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Eleonora Bartoli, Edy Veneziano, Andrea Smorti

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THE EVALUATIVE COMPONENT IN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE

Comparison of two Intervention Procedures

E. Bartoli *, E. Veneziano **, A. Smorti *

* Univeristà degli Studi di Firenze, ** Université Paris Descartes-CNRS, MoDyCo & LPPS

Abstract

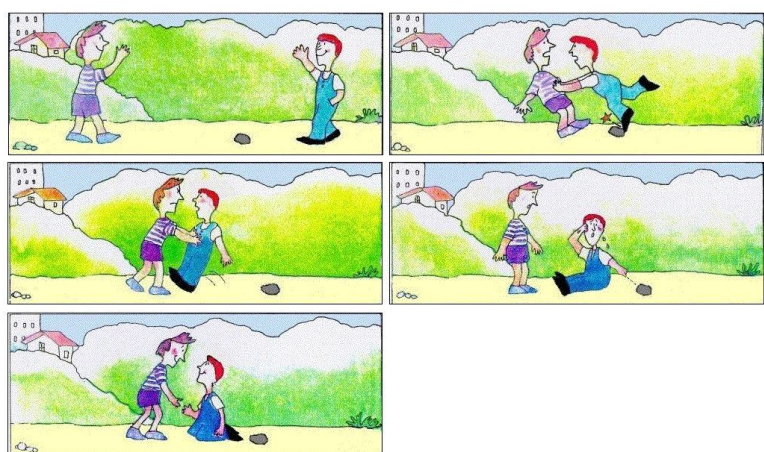
Given that interaction among peers is proved to be useful in the development of cognitive and narrative skills, this study compares the effects of an intervention based on the interaction among peers (INTP) and one between child and adult focused on the causes of events (CosCau) (Veneziano, 2009), on the ability to tell coherent stories that take into account the causes of events and the internal states of the characters.

INTRODUCTION

Before 8-9 years few children express the evaluative component of narratives such as the explanation of events or the internal states of the characters of a story. However, when properly supported, they can reach higher performances (e.g., Veneziano & Hudelot, 2009; Strasser et al.). On the assumption that peer interaction can lead to a socio-cognitive conflict soliciting children to argue in favor of their position and to coordinate different points of view, thus enhancing higher-level cognitive skills (Buchs & Butera, 2004), our hypothesis was that an intervention based on interaction among peers (INTP) could strengthen children's narrative skills, especially in evaluative discourse. To test this hypothesis, the study compares the INTP condition with an adult-child intervention that focuses children's attention on the causes of the events of the story (e.g., Veneziano & Hudelot, 2009), which proved to be effective.

METHOD

Material Children were asked to narrate the Stone Story (Furnari adapted by Veneziano & Hudelot, 2009) a story composed of 5 pictures based on a misunderstanding between two characters (see below).



Procedure Two matched groups, constituted each by twelve 6-to-8-year-olds, were compared. One group participated in the procedure peer interaction (INTP) and the other in the procedure adult-child conversation on causes (CosCau). Below the different phases of the procedure in the two groups.

INTP	CosCau
RP1: 1ST NARRATIVE	
Children were presented with the images of the "Stone Story" and once they were ready to tell the story, the images were removed and children narrated their first spontaneous monological narrative to the experimenter.	
RPINT1: 1ST INTERACTION	COSCAU: CONVERSATION ON CAUSES
Using a hand puppet, the experimenter played the role of a child who doesn't know the story. With the pictures on the table, children were asked to tell the story to the puppet who was supposed to retell it to the teacher who will then grade the puppet on it.	With the images in front of the children, the experimenter asked the child four main questions relating to the causes of the four key events of the story; the 1st push, the 2nd push, the point towards the stone and the final reconciliation between the characters.
RPINT2: 2ND INTERACTION	
The puppet told the child a simplified version of the story (always the same for all children) and the child was asked whether there was something to change or add. The hand puppet is then removed.	
RP2: 2ND NARRATIVE	
The children were then asked to tell the experimenter the story a second time.	
RP3: 3RD NARRATIVE	
One week later children were seen again and told the story following the same procedure as that used for the first narrative to check whether the gains obtained were stable .	
RV: THE BICYCLE STORY	
At this session, children were presented with the Bicycle Story (analogous to the Stone story created within the project CFQCU, Veneziano, in press) to check whether the gains obtained were generalizable .	

Data analysis The entire interviews were transcribed and coded for overall coherence, internal states (IS) (including epistemic and intentional IS), explanations, false belief and rectification of false belief (e.g., Veneziano, in press). Scores in overall coherence, IS and explanations were submitted to a two-way ANOVA (with procedure and narrative as IV) to verify 1. the difference between the first narrative and the following ones in both groups and 2. the difference between the two procedures. Epistemic IS, Intentional IS, False belief and rectification of false belief were submitted to a chi-square test.

RESULTS

Figure 1: Score of Coherence

Only the CosCau group has an improvement in the coherence score in the 2nd narrative. After one week no difference between groups is found.

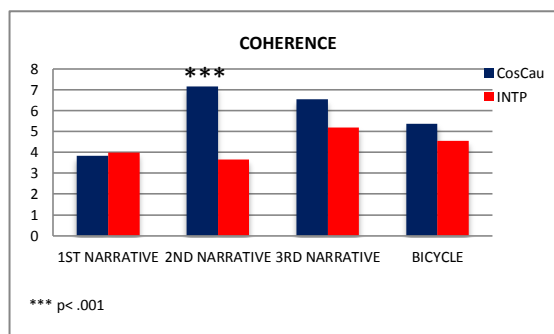


Figure 2: All Internal States (IS)

The reference to IS (intentional, epistemic, evaluative, emotional, physic and perceptive) follows a similar trend as the score of coherence: the CosCau group produces more overall IS in the second narratives but no significant differences are found.

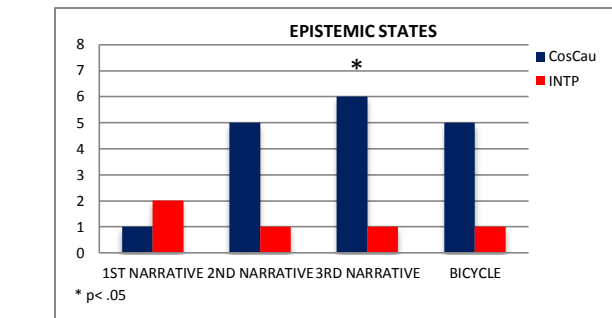
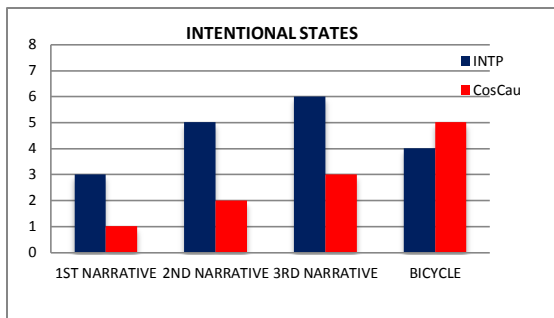
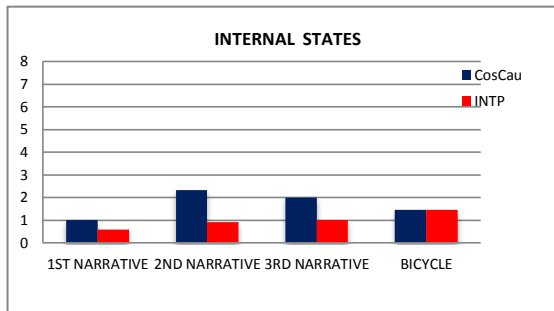


Figure 3: Intentional and Epistemic States

The difference in the improvements is in favor of the CosCau group for the third narrative ($\chi^2(1,22) = 4.14, p < .05$) and presents a tendency in the same direction for the second narrative ($\chi^2(1,22) = 2.75, p = .09$).

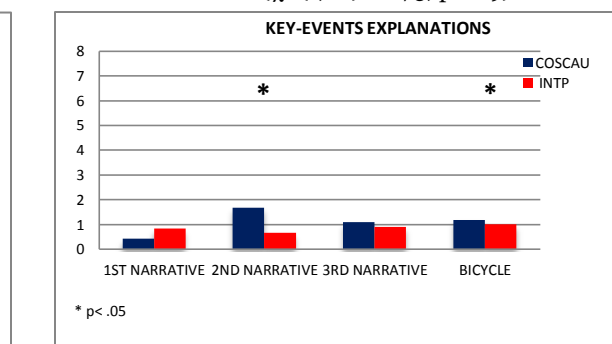
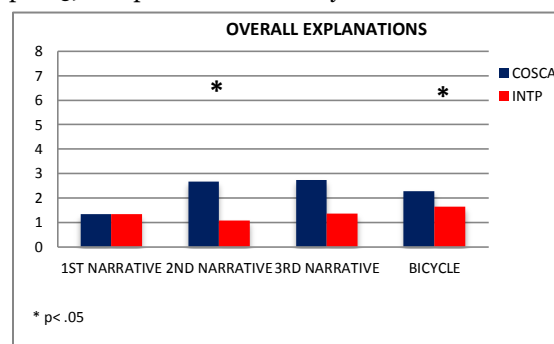


Figure 4: Overall Explications and Explications of the Key Events

Children in the CosCau condition give significantly more explanations in the 2nd narrative and in the bicycle story.

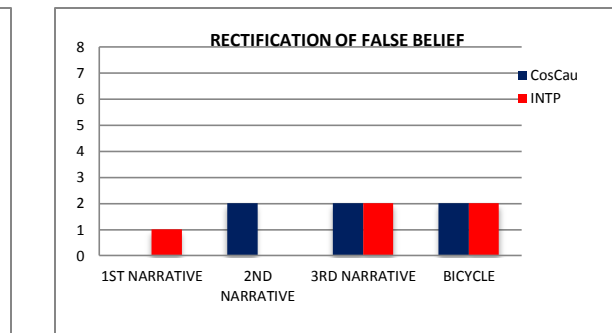
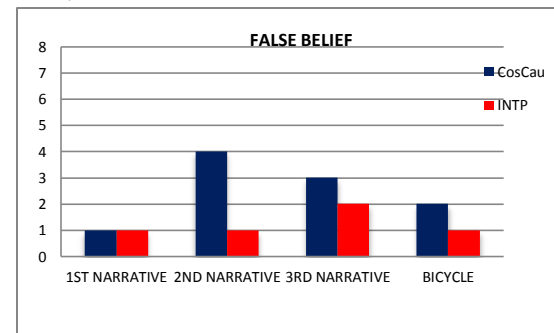


Figure 5: False Beliefs and Rectification OF False Belief

Mild improvements in False Belief and in Rectification of False Belief rise in CosCau group in the 2nd narrative, while a slight improvement in both False Belief and Rectification of False Belief appears in INTP group after one week.

DISCUSSION

Results show that our hypothesis was not confirmed and that focusing children on the causes of events solicits more coherent narratives in children than telling the story to a peer with a lower level of competence. Nonetheless, one week later, the two groups are similar. To the exception of the epistemic states that continue to increase in the CosCau group. This higher performance of the CosCau group in a key feature of the story one week later suggests that an internal process of cognitive and linguistic maturation might be in progress. It should however be noted that our results concern only one type of peer interaction (the one used in this experiment) and is limited by the small size of the sample. Further analyses will need to investigate the first negative effect that seems to occur after the interaction with the hand puppet in the INTP condition, as well as the positive effects observed one week later.

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