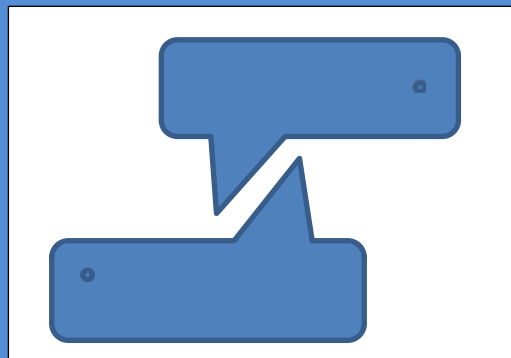


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## **Bilingual Acquisition of Yi and Mandarin by Yi Ethnic Preschoolers in Yunnan, China**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates how ethnic preschoolers in an ethnic minority concentrated community acquired bilingual competence of Yi<sup>3</sup> and Mandarin<sup>4</sup>. It mainly examines the influence of a bilingual environment, specifically, the amount of language exposure and input, on bilingual competence. The data were collected through observation, interviews and audio-recordings. In the data collection process, the systematic approach of ethnographic methods was followed by a planning phase, a discovery phase, and a presentation of findings phase. The process in which the informants simultaneously acquired bilingual competence at home, at school and in the community is carefully observed.

The results of the study indicate that a bilingual environment, especially, the amount of exposure and input is a significant predictor of bilingual competence. The interlocutors' positive attitudes toward bilingual teaching could influence bilingual acquisition of the ethnic preschoolers. The results suggest that parents should follow the one-person, one-language strategy to create a favorable bilingual environment for children. Also, both parents and teachers are recommended to highlight the quality of language exposure and input.

**Keywords:** Bilingual, acquisition; Yi and Mandarin, competence, input, exposure

### **1. Introduction**

Early childhood bilingualism is a widespread phenomenon and it is estimated that nearly half of the world's population is functionally bilingual and that most of these bilinguals are ethnic minority people (Edwards, 2004). The study of bilingualism has become a trend in linguistic circles and there has been an increasing number of studies on bilingual children. China, as a multiethnic country with a Han majority and 55 ethnic minorities, has

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<sup>3</sup> Yi language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman Language Group of the Sino-Tibetan Language Family, it is a language spoken by Yi ethnic minority who mainly live China, Lao, Vietnam, and Thailand. In China, they mainly live in Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. There are six dialects spoken by the Yi people in China. Yi language in this study refers to one dialect spoken in Yunnan Province. In this study, Yi language is 'Yi' for short.

<sup>4</sup> Mandarin is a category of related Chinese dialects spoken across most of northern and south-western China. Generally, Mandarin can refer to either of two distinct concepts: standard Mandarin and all of the Mandarin dialects; the former is based on the particular Mandarin dialect spoken in capital Beijing and the latter is spoken in northern and southwestern China. In this study, Mandarin refers to one of the Mandarin dialects spoken in Yunnan Province.

diversified languages. Thus, bilingualism is common in China. In the majority regions of the country, Mandarin is used as the common language and the school media of instruction, and ethnic minority languages are used as the home language, so most ethnic minority children are raised bilingually. Bilingual competence has become the necessity for ethnic minority children to adapt to the mainstream culture. However, in the process of becoming fully bilingual, various problems are encountered by children in ethnic minority concentrated regions. Children's bilingual competence in Mandarin and their mother languages are not symmetrically developed. For instance, some children are fluent in minority languages, but have difficulty speaking and understanding Mandarin; some can understand both languages very well, but refuse to speak either language for various reasons.

In addition, previous research indicates that the critical period of language acquisition occurs in early childhood (age five to puberty), when language develops readily; language acquisition is much more difficult and ultimately less successful after that (Lenneberg, 1967; Pinker, 1994). Thus, this study specially investigates bilingual acquisition of ethnic preschoolers when they were in the critical period of language acquisition. In addition, the Yi nationality, as a big ethnic minority group of China, has covered a population of 8.71 million (National Census, 2010). It is representative among the ethnic groups, so Yi ethnic preschoolers were chosen as subjects of the current study. With Yi ethnic preschoolers as the subject, this paper aims to investigate the influence of the amount of language exposure, language input, and bilingual environment on bilingual acquisition of ethnic minority children, and to probe favorable approaches on raising competent bilingual children. The related literature applied in the present study has been reviewed in terms of bilingual language acquisition and sociolinguistic perspectives on bilingualism.

### *1.1 Bilingual language acquisition*

Bilingual language acquisition is reviewed in relation to the following dimensions: theoretical views of language development, bilingual first language acquisition, language development in simultaneous bilingual language learners, and bilingual and code-switching.

#### *1.1.1 The theoretical views of language development*

The theoretical views of language development are viewed from behaviorists, innatists and interactionists. The first view is the behaviorist view of language development. According to B.F Skinner's (1959) classic text, *Verbal Behavior*, parents reinforce an infant's language development when they respond by smiling, cuddling the baby, and verbalizing. This behavior serves as further reinforcement, encouraging the baby to repeat the sounds that brought such a response. Gradually, reinforcement becomes more specific, contingent on increasing ability to produce adult-like language. The second is the innatist view of language development. Innatists hold the views that the capacity for language is inborn. Noam Chomsky (1972) hypothesizes that children are born with a linguistic structure that makes it possible for them



to acquire language as quickly as they do during the preschool years. Language, however, does not emerge automatically; rather, it is triggered by exposure to verbal communication in the environment (Essa, 1999). The third is the interactionist view of language development. Social interactionist theorists deem that language is intimately tied to social processes, but the critical fact is that it must emerge within the social environment provided by the parents. Furthermore, the social interaction that triggers language is a two-way operation, in which children cue their parents and parents, in turn, supply appropriate language experiences (Bhannon & Leubecker, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) considers that the young child's primary social tool is language. As a whole, the three types of views imply that child language acquisition can be influenced by various factors including an inborn capacity, the environment, and society.

### *1.1.2 Bilingual first language acquisition*

There is a general consensus among researchers in child bilingualism that the simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages from birth can be considered as an instance of first language development in each of the child's languages. According to De Houwer (1990), 'Bilingual First Language Acquisition' refers to situations in which a child is regularly exposed to two languages within the first month of birth onwards and she is addressed in both languages on a regular basis. Meisel (2004) suggests that if bilingual acquisition begins approximately before the age of five, the course of acquisition seems to be identical to simultaneous acquisition of two languages from birth. Conversely, successive bilingualism occurring approximately between ages 5 and 10 can be considered as child second language acquisition and therefore more similar to adult second language acquisition than bilingual first language acquisition.

### *1.1.3 Language development in simultaneous bilingual language learners*

Researchers (Volterra & Taeschner, 1978; Vihman, 1985) claim that bilingual children acquiring two languages simultaneously begin with one linguistic system that later separates into two systems, usually between the ages of 2 and 3 years (Paradis & Genesee, 1996). Volterra and Traute (1978) claim a 'single-system hypothesis' based on the observation that some bilingual children that acquire two languages from birth may initially go through a developmental stage in which they produce mixed utterances. Thus, the occurrence of early mixed utterances was interpreted as an indication of a single initial language system. The more recent theory is The Dual Language System Hypothesis claimed by Genesee, Paradis, and Crago (2004). Evidence of separate grammatical systems, some from the beginning of first word combinations also lend support for the Dual Language System Hypothesis.

Lexical and Morph Syntax Development in Early Bilingual Children offer significant clues and facilitates probing the process of bilingual acquisition. Morph syntax is the study of word-formation and grammatical rules. It appears that for some grammatical structures (e.g. negative sentences and verb forms) simultaneous bilingual children exhibit the approximately same rate of development as monolingual children, with a high degree of variation

due to individual characteristics and environmental variation (Paradis & Genesee, 1996; Paradis & Crago, 2003). In addition, in learning language, children develop syntactical structures through interaction with adults. These structures are called "vertical constructions." For example, Brenda, a child, says, "Hiding." Adult: "Hiding? What's hiding?" Brenda: "Balloon." Children's "horizontal" structures develop out of the "vertical" structures of the interaction with other children or with adults (Scollon, 1974).

Lexicon concerns the study of vocabulary in language. Universally, most young children have vocabularies that largely consist of nouns together with a few verbs and adjectives. For a large minority, however, early vocabularies include a number of formulas or social routines such as "I want it" or "Don't do it" (Nelson, 1973). There is a difference in the frequency of noun use between pairs of children matched on mean length of utterance but differing in at least six months in age (Horgan, 1981). Children between the ages of 11/2 and 6 years quickly acquire an extensive vocabulary and learn to comprehend over 14,000 words (Templin, 1957) or an average of about 9 new words per day (Rice & Woodsmall, 1988). They absorb new meanings as they encounter them in conversational interactions (Pinker, 1984). For dual language learners, vocabulary measures of preschool and school age are relatively lower than monolingual peers. However, when the vocabulary of both languages is combined and translational equivalents are only counted once, the measures are comparable to the monolingual norms (Pearson, Fernandes, Lewedag & Oller, 1997).

As a whole, this part reviews theories in bilingual language acquisition related to the present study. The verbal behavior view and interactionist view are applied to explore Yi preschoolers' bilingual acquisition. The innatist view might influence in the process of acquisition to some extent, but it is not a focus. The combination of the verbal behavior view and the interactionist view may facilitate in portraying how a bilingual environment, input and exposure have influence on the bilingual acquisition of the subject. The subjects were exposed to both Yi language and Mandarin from birth on, so Yi and Mandarin might be the case of bilingual first language acquisition. Also Yi ethnic preschoolers are simultaneous bilingual language learners. Their simultaneous development in both Yi and Mandarin are investigated.

#### *1.1.4 Bilingualism and code-switching*

Code-switching is a widely observed phenomenon especially in bilingual, multilingual communities and multicultural communities. Numan and Carter (2001) briefly define the term as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse". So code switching comes into use in different discourses. Crystal (1987) presents a function in which a speaker may not be able to express him/herself in one language so switches to the other to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. Holmes (1992) states that another function of code switching is to build intimate interpersonal relationships among members of a bilingual community. A varying degree of code switching may also be used between bilingual conversationalists depending on the person being addressed, such as family, friends, officials and superiors and depending on the location,



such as church, home or place of work (Crystal, 1987). However, according to Owens (2004), the function of code switching is twofold. First, it may be an aid for retention of the first language while a second is learned. Second, once the two languages are learned, code switching may ensure that both are used. Therefore, systematical code switching appears to be a function of the participants in a conversation. In this study, the subjects were bilingual in Yi and Mandarin. The theories in code-switching help investigate simultaneous bilingual acquisition of the subjects.

### *1.2 Sociolinguistic perspectives on bilingualism*

Based on sociolinguistic perspectives, language acquisition of bilingual children is nurtured and influenced in various social contexts.

#### *1.2.1 Speech community*

Linguistic anthropologists share with sociolinguists the definition of a speech community as a real group of people who share something about the way in which they use language. In order to seek the influence of the speech community on bilingual acquisition, in this study, the researcher quotes the definition given by Gumperz (1968): “A speech community, or linguistic community is a social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication. Linguistic communities may consist of small groups bound together by face-to-face contact or may cover large regions, depending on the level of abstraction the author wishes to achieve” to elicit the relationship of the groups. This definition is more appropriate for those situations where speakers who live in close contact speak different languages. Chomsky (1987) assumed that there must be a property of the human mind that allows “a person to acquire a language under conditions of pure and uniform experience”. What he noted “as pure and uniform experience’ refers to a certain language community in which a person’s language competence is acquired and sharpened.

#### *1.2.2 Bilingual Environments*

There are a number of environments in which a child can be exposed to bilingual input. In one case, the parents can have different native languages. Both parents speak their native language to the child from birth, that is, the so-called one-parent one-language strategy (Döpke, 1992). In another case, both parents share the same native language, which is the community language, but the parents speak the minority language at home between them and speak the majority language with the child outside the home for the purpose of getting the child involved in school education. The child is in turn exposed to the community language through various input sources such as interaction among surrounding people, and some other sources. However, for the purposes of this study, it suffices to discuss the latter type. Apparently, the two types of childhood bilingualism presented above are obviously a subset of the many and various possible bilingual environments in which a child may be raised. As has often been noted, both the type and the amount of input the bilinguals receive in each language are seen as being important in the developmental process (De Houwer, 1995). In both

cases it is of great importance for the parents to establish a successful bilingual environment in order for the child to have a relatively balanced exposure to both languages.

Both in the one-parent one-language approach and in the case in which both parents are speakers of the minority language, the parents should find ways to maximize the child's exposure to the minority language in order to increase the possibility that the child will eventually grow up speaking that language. The bilingual child, however, will certainly grow up speaking the language predominantly used in the society in which he lives and studies. Kessler (1984) has rightly pointed out that in order for bilingualism to be maintained, the continued and regular use of the bilinguals' two languages in natural communicative settings is required. The interaction with caregivers, relatives or friends that speak the minority language can greatly extend the child's exposure to this language. In this way, the amount of linguistic input in the minority language will be increased and at the same time the child will realize that the language not spoken by the community is also the language of another extended community. Even if the parents have decided to address the child in the minority language regardless of the presence of monolingual speakers of the community language, this strategy works as long as the children are still very young (Döpke, 1992). Therefore, the creation of a linguistic environment in which the child is exposed to the minority language in various natural settings is of great importance to the development of the child's linguistic identity in the minority language, a task that requires the deliberate effort and commitment on the part of the parents.

### *1.2.3 Language Dominance and the Input Patterns of Bilingual Children*

It has been noted in the bilingual acquisition literature that one language often dominates even in cases of simultaneous acquisition of two languages from birth (e.g. Döpke, 1992; Grosjean, 1982). Grosjean (1982) states that 'the main reason for dominance in one language is that the child has had greater exposure to it and needs it more to communicate with people in the immediate environment'. Grosjean further notes that it is not common that both languages are developed to the same extent and in most bilingual acquisition contexts, the child will obtain more input from one language than the other because it is either the language of the community or the language of the main caregiver. Moreover, other researchers have noted that the level and active use of one of a bilingual child's languages is influenced by the amount of input the bilinguals receive in that language (De Houwer, 1995; Döpke, 1992). Lanza (1997) suggests, among other things, the amount of exposure the young bilingual child had to each language is an indicator of language dominance. Similarly, Schlyter (1993) also suggests that the dominant language often represents the majority language, while the weaker language is usually the minority language. Similarly, Döpke (1992) claims that in bilingual acquisition the language which is used more often in a wide variety of contexts in the bilingual's life tends to become more dominant over the language that is used less often in less significant contexts. As is apparent from the previous discussion, the bilingual





children's amount of exposure to each of their two languages can be used as an indicator of language dominance.

Regarding the current study, the linguistic community is a Yi speaking village, where people interact with each other in their mother language Yi. Bilingual environments for the subjects extend from the linguistic community where they are growing up to the larger environments where they visit regularly or irregularly in the critical period of bilingual development. With respect to amount of language input and exposure, and dominance and subordinate, the present study tests how these factors influence the bilingual development of the subjects.

## **2. Methodology**

This part starts with an introduction of ethnographic methods in bilingual acquisition, followed by an ethnographic description of the linguistic community. Then, participants are introduced. Finally, data collection and analysis are stated.

### *2.1 Ethnographic methods in bilingual acquisition*

Myers (1999: 5) states that “ethnography refers to both a way of seeing and observing life in particular social groups, and a way of recording, analyzing and representing this life”. Many researchers (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Hymes, 1986) describe ethnography as a theoretically driven, systematic approach to the study of everyday life of a social group, including a planning phase, discovery phase, and a presentation of findings phase. Knupfer (1992) asserts that through ethnographic methods, researchers can discover the link between the specific individual studied and the social and cultural macrostructures.

Concerning ethnographic approaches' application to bilingual acquisition, following Vygotsky's (1978) view of learning as a social activity, ethnographers can closely observe how individuals interact with people and the environment in activities in certain domains. Hausslers (1985) maintains that an ethnographic case study is an “in-depth analysis of one child's language development”. Also Wallet and Green (1980) point out an ethnographic perspective for looking at language acquisition allows us to view both children and adults as active significant participants in the making of bilinguals. Utilizing ethnographic methods, the above studies illustrate the occurrences of events in contexts, helping us to have a fuller and more in-depth understanding of language acquisition and development. Therefore, through applying ethnographic methods, this study specifically highlights how bilingual ethnic preschoolers acquired two languages in various social contexts in accordance with these settings in family, community and kindergarten.

### *2.2 An ethnographic description of the linguistic community*

As the subjects in the present study sometimes visit outside of the community for various reasons, it is necessary to describe the larger linguistic environments. Yuxi is a municipality city of approximately 2 million inhabitants. It is located about 100 kilometers southwest of Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. About 395,374 Yi people are scattered around Yuxi, which covers 5.1% of the total population of Yuxi. Luohe

Township is approximately 18 kilometers away from Yuxi City. 89.6% of the total population in this township is Yi (Yuxi Year Book, 2007).

Luohe is a bilingual community in which many inhabitants are bilingual in a minority language (Yi or Hani) and the majority language Mandarin. Almost all Yi people in Luohe are able to speak Yi and Mandarin except a small portion of senior citizens who were around 70 years, who simply speak Yi as some of them never go outside the village. Generally speaking, people interact with each other in Yi in the village, but for the purpose of teaching young children two languages, many people, mainly the children's parents, address the children in Mandarin and turn to Yi when interacting with other people. The school medium of instruction from kindergarten to middle school is Mandarin. Moreover, the popularity of Mandarin is evident in the media (TV stations, radio programs, newspapers, magazines), in the village (in the form of signs and announcements), and on the street of the township (most store personnel in medium to large stores often provide service in Mandarin). What should be pointed out is that all people living in the investigated village, Dawan, are Yi native speakers. The language environment in this village parallels the overall situation of Luohe Township as a whole. Therefore, the researcher mainly describes the larger linguistic community.

In addition, in the smaller linguistic community of Dawan Village, there are some specific characteristics worth describing. It is about 10 kilometers away from Luohe Township. In total, there are 303 people consisting of 78 families, and all people are born of Yi origin. Yi language has been orally handed down from generation to generation, but has no written language. Almost all people, to some degree, are capable of speaking Yi and Mandarin. Generally speaking, the adults interact in Yi among themselves, while they mainly address preschoolers in Mandarin. But Yi is spontaneously acquired by the preschoolers. On the contrary, almost all school aged children can distinguish between the two languages and fluently switch between them freely, so communicating in both Yi and Mandarin among the adults and school aged children is frequently occurring.

In addition, the village kindergarten is located in the center of the village, and Mandarin is the medium of instruction in the kindergarten. However, Yi can be heard at times because of the following factors: First, the special location of the kindergarten gives the children chances to hear Yi spoken by adults as people from time to time pass the kindergarten, and they often gather at the entertainment ground nearby and carry out a variety of talks in Yi. Second, the only teacher, a 22 year-old Yi girl, sometimes also addresses the children in both Yi and Mandarin as these children from different age groups are combined in one class. Some of the children, especially, the younger ones have much difficulty in understanding Mandarin. Hence, the teacher particularly switches between the two languages in outside activities and various games. Third, some of the children are used to speaking in Yi among themselves. Otherwise, the kindergarten is open from Monday to Friday, and students are required to use Mandarin during class, but both Yi and Mandarin are allowed outside the classroom. The ways of interacting in various contexts facilitate the children who have difficulty with either of the languages.



Besides the dimensions mentioned above, village meetings and visiting vendors also assist the preschoolers' language acquisition. The village meetings are regularly held, on average, at least twice a month, and the host mainly uses Mandarin. During the meetings, children are free to be in and out of the meeting hall, which offers them opportunities to learn Mandarin as well. Moreover, monolingual Mandarin-speaking vendors often come to sell various goods, and children are usually active in joining in bargaining or simply watching others. On average, these vendors come twice a week. All of these environments provide the preschoolers with good chances to acquire vocabularies from various fields. Therefore, it is quite common for them to hear both Yi and Mandarin being spoken by adults in diversified social settings.

### *2.3 Participants*

The participants were eleven Yi ethnic preschoolers, who all attended the village kindergarten. Their ages ranged from three to seven. All children were brought up bilingually. Their bilingual competence was tested with criterion set in three levels: excellent, fair, poor<sup>5</sup>. Based on the result of bilingual competence of each participant, three informants were selected for the further case study. Purposive sampling was applied to select the informant. That is, the informants chosen were asymmetric in bilingual competence, which would help in analyzing how bilinguals of different language competence differ in bilingual acquisition.

### *2.4 Data collection and analysis*

Data were collected through observation, interview and audio-recording. Totally, six months were spent in collecting data. Observation was employed in the whole process of investigation. The researcher kept observational field-notes of language use in various settings. Mainly, observation of language use in the kindergarten, the subjects' activities after school and at home were emphasized. Additionally, some of the observations were elicited with the researcher's participation.

For the interview, as Thordardottir & Weismer (1996) claim, parent and teacher reports can be reliable sources for obtaining bilingual language acquisition histories and language profiles because these informants have observed the child in a variety of linguistic contexts over long periods of time. So the interviews were mainly carried out with the teacher and parents with supplemental interviews of five village people. The interview questions were reviewed by two specialists in linguistics, one specialist in linguistics and a native speaker to check whether the questions were fully prepared and drafted appropriately with regard to the interviewees' backgrounds. The questions varied among these interviewees in accordance with the interviewees' relationship to the subjects.

Audio-tape recordings were simultaneously carried out with the observations and interviews. The recordings of children's activities were fulfilled naturally

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<sup>5</sup> As one of the researchers is Yi native speaker, the researcher tested the participants in Yi and Mandarin respectively, using daily use wordlist and dialogues. 'excellent'= be able to understand and speak fluently; 'fair'= be able to understand most but has problems in speaking; 'poor'= only be able to speak some daily use words.

with the help of the informants. For example, in the exclusive children games, an audio-tape recorder was put into each informant's pocket, which enabled them to play fully without any extra interventions. Story-telling and picture-description materials were properly chosen to meet the subjects' language ability. Additionally, with the help of a shop keeper in the village, the researcher obtained some original audio-taped conversations which occurred among the shop keeper and the informants.

In the course of collecting and analyzing the data, the systematic approach of ethnography was strictly followed: a planning phase to clarify the objectives of the study; a discovery phase to describe the subjects' language backgrounds and bilingual environments; and a presentation of findings phase to describe their bilingual corpora, to compare the subjects' amount of language exposure and input, and to analyze interlocutors' attitudes toward bilingual teaching.

### **3. Findings**

The findings are reported in three parts, starting with a display of the informants' bilingual corpora, and followed by a comparison of the informants' bilingual exposure and input. Finally, the interlocutor's attitudes toward bilingual teaching are summarized.

#### *3.1 Informants' bilingual corpora*

The informants to be described vary in language competence, which enabled the researcher to cover wide perspectives of their bilingual acquisition. Thus, a deep and broad description of three informants<sup>6</sup> involving their bilingual environments at home, at kindergarten and in the community is presented. The areas investigated cover frequency of language exposure and input in various settings. The information offered in the corpora is mainly from interview materials, and some are from the researcher's observations and audio-tape recordings. As language use in the larger linguistic community and kindergarten has been described previously, the informants' bilingual corpora focus on language use at home and individual language contact in the larger community. The result of each informant is presented below.

##### *3.1.1 Informant 1's bilingual corpus*

Jenny was 6.3 years old at the time of this study. Both her parents are Yi. Her first exposure to Yi and Mandarin occurred soon after birth. She was active and talkative, and never shy of strangers. She has lived with her parents and paternal grandparents since birth and is regularly addressed in a different language by each person. Apart from short intervals when her father is away from work, her exposure to two languages is balanced. Strictly speaking, the language input of Jenny does not follow the one-person one-language principle. Her parents mainly address her in Mandarin and switch to Yi sometimes, while her paternal grandparents mainly address her in Yi with Mandarin mixed in sometimes. However, her parents and grandparents usually speak Yi among themselves in every situations. Before she went to

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<sup>6</sup> The 3 informants were selected from the population. They were asymmetrical in bilingual competence. For the privacy of the informants, pseudonyms were used. Informant 1 is Jenny; informant 2 is Harry; informant 3 is George.



kindergarten at three years old, her grandmother was the most regular caregiver. Thus, her exposure to Yi was more frequent. Meanwhile, neighbors and other village people were used to addressing preschoolers in Mandarin. Jenny also indirectly acquired Mandarin in this way.

Based on the interview with her parents, the researcher summarized information about Jenny's language background from birth up to the time of the study. The information obtained is presented below.

Age	Place	Purpose	Language	Duration (average)	Frequency (average)
From birth-6.2	Luohe Township, Yuxi City,	Celebrate, shopping, see doctor	Mandarin	1 day	Once a month
Birth-6.2	Maternal grandparents' home	Visit and enjoy holiday	Mandarin And Yi	2 days	Irregularly
2.2	City hospital	Under treatment	Mandarin	2 weeks	Once
3-6.3	The township kindergarten	Celebrate activities	Mandarin	1 day	Once every 2 months

Table 1. Places visited by Jenny

Table 1 shows that, from birth up to the period of investigation, the informant had not regularly traveled to other places for various purposes. On average, she spent 20 days a year fully visiting outside of the village and being exposed to Mandarin besides also regularly visiting her maternal grandparents where she was exposed to both Yi and Mandarin. During the visits, she was likely to speak Mandarin and did not have difficulty in understanding or speaking. In addition, her duration outside of the village was not very frequent, approximately 1 day or 2 days each time.

Input type	Language	Frequency (average)
Mother	Mainly Mandarin	4 hours daily
Father	Mainly Mandarin	2 hours daily
Paternal grandmother	Mainly Yi	3 hours daily
Paternal grandfather	Mainly Yi	3 hours daily
Neighbors	Mainly Mandarin	Irregularly
Kindergarten	Mainly Mandarin	6 hours daily
Other village people	Yi and Mandarin	Irregularly
Playmates	Mainly Mandarin	3 hours daily
Television	Mandarin exclusively	2 hours daily
Village announcements	Yi and Mandarin	Regularly

Village shopkeeper	Mainly Mandarin	2 hours daily
Contact with outsiders	Mandarin	Irregularly

Table 2. Jenny's language input (from birth-6.3)

Table 2 shows that the informant had regular contact with various people in different social contexts. And these interlocutors mainly addressed her in Mandarin. Moreover, the frequency column shows that she was exposed to both languages by various people for about thirteen hours a day, including her parents. And based on frequency of language input, on average, her exposure to Mandarin was seven hours or so, while her exposure to Yi was about six hours. That is, Jenny's exposure to the two languages was roughly equal, which is the main reason why she can symmetrically speak both Yi and Mandarin.

Based on the investigation, the researcher found that Jenny could freely switch between two languages and had no difficulty when expressing and describing pictures and scenes in both languages. Meanwhile, she often borrowed Yi vocabulary when using Mandarin, especially, words about nature and substances. Moreover, she sometimes spoke Mandarin with Yi grammar; she even spoke some incomprehensible utterances. Strictly speaking, she was not able to speak standard Mandarin because of the special language environment. In a word, it is concluded that her dual languages were well-developed during the recording period. This is the result of balanced input with all interlocutors speaking Yi and Mandarin.

### 3.1.2 Informant 2's bilingual corpus

Harry was 6.7 years old at the time of this study. He was reserved, shy of strangers and not talkative. His first regular exposure to Yi and irregular exposure to Mandarin occurred soon after birth. Both his parents are Yi natives and are excellent in Yi but fair in Mandarin. Harry lives with his parents and is regularly addressed in Yi by each parent. His father is quite taciturn and seldom interacts with Harry. His mother is a farmer, and she seldom goes outside the village, so her personal exposure to Mandarin is scarce. However, both parents have no difficulty in understanding and speaking Mandarin. In Harry's case, both parents consistently addressed him in Yi before he was around four years old. When three years old, he once attended kindergarten for five months; however, he encountered difficulty in understanding Mandarin and was often laughed at by his peers for his language weakness. Hence, his parents took him home when he was about 3.5 years old. He had still not improved in Mandarin when he was approximately five years old, so his parents pondered language education for him and attempted to use some Mandarin with him, so they sent him back to kindergarten again. Based on the investigation, Harry's language background from birth up to the time of the study is summarized below.



Age	Place	Purpose	Language	Duration (average)	Frequency (average)
Birth-6.7	Luohe Township, Yuxi City	Celebrate festivals, shopping, see doctor	Mainly Yi and some Mandarin	1 day	Once every 2 months
5-6.7	The township kindergarten	Celebrate activities	Mainly Yi and some Mandarin	1 day	Once every 2 months

Note: 1. The duration of visit to Luohe Township and Yuxi City never surpassed 2 days.  
 2. His parents helped translate Yi into Mandarin when he spoke Yi during visits.

Table 3. Places visited by Harry

Table 3 shows that, from birth up to the period of investigation, Harry had rarely traveled to other places. On average, Harry was only exposed to Mandarin 12 days a year and the frequency did not often occur. During that time, he seldom speaks Mandarin due to his refusing to speak it and he still confronted some difficulty in understanding and speaking. Moreover, his duration outside of the village was fairly short, approximately one day each time. For a bilingual learner, it is absolutely not enough to achieve competency in both languages.

Input type	Language	Frequency (average)
Mother	Mainly Yi	7 hours daily
Father	Mainly Yi	5 hours daily
Paternal grandmother	Mainly Yi	Irregularly
Paternal grandfather	Mainly Yi	Irregularly
Neighbors	Mainly Yi	Irregularly
Kindergarten	Mainly Mandarin	6 hours daily
Other village people	Yi and Mandarin	Irregularly
Playmates	Mainly in Yi with Mandarin mixed in	2 hours daily
Television	Mandarin exclusively	3 hours daily
Village announcements	Yi and Mandarin	Regularly
Village shopkeeper	Yi and Mandarin	Irregularly
Contact with outsiders	Mandarin	Seldom

Table 4. Harry’s language input (from 1-6.7)

Table 4 shows that Harry seldom had contact with people outside his usual circle and social contexts, and these interlocutors mainly addressed him in Yi. Moreover, it exhibits that he was exposed to both languages about twelve hours a day. On average, his exposure to Yi was nine hours or so, while he was only exposed to Mandarin approximately less than three hours a day. Thus, Harry's exposure to the two languages was fairly unequal. That is, the input of Yi extremely outweighed Mandarin.

In addition, the researcher observed that Informant 2 could fluently speak Yi in various situations and flexibly learn to use relevant utterances and choose related lexical terms in certain circumstances. For instance, when describing pictures, he was capable of fluently speaking Yi and sometimes using beautiful words to give a specific description of certain pictures. However, he had serious problems in speaking and understanding Mandarin, and made ungrammatical or incomprehensible utterances. As a whole, in his pattern of language development, Yi developed faster than Mandarin as he is dominant in Yi. This problem was quite apparent and was easily traced from the recording materials. This was the result of less than balanced input from his parents and other people who spoke predominantly Yi. Therefore, he has a long journey to go in both understanding and speaking Mandarin.

### 3.1.3 Informant 3's bilingual corpus

The child featured in this corpus is George. He was 6.1 years old at the time of this study. George's first regular exposure to Mandarin and irregular exposure to Yi occurred soon after his birth. He was a flexible and active boy. George has lived with his parents, paternal grandparents and an aunt since birth and is usually addressed in a different language by each person. The language input of George followed the on-person one-language strategy. His parents and aunt mainly address him in Mandarin, while his paternal grandparents mainly address him in Mandarin with Yi mixed in sometimes. However, all his family members usually speak Yi among themselves even when George is present, except when some Mandarin-speaking monolingual visitors are present. Based on the investigation, George's language background from birth up to the time of the study is summarized and presented below.

Age	Place	Purpose	Language	Duration (average)	Frequency (average)
Birth-6.1	Luohe Township, Yuxi City	See doctor, celebrate festivals, shopping	Mandarin	1 day	3 times in a month
2/5-6.1	Kunming	Visit aunt's home, enjoy holiday	Mandarin	2 weeks	Twice a year
3/5	City hospital	Under treatment	Mandarin	3 weeks	Once
3-6.1	The Luohe Township	Celebrate various activities	Mandarin	1 day	Once every 2 months

Table 5. Places visited by George





Table 5 shows, from birth up to the period of investigation, George had traveled to many places for various purposes. On average, George spent approximately three months a year visiting different places and the frequency was maintained regularly, which indirectly accelerated his acquisition of pure Mandarin. That is, his exposure to Mandarin was much more frequent than Yi as all these places visited by him were predominant in Mandarin and he personally was likely to speak Mandarin. Additionally, he was addressed in Mandarin almost by all his caregivers, hence his chances to be exposed to Yi were quite rare.

Input type	Language	Frequency (average)
Mother	Only Mandarin	7 hours a day
Father	Only Mandarin	2 hours a day
Paternal grandmother	Mainly Mandarin	2 hours a day
Paternal grandfather	Mainly Mandarin	1 hour daily
Paternal aunt	Only Mandarin	2 hours daily
Neighbors	Mainly Mandarin	Irregularly
Kindergarten	Mainly Mandarin	6 hours daily
Other village people	Mainly Mandarin	Irregularly
Playmates	Mainly Mandarin	3 hours daily
Television	Mandarin exclusively	5 to 6 hours daily
Village announcements	Yi and Mandarin	Regularly
Village shopkeeper	Mainly Mandarin	Short periods daily
Contact with outsiders	Mandarin	Irregularly

Table 6. George’s language input (from birth-6.1)

Table 6 illustrates that George had frequent contact with various people and social contexts, and these interlocutors mainly addressed him in Mandarin. Apart from all village people only interacted in Yi among themselves and village announcements sometimes were carried out in Yi, the rate of frequency (on average, twelve hours a day being exposed to Mandarin) further shows that he was almost exposed to Mandarin all day, while he almost had no chances to speak Yi. So George’s exposure to the two languages was very unequal; the input of Mandarin extremely outweighed Yi, which resulted in his difficulty in speaking Yi although he could understand Yi well.

It is concluded that Informant 3 was used to meeting different people from various ethnic backgrounds and was not shy in communicating with them. There were traits exhibiting that he was exceptionally intelligent or had higher than normal intelligence. Besides, he could fluently speak Mandarin

in various situations and he flexibly learned to use relevant utterances and chose relevant lexical terms. However, he had serious problems in speaking Yi although he had good listening ability. As a whole, in his pattern of language development, his Mandarin developed faster than Yi. This feature was quite apparent and was easily traced from the recording materials. This was the result of less than balanced input from his parents and other people who spoke predominantly Mandarin. Therefore, he has a long way to go to have a good mastery of Yi, especially oral ability, which is what an Yi native should possess.

### 3.2 Comparison of informants in terms of bilingual competence

The informants' bilingual corpora and other observations, each informant's language exposure and input, and their bilingual competence are compared below.

#### 3.2.1 Comparison of the Amount of Language Exposure and Input

The three informants' amount of language exposure and input are compared from four aspects: the duration of visits outside of the village each year (12 months), the frequency of speaking Mandarin each day (12-13 hours), the frequency of speaking Yi each day and the input type. Twelve types of interlocutors were covered. They were mother, father, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, neighbors, kindergarten, other village people, playmates, television, village announcements, village shopkeeper, and contact with outsiders.

Name	Duration of visit	Mandarin Frequency	Yi Frequency	Input type
Informant 1	0.7	7	6	13
Informant 2	0.4	3	9	13
Informant 3	2	12	1	14

Table 7. Comparison of Exposure and Input of Informants

Table 7 demonstrates the informants' unequal amounts of exposure and input in Mandarin and Yi with various interlocutors. In detail, it shows that Informant 3 ranked on the top in these aspects: duration of visit, Mandarin exposure and input, and input type. On the contrary, Informant 2 lagged behind in duration of visit, and exposure and input in Mandarin. And informant 1 almost ranked in the middle in all aspects. However, the three informants are similar in the input type as their bilingual acquisition was influenced by about 12 types, such as parents, relatives, outsiders, media and so forth. Overall, by comparing the language exposure and input of three children, it was found that Informant 3 was brought up in a Mandarin-dominant environment with a slight exposure to Yi, and that Informant 1 was brought up in a language environment with both languages input equally, and that informant 2 was brought up in an Yi-dominant environment with slight exposure to Mandarin.



### 3.2.2 Comparison of Bilingual Competence

Through the use of pictures and storytelling, the informants' bilingual competence in Mandarin and Yi were evaluated from two aspects: listening and speaking. The informants' bilingual competence was divided into three levels (level 1= poor, level 2= fair, level 3=excellent). The judgment criteria was described in the previous section.

Name	Listening	Speaking
Informant 1	Excellent	Excellent
Informant 2	Fair	Poor
Informant 3	Excellent	Excellent

Table 8. Comparison of Mandarin Competence

Table 8 clearly demonstrates that Informant 1 and Informant 3 have a good mastery of Mandarin in listening and speaking with all aspects reaching level 3. Informant 2 was poor in speaking but he had basic listening ability in Mandarin. As is shown in Table 7 that Informant 1 and Informant 3 have had greater exposure to Mandarin than Informant 2, and in Table 8, the two informants show excellent competence in Mandarin; it can be inferred that they show excellence in Mandarin because they have had greater exposure to Mandarin than Informant 2.

Name	Listening	Speaking
Informant 1	Excellent	Excellent
Informant 2	Excellent	Excellent
Informant 3	Excellent	Poor

Table 9. Comparison of Yi Competence

Table 9 clearly shows that Informant 1 and Informant 2 have a good mastery of Yi in listening and speaking with all aspects reaching level 3. While Informant 3 was poor in speaking, he had excellent listening comprehension. As is shown in Table 7, Informant 1 and Informant 2 have had greater exposure to Yi than Informant 3, and Table 9 shows the two informants are excellent in Yi; it can be inferred that Informant 1 and Informant 2 show excellence in Yi because they have had greater exposure to Yi than Informant 3.

As a whole, through the comparison of the informants' bilingual acquisition, it can be concluded that Informant 1 is the most balanced in bilingual development by being excellent in two languages; Informant 3 and Informant 2 are unbalanced in bilingual development with each being poor in one language respectively.

### 3.3 Interlocutors' attitudes toward bilingual teaching

Parents, teachers and village people's attitudes toward bilingual teaching were collected. The attitudes are factors to facilitate bilingual teaching of the preschoolers.

All interviewees, including the three pairs of parents, one teacher and five village people, held an agreeable attitude that bilingual teaching was an important and favorable means to educate younger ethnic children in the speech community as the majority of them considered that holding bilingual competence could relieve communicative obstacles with monolingual Mandarin speakers. They all agreed that younger children should be addressed in both Mandarin and Yi from birth or before attending kindergarten. And they further pointed out that being capable of speaking their native language could show Yi people's ethnic identity and solidarity, and being capable of speaking Mandarin before attending kindergarten could relieve the children's burden in understanding Mandarin and enable them to easily get involved in school courses.

On account of the factors summarized above, the parents and the teachers were engaged in carrying out bilingual teaching to the younger generation in the village, and the village people also influenced the children's bilingual language acquisition. Obviously, they were motivated to carry out bilingual teaching to the preschoolers as they all held positive attitudes toward bilingual teaching of the children.

## 4. Discussion

Based on the language environments and caregivers' ways of bilingual teaching, it was observed that the informants' bilingual acquisition was fully influenced by the interlocutors, the school, and the community. In the process of acquiring two languages, they were influenced and shaped by parents' and other caregivers' reinforcement, and the speech community and school, as the bilingual environment for them, played a significant role in nurturing their bilingual competence. The way of their bilingual development was consistent with behaviorists' views and interactionists' view. For instance, in B.F Skinner's (1959) classic text, *Verbal Behavior*, parents reinforce an infant's language development when they respond by smiling, cuddling the baby, and verbalizing; accordingly, Bhhannon & Leubecker (1985) deem that language is intimately tied to social processes, but the critical fact is that it must emerge within the social environment provided by the parents; Essa (1999) contends that language does not emerge automatically, but rather is triggered by exposure to verbal communication in the environment. The strong influence of behavior and interaction with interlocutors were obviously exhibited in the present study and the results, to some extent, were consistent with the previous studies. However, whether the informants were born with a linguistic structure as stated in Noam Chomsky (1972) was not traced in this study.

In addition, code-switching frequently occurred with the informants and their code-switching was mainly dependent on the person being addressed, such as family members, playmates, and other people and also dependent on the location, such as home, kindergarten and other settings. The frequent exhibition of code-switching by the informants was supports Crystal's (1987)



interpretation that a speaker may not be able to express him/herself in one language so switches to the other to compensate for the deficiency and Holmes's (1992) statement that code-switching may be used in order to build intimate interpersonal relationships among members of a bilingual community. However, code-switching had more purposes for the informants in the current study, such as to maintain linguistic solidarity and ethnic identity. For a bilingual preschooler who is in a vital stage of acquiring two languages, apparently, code-switching is a helpful tool for them.

Apart from that, it was observed that, as a whole, the minority language Yi was dominant over the majority language Mandarin in the small speech community. However, owing to the interlocutors' positive attitudes toward bilingual teaching, Mandarin became more dominant in preschoolers. So both Yi and Mandarin can be deemed as dominant languages in this community. Thus, this finding did not fit into the range interpreted by Schlyter (1993), suggesting that the dominant language often represents the majority language, while the weaker language is usually the minority language. In addition, this study illustrates that the bilingual competence of the informants was influenced by the amount of exposure and input of the two languages, and the informants' excellent competence in Mandarin was attributed to the dominance of Mandarin in their bilingual environment. This can be explained with Döpke's (1992) finding that the amount of input in the majority language increases as soon as the bilingual children are born, and from then on, the majority language is the language of instruction and the language used in most of the children's social interactions, and the community language is also widely used by the group of people. In addition, De Houwer (1995) claims that both the input type and the amount of input the bilinguals receive in each language are seen as being important in the developmental process. Accordingly, in this study, it is in accordance with De Houwer's claim as the finding indicates that the informants who received more input types and amount of input in a certain language develop bilingual competence more equally. Therefore, it is of great importance for the parents and other interlocutors to establish a successful bilingual environment in order to raise bilingual children successfully.

Furthermore, it was not observed that the language input of the interlocutors followed a strict one-parent one-language approach; apart from some parents who mainly addressed the children in Mandarin or Yi. Also the informants' bilingual acquisition was not fully successful except for one informant who was capable of speaking two languages fluently. Two other informants still encountered much difficulty in understanding or speaking one of the languages. The phenomenon of sole or main input of a certain language was fairly obvious in this speech community. In contrast to Lanza (1997) reports that the amount of input in each language plays a role in the process of bilingual acquisition. For the informants in the present study, it is not enough to achieve balanced input in two languages due to their unbalanced exposure to two languages which was mainly manipulated by the interlocutors of input. The key to development is to consistently use the two languages.

## 5. Conclusions

This study discusses how ethnic bilingual preschoolers simultaneously acquired bilingual competence. Through the use of ethnographic methods, it studied ethnic preschoolers' acquisition of Yi and Mandarin in a special speech community via non-native Mandarin speaking parents and surrounding people who addressed the preschoolers in Mandarin but interacted among themselves in Yi. Based on further investigation of three informants' bilingual acquisition, valuable data were obtained. One informant's languages were symmetrically developed in Yi and Mandarin, while two informants' languages were not as their bilingual environment and the amount of language input were unequal.

The results of the study indicate that a bilingual environment, especially, the amount of exposure and input are significant predictors of bilingual competence. The interlocutors' positive attitudes toward bilingual teaching could influence bilingual acquisition of the ethnic preschoolers. The results also suggest that parents should follow the one-person one-language strategy and create a favorable bilingual environment for the children. Finally, both parents and teachers are recommended to highlight the quality of language exposure and input.

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## **The analysis of the discourse markers in the narratives elicited from Persian-speaking children**

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### **Abstract**

Discourse markers (DMs) are linguistic elements that index different relations and coherence between units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987). Most research on the development of these forms has focused on conversations rather than narratives. This article examines age and medium effects on use of various discourse markers in pre-school children. Fifteen normal Iranian monolingual children, male and female, participated in this study. They were divided into three age groups (4;10 - 5;02, 5;10 - 6;02, 6;10 - 7;02).

This article shows that the functions of DMs within the oral narrative context follow neither from their usual meanings nor from their usual discourse functions in other contexts. These markers just help to continue the narrative procedure. Narrative experts illustrate how DMs initiate and conclude narrative action, how they guide listeners to follow their interruption and sequence of narrative elements. The results showed that the frequency of some DMs change with age and some others remain constant. Further; the genre has a direct impact on the type of DM produced. Overall, children behave differently when they are asked to retell a story, comparing to the time when they are asked to produce a story, in terms of the number of utterances and also DMs.

**Keywords** coherence, functions of discourse markers, narrative development, levels of discourse, retell story

### **1. Introduction**

During everyday communication, speakers use “linguistic, paralinguistic, nonverbal elements that signal relations between units of talk...” (Schiffrin, 1987:40). These elements are called discourse markers (DMs). Research on discourse markers (DM) in the last few decades has become an important topic. Verbal DMs are elements that organize discourse coherent units and structure social interaction among the participants at different levels. Discourse markers (DMs), according to Fraser (1990, 1996), are pragmatic markers which provide a commentary on the following utterance; that is they lead off an utterance and indicate how the speaker intends its basic message to relate to the prior discourse. They tend to occur most prevalently in impromptu oral speech (Ostman, 1982,). Most research on DMs has focused on the dynamics of everyday conversation rather than narratives and analyzed how adults use DMs in these contexts (Fraser, 1996; Louwrese, & Mitchell, 2003; Schiffrine, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2002). Few studies conducted on how children learn to mark different levels of discourse. The aforementioned studies provide ample evidence of how well-developed narrative study is in the broader realm of discourse analysis. Also, a great variety of narrative texts have been examined. These include oral narratives

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such as conversational narratives (Koike, 1996; Labov, 1972; Norrick, 2001), retold stories (Norrick, 1998), and memory recall stories or elicited narratives (Chafe, 1980; Stromqvist and Verhoeven, 2004). Narrative is, simply put, the art of “telling back” what has been learned. It is an integral part of the Charlotte Mason method, and is often used by classical educators and other homeschooling families who employ a “living books” approach to education, rather than a textbook approach. A living book can be defined as one that captures the imagination, makes its subject matter come alive, and becomes a beloved and formative influence in a young person’s life. The art of narration begins early, before a child learns to read. Even a preschool child can “tell back” the favorite stories read over by parents. When our young children “read” their favorite books, turning the pages lovingly and repeating the stories to their dolls, that is an unprompted narration. Later, as the words of the Bible, literature, history, and biography, become a part of our curriculum, narration becomes more structured. Through narration, a child learns to think, to sift information and to choose what is important to remember and what is not. As the matter of the narration becomes more complex, so does the narration itself. Instead of just “telling back” the story, the details and underlying themes of a reading can be drawn forth. The topic ‘children’s narratives’ covers many sub-branches such as “oral, written, and oral face-to-face”, “oral ‘removed’ and one-to-many”, and one-to-one”. Differences may cause the same teller to tell utterly different kinds of narratives. Storytelling is a type of talk with its own structural conventions and interactional relevance. Storytelling differs significantly from regular turn-by-turn conversation in its sequential implications, so that we might expect it to invest DMs with special organizational functions not found in other forms of talk. Some studies have shown that discourse markers play different functions in narratives compared to conversations. Norrick (2001), for example, argues that DMs have special organizational functions in oral narratives. These arise because of the unique structural and sequential conventions of oral narratives which are quite different from the turn-by-turn exchange in spoken conversation. Koike (1996), through the analysis of personal experience narrations of eight Spanish speakers, contends that when expressions function as DMs in oral narratives, they can take on special functions and meanings. Koike further claims that the multi-functional ability of the adverbial marker assists the listener in processing information, which in turn, contributes to the overall success of the oral narrative. Minami (1998) demonstrates that Japanese storytellers employ particular linguistic devices as specifically narrative discourse markers keyed on the verse/ stanza organization of Japanese oral personal narratives. Previous research suggests that the ability to mark relationships between units of discourse is developed relatively late. However, given that pragmatic competence continues to develop through additional stages (Bloom et al. 1980), it is not clear whether the late mastery of discourse markers necessarily means the lack of ability to understand them at an early age. Children’s early use of discourse markers may enable them to detect the communicative need to develop a full understanding of the meaning of them. The previous literature shows that learning to use DMs is not simple and their development involves a complex interplay of knowledge between



different levels of discourse. These studies, taken all together, have revealed developmental trends from marking exchange or action levels to ideational levels, and shifts from marking contextual and local levels to textual and global levels, respectively, in children's discourse. Furthermore, there has been relatively more emphasis on the development of these markers in conversations than narratives. It is possible that DMs can be used for different organizational functions in the context of narratives compared to conversations. Finally, in most of these studies spontaneous data were analyzed, thus the content of talk across ages was rarely kept constant (see Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp, 1999, for an exception). Numerous studies deal with definitions and different functions of discourse markers by native speakers (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Miracle, 1991), so does this research.

The present study addresses the questions of whether Persian children can apply discourse markers between the ages 4 and 7 and also which discourse markers they use more frequently. The answer to these questions will provide insight into understanding the development of pragmatics in general. we address the use of additive, temporal, adversative and causative DMs by investigating how Persian-speaking children (aged 4-7) use them in their retold & elicited oral narratives.

## **2. Methodology**

Purpose of this study is to examine if a developmental line in the use of DMs in typical developing children's narratives can be established. This will be described within the framework of a cross-sectional study in which language data are collected at one point in time with use of different age groups of children (4;00 until 7;00 years of age) responding to two specific language tasks in which the children both retell a story and produce a story.

### *2.1. Participants*

DMs data are forthcoming from already collected transcripts of narratives of typically developing children in the age of 4;0 to 7;00 years of age. Fifteen native Persian monolingual children participated in this study. Eight of the participants were boys and seven of them girls. The children were selected with help of a kindergarten in Tehran. Children's parents were asked to fill in a questionnaire to consent the participation of their child and to give case history information. Jansonius et.al. (2007) state that deviant children in a standardization study are problematic. Therefore, all children were selected strictly (Table 1 Selection criteria). In order to determine a standard score, it is important that only typically developing children participate in such a study. In this way a normally distributed group of children was collected.

- Child's parents were born in the Netherlands and are Dutch; the child is not bilingual.
- Child's parents do not possess a speech-, language-, hearing-, reading- and/or writing disorder.
- Child's main caretaker (mainly the mother) is among all classes of society, strictly categorized in socioeconomic groups.
- The child has no congenital abnormalities (such as a cleft).
- The child was admitted to primary school education.

- The child has no severe hearing disorder or is deaf.
- The child has no severe visual handicap.
- The child has no severe physical handicap.
- The child has no psychiatric disorder, determined by a psychiatrist.
- The child has no mental handicap according to the teacher.
- The child has a normal learning development (receives no support from Special education); the child is not repeating a class or has a history of repeating a class. (Jansonius et.al. 2007).

Table 1. Exclusion criteria of children in the standardization study

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
male	8	53/33
female	7	46/66
total	15	100

Table 2. Frequency distribution and percentage of participants according to gender

As can be seen in table 2, from 15 samples under study, 7 persons were girls (46/66%) and 8 were boys (53/33%).

## 2.2. Material

The materials consisted of two picture books ( half of A4 size paper ) geared toward the children's age. Book A called "Mamali wants to be a doctor" containing 12 pictures was about a boy who had taken some pills by mistake and got sick. Book B, called "Tipiti, the little chick" containing 11 pictures was a made-up one. It was about a snowman who had lost his nose. All characters of each story appeared on every page of the books.

## 2.3. Procedure

In order to carry out the present study, two tasks were given to the participants. In the first task, each subject was individually asked to tell two stories, with the experimenter and subject seated side by side at a table in a quiet room. The experimenter talked with the subject for a while to build up rapport at the beginning.

In the first task, the story was narrated by the researcher for them and then the children were asked to retell the stories. In the second task, another pictorial book was given to each child separately, based on the pictures of which, they were asked to produce a story. There was no time limit to preview or tell the stories. The experimenter would prompt maximally by saying 'Any more?' Neutral verbal or non-verbal encouragement in form of 'Yes' smiling and head nods were used when necessary. Their narrations were recorded using a tape recorder by the researcher. Finally, all children's narrations were transcribed and then their markers were separately identified and counted. Four major types of connectives used were additive, temporal, adversative and causal. The number of DMs was counted. The



proportion of each type of DM used was calculated by dividing the number of each type of DM by the total number of DMs used. The change in the density of DMs used with age was also examined. Density was calculated by dividing the total number of conjunction used by the number of clauses in the two stories.

*2.4. Research questions*

There are three significant questions that lead our research to its proper interpretation, and are going to be answered:

- 1. How many markers are used by children in this study?*
- 2. Is there a developmental trend in the use of discourse markers?*
- 3. Is there a significant difference between retold and produced stories concerning the use of discourse markers?*

**3. Findings**

Our results were reported in two main categories. First, the frequency and percentage of demographic variables were presented by table. In the second part, the results were presented by taking the questions of the study into account. Before analyzing the data based on the research questions, the frequency of participants were calculated according to gender. Table 3 indicates the results.

Now, in order to answer the research questions, the data were analyzed as follow:

*Q1: How many markers were used by children in this study?*

age	N	additive	mean	sd	density	adversative	mean	sd	density
4-5	5	2	0/4	0/48	0/02	0	0	0	0
5-6	5	2	0/4	0/48	0/02	0	0	0	0
6-7	5	0	0	0	0	2	0/4	0.48	0/01

causative	mean	sd	density	temporal	mean	sd	density
1	0/2	0/4	0/2	31	6/2	87/5	0/33
1	0/2	0/4	0/2	33	6/6	57/2	0/37
1	0/2	0/4	0/2	58	11/6	44/3	0/52

Table 3. The distribution of average number of discourse markers in story-retelling task

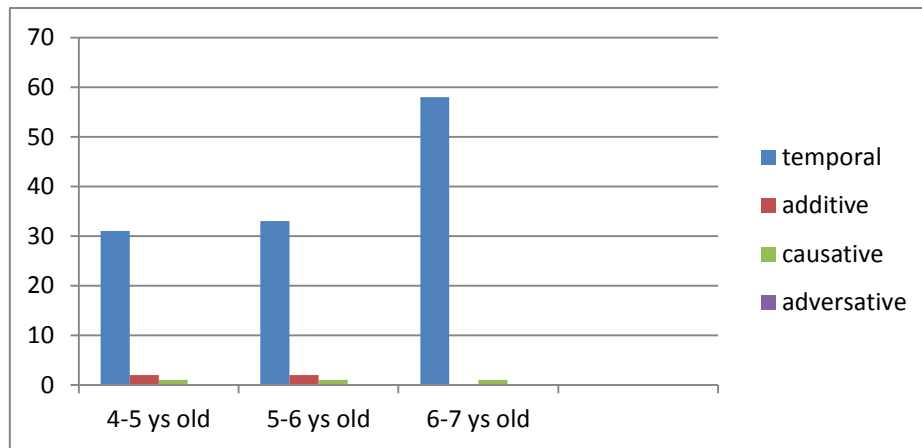


Chart 1. The distribution of discourse markers in story-retelling task

As Table 3 and Chart 1 indicate, the most frequently used discourse marker in all age groups in this task was temporal and the least frequently used one was adversative. In other words, all children in all age groups firstly preferred to use temporal discourse markers like "then", then additives like "and", causatives like "because" and finally adversatives like "but"

Age	N	additive	mean	sd	density	adversative	mean	sd	density
4-5	5	8	1/6	0/48	0/13	2	0/4	0/06	0/03
5-6	5	9	1/8	0/48	0/14	0	0	0	0
6-7	5	12	2/4	2/32	0/13	0	0	0	0

causative	mean	sd	density	temporal	mean	sd	density
1	0/2	0/4	0/01	19	3/8	4/91	0/32
1	0/2	0/4	0/01	27	5/4	2/05	0/42
1	0/2	0/4	0/01	28	5/6	1/47	0/29

Table 4. The distribution of average number of discourse markers in story-production task

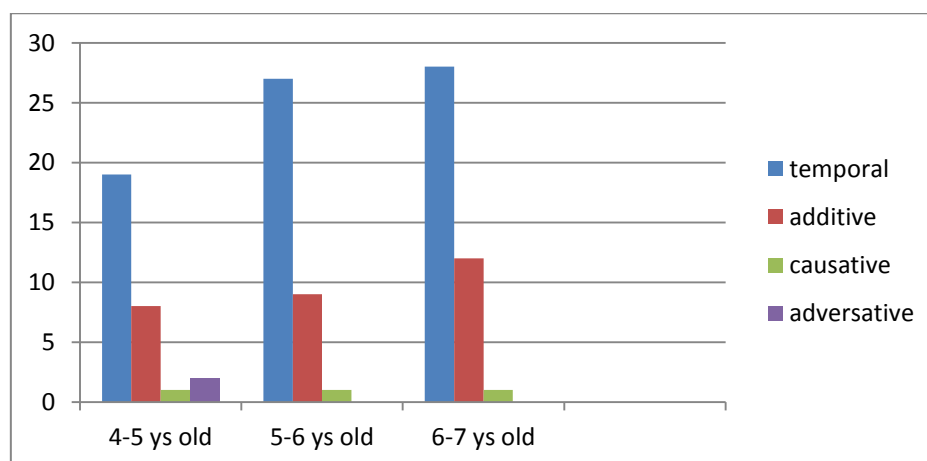


Chart 2. The distribution of discourse markers in story-production task



As Table 4 and Chart 2 indicate in this task like the previous task, the most frequently used discourse marker in all age groups was temporal and the least frequently used one was adversative. That is children in both tasks hold the same preferences in the discourse markers selection.

*Q2: Is there a developmental trend in the use of discourse markers?*

As can be seen in Table 3 and Charts 1, the only developmental trend in terms of discourse markers in the story retelling task, is in the use of temporal DMs, but in story production task, as can be seen in Table 4 and Chart 2, there is a developmental trend in the use of additive and temporal DM. Other DMs do not appear to show any meaningful & significant developmental trend in any task.

*Q3. Is there a significant difference between retold and produced stories concerning the use of discourse markers?*

Although the number of utterances the children produced in each task was different, as can be seen below, the number of DMs did not differ significantly, except for the number of temporal DMs. Below, the comparison of the number of utterances children produced in each task can be found

4-5 ys old: [ story retelling: 89 utterances  
story production: 58 utterances

5-6 ys old: [ story retelling: 93 utterances  
story production: 64 utterances

6-7 ys old: [ story retelling: 110 utterances  
story production: 87 utterances

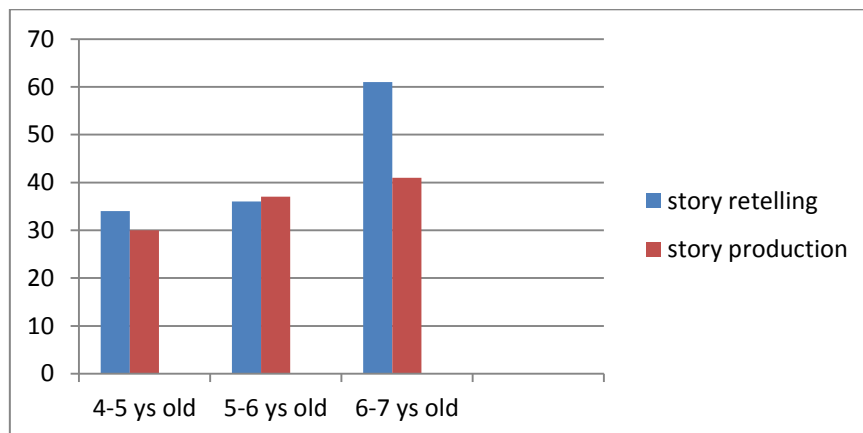


Chart 3. Comparison of the number of DMs in both tasks

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Age of emergence

A number of studies with English speaking children showed that children used all types of DMs before 3 and a half years old. (like Bloom et. al. 1980) However, in this study, few adversative and causal DMs were used appropriately at all ages. It may be due to the difference in methodology since story rather than personal narrative is used in this study. The children's production may be restricted by the story content. Moreover, children have to construct the story grammar. The use of connectives (DMs) is dependent on the cognitive effort spared according to Shapiro & Hudson 1991.

Furthermore, the study shows that there is no developmental sequence concerning DMs.

This contradicts with previous researches (like Bloom et. al. 1980). In his study, Bloom points out that developmental sequence reflects the cumulative sequence of semantic development: the temporal, causal & adversative sentences were all additive; causal was both additive and temporal; some of the adversative sentences were additive, temporal, causal & quasi-causal.

### 4.2. Use of Temporal DM

According to a number of English studies ( Greenfield and Dent 1982, Jeremy 1978, Peterson and McCabe 1987, 1988 ) , children and even adult are fond of linking their narrative clauses by means of 'and'. It has been described as an all-purpose discourse glue by Peterson & McCabe 1988. Its use imposes continuity and helps to make a narrative cohesive and coherent, temporal DM has the same function, i.e, it is used as an all-purpose glue. It is speculated that in Persian, temporal markers like ' then' (ba'ad) which are frequently used at all age groups also have similar function. This demonstrates that children firstly use conjunction with specific semantic meaning (i.e. the temporal marker) to show the continuous of the narrative 'explicitly', especially When they approach to 5, they begin to be aware of the story structure. In order to make the story as a whole, a large number of temporal markers are used to connect the sentences. The story gains in continuity. However, it sounds a little bit unnatural for the listeners since the temporal marker is quite redundant. Obviously, they shift to use them with no specific semantic meaning to make the narrative cohesive in a comparatively more 'implicit' way. Their stories are more coherent and the flowing is more natural.

### 4.3. Correctness of conjunctions used

It is well documented in English studies that young children always use connectives inappropriately. Peterson (1986), in his study demonstrated that three to five years old children made the majority of errors, mistakenly using adversative connectives when causal or pre-causal relationships existed. In addition, 40% of the connective 'because' and 62% of the connective 'so' used by three to nine years old children involved syntactic or semantic errors (Peterson & McCabe 1985).

However, it is not the case in Persian. Only five conjunctions used by the Persian-speaking subjects were incorrect. All of them involved semantic





errors. No syntactic order reversals of causal relationship were noted. This finding seems to show that the acquisition of syntactic form of Persian DMs does not precede the acquisition of the semantic meaning of them. Once children learn the connectives (DMs), they can use it appropriately to code the semantic relation between clauses. Another possible explanation relates to the special property of Persian connectives, sometimes the use of connectives is not obligatory in Persian speaking as the semantic relationship between clauses can be implied. Since the chance of using connectives decreases, the chance to use it incorrectly may also decrease. This may be one of the reasons for why Persian-speaking people seldom misuse the conjunctions.

Due to the limited number of DMs, especially causal and adversative ones in the study, the finding is quite preliminary. Further research with a larger corpus is recommended to confirm the result.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study examines and discusses the use of DMs in the narratives of monolingual Persian-speaking children with typical development. Relatively little research has been done on children's acquisition of discourse markers, although they clearly play an important role in their developing understanding and use of the language. The statistical analysis of DMs use in this study demonstrated that all age groups could use all types of DMs, especially temporal DM that all participants used significantly. But contrary to what previous studies (like Bloomet al,1980, Shopiro and Hudson,1997: Bennet and Castor, 1986, Choi, 2007) have suggested, there was no developmental line concerning the use of DMs, in other words, no specific difference was noted on the kind of DM being used regarding the age of the participants. Additionally, children tended to provide more event details when they were asked to retell a story comparing to the time when they were asked to produce a story on their own. It means they included more words, more cohesive devices and they made fewer mistakes in their story-retell task. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding , one of which, that we tend to favour, is that children function better when they are asked to retell a story rather than producing a story, as they have a pre-model in their mind based on which they can organize their words and narrate their story (Merit and Liles, 1989). The findings also suggest a link between the genre of narrative (narrating personal experiences, story telling and retelling) and the children's performance, in other words when the children are asked to narrate their personal experience, they probably perform differently comparing to the time when they are asked to produce a story (Merrit and Liles, 1989; Ripich and Grifith,1988).

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