

Bar-Ilan University

**Macrostructure and Microstructure in Narratives of
Adult Students with Intellectual Disabilities**

Ilanit Avraham

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's
degree in the School of Education Bar-Ilan University

Abstract

Background: Individuals with intellectual disability (ID) may have language impairments that limit their narrative skills. The novelty of this study lies in examination of narratives of adult students with ID in terms of microstructure (e.g., vocabulary) and macrostructure (e.g., story grammar elements) measures.

Aims: to investigate the microstructure and macrostructure aspects of narrative language abilities of adult students with ID, who study in post secondary academic enrichment program.

Methods and Procedures: 17 adult students with ID and 16 typically developing (TD) students, produced narratives out of a wordless picture book. Narratives were examined for macrostructure (e.g., goals, attempts, and outcomes), microstructure (e.g., length, lexis, Grammaticality, and Complexity), and mental state terms (MSTs) (e.g perceptual terms and emotional terms).

Outcomes and Results: In terms of microstructure, students with ID performed like their TD peers in terms of efficiency, fluency, and lexis yet they differ on sentence complexity and grammaticality. In terms of macrostructure, no difference was found in storyline and episodic content between the two groups, yet, the students with ID exhibit lower scores in coherence. There were no differences between the groups on the expression of MST except for the use of physiological state terms.

Conclusions and Implications: The findings indicate that in spite of their weakness in terms of coherence, syntactic complexity, and grammatical sentences, students with ID exhibit strengths in narrative macrostructure story scheme and the use of MTS due to

maturity and cumulative life experience contributed to their strength in their language abilities and narratives performance.

Key words: narrative, microstructure, macrostructure, mental state terms, inclusion academic education

What This Paper Adds:

While narrative linguistic proficiency has been examined in children and adolescents with ID, there is a lack of research about the narrative language skills of adults with ID. Narrative abilities continue to progress in adulthood. This study contributes to the literature of adults with ID by revealing the influence of their academic learning and social environment, their studies and life experience on the development of narrative abilities. The importance of this study is the attempt to outline the construction of the narrative microstructure and of macrostructure profiles of individuals with ID. Understanding the narrative profiles of adults with ID allowed the detection of relatively strong macrostructure skills which may serve as compensation for the relative weakness in microstructure skills in order to produce a more coherent narrative.

Introduction

Narratives are part of everyday practice. Narratives are found across different contexts and cultures. Using narratives is a functional skill and a mean for sharing stories which consist of a single event or causally related events (Trabasso et al., 1992; Westby, 2016). Storytelling has been associated with educational accomplishments, social inclusion, and emotional empowerment (Atkinson, 2006; Grove, 2014; Hamilton, 2009; Isitan et al., 2018). This is of utmost importance especially for individuals with disabilities. This study attempts to profile the narrative abilities for macrostructure (e.g., goals, attempts, and outcomes), microstructure (e.g., story length, lexis, and

morphosyntax), and mental state terms (MSTs) of adults with mild intellectual disability (ID) who participate in the Post-Secondary Education - 'Empowerment project' which offers academic enrichment for adults with ID at the School of Education at Bar Ilan University.