



Introduction

Previous research has established that children’s narrative ability is an important skill that has been linked to future language ability, school readiness, and higher-order cognitive control processes.

Research by Applebee (1978) found that storytelling begins at approximately age two and progresses through six stages of development.

Children’s narrative ability develop rapidly though the preschool years, and most reach the final stage at approximately age six.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the narrative ability of a typically developing sample of three-year-olds.

Based on previous research by Applebee (1978), we predicted that most participants would be telling stories at either the sequence or primitive narrative stage

Methods

Participants

22 children (36-45 months, mean age= 38.5 months)
11 males, 11 females

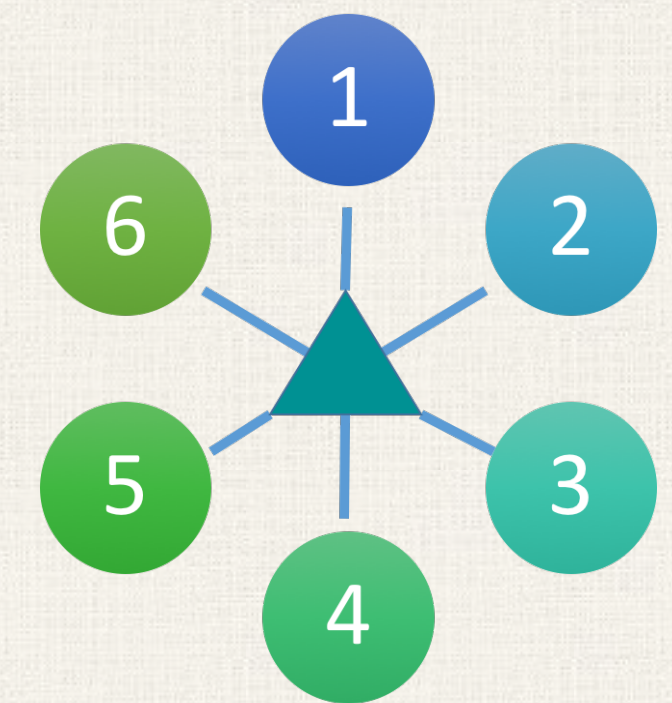
Picture Book Task

Children told a story using the wordless book *Goodnight Gorilla* (1994). Narratives were recorded and scored based on the Applebee stages of narrative development (1978).

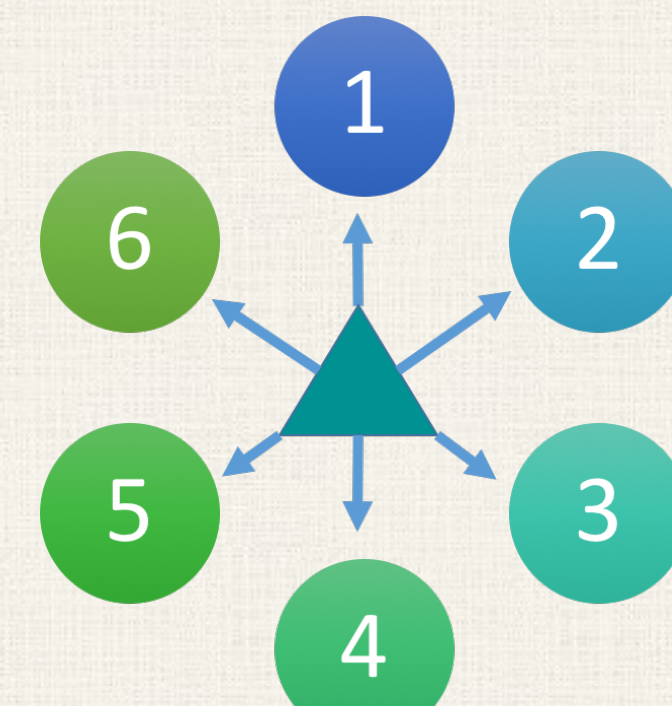
Stages of Narrative Development



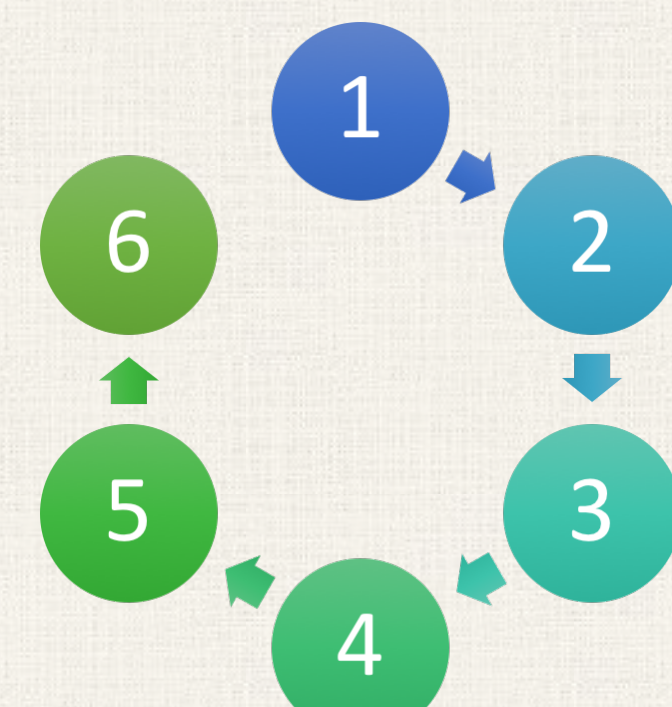
Heap: No overarching structure



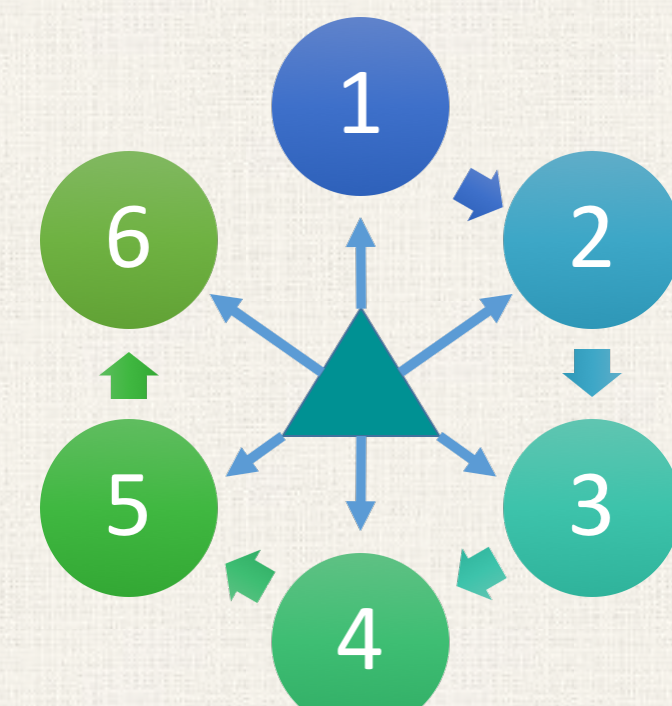
Sequence: Elements linked by similarity



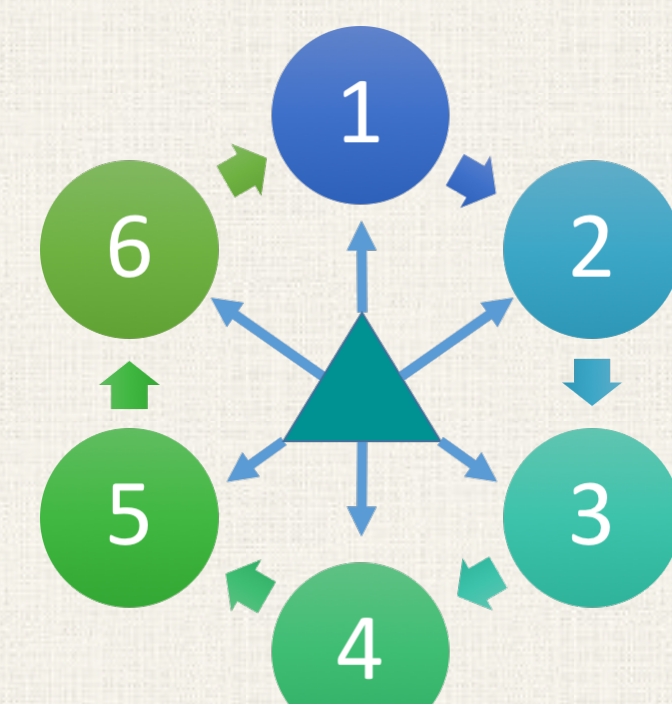
Primitive Narrative: Elements linked to central idea



Unfocused Chain: Presence of cause and effect

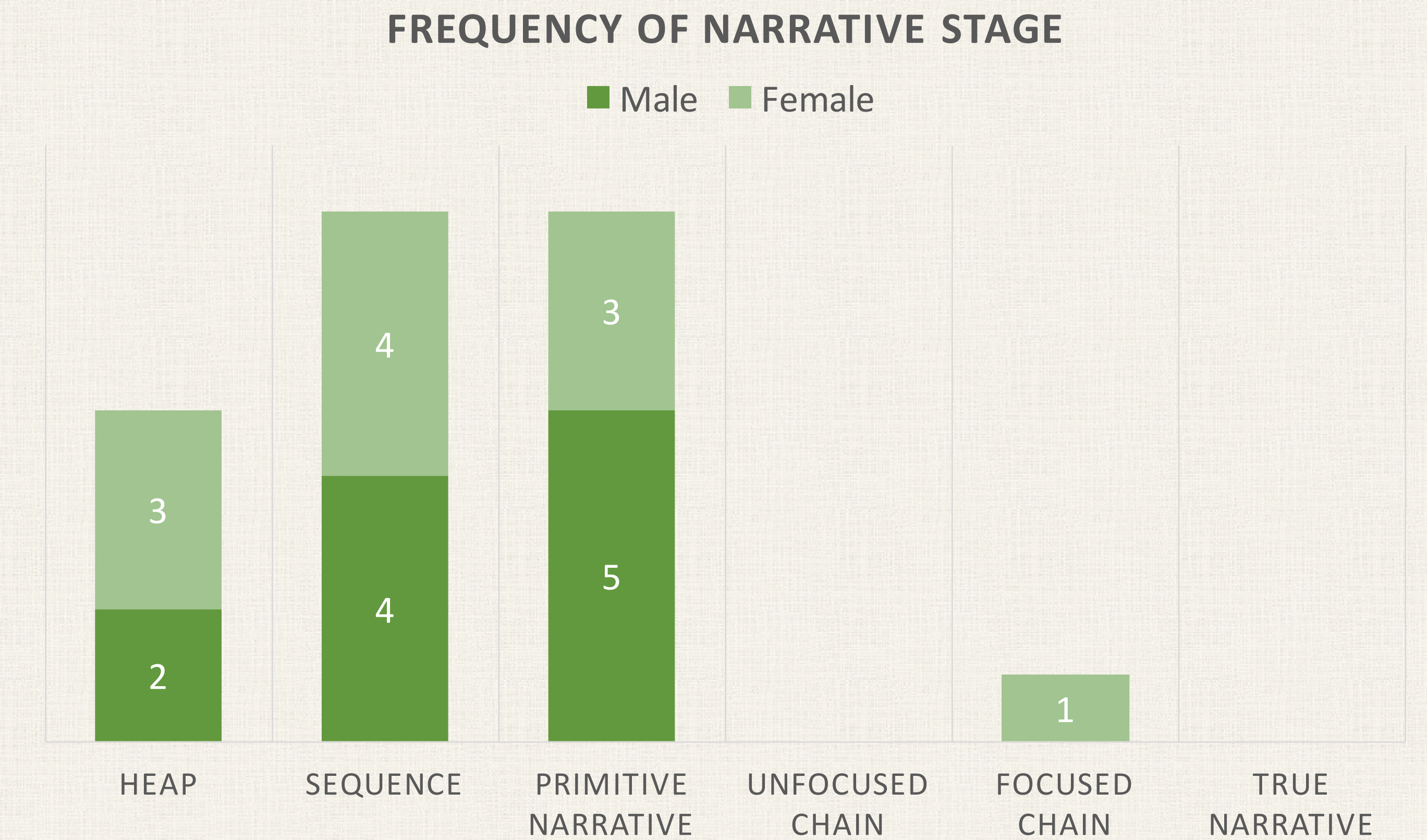


Focused Chain: Cause and effect + central idea



True Narrative: Each event build on previous event, end links to beginning

Results and Discussion



- The majority of children produced narratives at the sequence or primitive narrative stage, which is consistent with Applebee’s (1978) research
- No significant difference in stage levels between males and females
- No significant correlation between age of child and stage of narrative

Based on this data, it appears that although there is variability in preschoolers’ narratives, almost all 3-year-olds lack causal relationships between story events.

Children in this study will be followed over one year to determine how their narratives advance and if they will link to other aspects of functioning (e.g. cognitive skills)

References

Applebee, A. N. 1978. *The child's concept of story.*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Heilmann, J., Miller, J. F., & Nockerts, A. (2010). Sensitivity of narrative organization measures using narrative retells produced by young school-age children. *Language Testing*, 27(4), 603-626. doi:10.1177/0265532209355669

Rathmann, P. (1994). *Good night, Gorilla.* New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons.