

How Children Talk about Conversations: Development of Roles and Voices

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How could a child talk about a conversation she heard recently? She could reproduce the conversation verbatim with direct quotations and omit any references to the speaker. Or she could frame the quotations and indicate to the listener who said what to whom. She could also use markers that evaluate the conversational exchange between the two speakers. This study investigates these and other possible ways Turkish children report conversations and how these reports change with age. The different ways of talking about conversations might reflect the child's different stages of social-communicative development. That is, the child might establish different roles and voices in a narrative situation using different ways to talk about conversations.

Previous studies on children's ability to talk about talk have been conducted by Goodell & Sachs (1992) and Hickmann (1982). They have studied the acquisition of different reporting styles of English by children 4 to 10 years of age. In particular they have investigated the use of a) unframed direct quotations (i.e., "I want to go to the movies.") b) framed direct quotations (i.e., John said, "I want to go to the movies.") c) framed indirect quotations (i.e., John said that he wanted to go to the movies.) and d) paraphrases of the original quote (i.e., John wanted to go to the movies.). Goodell & Sachs found that the use of the framed direct quotations increased linearly with age. However, framed indirect quotations followed a U-shaped function : 6-year olds displayed fewer correct indirect forms than did either 4 or 8-year olds. Hickmann examined the developmental progression of these reporting styles on the basis of discourse organization. The data indicated that the 4-year olds used unframed direct quotations or paraphrases of what they had heard throughout the discourse. In contrast, within the reported discourse 7 and 10- year olds initially used paraphrases but then shifted to the use of framed direct quotations. This shift was strongly demarcated in the reported discourse. Adults integrated framed direct and indirect quotations with paraphrases throughout their reports.

The focus of the above studies was on how children reported *individual utterances* (i.e., John said, "I want to go to the movies"). This study investigates the use of different reporting styles by children as done previously. In addition, it investigates how children report the interaction between two speakers' utterances in a conversational exchange. Therefore in this study, reporting a *pair of utterances* (adjacency pair) uttered by two speakers becomes an important unit (i.e., John said, "Reading a newspaper is a good idea." So Mary asked, "Why don't you go and get a newspaper?") That is, how does the child organize his reported discourse as exchanges between a speaker and an addressee?

In order to talk about speech events and reorganize information to orient a listener to the relevant properties of a conversational exchange the child needs to acquire and use several linguistic devices. The main linguistic devices for reporting utterances are a framing clause and its constituents. A framing clause (i.e., X said "...") usually consists of a subject in the form of a proper noun or pronoun (i.e., John said, "...", or He said, "..."), a verb of saying (i.e., John said, "...", or John asked, "...") and, a connectivity marker (i.e., "... But John said "..."). The latter device is important if the frame is in a discourse because it marks explicitly the relationship between two speakers' utterances. The differential usage of these devices might help the child inform a listener about: 1) what was said 2) who said it, and 3) what was the interaction between two speakers' utterances in the conversational exchange. The linguistic devices used to orient listeners will be discussed below with regard to their counterparts in Turkish since they are important in children's mastery of reporting conversations.

What was said

The main linguistic devices for reporting what was said are the previously discussed unframed direct quotations, framed direct quotations and framed indirect quotations. The examples given below illustrate the similar reporting styles in Turkish:

Unframed direct quotation

- (1a) Filme gid-iyor-um"
 movie-to go-PRES-1stSg.
 "I am going to the movie"

Framed direct quotation

- (1b) John "Filme gid-iyor-um" dedi.
 John "movie-to go- PRES-1stSg " say-PAST- 3rdSg
 John said, "I am going to the movie".

As Turkish is a SOV language, the subject (John) of the frame clause is placed before the quoted utterance and the verb (dedi) comes at the end.

Framed indirect quotation

- (1c) John filme git-tig-i-ni soyledi
 John movie-to go-NOM-POSS-ACC tell-PAST- 3rdSg.
 John told his going to the movie.
 John said that he was going to the movie.

In the form of framed indirect quotation the verb of the quoted utterance takes a nominalization, a possessive suffix and an accusative suffix. The verb of saying also changes from *dedi* 'said' to *soyledi* 'told'.

Who said it

To specify who said the utterance and to mark a turn change, proper names may be used as subject markers in the frame clause (i.e., *John* said, "...") An example of the use of proper names in Turkish frame clauses is given below:

- (2a) *John* "... dedi. *Mary* "... dedi.
 John "... say-PAST-3rdSg *Mary* "... say-PAST-3rdSg

In Turkish, the use of proper names especially marks the turn shifts because their usage contrasts with other types of frame clause in which the pronoun is inflected in the verb of saying. This indicates that the use of a proper name or pronoun in a frame clause is optional and is used as a discourse marker (2a) vs (2b):

- (2b) *John* "... dedi. "... dedi.
 John "... say-PAST-3rdSg "... say-PAST-3rdSg

What was the interaction between two speakers' utterances in the conversational exchange.

In reporting conversations, the interaction between the two speakers can be marked in terms of agreement-disagreement, or question-answer relations. To mark the interaction, non-generic verbs of saying may be used (i.e., *John* agreed) instead of the generic ones (i.e., 'say'). Also, temporal and evaluative connectivity markers (i.e., Then *John* said, "... or However, *John* answered, "...") in the framing clause serve as markers of interaction. A typical usage of the connectivity markers in Turkish is shown in the example below:

- (3a) *Mary* "... dedi. *Ama John* "... dedi.
 Mary "... say-PAST-3rdSg. *But John* "... say-PAST-3rdSg
 Mary said, "...". *But John* said, "...".

In addition, Turkish has a special connective, *de*, that is frequently used in reporting conversations. The closest translation of this connective into English could be 'in turn'. It is used for pairing of utterances between two speakers when there is a switch in reference. It is placed after the proper name in the framing clause of the second speaker's quote:

- (3b) *Bert* "Cok sikici bir gun" dedi. *Ernie de* "Evet" dedi.
 Bert "Very boring a day" sayPAST3Sg. *Ernie in turn* "yes" sayPAST 3Sg
 Bert said "It is a very boring day" *Ernie, in turn, said,* "Yes"

Table 1 summarizes the above linguistic devices used for reporting conversations.

Table 1

Summary of Linguistic Devices Used for Reporting Conversations

What was said. Unframed Direct Quotation, Framed Direct Quotations
Framed Indirect Quotations

Who said it. Proper Names in the frame clause

What was the interaction between two speakers' utterance. Use of Verbs of Saying, Connectivity Markers (Temporal, Evaluative and, *de* (special Turkish connective))

Let us now turn to the study designed to investigate the children's mastery of these reporting styles.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 48 children half of whom were boys. Subjects were distributed, 16 each, into three age groups of median ages 5.2, 9.4, and 13.1. Hereafter their groups are referred to by the numerals 5, 9 and 13. All subjects were monolingual Turkish speakers.

Materials

Each child saw a Sesame Street videotape of a Bert and Ernie dialogue which was one minute in length. The dialogue is reproduced in Table 2 and provided the subjects with the conversation situation.

Table 2

The original version of Bert (Budu) and Ernie (Edi) dialogue in Turkish

1 **Edi:** Budu, ne kadar sikici bir gun degil mi?

2 **Budu:** Dogru, haklisin Edi.

3 **E:** Fazlasiyla sakin

4 **B:** Evet, cok tatsiz bir gun

5 **E:** Mmmm, canim sikildi

6 **B:** Benim de. Aslinda benim canim ne istiyor biliyor musun Edi? Gazete okumak.

7 **E:** Hey! Bu harika bir fikir.

8 **B:** Degil mi?

9 **E:** Hadi oyleyse bakkala gidip, bir gazete alip geliver.

10 **B:** Olmaaz !

11 **E:** Neden olmaz Budu?

12 **B:** Cunku dun de ben gittim. Daha onceki gun de ben gittim

13 **E:** Dogru, haklisin. Kac gundur hep sen gidiyorsun.

14 **B:** O yuzden Edi, bugun bakkala sen gideceksin. Bakkaldan gazete alma sirasi senin.

15 **E:** Oldu...

(English Translation)

1 **Ernie:** Bert, what a boring day isn't it?

Table 2 continued

- 2 Bert: Yes, you're right, Ernie.
 3 E: It's too dull.
 4 B: Yes, it is an unpleasant day.
 5 E: Mmmmm, I'm bored.
 6 B: Yes me too. Do you know what I want Ernie? To read a newspaper.
 7 E: Gee! That's a wonderful idea, Bert!
 8 B: Isn't it?
 9 E: Then go to the store and, buy a newspaper.
 10 B: No way!
 11 E: Why not Bert?
 12 B: Because I went the other day. I went also the day before that.
 13 E: That's right. You have been going all the time.
 14 B: That's why, you will go to the store today, Ernie. It's now your turn to buy the newspaper.
 15 E: O.K.

Instructions

Each child was tested individually. The child was told that she would see a Bert and Ernie movie. Her task was to tell "what happened in the movie" to a friend who was waiting outside. The child saw the videotape twice. Then the friend entered the room and the child was told to tell what happened in the movie. The retelling was audio taped.

Results

The results are organized into two main parts. In the first part, the data analysis of childrens' reports is presented according to age. In this part the results of the analysis are discussed in terms of the linguistic devices used by children to inform their listener about a) what was said b) who said it c) what was the interaction between two speakers' utterances. In the second part, the representative reports by children from each age group are presented to indicate how children talked about conversations.

What was said

The mean proportions of sentences with unframed direct quotations, framed direct quotations and, framed indirect quotations in three age groups are given in Table 3.

Table 3
 Proportions of Unframed Direct Quotations, Framed Direct Quotations, Framed Indirect Quotations According to Age

Age Group	Unframed Quotations	Framed Direct Quotations	Framed Indirect Quotations	Total Number of Quotations
5	.52	.49	0	243
9	.07	.89	.04	247
13	.09	.58	.35	218

Table 3 reveals the reporting style favored by each age group. Five-year olds used proportionately more unframed direct quotations than either of the two older groups. Framed direct quotations were used mostly by 9-year olds. Lastly, 13-year olds favored framed indirect quotations more than the other groups in their reports. Some of the framed direct quotations used by 9-year olds seem to be replaced by indirect quotes in 13 year olds' reports.

Who said it

The mean proportion of turn changes marked by the speakers' proper names (i.e., Bert said "...") is given below.

Table 4

Proportion of Turns with Speaker Names According to Age

Age Group	Turns with speaker names	Total number of turns
5	.03	149
9	.74	178
13	.71	167

The table shows that 5-year olds rarely marked the turn changes with speaker names in the frame clause. That is, children in this age group did not indicate to their listeners who said what. Whereas 9- and 13- year olds marked turn changes using speaker names very frequently in their reports.

What was the interaction between two speakers' utterances

Figure 1 illustrates each age group's preference for verbs of saying to mark the interaction in the conversational exchange. The mean proportions were calculated for the generic verbs of saying (*dedi* 'said' and, *soyledi* 'told') and also the non generic ones like (ask, agree, etc.).

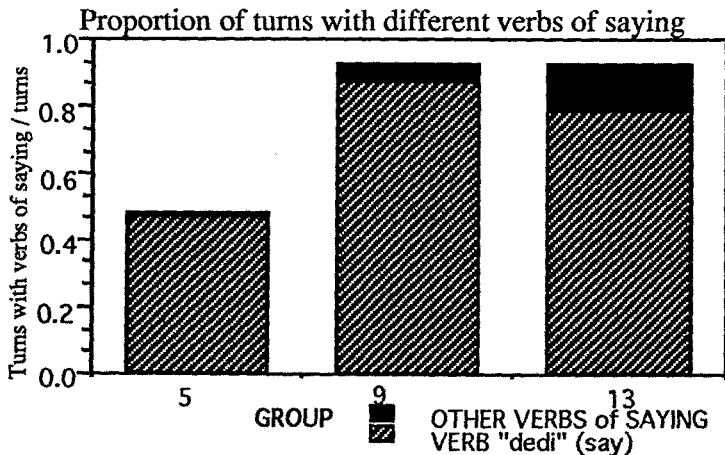


Figure 1: The mean proportions of turns with the generic and the non generic verbs of saying according to age group

As shown in Figure 1, 5-year olds used only the generic verbs of saying. That is they did not mark the interaction. Nine-year olds, included a small proportion (.05) of non-generic verbs in their reports. However, they used fewer non generic verbs than the 13-year olds (.14) who marked the interaction in the conversational exchange more than the other two groups.

Table 5 lays out the mean proportions of different connectivity markers to talk about the conversational exchange in different age groups.

Table 5
Proportion of Turns with Different Connectivity Markers

Age Group	Turns with temporal markers	Turns with <i>de</i>	Turns with evaluative markers	Total number of turns
5	.16	.10	0	149
9	.20	.40	.05	178
13	.15	.38	.13	167

Table 5 shows that all the age groups used the temporal marker in almost equal proportions. However, the special Turkish connective *de* was favored by 9- and 13-year olds more than by the 5-year olds. That is, these two groups marked the turn changes for the listeners consistently. Lastly, the evaluative markers (so, but etc.) were favored by the 13-year olds most. This allowed the oldest group to interpret the conversational exchange in terms of agreement-disagreement, or antecedent-consequence relations. Therefore the mean proportion of different connectivity markers reveal that there is a developmental increase in children's reports with regard to the use of the Turkish connective *de* and the evaluative markers.

Representative retellings by age

The representative retellings by children from each age groups are presented to summarize the characteristics of each group's reporting style.

Five-year olds

Children in this age group used primarily unframed direct quotations to report the conversational situation. Note that this style of reporting does not mark the turn changes or the relationship between the two speakers' utterances as shown in this example: (the turns are marked by double slash)

Example (Ayse, 5;2)

(4) "Canim cok sikiliyor." // "Benim de." // "Gazete okumak isterim."
// "Bay Z'nin dukkanindan gazete al" // "Nicin?" // "Cunku hep ben aliyorum." "Ertesi gun de ben almistim". "Ondan onceki gun de ben almistim" // "Aaa dogru".

Literal Translation

"I'm bored." // "Me, too." // " I want to read a newspaper." // " Get a newspaper from Mr. Z's store." // "Why?" // " Because I buy it all the time." " I bought it the other day." " I bought the day before that, too." // "That's right."

Nine-year olds

In contrast to the 5-year olds, the 9-year olds typically framed the quotations (Edi "Cok hareketsiz bir gun" dedi. Trans., Ernie said, "This is a boring day") and marked turns by using proper names in the frame clauses. They also used the Turkish connectivity marker *de* 'in turn' to mark the turn changes.

Example (Cem, 9;5)

(5) Edi "Cok hareketsiz bir gun" dedi. Budu de "Evet" dedi. Budu "En iyi fikir gazete okumak" dedi. Edi de "Evet, oyle" dedi. "Cok iyi bir fikir" dedi. "Hadi Budu, sen gidip Bay Z'nin dukkanından bir gazete alip gelir misin?" dedi. Budu de "Hayir, olmaz" dedi. "Cunku ben dun, dunden onceki gun ve ondan onceki gun de ben gitmistim" dedi. "Bugun sira sende" dedi. Edi de "Evet, bugun sira bende" dedi.

Literal Translation

Ernie said, "This is a boring day". Bert said, "Yes, you are right" Bert said, "To read a newspaper is a good idea". Ernie in turn said, "Yes, that's right." He said, "This is a wonderful idea". He said, "Bert, would you go and get a newspaper from the store?" Bert in turn said, "No way!". He said, "Because, I went the other day and the day before that". He said, "Now it is your turn to go". Ernie in turn said, "Yes, it is my turn to go."

Thirteen-year olds

In contrast, the 13-year olds used primarily framed indirect quotations (i.e., Ernie gunun cok sikici oldugunu soyledi. Trans., Ernie said that it was a boring day). They used a great variety of evaluative connectivity markers in the frames and non-generic verbs of saying. Therefore children in this group in addition to marking turn changes for the listener evaluated and marked the conversational exchange in terms of agreement- disagreement, antecedent-consequence or question-answer relations.

Example (Murat, 13;1)

(6) Edi gunun cok sikici oldugunu soyledi. Budu de ona hak verdi. Sonra Budu caninin gazete okumak istedigini soyledi. Bunun uzerine Edi ona Bay Z'nin dukkanina gidip gazete almasini soyledi. Ama Budu, bunu kendisinin yapmiyacagini cunku dun vi daha onceki gun kendisinin gazete aldigini soyledi. Sonra Edi'nin gazete almasini istedi. Edi de "tamam" dedi.

Literal translation

Ernie said that it was a very boring day. Bert agreed with him. Then Bert said that he wanted to read a newspaper. So, Ernie told him to go to Mr. Z's store and buy a newspaper. But, Bert said that he was not going to do it because he bought the newspaper yesterday and the day before that. Then he asked Ernie to get the newspaper. Ernie said, "O.K."

Discussion

The results indicate that there is a developmental change in children's ability to orient their listeners to different properties of a conversation. These findings support the literature that suggests that when children are learning to narrate they are learning about the requirements of narration as a conventional communicative form (i.e., Bamberg 1986)

The linguistic devices discussed above may help the child to establish different roles and voices in a narrative situation reflecting different stages of social-communicative development. The respective notions of *participant role* and *authorial voice* in discourse have been developed by Goffman (1981), Hanks (1990) and Bakhtin (Voloshinov 1973) respectively. Participant role is the stance or alignment which speaker takes in relation to his utterance. Voice, on the other hand is defined as the attitude or evaluation a speaker expresses towards his utterance. These notions might provide us a framework for further analysis of children's reports of conversations in terms of their *social-communicative* development.

The distinction between the conversation situation and the narration situation is important. (Figure 2).

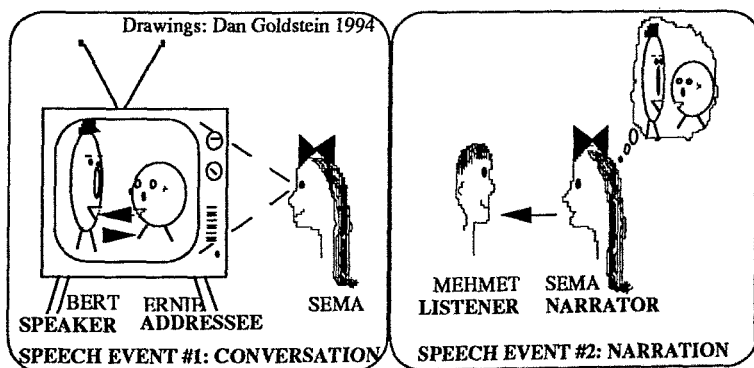


Figure 2: Conversation and narration situations

The figure displays speech event #1 as the conversation situation when the child (Sema) watches the conversation between Bert and Ernie (speaker and addressee). Speech event #2, is the narration situation when the child Sema narrates the conversation to a listener (Mehmet). Therefore a narration situation between a narrator (Sema) and a listener (Mehmet) transposes a conversation situation between two speakers (Bert and Ernie) from the conversation situation's time and place to that of the narration. Linguistic devices enable the differentiation of child's (Sema) 'role as a narrator' and, her 'authorial voice' in the narration situation as distinct from the 'roles' and 'voices' of the speakers (Bert and Ernie) in the conversation situation.

Five-year-olds merely reproduce the speech of others without any differentiation as to the narrator role (Sema) in the narrative situation from that of the speakers' roles (Bert and Ernie) in the conversation situation. This lack of differentiation of roles makes it difficult for the listener (Mehmet) to know who said what. As the child becomes aware of the need to orient the listener, she (Sema) begins to assume the narrator role and also differentiate between Bert and Ernie's roles in the reported conversation for the listener. Nine-year olds can express *narrator role* by framing the speakers' utterances and marking turn changes. Once the two speakers' roles (Bert and Ernie) are differentiated the interaction between them may now be marked. That is, the next developmental shift is one that moves from reporting of other's speech to involvement of the self as an author, as an interpreter of what was said. Here the child evaluates Bert and Ernie's utterances and the interaction between them using indirect reported speech, evaluative connectivity markers and non-generic verbs of saying. At this point, 13 year old narrator, Sema can express her attitude, *authorial voice* towards Bert's and Ernie's utterances and the relationship between them for the listener. She gradually becomes both the narrator and the author of the reported conversation in the narrative situation. Therefore the possible ways children talk about conversations reflect their stages of being social actors with language "... actively engaged in the construction of their social worlds." (Goodwin 1990, 283)

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