

## Narrative macrostructure abilities of Japanese-English bilingual children; Investigating the effects of age, input, reading and schooling

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### Abstract

Narrative macrostructure abilities, namely the skill to tell a story with a coherent overarching structure, have been hypothesised to develop in tandem in the two languages of bilingual children (Pearson, 2002). Recent studies, however, have suggested that narrative skills in the two languages may diverge (e.g. Lindgren and Bohnacker, 2022). The present study investigated the possible reasons for this potential divergence in 36 Japanese-English bilingual children aged 5-13 who acquired Japanese as a heritage language in English-speaking countries. The retelling mode of the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (LITMUS-MAIN; Gagarina et al., 2019), consisting of picture-based stories, was used to elicit narratives. Narrative macrostructure skills were operationalised as story structure score (SS score) and story complexity score (SC score). The effects of language of elicitation (Japanese or English), chronological age, amount of input, the frequency of reading, and the frequency of schooling on the narrative macrostructure in each language were investigated through linear mixed effects regression models. We also examined how these factors modulated dominance in the narrative macrostructure in the two languages by measuring the differences in the scores between the two languages for each participant.

Results revealed variable scores across participants but showed that age and schooling rather than language of elicitation (Japanese or English), better explained performance within each language. Moreover, the novel analysis regarding dominance in macrostructure further suggested that younger children with less schooling in the heritage language had better narrative skills in the majority language, whereas older children with more heritage language schooling displayed a more balanced narrative profile across the two languages.

These findings indicated that age and dominance are important variables at explaining narrative macrostructure skills within and across the two languages, respectively. The significant effect of schooling in our study highlights the role of quality of input on the development of narrative abilities. This is a novel finding in the study of bilingual heritage narrative development, which broadens our understanding of the influence of schooling on heritage language development, previously reported for syntactic structures (Bayram et al., 2019).

Figure 1

SS score in Japanese and English

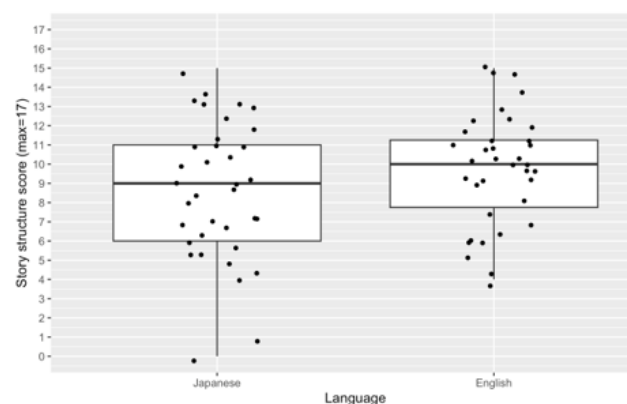
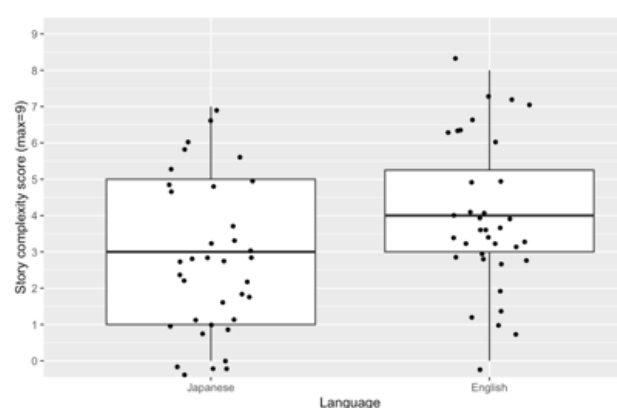


Figure 2

SC score in Japanese and English



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