome |

The MAIN stories can be used in three different modes: Model Story, in which the child first listens to a story told by the experimenters, answers comprehension questions about the story and then tells another story, Retelling, in which the child retells a story that was told the experimenter, and Telling. All the studies in the

present issue employ the Baby Birds and Baby Goats stories in the telling mode. In the following section, we give a description of the Baby Birds and Baby Goats stories.

### *2.1 Baby Birds and Baby Goats*

The creation of the content of Baby Birds story was inspired Cat story by Hickmann (2002). The origins of Baby Goats story can be found in the Fox story by Gülzow and Gagarina (2007). The stories have been developed to be parallel in terms of their episodic structure, i.e. to contain the macrostructural elements described above (Table 1). They both contain 5 animal characters, a family consisting of one parent and two children (birds/goats), one 'baddie' that is trying to hurt the children (cat/fox), and one 'hero' that comes to the rescue (dog/bird). Figure 1 shows small-scale copies of the Baby Birds and Baby Goats pictures, respectively.

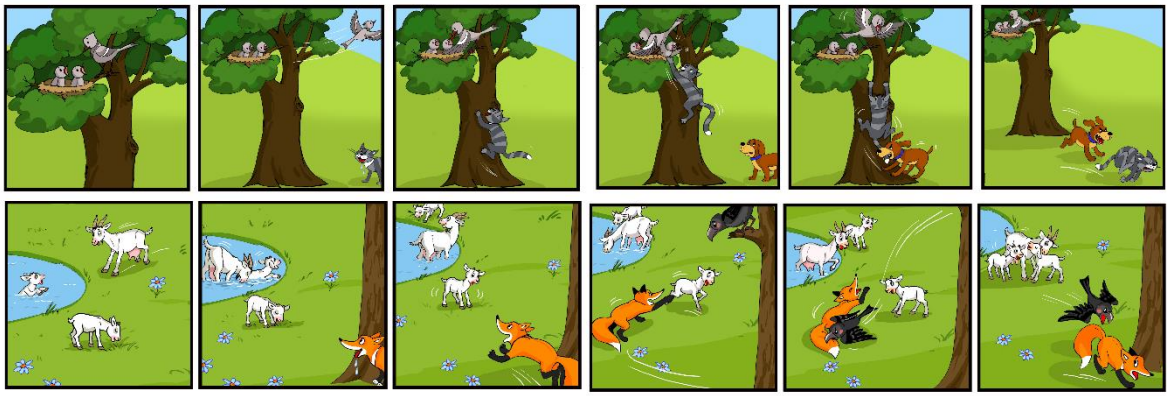

**Figure 1**: Small-scale copies of Baby Birds (top) and Baby Goats (bottom), Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (Gagarina et al., 2012; 2015).

## 3 References

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