ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN DISCOURSE IN L1 AND L2

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ABSTRACT

Language is described as a system of arbitrary symbols used by group of people for the purpose of communication. Discourse is considered as a highest ability of language. It can be elicited on tasks like picture description, narration and conversation like tasks. The output on discourse task is directly dependent on the nature of the task. The current study was carried out with the aim of comparing the output on oral and written discourse in L1 and L2. 20 neuro typical Malayalam-English Bilinguals were considered for the study. It was found that there was a dissociation in the pattern of performance across languages. In L1 oral discourse was better than written discourse while in L2 written discourse was equally good as oral/narrative discourse.

Keywords: Modality, Narration, Native Language, Second Language.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Narrative discourse is considered as the highest level of interaction (Filiaci, 2018). Discourse deals with expression of ideas, feelings and opinions. It would reflect a person's perspective on concrete events. Narrative discourse also can be used to assess communication competence. A person can be asked to speak about specific situations or narrating an incident or recounting an experience. The quantum of verbal output is assumed to vary with respect to the task used in assessment of discourse. Narrative discourse also assesses some integral pragmatic behaviors. Coherence is an important estimate as well constituent of discourse. It is the semantic property within discourse and is judged based on the connection of one sentence with another sentence or usage of sentences in reflecting a topic or theme (Gebauer, Zaunbauer & Moller, 2013). Narrative discourse would vary with respect to the modality used for elicitation of the output. In other words, the verbal output of discourse would vary with oral and written modalities. A handful number of studies (Gottardo, Seigel & Moller, 2001; Hulk & Moller, 2010)) have been carried out with respect to the competence in oral and written discourse especially in English second language learners The results showed that the cognitive and performance constraints vary with modality. The grammatical variation in oral and written output is highlighted in these studies as the individual has a provision in consulting back in written discourse, the usage of grammatical markers are assumed to be better for written discourse compared to oral discourse. The cognitive constraints are assumed to be more for written discourse as the individual would be vigilant and periodically revise the content, the oral discourse is free of such cognitive constraints. The coherence and cohesion operates in a parallel manner. Written discourse can be elicited only in educated individuals and the skill is considered highly individualistic. The performance on discourse is also assumed to vary for

the first and second languages (Meisel, 2001). The proficiency in the second language would be a major determinant in the performance. Better, the proficiency better is the output on discourse. The second language would impose semantic, syntactic variants owing to this the verbal output on discourse in the second language also would be qualitatively, and quantitatively different compared to the first language. Oral and written discourse in L1 and L2 is also expected to vary, however there is dearth of studies comparing the output on written and oral discourse in L1 and L2 necessitating the current study.

Need for the study: The current study is an experimental study carried out with the aim of examining the oral and written discourse in L1 and L2. The output is prone to vary for the two modalities as well as the languages. A detailed analysis would reveal the parameters different across the two languages. Thus, the results of the current study would help in determining such factors. Many studies carried out in this direction has emphasized on grammatical analysis, the other parameters like information content, communication confidence, coherence parameters also would be important in determining the differences.

Aim of the study: To compare the oral and written discourse abilities in L1 and L2

2.METHODS
Participants:
20 neuro-typical bilingual individuals served as participants. The Participants were in the age range of 18-25 years. All the participants were native speakers of Malayalam with English as second language. The participants had a background attending English medium schools in their primary and secondary schooling period. The participants were reported to have advanced level of proficiency in their native language and intermediate level of proficiency in second language. Participants had no history of hearing loss, cognitive issues, psychological issues and other complaints.

Stimulus and Procedure
As the aim of the study was to compare oral discourse and written discourse abilities in native language and second language, the participants were asked to speak and write about a given topic. The topics for the discourse were selected from a range of general subjects that is being usually discussed in the common scenarios. For oral discourse, the topic for the mother tongue was selected as' Cinema' and for the second language was selected as 'Women Empowerment'. The written discourse contained topics of 'Media' and 'Educational system' for native and second language respectively. A short preparation time of 1 minute was given before the initiation of task to get familiarize with the topics. The sample collected for oral discourse was recorded for 2 minutes and a time of 4 minutes was given for eliciting written discourse.

The samples were analyzed with a set of qualitative and quantitative parameters. The quantitative parameters measured were on the basis of Information content units , number of simple sentences and complex sentences , and number of phrase units. The qualitative parameters were perceptually evaluated using a 5 point rating scale and it includes continuity, link, confidence and fluency. 0 on the scale indicated poor while 5 indicated excellent. All these parameters were measured separately for each topic under oral and written discourse to evaluate the participants.

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative and Quantitative analysis was carried out to compare the performance on oral and written discourse in L1 and L2. For oral discourse in L1, the mean for information content units, number of simple, complex sentences and number of phrases on L1 was 9,5,7 and 5. For written discourse in L1, the mean values for the same set of parameters were 7,4,5 and 5 (see figure 1) . In L2 the mean values on oral discourse for the same four parameters were 8,5,6 and 4. 5,4,4 and 3 (see figure 2) were the average mean values on written discourse in L2.
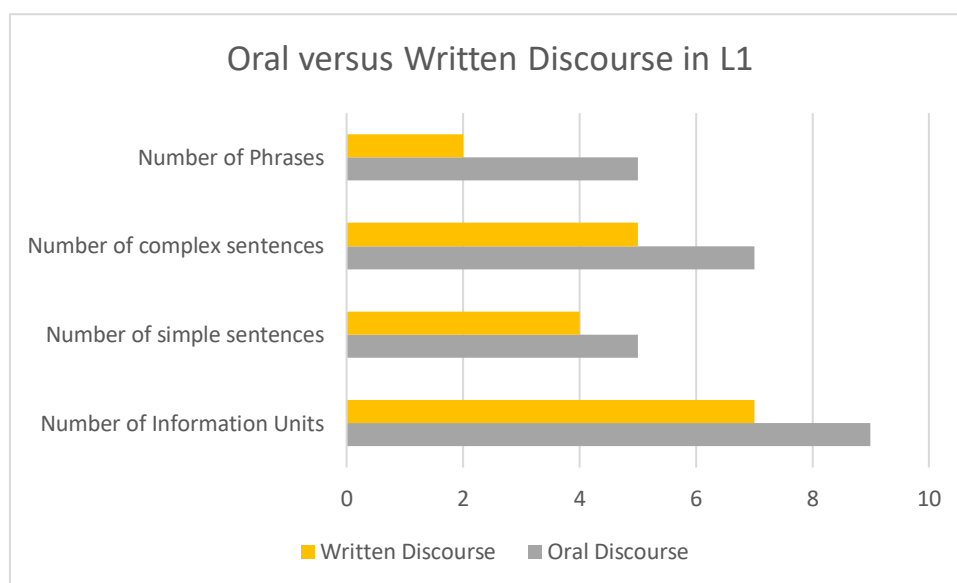

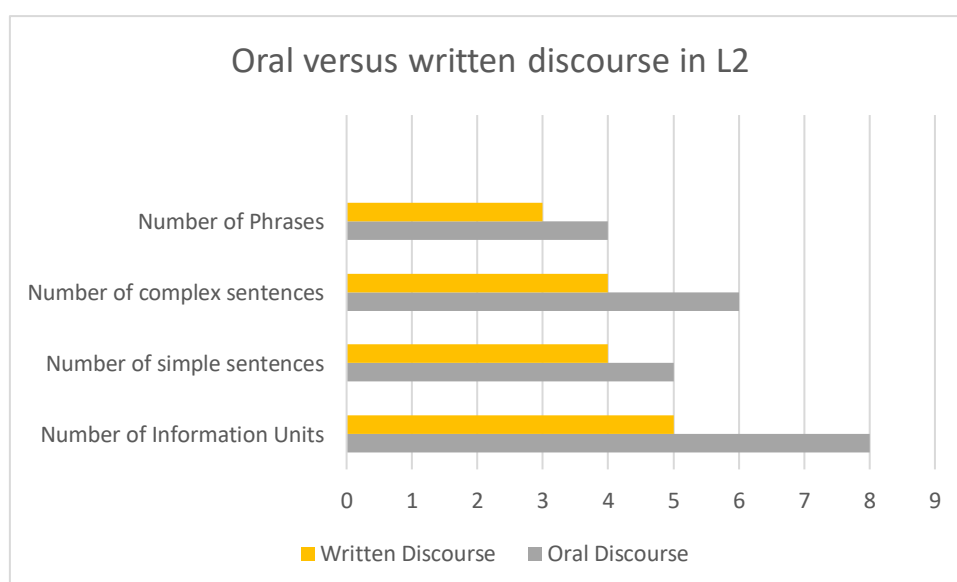**Figure 1:** Oral versus written discourse in L1

Figure 2: Oral versus written discourse in L2

In order to verify if there was any significant difference between oral discourse and written discourse in L1 and L2 on the four parameters, statistical analysis was carried out. The data did

not abide by the properties of normal distribution, hence Wilcoxon's signed rank test, a non-parametric test was used for analysis. Z scores was 2.33, 2.26, 2.07 and 1.88 for Oral v/s written in L1 and the corresponding p values showed significant difference between oral and written discourse in L1 for all the above-said parameters. Z scores for L2, oral and written discourse was 1.33, 1.09, 1.38 and 1.98 and the corresponding p values showed no significant difference between oral and written discourse except for the number of phrases. In addition to the quantitative analysis carried out qualitative analysis was carried out using a five point scale, the continuity, link, confidence and fluency was better in L2 for writing. For L1, the continuity, link, confidence and fluency was better for speaking compared to writing.

The study was carried with the aim of comparing the oral and written discourse abilities in L1 and L2. The oral discourse has advantages over the written discourse as the output is more spontaneous, the amount of effort is considerably less compared to written discourse. Written discourse on the other hand has some clear advantages over the oral discourse as the output can be verified and modified any time (3). The other advantage of oral discourse over written discourse is that the written output is subjected to flexibility. As there is a direct referent available, the output can be modified anytime. The current study was carried out with the aim of comparing the output on oral and written discourse in L1 and L2. On L1, the oral discourse parameters were better compared to the written discourse parameters. This could be attributed to the fact that the participants were less habituated to write in L1. As the medium of instruction was English for all the participants and most of them did not did not use L1 in writing, the discourse parameters were better for oral discourse compared to written discourse. In L2, there was no significant difference for the majority of parameters on oral and written discourse. This can be again attributed to practice as the age range of the participants considered was between 18-25 years and this group of participants use L2 (English) in their routine the parameters on oral discourse would have been better and as they are exposed to L2 for writing since early childhood, the parameters on written discourse can be equally good or better compared to oral discourse in L2. The study can be extended on different age groups to deduce the trend in oral and written discourse.

Conclusions: The study was carried with the aim of comparing the oral and written discourse in L1 and L2. There was dissociation between L1 and L2 oral and written discourse: In L1, oral discourse was better in L2 oral and written discourse were equally good.

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