11 Microgenesis of narrative competence during preschool interactions: Effects of the relational context

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> I examine socialization for competence, not only from the point of view of the child developing cognitive skills but in terms of the total inter-active process of teaching and learning in cultural context and the meaning attributed to it by all those involved.   (Kağıtçıbaşı 2007: 60)

Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı was an influential socializing agent leading to my entry into psychology as my chosen field. As she is a long-term family friend, the topic of her emergence as a foremost social scientist in the world often blossomed in our dinnertime talk. When I wanted to switch from another field to psychology, her encouraging words exhilarated me and comforted my family. In fact, she was the one to call and inform me that my transfer to psychology has been approved. I remember that bath-robed moment of my life vividly, where my mother rushed me out from a shower to accept that personally momentous call from Çiğdem. Over the following years, I learned a lot from her both as a student and a colleague. I am honored to have the opportunity to deliver the following piece of work, which owes much to her guidance and encouragement, in celebration of her theoretical and applied contributions to socialization of children into competent beings.

Self-stories derived from autobiographical memory and how children develop these cognitive/linguistic structures have been a focus of intensive interest in the last two decades. The work on children's narrative competence stems from at least three lines of concern: (1) *Narratives as indicators of self-development.* In this view, narratives are seen as the primordial discourse structures in which humans organize self-related experience (Engel 1995; Ochs 1996). As Georgakopoulou (2002) suggests, "Narrative is widely held as a fundamental mode of discourse, unquestionably primary in everyday social lives, and central to the organization and sense making of personal and socio-cultural experience." (2) *Narratives as indicators of cognitive-conceptual development.* According to this line of research, the ability to represent an experience in narrative form is critical to organizing and retelling the experience in autobiographical memory (Nelson 1996; Nelson and Fivush 2004). (3) *Narratives as indicators of linguistic development.* This approach proposes that narratives reveal children's levels of language

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competence through the degree of coherence, the organization, and the linguistic constructions employed in generating stories (Berman and Slobin 1994). In other words, narratives provide fruitful venues for researchers to seek for the most sophisticated linguistic devices that children have in their repertoire. Whether conceptualized primarily as an indicator of development in self-related, cognitive-conceptual, or linguistic areas, narrative discourse is central to the interface of all these specific developments.

As Nelson (2003) aptly suggests, narrativizing personal experiences is a way of establishing shared meaning, often engendered by social functions. Adults tell narratives to one another to inform, to warn, or to entertain, i.e., with socially interactive and culturally relevant goals in mind. The conversational analysis literature examining adults' multi-party discourse finds that conversational narratives can be occasioned by a range of social goals that emerge in the ongoing flow of the interactional context (Jefferson 1978; Sacks 1972; Schegloff 1997).

Although the literature on adults' storytelling has examined such social functions of narratives, work with children has mostly focused on the development of structural competence rather than the contexts that occasion narrative talk. The cognitive developmentalists (Mandler 1982; Rumelhart 1975; Stein and Glenn 1979; Thorndyke 1977) led the way in working on children's narratives, seeking to lay out the developmental course of acquisition of pieces of universal story schemata such as settings and problem resolutions. Children's stories were judged in terms of completeness with respect to universal story structures found in adults' notions of stories.

More recently, the socio-cultural developmental viewpoint took up the study of narrative development by conceptualizing it as an interactive skill, which is acquired in the social context of everyday conversations (Eisenberg 1985; Fivush and Reese 1992; Gee 1991; Miller and Moore 1989; Nicolopoulou 1997; Ochs and Taylor 1992; Peterson and McCabe 1994; Snow 1990). One of the offshoots of this approach, the social interactionist perspective, has shown to us that the qualities of parent–child discussion of the events that the child participates in plays crucial roles in organizing children's own memories as encoded in their narratives (Haden et al. 2001; Nelson and Fivush 2004; Reese 2002). A large body of research has accumulated on the influence of children's narrative interactions with their parents on the development of their storytelling capacities. Peterson and McCabe (2004; see also Peterson et al. 1999) have shown that the degree of variability in families' narrative exchanges with their children predicts the children's own narrative competence. Fivush and colleagues (Fivush and Fromhoff 1988; Fivush

et al. 1996) have demonstrated that parents who use an elaborative style in talking about past events with their children lead to children who themselves produce relatively more richly structured narrative discourse when asked to narrate. In these views, parents are seen as scaffolding and modeling culturally prevalent styles of storytelling to their offspring during interactions of collaborative remembering.

How other (i.e., non-parental) everyday relationships of young children affect their narrative performance and competence in collaborative remembering episodes is not studied as extensively as family narratives (Pratt and Fiese 2004). My research with Turkish-speaking children has examined the communicative practices that engender narrative talk in the institutional settings of preschools. The social relations in preschools include a few teachers and multiple peers. The physical environment is often filled with materials such as blocks, art supplies, puzzles, books, and other toys. Thus, under what conditions do children engage in narration about past personal experiences in an environment filled with attractive objects and multiple potential conversational partners? The basic question in my research in Turkish preschools concerned the *functions* and the *forms* of naturalistically occasioned narratives in children's interactions in the peer group. I found that the formal complexity of narrative discourse that children produced was often dependent on socially relevant functions emerging in children's multi-party interactions. When child narrators told self-related stories, these stories served to "interactionally position" (Wortham 2000) themselves with respect to prior narration, often leading to richer content and more elaborated narrative structures than those included in preceding talk-in-interaction. Such interactions often lead to rounds of narratives, as established in previous work (Küntay and Ervin-Tripp 1997; Küntay and Şenay 2003). In this chapter, I will focus on how multi-party interactions with peers and teachers gave rise to certain social functions such as one-upmanship, which, in turn, led to increasingly more sophisticated discourse forms in subsequent storytellers.

Method

Research setting

The talk-in-interaction corpora examined in this chapter include naturally occasioned narratives collected from Turkish preschool children as part of fieldwork conducted in two preschools in İstanbul. These two preschools are described by the pseudonyms Ubaruz School and Eryavuz School. Almost all of the children in the Eryavuz School had

Table 11.1. *Distribution of participants by center, age, and gender*

	Eryavuz Center		Ubaruz Center	
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female
3- to 4-year-olds	11	2	5	1
5- to 6-year-olds	7	5	8	7

families of higher middle to upper class socio-economic backgrounds. The Ubaruz School catered to the children of the staff of a big university, and therefore included children of more heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds. The preschools selected for the study were both educationally, rather than custodially, oriented (Kağıtçıbaşı et al. 1988). A preschool educational program called High/Scope (Hochmann et al. 1979) was implemented at both of the sites. The High/Scope system divides the curriculum into Circle Time, Planning-of-Working Time, Working Time, Remembering-of-Working Time, and Small Group Time.

Participants

The research design was maximally inclusive of all the children who were attending either of the two preschools during the course of the field study. Overall, there were forty-six three- to six-year-old children participating in the study, twenty-five from the Eryavuz School and twenty-one from the Ubaruz School. Table 11.1 summarizes the gender and age distributions of the participants in each of the preschools.

Data collection

The field studies in each of the preschools continued for two and a half months. I visited the preschools for two to three days a week throughout the course of the study. In the first week of the study, I familiarized myself with the spatial and temporal arrangements of the schools. In the meantime, the children became accustomed to my presence in various contexts. At the end of a week in each of the preschools, I started audio-recording (and occasionally videorecording) various organized and free-time activities. Some of the recorded settings were free-time activities during which children sat around and got involved in some loosely structured activity. Others were more formal classroom settings, where the teachers elicited and shaped participation on previously established topics. For this chapter, sixty hours of recordings are included.

All the recorded data were transcribed. The transcripts included descriptions of the settings, the participants, and the nonverbal interactions.

Identification of narrative rounds   Children's talk displays many different types of extended discourse (Berman 1995; Preece 1987) that might lead to multiple and conflicting definitions of narrative (Ervin-Tripp and Küntay 1997), and often is hard to differentiate from other genres of discourse (Küntay 2004). In this study, a broad working definition of narrative was adopted in order to take into account minimal narrative-like discourse that is frequently observed in child discourse. Sperry and Sperry (1996) define "a *minimal narrativelike displaced sequence* as any topic-centered discourse containing at least one asserted verb about a displaced action and one other asserted utterance relevant to the topic" (pp. 445–46). In accordance with this definition, two criteria were used in extracting narrative segments from the recordings: (1) whether the discourse is extended, that is, whether there is more than one utterance referring to the recounted event, and (2) whether the discourse refers to personally experienced events that are temporally displaced in the past or in the future. The segments of talk that include both of these criteria were included in the analysis as narratives. Although narratives are often thought to concern real or pretend memories that refer to past events (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Polanyi 1989), children's talk also includes hypothetical narratives set in the future tense (McCabe 1997). The criterion of encoding past events has not been unequivocally accepted by all past researchers as a necessary indicator of narrativity (Ervin-Tripp and Küntay 1997; McCabe 1997; Ochs et al. 1989). Accordingly, the present study includes narratives of events that refer both to past and future events, although most narratives in the data concerned the past.

In order to locate sequences of narratives in the transcripts, two coders independently read over the datasets and marked off extended talk about past or future events. The next step for both of the coders was to consider the context of the narrative to determine whether further narratives could be located. Those narratives that are preceded and/or succeeded by narratives from other participants were included in the analysis as parts of rounds of narratives. Ninety-five rounds of narrative, fifty-two from the Eryavuz corpus and forty-three from the Ubaruz corpus, were identified.

Findings and discussion

In previous work (Küntay and Şenay 2003), I examined the different ways children achieve thematic relevance with prior stories. In this

chapter, I will elaborate on how a certain social goal of "one-upmanship" appears to characterize the activity of rounds of narration. One-upmanship in this context refers to modeling on and attempting to outperform the discourse specimen provided by a peer.

As Kyratzis (1999) reports in her study of American preschoolers, personal narratives were rare in peer-to-peer talk in the Turkish pre-school settings. There was only one such narrative in the entire corpus, about a boy's adventures in a computer game that was told exclusively to a peer, who did not show much interest in being the designated addressee. The children spent most of their unsupervised time in playing with toys and role play, showing a dispreference for talk-centered activities such as storytelling. Only when an adult was present and willing to allow for extended turns from the children, did they show an interest in recountings of personal experiences. The presence of peers in the same setting led to rounds of narratives, where children took turns in claiming and counterclaiming the floor from one another in telling about frag-ments of experiences. Such interactions took place during mealtimes or Circle Time, where groups of five to ten children sat around their teacher to conduct a certain function such as eating or discussing a prespecified topic. In the next two sections, I will demonstrate the role of teachers and the role of peers in this activity through the analysis of talk-in-interaction during the rounds.

Role of teachers

The teachers acted as the managers of these multi-party interactions, and thus determined the timing and extent of storytelling behavior, both through nonverbal and verbal behavior. Excerpt 1 happened during Circle Time, before the teacher (T1) had a chance to initiate the topic of the day. The child participants are a boy age 3;10 (Can) and a girl age 4;1 (Beril). Although there are five more children participating in the activity, it is clear who the child narrators are designating as their preferred addressee from the summons they employ in (1) and (4) (i.e., *öğretmenim* "teacher"). The first narrator, Can, launches a narrative about his unsupervised swimming adventures in the sea (1–2), which is a remarkable childhood experience by any standard. The teacher responds to the story by a positive evaluation (3). Right after this enthusiastic uptake by the teacher, the second narrator captures the teacher's attention through a double summons (4), and chimes in with a relevant story about her own swimming-related activities. The second child holds the floor for many turns, elaborating on the previously introduced theme of independent swimming, which was already approved by the teacher.

Because of Beril's successful taking over of the floor, Can initially has to leave his account uncompleted. After a few unsuccessful attempts to reclaim the floor (which happens in parts not included here), Can returns to the same theme in (25), offering some elaborations. It is clear that it is the teacher who ends this round (and the Circle Time encompassing it) in a formulaic way (33) after asking for any contributions from the group of children (28–29, 31).

Excerpt 1 (Ubaruz data)

1	CAN:	*öğretmenim ben- ben arabada banyomu – mayomu giydim*[1]
		teacher, I – I in the car my bath – I put on my swimming suit
2		= *sonra da denizde kendim yüzdüm*
		and then I swam by myself in the sea
3	TI:	*çok güzel*
		very nice!
4	BERIL:	*öğretmenim öğretmenim,*
		teacher teacher.
5		*bi kere biz havuza gitmiştik.*
		once we went to the pool
6		*mayomu giydim,*
		I wore my swimming suit
7		*sonra bi atladım,*
		then I jumped immediately
8		*kendim yüzdüm,*
		I swam by myself
9		*annem de gelmedi.*
		and my mother did not come
10		*za- oraya gittim sonra,*
		I went there then
11		*sonra tekrar atladım,*
		then I jumped again
12		*sola gittim.*
		I went to the left
13		*bi daha atladım.*
		I jumped again

[1] Transcription symbols used: (1) "=" = latching on previous turn, (2) underlining = stressed word, (3) "," = continuing intonation, (4) "." = final intonation, (5) ".." = short pause, (6) "-" = self-correction, (7) "(0.5)" = half a second's pause, (8) "((xxxx))" = observer/researcher commentary or contextual notes, (9) "(.)" = very brief pause, (11) "hhhh" = laughter, (12) ":" = vowel lengthening.

14		*sonra da.. a şey ee simidin üstüne geldim*
		and then.. aa I climbed over the life buoy
15		*sonra tekrar düştüm havuza,*
		then I again fell into the pool
16		*yüzdüm*
		I swam
17		*bi daha üste geldim*
		again I came over to the top
18		*bi daha düştüm*
		again I fell
19		*çıktım o zaman*
		that time I got out
20		*sonra küçük denize- küçük havuza gittik*
		then we went to the little sea- little pool
21		*yüzdük*
		we swam
22		*sonra da (0.5) orda sisi gördüm arkadaşlarımla beraber.*
		and then I saw the fog together with my friends
23	T I:	*öyle mi?*
		is that so?
24		*korkmadın mı?*
		weren't you afraid?

[Thirty-nine lines of intervening talk about swimming, where other participants chime in with some talk about swimming. One child offers a future planning narrative, describing his future projected activities regarding swimming.]

25	CAN:	*öğretmenim babam da denizde beni kendi yüzdürüyodu ama*
		teacher my father too was helping me swim in the sea but
26		= *ben de kendim yüzemedim.*
		(as for me) I also could not swim by myself
27		*ama babam beni bırakmıyordu*
		but my father was not letting go of me
28	T I:	*şimdi*
		now
29	T I:	*başka bişey söylemek istiyomusunuz?*
		do [you] want to say anything else? ((addressed to the whole group))

30	CAN:	*ha:yı:r*
		no:
31	TI:	*yokmu?*
		Nothing?
32	CAN:	*ı-ıh*
		no
33	TI:	*beraber saatimiz bu kadarla sona ersin*
		let our circle time end with this much

In addition to managing the allocation of the floor to the child partici-
pants, what is the role of the teacher in such narrative interactions? In
other words, how does the teacher's presence lead to such rounds of
narratives? Once the theme of an original story captures the teacher's
attention, other children generate their own personal narratives around
the theme that is already accepted. In attempts to talk more than and/or
outperform the previous narrator, subsequent storytellers often produce
more elaborate and structurally complex narratives. Thus, complex nar-
rative structures are displayed, with the support of culturally meaningful
social relations such as child–teacher relationships embedded in the
institutional framework of preschools. Often, and especially in organized
classroom interactions such as that detailed in Excerpt 1, the topical
agenda is set up by the teacher in advance. Even if a child speaker
manages to take the floor from the teacher, the tone of the teacher's
response to this initiation is crucial in determining whether the partici-
pants can sustain thematically similar talk.

Yet, to increase their chances of relevance, the children have to pay
attention to what the previous speaker has been saying, not only to the
teacher's reaction to it. In what ways children use their peers' prior talk
as a bridge into their own contributions is the topic of the next section.

Role of peers

Although peer-to-peer narration is scarce, the effect of other peers in
the setting is conspicuous in these rounds of narratives. First of all, the
stories of other children in the group constitute cues for subsequent
stories. Children participating in group activities seem to feel an urge
to pull out a relevant experience from their personal narrative repertoire
once a first story gets told. Secondly, often the subsequent storyteller
enacts his or her story using a more elaborate structure than the pre-
ceding one(s). Excerpt 2 is a case in point. The participants in this round
are two boys (4;10 and 4;11), and the adult researcher. In this excerpt,
we see that the adult prompts Hakkı to provide a resolution (3) and to

evaluate his feelings (5) about the events presented in his original story (1–2). When Ethem, the second storyteller, launches a similar story (8–10), he spontaneously provides a resolution (11–12) and indicates his internal response (13). The adult's intervention in the first story appears to have resulted in the subsequent story being developed further to include the elaborations that the adult was seeking in the first child's version. That is, the structural elements prompted into the narration of other children by adult participants are often spontaneously introduced into the discourse of subsequent children. Thus, the components of peers' narrations are filtered through the mediation of the adult into subsequent storytellers' discourses, leading to more elaborate narratives by subsequent participants across conversational time.

Excerpt 2 (Eryavuz data)

1	HAKKI:	*ben bi kere hasta olmuştum,*
		once I got sick
2		*bana iğne yaptılar.*
		they gave a shot to me
3	ADULT:	*aa! sonra*
		oh! then
4	HAKKI:	*o iğneyi eeee- batırınca kendime geldim.*
		that needle, mmm- when they inserted it, I got better
5	ADULT:	*acıdımı?*
		did it hurt?
6	HAKKI:	*acımadı.*
		it did not hurt
7		*hiç acımadı.*
		it did not hurt at all
8	ETHEM:	*bi kerecik de ben ameliyat olmuştum,*
		once I also had a surgery
9		*orda da iğne- iğne yapmışlardı,*
		there also needle- they also gave me a shot
10		*bırakmışlardı o iğneyi kolumda,*
		they left that needle in my arm
11		*öyle gitmi- gittiler,*
		and lef- left
12		*öyle durup kalması gerekmiş,*
		(the needle) needed to stay put like that
13		*ben de onun için hiç ağlamadım.*
		and therefore I did not cry at all

In these rounds of narratives, there appears to be an urge to relate a personal experience relevant to the topic at hand. Excerpt 3, for example, follows twenty-two lines of two other children telling the teacher about their respective visits to the doctor. Osman, a boy aged 4;2, contributes with a report of the non-occurrence of the topical event in his life. By reporting that his mother did not take him to the doctor, Osman justifies why he does not participate in the group activity of a story round. Since he does not have a relevant experience that he can employ to tie in to the previous themes included in the other's stories, he will not be able to relate a relevant story, but still supplies a turn.

> *Excerpt 3 (Ubaruz data)*
> OSMAN   annem beni doktora götürmedi
>   my mother did not take me to the doctor

In these rounds of narratives, second narrators often claimed to have exactly the same experience as first narrators. Since such claims led the first narrators to relinquish the floor to another child, the transitions were often contentious. Excerpt 4 is an example, where Mert (5;10) relates an experience, which Hasan (5;1) tries to emulate in a subsequent story. Mert challenges Hasan about the accuracy of his reported experience (5–6), which is the basis for his demand for the floor (4). In (11), Mert bluffs Hasan by offering a forced-choice question to which neither alternative is the right answer. The interaction continues, with the dispute escalating and Mert telling Hasan to shut up. Later, Mert complains that it is always only Hasan who is telling stories.

> *Excerpt 4 (Eryavuz data)*
> 1   MERT: *Famecity'e gittim,*
>   (I) went to Famecity
> 2   *orda yeni bi oyun çıkmış,*
>   there, there was a new game
> 3   ADULT: *haa*
>   mmmh
> 4   HASAN: *aa ben o oyunu oynadım*
>   oh, I played that game
> 5   MERT: *oynadın*
>   you played
> 6   *nasıldı?* ((challenging tone))
>   how was it? ((challenging tone))
> 7   HASAN: *çok iyiydi*
>   (it) was very good

8	MERT:	*nasıl bişeydi?* ((challenging tone))
		what kind of a thing was it? ((challenging tone))
9	HASAN:	*yani çok değişik bi oyun*
		well, a very different game
10	ADULT:	*tamam sen anlat Mert*
		OK, you tell (us), Mert
11	MERT:	*yumurtanın içinde baykuş mu çıkıyodu (.) kuş mu?*
		was (an) owl or (a) bird coming out of the egg?
12	HASAN:	*kuş çıkıyodu. ((hh))*
		(a) bird was coming out
13	MERT:	*hayır ikisi de değil*
		no, none of those
14		*civciv çıkıyodu*
		(a) chick was coming out
15	ADULT:	*hhhhhhh*

This excerpt is a good illustration of the interactional strategies used by preschool-age narrators in managing their position in group talk. One way to seize the floor and assert one's own position is to interrupt the co-participant and state that you have had a similar experience to that just reported, as demonstrated by Hasan in excerpt 4. Another tactic is to challenge the accuracy of the reported experience, eliminating the justification for the co-participant's embarkation on a long stretch of discourse, as demonstrated by Mert in 6, 8, and 11.

Conclusions

Both adults and peers contribute to the socialization of narrative competence in young Turkish children. Adults conduct their role by initiating topics, and selectively attending to and helping to sustain certain topics initiated by children. Peers, on the other hand, provide skeletal narratives which other children as narrators build upon. In sum, children weave in both components from other children's narratives and adults' responses to these materials, while working towards becoming competent narrators in this subculture.

Narrative discourse is often seen as the pinnacle of autonomous and complex language production in children. In addition, selves and autobiographical memories are often conceptualized as being reflected and constructed in narrative discourse. In such ways development of narrative competence can be thought mainly to contribute to the development of

individuation. Yet, when we examine the microgenesis of narrative inter-actions, we are struck by the extent to which social interactions with peers and adults play a role in fostering narrative competence. These rounds of narratives allow juxtaposing of self-experiences with those of others, contributing to the relatedness aspect of self in addition to individuation.

An issue that does not get enough attention in the literature about narrative development is how non-parental social relations and inter-actions contribute to the development of autobiographical narrative, and, in turn, to that of autobiographical memory and self knowledge. Although parental interactions play an important role in scaffolding and encouraging autonomous narrative discourse in children's homes, com-municative practices and social organizations in preschools call for paying attention to what is scaffolded in other children's discourse by significant adults such as teachers. Thus, the social roles vis-à-vis peers and teachers, and the interactive goals originating from these social roles, prompt children to develop narrative discourse, often emulating similar struc-tures approved in prior talk. In these rounds of narratives, Turkish preschool children seek to display themselves interactionally through preferred identities such as a "well-behaved boy" or a "swimmer girl." How the significant adults responded to the interactional positioning of peers as previous speakers is crucial in determining the form that subsequent narratives take.

This work shows that children develop the ability to produce auto-nomous narratives in relational contexts and with relational aims, con-tributing to the idea of "the autonomous-relational self" as proposed by Kağıtçıbaşı (1996, 2007). In other words, narrative competence, though often conceived as an individualized skill, runs its course of development within a rich medium of human relatedness. How these relational con-texts unfold in different institutional and cultural settings, then, must be crucial in determining the eventual contour that narrative competence assumes as well as how the self is construed through autobiographical reminiscing.

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