

## **Exploring character introductions in the narrative production of Swedish-speaking four- to six-year-olds**

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A narrative is an example of complex discourse, requiring the speaker to use suitable linguistic expressions and taking the listener's prior knowledge into account. Narrative ability becomes increasingly important as children grow older, e.g. for literacy development (Dickinson & Tabors 2001). As has been shown in earlier studies, children's narratives develop extensively during the later preschool years (e.g. Berman & Slobin 1994). Part of telling a good story is to properly introduce new story characters and to make it clear to the listener which character performed which action. This paper investigates character introductions in the oral narratives of 72 monolingual Swedish preschoolers aged 4;0-6;10. Since character introduction has not been investigated for Swedish, the study had an explorative focus, where the aim was to investigate character in the narratives from different perspectives.

Picture stimuli of the Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives (MAIN, Gagarina et al. 2012) were used to make the children tell a story to a listener who could not see the pictures. All character introductions produced by the children were coded using several measures, including type of referring expression (in Swedish, a new character is better introduced by an indefinite noun phrase than by a pronoun), and a scoring system for first mentions adapted from the Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument (ENNI, Schneider et al. 2005).

Clear age effects were found. For instance, few four- and five-year-olds introduced all story characters with an indefinite noun phrase, whereas this was done by 75% of the six-year-olds. This suggests that the ability to correctly introduce referents in Swedish narratives is not fully developed until the age of six. Most measures showed no difference between four- and five-year olds, but the five-year olds used more indefinite noun phrases, whereas the four year-olds used an equal proportion of definite and indefinite noun phrases to introduce their story character, indicating that the ability to correctly distinguish between indefinite and definite in narrative production develops from age five onwards. In addition to reporting on results from various measures and a detailed analysis of age effects, potential task and genre effects will be discussed.

### **References**

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