2 A Contemporary Perspective on the Developmental Continuum of Fictional Narrative Skills in DLLs over the Preschool Period

"Human beings, especially after the development of the verbal faculty, have constantly told stories, presented events and squeezed aspects of the world into narrative form" (Cobley, 2001, p. 2). As a result, it is not surprising that a wide range of overarching disciplines inform research on narrative, including but not limited to history, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and sociology. Before further discussing and exploring the role and scope of fictional narrative skills in DLLs as well as the current approaches and foci to the analysis of these skills, the domain to be investigated first requires specification in regards to the clarification of central terms and theoretical underpinnings.

As the current work is devoted to the study of oral fictional narrative skills displayed by preschool-aged DLLs and the support thereof via a peer-assisted intervention and is grounded in the scientific discipline of communication sciences and disorders, the theoretical backdrop presented in this section will mainly draw on linguistic, sociological, and developmental psychological aspects. The first sections of this chapter will be devoted to the *theoretical underpinnings of narrative production in child language*, where different views on narratives in early childhood will be discussed. After reflecting on *narrative as a mode for establishing and representing meaning through co-construction* (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1991; Lüdtke, 2012a), narrative will be discussed as a *form of decontextualized extended discourse* (e.g., Berman & Slobin, 1994; Curenton & Lucas, 2007), followed by a section on the *emergence of narrative* in a socio-emotional context, *based on a social-interactionist point of view*. After giving an *overview on the types of narratives produced by preschool-aged learners* (both mono- and dual-language), this work will focus on the study of *fictional narrative production in early childhood*, including the derivation of a *working definition*. Finally, drawing on current research evidence, an *overview of the development of fictional narrative competence over the preschool period* will be provided.

U. Licandro, *Narrative Skills of Dual Language Learners*, Diversität in Kommunikation und Sprache / Diversity in Communication and Language,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-14673-3_2

2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of Narrative Production in Child Language

The following sections will serve to examine the theoretical underpinnings of oral narrative production in the area of child language, by exploring aspects representative of the function and structural characteristics of narrative production in preschool-aged children, without becoming too invested in a restrictive definition.

2.1.1 Viewpoints on Narrative in Child Development

While the term is ubiquitous, *narrative* has resisted precise definition. Therefore, definitional and methodological approaches in research on "narrative" must be first addressed. In the scope of child language research, major theoretical approaches are presented here. The first to be explored, posits narratives in childhood as a central place of interaction, where shared meaning is established. Furthermore, narrative has been explored as a form of decontextualized extended discourse, providing insight into socio-emotionally relevant, decontextualized linguistic skills.

Narrative as a Mode for Establishing and Representing Meaning through Co-Construction

Several researchers emphasize the embeddedness and specificity of narrative composing practices as inherent to the organization of both thought and interpersonal communication.

Prominently, Bruner proposed a human propensity towards narrative and suggested that the mind structures its sense of reality through "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems" (1991, p. 3, also see 1990). Narrative is one of those products. Ultimately, he posits the narrative mode as an epistemological entity, which represents both a way of conversing about life and a means of knowing. As narratives are put forth as being fundamental to the storage and communicative interpretation of most episodic experiences and memories, "the structure of language and the structure of thought eventually become inextricable" (Bruner, 1991, p. 5). Narration, then, is an ontological condition of social life and constitutes an essential role in intersubjective communication, as it shapes the human organization of experience in "how we go

about constructing and representing the rich and messy domain of human interaction" (Bruner, 1991, p. 4).

Looking at narrative from a developmental psychological and emotion theory perspective allows one to consider the socio-emotional aspects of creating narrative, which can be found very early on in life, because the emerging intersubjective exchange between caretaker and child can be characterized as having narrative traits. In fact, Lüdtke (2012a) argues that the earliest stage of communication development emerges in utero, when mother and child will engage in an "intersubjective exchange of emotionally important proto-narratives" (p. 328), characterized by fetal movements stimulating the mother and triggering a "meaningful attunement from the mother's side […] via permanent monitoring- and evaluating-processes between the real or 'felt' [sic] and virtual or imagined infant and herself." (Lüdtke, 2012a, p. 329).

Right after being born, an infant will typically begin to engage in intersubjective exchange with her or his caretaker(s) as distinguished by the emotionally structured attunement of physical movements and vocal variations (e.g., Lüdtke, 2012a). On a daily basis, the infant will repeatedly participate in these types of interactive routines that socialize it to eventually incorporate culturally accepted, social-emotional interactive practices (e.g., Trevarthen, 2012). As Bruner proposed (1986), this interactive routine can be thought of as having a narrative structure; that is, a narrative of communicative action and not words. This early meaning attunement between child and caretaker by means of facial, gestural, and vocal expression is illustrated in Figure 1.

Similar to a linguistic narrative produced later in life, this co-constructive interactive routine serves as a meaning system for the child based on the sequencing of affective messages in the flow of socio-emotional interaction. The child comes to "know" that "this is what is happening; this is what will happen; and this is how it will feel" (Bruner, 1990, p. 81). This shared meaning system is established long before the child will engage in a narrative of words; in fact, it has been established that participation in this narrative of affective routines is a prerequisite for learning language (e.g., Trevarthen, 2012).

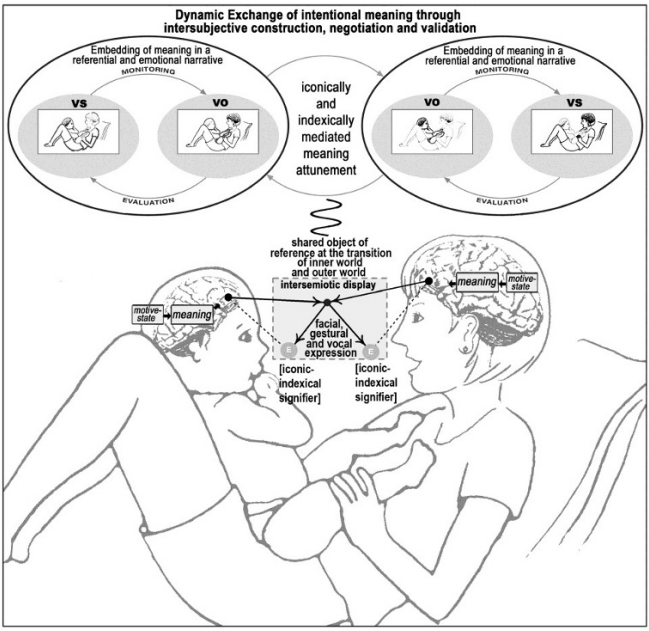

Figure 1. The Infant Stage: Iconically and Indexically Mediated Meaning Attunement (reprinted from Lüdtke, 2012a, p. 330). Copyright 2012 by John Benjamins. Reprinted with permission.

Children can therefore also employ narratives to make sense of experiences and relationships, i.e., "to deal with themes and concerns that preoccupy them emotionally" (Nicolopoulou, 2002, p. 121). For example, from the perspective of young children engaging in verbal discourse, Engel (1995) argued,

> We use stories to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives, to communicate with other people, and to develop relationships with them. We tell stories to become part of the social world, to know and reaffirm who we are.
>
> (p. 25)

While language in general helps organize experience, the delineation and description of past and/or fantastic scenarios (e.g., in pretend play) takes on an important role in integrating cognitively and socio-emotionally challenging problems, and it can act as a

tool for exploring the boundaries between improbable and probable events (Engel, 2005, 1995).

Narrative as a Form of Decontextualized Extended Discourse

Meanwhile, narrative can also be conceptualized as language "used to describe ideas, emotions, history, and heritage" (Curenton & Lucas, 2007, p. 378). More specifically, the historic, yet pervasive classification in child language research put forth by sociolinguist William Labov defines a narrative as describing a (single) event or experience that contains at minimum "a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered" (Labov, 1972a, pp. 360-361). In this capacity, narrative skills refer to the comprehension and production of socially and academically fundamental discourse-level language abilities as expressed in at least two cohesive utterances which, at their core, represent an action or a series of actions or events (Abbott, 2002), either real or imagined. Accordingly, instead of being streams of unrelated words or sentences, oral narratives can be characterized as coherent linguistic structures created by several linked utterances that refer to the production of a fictional or real account of an experience or an action (e.g., Berman & Slobin, 1994).

While narrative is generally referenced as a type of discourse in accord with conversation and exposition, it can be distinguished from the other two because it involves the monological production of multiple topic-centered and cohesive utterances (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011; Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Gosse, 2010). More specifically, narratives are a form of decontextualized extended discourse (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991), as the ability to produce a narrative demonstrates a child's ability to sustain a discussion about the world beyond the here and now (Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995).

In this capacity, oral narrative production can be treated as source of information about discourse level organization as well as productivity, word, and sentence level organizational skills of children (e.g., Justice et al., 2010). A narrative construction can be described in terms of the global structure of the entire narrative (often referred to as macrostructure) and at the level of discrete language skills, such as specific lexical and morpho-syntactical types the speaker chooses to compose the narrative (often referred

to as microstructure). Another special emphasis can be given on the linguistic means chosen to express the main character's viewpoint (often referred to as evaluative language use; for a detailed discussion of all three aspects, see section 3.3). The analysis of specific aspects included in narrative discourse has commonly been used in clinical and educational environments to track children's narrative development and to examine the role of influencing factors, such as expressive language and home language environment, on narrative production (for a review, see sections 2.2 and 3.4 in this work).

In summation, viewing narration as a mode for establishing and representing meaning, is an important vehicle for children in making sense of the world, establishing and maintaining relationships, and expressing their thoughts and feelings about important topics (e.g., Bruner, 1990, 1991). While recognizing the value of this perspective, the current work will be more concerned with the complexity and specific linguistic features expressed in independent oral narrative production of young DLLs, rather than focusing on the distinctive functional aspects of child narrative discourse or an in-depth analysis of the interactive practices framing this process[4]. Overall, the current work focuses on the child a narrator during the preschool years and is dedicated to the premise that even the most 'simple' of stories is embedded in a complex network of emerging cognitive, language and literacy skills.

Types of Narratives Produced by Preschool-Aged DLLs

Four basic types of oral narrative discourse have been identified in differential distribution across preschool-age children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including DLLs (for an overview, see Goldstein, 2000; Heath, 1986; Hedberg & Westby, 1993; Hughes, McGillivray, & Schmidek, 1997). These types include accounts and recounts of a salient personal experience (personal narratives), the narra-

[4] Also, while the current work acknowledges and highlights the socio-emotional function of narrative as an inherently interactive language practice, it is neither the goal nor a side quest of the current work to take a definitive stance on the controversy surrounding "narrative-as-knowledge and narrative-as-interactive moves" (cf., Bamberg, 1997, introduction), as it is beyond the scope of the discussion. It is however acknowledged that narratives, just as other communicative acts, cannot be viewed as independent from the narrator's social context (cf. Shiro, 2003).

tion of what-is-going-to-happen or what-is-currently-happening in pretend play (event cast; also see Melzer & Palermo, 2015), the verbalization of routine series of events (script narrative), and the construction of a made-up story[5], following the format of a storybook, fairy tale, myth, or fable (fictional narrative). Figure 2 presents all types, including examples for prompts, which might elicit these types of narrative and first sentences of narratives, respectively.

Through the exposure to and active engagement with narratives in these contexts, the child starts to acquire the pragmatic rules and organizing patterns that govern the use of the language outside of clear shared conceptual contexts (Ezell & Justice, 2005). Gradually, the child moves beyond the use of "exophoric or deictic devices used to ground reference and predication in the immediate perceptual context" towards "endophoric devices for grounding her acts of reference and predication in already recounted parts of the narrative" (Tomasello, 2003, p. 271).

Recount	**Account**	**Event Cast**	**Script Narrative**	**Fictional Narrative**
Prompted personal narrative	Unprompted reminiscing/ spontaneously produced personal narrative	"Broadcasting" or directing during pretend play activities	Verbalization of routines and common events/ activities	Made-up story
(e.g., "Tell Grandma what you did at preschool today.")	*(e.g., "Something similar happened to me yesterday. I went...")*	*(e.g., "You are going to be the teacher who leads the class. First, you will...")*	*(e.g., "What do you usually do when you arrive at preschool?")*	*(e.g., "Once, there was a boy and he had a pet frog. Suddenly,...")*

Figure 2. Types of Oral Narratives Produced by Monolingual and DLL Preschool-Age Children. Overview adapted from Goldstein (2000) and Hughes et al. (1997). Own examples were included.

[5] From a general linguistic standpoint, it is important to distinguish between story referring to "all the events that are to be depicted" (Cobley, 2001, p. 5) and narrative as "the showing or telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place" (Cobley, 2001, p. 6). However, in language acquisition research, the two terms narrating and storytelling have been used simultaneously (e.g., McCabe, Bliss, Barra, & Bennett, 2008). In fact, Heath (1986) referred to stories as a subtype of narrative (see Fig. 2), e.g., fairy tales or other fictional narratives that include fictionalized accounts of characters attempting to carry out a goal. Therefore, the terms story and storytelling will be applied here as a synonym in reference to fictional narratives.

This acquisition process is met by a gradual sophistication of early narratives with child narratives becoming increasingly more complex, both linguistically (Peterson & McCabe, 1983; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991) and socio-cognitively (Curenton, 2004, 2011). The child begins to realize that narratives are built around characters that encounter specific problems and that a narrative is embedded in a particular place or setting and has a linguistically expressed sequence (Vukelich & Christie, 2009).

2.1.2 The Emergence and Development of Narrative in a Socio-Emotional Context

Due to its reliance on lexical, morpho-syntactical and pragmatic skills, the development of narrative discourse abilities is a complex area of language acquisition. Therefore, much like other complex developmental areas, oral narrative competence does not emerge suddenly or automatically, but rather is acquired gradually in the context of socially and emotionally scaffolded[6] interactions. Still, it is remarkable how it only takes a few years for a typically developing child to advance from an engagement in preverbal interactions to the active use of sophisticated linguistic structures that allow for the construction of coherent stories in uninterrupted monologue at the end of the preschool period. The process framing this achievement is detailed below.

From a social-interactionist point of view (e.g.[7], Bruner, 1983, 1990; Papoušek, 1994; Tomasello, 1992, 2003; Tomasello & Farrar, 1986; also see section 7.2 in this work), a substantial body of research has sought to specify the interactive practices most effective in promoting and facilitating the development of linguistic skills. The main focus has been on features of adult-child interaction (in practice, most often mother-child interaction). Around the age of 2, parallel to the emergence of simple pretense play (e.g., Bretherton, 1989; Engel, 2005), children begin to talk about events outside of ongoing actions (Alamillo, Colletta, & Guidetti, 2013) in the context of early face-to-face conversations with their caregivers. Typically, these first narrative constructions

---

[6] In his original description, Bruner (1975) used the term "scaffolding" in reference to interactions between a parent and a child or between a tutor and a tutee, where the more knowledgeable partner (i.e., parent, tutor) provided just enough support based on the progress made by the child on an ongoing basis.

[7] Note that an ubandance of literature has been produced on this topic and only a selection of sources can be credited here.

involve single-phrase two-word utterances that are autobiographical in nature (McCabe, 1997), covering events in the recent past of the child while the interactional context is predominantly characterized by short conversational turns and frequent turn taking (Nelson, 2007; Ninio, 1988). As both elicitation and maintenance of early narratives rely heavily on scaffolding through prompts, hints, and questions (Miller & Sperry, 1988; Reese & Fivush, 1993), this emergent narrative practice has also been characterized as joint reminiscing (Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002; Tulviste, Tõugu, Keller, Schröder, & de Geer, 2016). Consequently, first linguistic narratives are in situ interactive efforts that bear more traits of social-emotional co-constructions (also see Sperry & Sperry, 1996) than independent performances. With conversational partners further providing structure through linguistic and/or emotional scaffolding, children gradually develop competency in extended speaking turns (Kelly & Bailey, 2012), also referred to as discourse, as characterized by multiple contingent sentences (Lucero, 2015; Pearson & de Villiers, 2005). Accordingly, this acquisition process can be conceptualized as not being simply governed by maturation, but rather by exposure to more sophisticated discourse models in scaffolded interactional spaces.

Researchers like Nicolopoulou (2002) have argued that this "one-sided picture of the "social context" [sic] of development must be expanded to take systematic account of the complementary role of children's peer relations" (Nicolopoulou, 2002, p. 119). As will also be argued later in this work, the notion of peers actively scaffolding each other's narrative acquisition process is one that should not be overlooked. This perspective is illustrated by excerpts from transcripts based on video recordings of DLLs co-constructing fictional narratives at their ECEC institution (see Examples 1 and 2; both appear in Licandro, 2014, p. 335)[8]:

Two 4-year-old girls, Selma and Yade, are sitting next to each other and flipping through the pages of a picture storybook. Both children both come from Turkish speaking families and are German language learners. In the recorded scenes, they only converse in German.

[8] Both examples were videotaped outside of the reported studies in this work. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the children. Direct translations to English were added by the author.

Shared book reading example 1

Selma: Hey!
Yade: Und die Stuhl is(t) dann kaputt!
[And then the chair is broken!]
Selma: (blickt zu Yade) Ja.
[(looks over to Yade) Yes.]
Yade: Dann is(t) sie auch traurig.
[Then she is sad, as well.]
Selma: Und und der weint jetzt.
[And and he is crying now.]
Yade: Ja und hier ist auch da kaputt.
[Yes and here is also broken there.]
Selma: Ja, da muss da da muss einer das heile machen. (blickt zu Yade)
[Yes, there someone has to there there has to fix it. (looks over to Yade).]

Selma initiates the turn with the exclamation "Hey!" which can be seen as a token to direct her partner's attention to a special feature of the story and/or a prompt to elaborate on the event. Yade reacts by picking up the cue and addressing the special event in the picture: the broken chair. Selma frequently looks over to Yade, perhaps in anticipation of a reaction to her own statement, as an indication that her turn is finished, or awaiting Yade's following turn. Using the term "Yes," Yade confirms Selma's statement, either formally or on the content-level, before conceptually expanding on the previously given information. In response, Selma reciprocally confirms Yade's notion of the broken chair, before moving on to suggesting a solution ("someone has to […] fix it").

The second example includes the same girls looking a different picture storybook depicting two children who are baking cookies.

Shared book reading example 2

Selma: Aber die die kann man jetz(t) essen!
[But you can eat them them now!]
Yade: Nein, erst mal backen!
[No, first baking!]

Selma: Im Ofen, ne? (blickt zu Yade)
[In the oven, right? (looks over to Yade)]
Yade: Ofen, ja.
[Oven, yes.]

Yade, who mentions that the cookies have to be baked first, rejects Selma's initial statement that the cookies are ready to eat. This example provides a glimpse into a process of active negotiation, which results in the co-creation of a new meaning. To sustain their interaction, Selma acknowledges her partner's prompt and formulates her question of where the cookies are going to be baked to either obtain her partner's concurrence regarding her statement, or, again, as a means of engagement. Yade directly repeats the lexical notion of "oven," accompanied with an agreement token, to display her concurrence. The narrative co-construction provides a space that "allows them to try out what they know and confirm and disconfirm use through peer assistance" (Philp, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014, p. 23). The girls pool their knowledge and negotiate content and lexical information as they jointly construct the story. This is a behavior can frequently be observed in the realm of peer interactions in ECEC settings (e.g., Küntay & Şenay, 2003).

Through continuous exposure and practice to a variety of narratives in scaffolded conversations and shared storybook reading at home and in ECEC (e.g., Collins, 2010; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Küntay & Şenay, 2003), children become increasingly competent at organizing monologic utterances into coherent and cohesive messages. As a result, their narratives grow progressively more complex in terms of length and topics, and they depend less on assistance from a conversational partner (Pearson, 2002). As can also be seen in the example stories, children start including the internal states (i.e., references to emotions, cognitions, intentions, and physical states) of main characters (Yade mentions the character being "sad"). Starting around the age of four, children typically become increasingly proficient in expressing characters' perspectives through these means (Aksu-Koç, 1994; see Flavell & Miller, 1998 for a review).

In summation, in their first years of life, children venture beyond personal accounts and begin to tell stories in play (Stadler & Ward, 2005), verbalize routines, and retell and relay (fictional) third-person accounts, including others' perspectives. Each of these types of narratives can be found in the preschool-aged DLL's repertoire, as further specified in the upcoming section.

2.1.3 On the Importance of Fictional Narrative Production in Early Childhood

In addition to contextualized language skills (i.e., referring to the here-and-now), it is also crucial for preschool-aged children to acquire decontextualized language skills (i.e., referring to the there-and-then) to be equipped for the linguistic challenges of conversational language use. This classic proposition was explicated by Snow (1991):

> One major function language serves is to enable negotiation of interpersonal relationships; the skills relevant to interpersonal negotiation are honed through face-to-face conversations in which speakers and hearers may draw upon such resources as shared knowledge, gesture, interactive negotiation of meaning, and listener feedback. These physically, socially, and historically *contextualized* [sic] uses of language contrast with uses of language to convey novel information to audiences who are at a distance from the speaker and who may share only limited amounts of background knowledge with the speaker
>
> (p. 7)

This type of *decontextualized* language can typically be found in expository and literary contexts. The production of oral narrative is therefore one central component of early literacy, which has been defined to consist of "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing […] and the environments that support these developments" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 849). For example, fictional storytelling underpins a large part of school curricula related to the teaching and practice of literacy skills and is commonly prevalent in, but not limited to, classroom activities that involve storytelling, summarizing, and retelling—both orally and written.

Narratives can serve as an effective teaching context that provides the opportunity to acquire decontextualized language skills for young children (Westby, 2005). As children learn to decontextualize their thought process from the immediate here-and-now

to mental representations of the there-and-then, fictional narratives also expose them to extended, cohesive, and predominantly decontextualized discourse units characteristic of written language. Linguistic areas fostered during the preschool period, including phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics/discourse, all must interlink for literacy, i.e., activities and skills associated with print (Snow, 1991), to emerge (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). It can be argued that narratives form a bridge from oral language to literacy (Westby, 2005). In turn, narrative skills in the language of instruction are an important precursor and facilitator of skills related to academic learning (for a simplified model of this relationship, also see Figure 3 in section 2.2).

This transition from using contextualized speech to understanding and producing decontextualized language is especially prevalent in the comprehension and production of fictional narratives. While the organization of event sequences in script narratives and event casts can be characterized as more contextualized, as the structure is clearly laid out, the nature of a fictional narrative is more decontextualized. For one, it is decontextualized in the spacio-temporal domain; in other words, the production of a successful story requires the cognitive coordination and linguistic explication of a series of events that happened in the past or which are purely made up. Also, fictional narratives are usually decontextualized from personal experience, which requires the narrator to not only emphasize with the character(s) to understand their (hypothetical) motives, goals, and feelings, but to also linguistically convey their perspective through the use of evaluative language (Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf, 2004; also see section 3.3).

All children entering the educational system have to expand their language skills towards the mastery of decontextualized language features, but those entering the German education system with little or limited previous exposure to German and those who continue to speak a home language other than German are faced with an especially considerable challenge. Limited receptive and expressive skills in the area of contextualized and decontextualized language can affect children's social, emotional, linguistic, cultural, and academic development (e.g., Mehta, Foorman, Branum-

Martin, & Taylor, 2005). For example, the comprehension and production of narratives has shown to be a reliable skill to distinguish typically developing mono- and dual-language learning children from those with language impairments (Cleave, Girolametto, Chen, & Johnson, 2010; Fey, Catts, Proctor-Williams, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2004; Gagarina et al., 2012; 2015; Paradis, Schneider, & Duncan, 2013). In turn, difficulty in mastering narrative skill can be viewed as a risk factor for academic failure (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001; also see section 2.2).
For these reasons, the current work will henceforth focus on the production and support of oral fictional narrative abilities in young DLLs. In so doing, it is crucial to put forth a more detailed definition of the term *fictional narrative*.

Fictional Narratives in Preschool-Age Children – A Working Definition

As presented earlier, generally speaking, a fictional narrative can be viewed as a made-up story (for example, the response to pictorial stimuli as found in a picture storybook). Drawing on the theoretical and empirical background reviewed in this chapter, a *fictional narrative*, in the context of the current work, will be characterized via the following definition:

The term fictional narrative refers to the generation of a story produced in decontextualized discourse, in response to pictorial stimuli in a wordless picture book, which consists of at least two topic-centered utterances[9] *and may contain evaluative language features.*

In this capacity, preschool fictional narrative skills provide insight in both quantitative and qualitative aspects of connected language production, which reflect and promote socio-emotionally and academically important outcomes, and thus can also inform about aspects of intellectual and emotional development. During the preschool age, this type of narrative becomes especially important because of its role in the develop-

[9] It is important to consider that young children, especially DLLs with limited L2 language skills, might not (yet) be able to express temporal and/or causal relationships, while still trying to linguistically convey a sequence of events. Therefore, determining a minimal fictional narrative was based on at least two utterances linked by the same topic rather than by a conjunction.

ment of decontextualized oral language skills and its central part in school curricula (for both, see section 2.2). Accordingly, the more advanced and elaborative a child's skill to structure and to provide descriptive details about past experiences or fictional accounts, the better the child is equipped to perform successfully in various academic areas.

After having presented a generalized account on children's narrative production over the preschool period, it is further important to specify the acquisition process for fictional narrative skills.

2.2 Emerging Fictional Narrative Skills in Child Language Development: From Decontextualized Language Use to Academic Language Skills

Telling a story requires the narrator to move beyond the observable and to create meaning by coordinating, integrating, and encoding large amounts of information solely through language. As Tomasello conceptualizes, the child has to create a linguistic framework whereby "the immediate context in which a given utterance must be grounded is not the surrounding nonlinguistic context but rather the linguistic context formed by the rest of the narrative" (Tomasello, 2003, p. 244). Thus, constructing a narrative represents a sophisticated communicative task that requires a grasp of cognitive, cultural, and complex linguistic features in the varied domains of language, especially when the narrator cannot rely on the audience having had the same experiences to aid them comprehend the narrative; as such, the language must be even more complex.

While there is abundant evidence linking early language abilities to children's emergent literacy skills (e.g., Dickinson & Porche, 2011), researchers are still trying to disentangle the entrenched relation between fictional narrative abilities and the development of complex ways of linguistic expression as well as of academic language skills.

Throughout child development, the demands of oral language use change with an increasing emphasis on more complex and literate language forms (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). To be well equipped for the linguistic requirements in school, conveying the distinct from context, children need to have acquired some previous level of print, alphabet, phonological, as well as vocabulary knowledge, and a fundamental interest to

use literacy, because decontextualized and sophisticated oral language is a cornerstone of and a prerequisite for the successful participation in daily instructional activities in the classroom (e.g., Pearson, 2002; Snow, 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Fictional narrative production reflects these demands of academic language use, as it challenges a preschool-aged child to use longer and more complex linguistic forms in contrast to utterances produced in conversational speech (Hadley, 1998), personal narratives (Purcell-Gates, 2001), or explanations (Peets & Bialystok, 2015).

To successfully describe one or more events and to distinguish them from the ongoing present, a child has to combine its lexical-semantic and morphological knowledge (McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Melzi & Caspe, 2008) and produce the most complex syntactical constructions on hand (Tomasello, 2003, 2008). By tapping into multiple language features and organizational abilities simultaneously (e.g., McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Ukrainetz, 2006), oral language discourse offers comprehensive insight into a child's verbal expression skills.

By inferring information implicitly, the narrator weaves interconnections between different story parts and thus manages, as Montanari puts it,

> to interpret the characters and their relations in time and space, to view the onset events as the cause of the protagonist's development of a goal and a goal plan, to understand the protagonist's failures as relevant to the goal, and finally, to interpret his/her success as the end of the story.
>
> (2004, p. 456)

Putting it broadly, fictional narrative production—or storytelling—is characterized by a considerable cognitive demand: To tell a story draws on the child's ability to remember, and to temporally, spatially, and sequentially organize events (Norbury & Bishop, 2003) while taking into account the listener's knowledge and perspective. Ultimately, the narrator has to cognitively and emotionally distance his/herself from the immediate to explore the remote. Through the repeated engagement in (interactive) narrative practices, the development of higher-level metalinguistic, metacognitive, and conceptual operations is promoted (Nelson, Aksu-Koç, & Johnson, 2001).

It is therefore not surprising that research on monolingual children revealed that the extent to which a child can produce a coherent and cohesive narrative not only predates, but also predicts successful adaptation to academic literacy practices. In fact,

early cross-sectional work found a strong relationship between narrative comprehension among monolingual kindergartners and other measures of early literacy (Dickinson & Snow, 1987). Also, longitudinally, the narrative skills of monolingual preschool-age children have long been identified as one of the best predictors of later school achievement for children at risk for language and academic problems (Bishop & Edmunson, 1987; Paul & Smith, 1993; also see Figure 3).

Furthermore, a growing body of research has demonstrated that early oral narrative skills are linked with emergent literacy outcomes in preschool children (Dickinson & McCabe, 1991) and moderately to strongly predict later reading and writing performance. For example, Griffin and colleagues (2004) found that the ability to use evaluative story components at age 5 predicted children's reading comprehension and written narrative skills at age 8 (for further research evidence, also see Curenton, Craig, & Flanigan, 2008; Fey et al., 2004; Gardner-Neblett & Iruka, 2015; Neuman & Dickinson, 2011; Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaughency, 2010; Speece, Roth, Cooper, & De La Paz, 1999; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). In addition, later mathematical ability was also linked to preschool narrative competence (O'Neill, Pearce, & Pick, 2004).

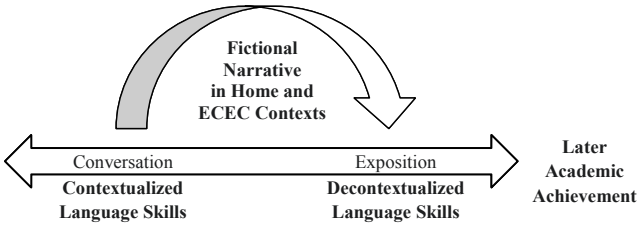

Figure 3. A Simplified Model of Narrative Discourse Fostering Decontextualized Language Use Central for Later Academic Achievement

In a large-scale study with DLLs, Miller and colleagues (2006) followed 1,531 Spanish-English learners from ECEC through third-grade and found that early lexical skills and grammatical complexity displayed in an oral narrative retell task accounted for a

significant amount of variance in both comprehension and decoding within and across languages.

In conclusion, command of the language of instruction including its decontextualized components is the foundation for reading and overall academic success (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Based on the reviewed evidence, there is reason to argue that to improve educational outcomes for DLLs, an emphasis should be put on activities featuring and fostering decontextualized language use, ideally beginning before entry in formal schooling. Building on this broader introduction on the development of fictional narrative skills, the following sections will be devoted to explore more closely the specific ways to collect and analyze fictional narratives in preschool-aged DLLs, followed by an in-depth study of current research literature on the fictional narrative skills of DLLs across and within languages as well as in comparison to their monolingual peers.