# Oral Discourse Coherence and Oral Fluency in English as a Foreign Language Preservice Teachers' Oral Narratives[1,2]

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## Abstract

A large number of research studies have highlighted the relevance of oral narratives for describing children's linguistic constraints, developmental stages of narrative discourse patterns, and sociocultural identities. Yet, little research has been found on the use of oral narratives as a means to longitudinally improve oral discourse coherence and fluency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This article reports a case study which was aimed at exploring and describing oral language enhancement in 26 Chilean preservice teachers of English through the implementation of oral narrative tasks over four months. Oral narrative samples were collected through audio recordings, then transcribed and analyzed through the Narrative Assessment Profile, and analytic rubrics elaborated in light of the literature review carried out for oral fluency. Findings suggest a relation between oral narrative tasks and oral discourse coherence and fluency improvement, with a large effect size (25% for social sciences) on oral discourse coherence. Also, a new measure and dysfluency indicator of L2 oral fluency was discovered and defined as false reformulation. It could be concluded that oral narrative tasks might constitute a valuable instrument for enhancing oral English as a foreign language over time.

## Resumen

Una plétora de estudios de investigación ha destacado la relevancia de las narrativas orales para describir ecológicamente las etapas de desarrollo y los patrones del discurso narrativo, las limitaciones lingüísticas en niños y adultos con y sin trastornos del lenguaje, y las identidades socioculturales. Sin embargo, se ha encontrado poca investigación que use las narrativas orales como un medio para mejorar longitudinalmente la coherencia y la fluidez del discurso oral en inglés como lengua extranjera. Este artículo reporta un estudio de caso que exploró y describió el mejoramiento del lenguaje oral en 26 profesores chilenos de inglés en formación a través de tareas narrativas orales durante cuatro meses. Las narrativas orales se grabaron, luego se transcribieron y se analizaron con el Perfil de Evaluación Narrativa. También se elaboraron rúbricas de medición para la fluidez oral a la luz de la revisión de la literatura. Los resultados sugieren una relación entre las tareas narrativas orales y el mejoramiento de la coherencia y la fluidez del discurso oral, con un tamaño del efecto grande (25% para las ciencias sociales) en la coherencia del discurso oral. Además, se descubrió una nueva medida e indicador de disfluencia concerniente a la fluidez oral en el ámbito de segundas lenguas y se definió como falsa reformulación. Se concluyó que las tareas narrativas orales podrían constituir un valioso instrumento para mejorar el lenguaje oral de manera longitudinal en inglés como lengua extranjera.

## Introduction

Oral narratives have been considered rigorous tasks which demand various aspects of language form, meaning and use, and provide rich and reliable data on oral language proficiency (McFarland, 2013; Zanchi et al., 2020). Therefore, narrating requires several linguistic, communicative, and cognitive skills such as oral discourse coherence and fluency. Oral narrative performance is referred to as "the ability to tell a rich, coherent and well-structured story" (Zanchi et al., 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, oral narrative performance has been associated with high academic achievement and literacy skills (Pinto et al., 2016). In the past five decades, numerous studies (e.g., Appose & Karuppali, 2018; Karusoo-Musumeci et al., 2021; Kunnari et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2013; Zanchi et al., 2020) have addressed oral narratives as an effective instrument to assess first language (L1) and/or second language (L2) oral proficiency in children with or without language impairment such as stuttering, and to predict academic achievement, especially in reading and writing skills.

However, little research has been conducted on oral narratives as potential tasks to longitudinally improve some of the inherent features of oral proficiency in young adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, such as oral discourse coherence and fluency. Therefore, this study aimed at exploring and describing the development of Chilean EFL preservice teachers' oral discourse coherence and fluency, through the implementation of oral fictional and personal experience narrative tasks over four months. The research

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questions that guided this study were: 1) Is it possible to establish a relation between oral narrative tasks and oral discourse coherence and fluency improvement over the course of four months? and 2) How do incoherence and dysfluency indicators affect oral narrative performance in participants' oral narratives?

## Literature review

### *Oral narratives*

Oral narratives are defined as the accounts of connected events that can be expressed through personal experiences or fictional stories (Boudreau & Chapman, 2000; Hessling & Brimo, 2019; Salamanca González, 2015). Oral narrative production includes a variety of communicative skills and mastery of pragmatics, syntax, and semantics (Suggate et al., 2018). Oral narrative tasks promote naturalistic language skills, providing researchers with better chances to describe strengths and weaknesses on the use of language components (Granados Ramos et al., 2019; Karusoo-Musumeci et al., 2021). Thus, oral narratives are commonly used at schools and significant associations have been found between oral narrative performance and academic achievements (Lucero, 2016; Zanchi et al., 2020).

Oral narrative samples can be analyzed from two different perspectives: macrostructural and microstructural (Appose & Karuppali, 2018; Kunnari et al., 2016). The macrostructure of narratives "includes statements regarding time, place, and characters and temporal sequencing of narrative events" (Mills et al., 2013, p. 2). Consistently, classic investigators of narratives such as Labov and Waletzky (1997) argued that the following elements fully structure oral narratives:

- orientation (time, place, situation, and participants)
- complication (conflict arisen from events and happenings)
- evaluation (meaning and significance of some events)
- resolution (result of the happenings)
- coda (verbal perspective returned to the present)

These constituents of narrative macrostructure are also defined in terms of story grammar (Janssen et al., 2020; Karusoo-Musumeci et al., 2021, which was first proposed by Stein and Glenn (1979). Thus, macrostructure analysis examines higher-order organization and the overall quality and coherence of narratives (Heilmann et al. 2010b; Heilmann et al., 2010c; Janssen et al., 2020; Kahveci & Güneyli, 2020; Karusoo-Musumeci et al., 2021; Lucero, 2016), all of which is understood as discourse coherence. Consequently, the narrative macrostructure perspective is commonly referred to as story coherence; story coherence (or macrostructure) denotes the way the events are connected to each other, and to the global topic of the narrative (Karlsen et al., 2021).

While narrative macrostructure is referred to as story coherence, microstructure refers to linguistic cohesion, depicting the semantic interactions between sentences, often with an emphasis on word use and linguistic complexity of the narratives (Karlsen et al., 2021). The microstructure perspective implies "the way that words and sentences work together to build a cohesive story. It is determined based on semantic and syntactic productivity, complexity, and accuracy" (Appose & Karuppali, 2018, p. 1). Thus, an oral narrative demands not only the learners' discourse coherence, but also knowledge of structural language throughout the domains of semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology (Hughes et al., 1997; Westerveld & Roberts, 2017). In recent years, oral fluency measures have increased in use with Spanish-English oral narrative microstructural analysis (Hessling & Brimo, 2019; Miller et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2018). Although narrative macrostructure and microstructure can be conceptually distinctive, past research has stressed the relevance of examining oral narratives at both macrostructure and microstructure levels while assessing oral narrative performance (Westerveld & Roberts, 2017).

Oral narrative samplings, in accordance with Janssen et al., (2020), provide a "reliable assessment of whether narrative ability will transfer to everyday language use" (p.183). So far, many studies have proved the benefits of oral narrative performance on literacy skills (Karlsen et al., 2021; Schaughency et al., 2017; Spencer & Petersen, 2018; Zanchi et al., 2020). Since the effect of narrative performance on literacy and higher order skills has been largely investigated, longitudinal studies on narrative performance influencing other language skills or components have been suggested as future research areas (Norbury et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study sought to study the role of oral narratives in improving oral discourse coherence and oral fluency in EFL young adult learners.

### *Discourse coherence*

Discourse coherence has gained relevance after decades of being ignored by linguists (Arévalo Balboa & Briesmaster, 2018), and appears as "a key concept, perhaps even the key concept, in discourse…analysis" (Bublitz, 1999, p. 1). Coherence constitutes a significant support to the whole discourse logic and rationality, and it is the most important factor in putting a casual group of utterances into an intelligible discourse; coherence is essential to efficacious discourse (Chatterjee & Chakraborty, 2019; Freed & Cain, 2021). Coherence, regarding narrative discourse, constitutes the temporal and causal structure of the narrative (Karmiloff-Smith, 1985; Pinto et al., 2019). In this respect, discourse coherence denotes the way the events are connected to each other, and to the global meaning of the narrative (Karlsen et al., 2021).

Numerous assessment models have been used for narrative discourse coherence analysis, such as narrative scoring scheme, story grammar analysis, and the narrative assessment profile (Heilmann et al., 2010a; Wood et al., 2018). Yet, the Narrative Assessment Profile (NAP) is a more culturally sensitive measure of narrative discourse in comparison with others; it avoids bias in favor of typically western European narratives (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Moreover, the NAP was developed by Bliss et al. (1998) to specifically assess discourse coherence and it is pertinent to evaluating the narratives of both children and adults with impaired language or not (McFarland, 2013). That's why NAP is the most suitable narrative assessment model for the purposes of the present study.

The NAP consists of six dimensions, namely topic maintenance, event sequencing, informativeness, referencing, conjunctive cohesion, and fluency (McFarland, 2013). McCabe and Bliss (2003) suggested that weak event sequencing and informativeness, besides topic maintenance, compromise discourse coherence. McFarland (2013) describes topic maintenance, event sequencing, and informativeness dimensions of the NAP as follows:

- Topic maintenance is concerned with how well all the different utterances in a narrative connect to a main topic, thus avoiding deviations such as insignificant, tangential, or ambiguous utterances that detract attention from the focused theme and disrupt discourse coherence.
- Event sequencing entails the order of presentation of events in chronological or logical order, which corresponds to the order of events in real life.
- Informativeness implies the elaboration necessary to tell a story lacking nothing, which involves information of the type and level of detail needed to for the listener to understand the gist of the story, Informativeness: Police officer (IPO), according to McFarland (2013. p. 139). and the embellishment required to tell a narrative appealing to listeners, as it would be demanded by a teacher. Informativeness: Teacher (TCH) (p. 139).

Conjunctive cohesion, and the fluency dimensions of the NAP, were omitted from the current study. This decision was made as they were considered to be overlapping with other macro and micro structural dimensions, such as fluency.

### *Fluency*

Up to the present date, L2 oral fluency has been defined, classified, and investigated from different perspectives (Huensch & Tracy-Ventura, 2017; Nergis, 2021; Peltonen, 2018). In the 1990s, L2 fluency was distinguished as overall oral language proficiency from a broad sense, and as a single dimension of L2 oral proficiency from a narrow sense (Lennon,1990). More recently, the latter perspective, which is the pertinent one to the current study, was classified by Segalowitz (2010) into three categories of L2 fluency: cognitive fluency, utterance fluency, and perceived fluency.

Cognitive fluency is related to oral performance (Velásquez-Hoyos, 2021), and involves cognitive processes such as lexical retrieval, information access, and articulation, which allow the speaker to deliver the intended message by tailoring the utterances (Nergis, 2021). Utterance fluency refers to the acoustic and temporal measures of L2 oral fluency, namely pauses, hesitations, repetitions, and repairs (Segalowitz, 2016). Lastly, perceived fluency consists of subjective judgments and impressions about L2 oral fluency (Nergis, 2021; Segalowitz, 2016; Velásquez-Hoyos, 2021).

Cognitive fluency is considered to underlie utterance fluency (Peltonen, 2017; 2018; Segalowitz, 2010) because speakers cannot properly perform oral discourse without the linguistic and cognitive functioning to do so, regardless of the listeners' perceptions or the speakers' on L2 oral fluency (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Shea & Leonard, 2019). Notwithstanding the interrelation of these three categories, utterance fluency was considered for the purposes of the present study, since it permits an objective measurement of L2 oral

fluency as a dimension of oral proficiency (Peltonen, 2018; Segalowitz, 2010; Tavakoli & Uchihara, 2020). In this regard, L2 oral fluency is assumed to be the ease, flow, and continuity of speech, measured by acoustic and temporal disturbances as dysfluency indicators (McDonough & Sato, 2019; Tavakoli & Uchihara, 2020). Research investigating L2 utterance fluency concurs that fluent oral performance is described by the least amount of silent and filled pauses, reformulations, hesitations, false starts, and repetitions (Derwing, 2017; Felker et al., 2019; Nergis, 2021; Wood, 2016).

Skehan (2003) categorized L2 utterance fluency measures into three subdimensions: 1) speed fluency (speech rate, articulation rate, and mean length of run), 2) breakdown fluency (silent and filled pauses), and 3) repair fluency (reformulations, repetitions, and false starts). These measures have been largely used to evaluate L2 utterance fluency and have been commonly operationalized into ratios (speech rate, articulation rate, mean length of run, and number of breakdown and repair dysfluencies to time speaking), and/or counts (number of breakdown and repair dysfluencies in speech) (Shea & Leonard, 2019). In the specific case of breakdown dysfluencies (pauses), besides frequency measures, location and duration can also be considered (Huensch & Tracy-Ventura, 2017).

In addition, establishing the length of silent pauses, which includes the threshold and the cap periods, is currently subject to a great deal of discussion in L2 utterance fluency literature (Shea & Leonard, 2019). Some researchers (e.g., Huensch & Tracy-Ventura, 2017; Merlo & Mansur, 2004; Peltonen, 2017) have used a wide variety of thresholds and caps ranging from 0, 1 to 3 seconds, or longer. Other researchers (e.g., Préfontaine & Kormos, 2016; Velásquez-Hoyos, 2021) have not even rated silent pauses quantitatively but perceptibly with qualitative measures of temporary interruption to the stream of speech and stretches of language with a fairly even tempo. In line with Skehan's (2003) breakdown fluency (pauses) subdimension, the present study assumed that pauses that are dysfluent are the ones which disrupt the normal flow of the speech (silent pauses longer than 4 seconds), and not the natural ones (filled pauses such as mmm, uh, etc., and silent pauses shorter than 5 seconds) that are produced as a cause of breathing or separating and organizing the chunks of ideas. In addition, it was revealed that longer silent pauses (≥ 1 sec.) are better dysfluency markers of L2 utterance fluency in oral proficiency than shorter silent pauses and filled pauses, respectively (Shea & Leonard, 2019).

## Methodology

The research design of this investigation consisted of a longitudinal, and exploratory case study of Chilean EFL preservice teachers' oral narratives.

### *Participants*

The 26 EFL preservice teachers were from the University of Concepción, Chile. There were 20 females, five males, and one participant who preferred not to state gender. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 and each participant accepted to participate voluntarily in the study by signing an informed consent form after having been provided with thorough information about the research. Participants' native language is Spanish, and they had completed the first semester of their EFL major as a prerequisite to participate in the study, so that they could deal with the linguistic and communicative demands of the oral narrative tasks. Participants' initial level of EFL oral proficiency was not assessed, which constitutes a limitation of this study. Also, it is important to state that there is no entry-level proficiency requirement to be admitted to the EFL major; however, most preservice teachers hold A1 or A2 levels of oral proficiency at the end of their first semester because the courses are designed to reach those levels, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

### *Data elicitation techniques and procedure*

For the elicitation of oral fictional narratives the method of telling a story about a picture was used (McFarland, 2013), in which participants were asked to generate a story using picture stimuli. The pictures depicted familiar topics to the participants in order to facilitate the use of familiar vocabulary, and consequently, spontaneous oral production. The other method was through oral personal experience narratives carried out by asking the participants to recount a particular personal event (McFarland, 2013; Pavlenko, 2008). Both methods, oral fictional and personal experience narrative tasks, were conceived to be meaningful to the participants in accordance with their ages, in order for them to be motivated by the tasks and communicate their ideas coherently and fluently. The whole process of data elicitation was developed in English, including both the tasks and participants' responses.

Oral fictional and personal experience narrative tasks were submitted to expert judgement agreement to determine their reliability (Refer to Appendix 1 for a detailed description). As a result, for oral fictional

narrative tasks, all tasks turned out to be 100% “highly clear” and 100% “highly coherent” in accordance with all raters. In the case of oral personal experience narrative tasks, Task 1 and Task 2 turned out to be 100% “highly clear” and 83% “highly coherent” while Task 3 was exactly the opposite: 83% “highly coherent” and 100% “highly clear”. Task 4 was considered to have 100% of both, “high clarity”, and “high coherence” (Refer to Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

Oral narrative samples were collected in four sessions during four consecutive months, that is, Tasks 1 (fictional and personal narratives) in the first month, Tasks 2 in the second month, Tasks 3 in the third month, and Tasks 4 in the fourth month. In the first week of each month, oral narrative tasks were carried out and then participants’ oral samples were collected through audio recordings. During the second and the third weeks of each month, oral samples were transcribed and analyzed through the rubrics described below in the data analysis techniques section. Finally, in the fourth week of each month, the participants were sent their oral recorded narratives, transcripts, and the analytic rubrics with their respective analyses as feedback. The data collection, through the four oral narrative tasks, constituted the intervention of the study, excluding any separate treatment such as eliciting oral narratives in class or a lab during those four months. Participants continued taking their regular English courses, based on B1 and B2 levels of proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages.

### *Data analysis techniques*

Oral narratives samples were recorded, and then transcribed in alignment with the procedure used by Brand and Götz (2011). They included all the utterances that participants produced, including reformulations, repetitions, false starts, and fillers such as, er, well, hmm, um, etc. However, nonverbal behavior such as coughing, and sighing were not included in the transcripts.

The Narrative Assessment Profile (McCabe & Bliss, 2003) was used as the analytic rubric to measure oral discourse coherence (topic maintenance, event sequencing and informativeness). This rubric was adapted from McFarland’s (2013) Narrative Assessment Profile Modified Coding Criteria and the structural elements (orientation, complication, and evaluation) of oral narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). The Narrative Assessment Profile evaluates oral discourse coherence as follows:

Dimensions of the NAP are rated on a three-point scale (0-2), to describe behavior that is “appropriate”, “variable”, or “inappropriate”. A designation of appropriate (given 2 points) signifies that the behavior occurs frequently enough to promote and maintain discourse coherence. Variable behavior (given 1 point) in a given dimension indicates that the level of performance occasionally reduces discourse coherence but that the narrator does demonstrate some strengths in that dimension. A behavior is considered inappropriate (and is given 0 points) when its frequency diminishes or compromises discourse coherence. (McFarland, 2013, p. 55)

It is important to establish that there are two types of informativeness: informativeness: police officer (IPO) and informativeness: chef (ICH)—the correct amount of action, description and evaluation) within the Narrative Assessment Profile Modified Coding Criteria, and its dimensions were rated inversely (0=appropriate, 1=variable and 2=inappropriate) in the present study. All four dimensions along with their coding criteria are fully described in the analytic rubric (Refer to Appendix 4). The ANOVA parametric test was applied to carry out the inferential statistical analysis to compare oral discourse coherence improvement through task performance across the four data collection points. Descriptive statistics was implemented to illustrate the occurrences of oral discourse coherence shortcomings.

The fluency analytic rubric was elaborated on the bases of Skehan’s (2003) measures of fluency, all of which were considered as dysfluency indicators for the purpose of this study. The rubric measured the following dysfluency indicators: 1) silent pauses, 2) reformulations, 3) repetitions and 4) false starts (Refer to Appendix 5 for a detailed description). The dysfluencies were computed to carry out the statistical analysis. To carry out the inferential statistical analysis for oral fluency, Friedman’s ANOVA nonparametric test was applied to determine if there were statistically significant improvement along the four data collection points.

## Results

This section of the article presents the results in accordance with the research questions of the present study.

### *Is it possible to establish a direct relation between oral narrative tasks and oral discourse coherence and fluency improvement over the course of four months?*

The ANOVA parametric test carried out for oral discourse coherence showed that the four months of oral narrative tasks implementation had a statistically significant effect on oral discourse coherence improvement, $F(2.104)=8.268$, $p=0.001$. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $\chi^1(5)=15.074$, $p=0.10$, and therefore, a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used. Table 1 displays the Tests of Within-Subjects Effects where the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

| Source | | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Data Collection Points | Sphericity Assumed | 90.029 | 3 | 30.010 | 8.268 | .000 | .249 |
| | Greenhouse-Geisser | 90.029 | 2.104 | 42.796 | 8.268 | .001 | .249 |
| | Huynh-Feldt | 90.029 | 2.302 | 39.117 | 8.268 | .000 | .249 |
| | Lower-bound | 90.029 | 1.000 | 90.029 | 8.268 | .008 | .249 |

Table 1: Tests of within-subjects effects for oral discourse coherence

Hence, the alternative hypothesis-H1 (there is a statistically significant improvement in oral discourse coherence after four months of oral narrative tasks implementation) is accepted and null hypothesis-Ho (there is no statistically significant improvement in oral discourse coherence after four months of oral narrative tasks implementation) is rejected. The Partial Eta Squared ($\eta^2_p=0.249$) from Table 1 above means that oral narratives tasks are 25% effective on oral discourse coherence improvement, which represents a large effect size in Social Sciences (Field, 2013). Table 2 below reflects the statistical pairwise comparisons between the first and the rest of the four data collection points of the study for oral discourse coherence.

| (I) Data Collection Point | (J) Data Collection Point | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig.[b] | 95% Confidence Interval for Difference[b] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | 2 | 1.923 | .686 | .058 | -.042 | 3.888 |
| | 3 | 1.692* | .581 | .045 | .027 | 3.357 |
| | 4 | 2.500* | .611 | .002 | .750 | 4.250 |

Based on estimated marginal means
*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Table 2: Pairwise comparisons for oral discourse coherence

It is observed in Table 2 that data collection point 3 (p=0.045; m=0.43; SD=0.216) and data collection point 4 (p=0.002; m=0.33; SD=0.194) present a statistically significant improvement in comparison with data collection point 1 (m=0.64; SD=0.375). Thus, a statistically significant effectiveness of oral narrative tasks implementation on oral discourse coherence improvement was evidenced from data collection point 3 on.

The Friedman's ANOVA nonparametric test carried out for oral fluency showed that there was a statistically significant difference regarding the frequency of dysfluencies along data collection points 1 and 4. Table 3 shows the test statistics of Friedman's ANOVA where $p=0.002<0.05$.

| | |
|---|---|
| N | 26 |
| Chi-Square | 15.348 |
| Df | 3 |
| Asymp. Sig. | .002 |

a. Friedman Test

Table 3: Test statistics for fluency

Hence, H1 (there is a statistically significant improvement in oral language fluency after four months of oral narrative tasks implementation) is accepted and Ho (there is no statistically significant improvement in oral language fluency after four months of oral narrative tasks implementation) is rejected. Furthermore, Table 4 below reflects the statistical pairwise comparisons between the first and the rest of the four data collection points along the study.

| Sample 1-Sample 2 | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fluency4-Fluency1 | 1.077 | .358 | 3.008 | .003 |
| Fluency3-Fluency1 | .846 | .358 | 2.363 | .018 |
| Fluency2-Fluency1 | .077 | .358 | .215 | .830 |

Table 4: Pairwise comparisons for fluency

It is observed in the previous table that data collection point 3 ($p$=0.018; $m$=5.04; $SD$=6.791) and data collection point 4 ($p$=0.003; $m$=4.27; $SD$=5.008) present a statistically significant improvement in comparison with data collection point 1 ($m$=11.08; $SD$=9.204). Thus, a statistically significant improvement was evidenced in oral fluency from data collection point 3 on. These findings demonstrated that a direct relation between oral narrative tasks and oral discourse coherence and fluency longitudinal improvement might be established.

*How do incoherence and dysfluency indicators affect oral narrative performance in participants' oral narratives?*

In addition, a descriptive analysis of the rating scores was carried out for oral discourse coherence considering the four data collection points; where 0 means appropriate discourse coherence, 1 signifies variable discourse coherence, and 2 implies inappropriate discourse coherence. Table 5 shows the mean, the mode, and the mode frequency per each dimension (TM=Topic Maintenance, ES=Event Sequencing, IPO= Informativeness: Police Officer, and ICH=Informativeness: Chef) of the Narrative Assessment Profile Modified Coding Criteria.

| Types of Task | | Oral Fictional Narratives | | | | Oral Personal Narratives | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dimensions | | TM | ES | IPO | ICH | TM | IS | IPO | ICH |
| N | Valid | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 26 |
| | Missing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mean | | .11 | .14 | .27 | .94 | .21 | .34 | .61 | .97 |
| Mode | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Mode Frequency | | 95 | 96 | 80 | 69 | 84 | 79 | 49 | 49 |
| Minimum | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Maximum | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

Table 5: Descriptive analysis of oral narrative performance

As evidenced in Table 5, oral discourse coherence was appropriate according to topic maintenance (0) and event sequencing (0) for both types of oral narrative tasks. IPO maintained oral discourse coherence in fictional narrative tasks (0=appropriate), but occasionally reduced oral discourse coherence in personal experience narrative tasks (1=variable). The most frequent rating score for ICH was 1 (variable oral discourse coherence) for both narrative tasks.

ICH was the most negatively affected dimension since participants occasionally omitted either the complication (story conflict) or the evaluation (significance of some events) in their narratives. The indicator complication was more frequently missed in oral personal experience narratives, and the indicator evaluation, in oral fictional narrative tasks. Perhaps participants might have had weak management of the linguistic resources required to tailor such kinds of utterances or might still be developing story schema in the target language. When comparing the behavior of oral discourse coherence between the types of oral narratives, oral personal experience narratives were the most negatively affected. As oral personal experience narratives occasionally lacked the complication, that omission implied the absence of the resolution (result of the happenings) of the narratives often, which was the most negatively affected indicator in IPO. Thus, oral personal experience narratives did not always fit the Narrative Assessment Profile. Figure 1 below constitutes a personal experience narrative transcription sample, in which there was neither complication nor resolution.

The last celebrations for Independence Day I ah stay in home with my family, and on the eighteen, I think, we have lunch all together, and we do do a barbecue, and empanadas, and just spend time together because my favily family is don't celebrate things, like bored in that way. So, just spend a few time together and share things and talk and that's all.

Figure 1. Oral personal experience transcription from Participant 1

Regarding the descriptive analysis of oral fluency, there was an emerging dysfluency that did not match any of the predetermined dysfluency indicators. The interesting feature about this dysfluency is that it was sort of an in-between mixture of a reformulation and a false start. For instance, Participant 2 produced an utterance which was automatically aborted and restarted on realizing a potential mistake. Therefore, the participant realized they were making a mistake, then they aborted the mistake in progress and replaced it with the correct form. Therefore, it was not a reformulation because no mistake was really made to be reformulated, but it was not a false start either since the abortion-restart was not related to a change of mind or idea, only to the awareness of the mistake to be made. Table 6 provides a comparison among a reformulation, a false start, and the emerging dysfluency.

| Dysfluencies | Examples |
|---|---|
| Reformulation (Participant 3) | "…and which wish for the best for each one…" |
| False start (Participant 4) | "…to re… kind of receive together the New Year…" |
| Emerging dysfluency (Participant 2) | "…we had read… we had already everything…" |

Table 6: Comparison of dysfluencies

It is observed that in the reformulation the mistake is fully made and then corrected, and in the false start there is an abortion and restart of a similar idea. However, in the emerging dysfluency there is no mistake but the awareness of it, then there is no correction and there is no restart of an idea either, but there is a replaced utterance of a possible mistake which was recognized and aborted while tailoring the utterance. This kind of dysfluency behaved in three different manners in the present study.

1. When the speakers recognized an error in progress and automatically aborted it and replaced it with the correct form (e.g., from Participant 5: "…we had rea… we had already everything…"; e.g., from Participant 6: "…they sh… they they could go out …").
2. When the speakers believed they were making a mistake which was not a mistake indeed, but it was automatically aborted and replaced anyway (e.g., from Participant 7: "…he felt rea…very bad…"; from Participant 8 "…there were ma… some marshmallows…").
3. When the speakers believed they were making a mistake, then attempted to start reformulating it, but automatically aborted the reformulation when recognizing it was not a mistake indeed, so the speaker resumed the expression (e.g., from Participant 9: "…one of my friends hid, sorry, yeah and one of my friends hid in...").

To date, the features of this emerging dysfluency have not been recognized in the field of oral fluency. Therefore, such an emerging dysfluency is defined in the present study as a false reformulation, which refers to the speaker's recognition or false recognition of a mistake while producing an utterance which is automatically aborted and restarted with no change of idea in an attempt of self-correction.

## Discussion

These findings of this study suggest a relation between oral narrative tasks and oral discourse coherence and fluency longitudinal improvement. This might be explained by the fact that oral narrative performance has been associated with high academic achievement and literacy skills (Pinto et al., 2016); which is why oral discourse coherence and fluency improved longitudinally. Consistent with the present study, the EFL subjects of the study conducted by Saeedi and Kazerooni (2014) significantly improved their oral fluency, because of the influence of narrative task structure and repetition. In a similar way, Javad Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) conducted a study that was largely focused on examining the effects of simultaneous use of careful online oral fictional narrative planning and task performance repetition on fluency in EFL learners' oral proficiency. The results attained from one-way ANOVAs showed that the engagement in careful simultaneously online oral fictional narrative planning and task performance repetition improves fluency significantly, just as in the current study. Likewise, some researchers (e.g., Foster & Tavakoli, 2009; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Tavakoli, 2009; Tavakoli & Foster, 2011) have found that an oral fictional narrative task structure is correlated to oral fluency.

As for oral discourse coherence, a large number of of studies (e.g., Appose & Karuppali, 2018; Kunnari et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2013; Zanchi et al., 2020) have used oral narratives with the purpose of eliciting oral language in order to transversely analyze developmental stages of narrative discourse patterns, linguistic constraints in children and adults with or without language impairment, and sociocultural identities. Yet, no previous research has been found to use oral narratives as a means of improving oral discourse coherence longitudinally in EFL.

The descriptive analysis of the results for oral discourse coherence indicate that oral personal experience narratives do not always fit the Narrative Assessment Profile. The exclusion of the resolution (results of the happenings) in oral personal experience narratives was partly because of the absence of the complication (story conflict). Regarding this issue, it is worth considering that in a narrative of real events (oral personal experience narrative), sometimes the conflict is not necessarily expressed because the events are narrated just the way they happen, no dilemma must be developed to narrate the characters' experience. On the contrary, an oral fictional narrative (nonreal/imaginary events) is more likely to be embellished with a conflict for the story to fulfill its purpose. In other words, if there is no conflict, there is no possible fictional narrative to be told, and there is no possible resolution for personal experience narratives. Participants demonstrated appropriate topic maintenance and event sequencing, variable IPO and ICH.

Soto and Hartmann (2006) found that topic maintenance was assessed to be appropriate more than any other dimension in all narratives and all subjects of their study, similarly to the present study's results. Also, participants presented appropriate event sequencing throughout the shared reading and wordless picture book elicitation tasks. In the conversational narrative and the story stem narrative tasks, event sequencing was assessed to be variable. Such results related to event sequencing differed a bit from the ones of the present study, in which this dimension turned out to be the most appropriate considering its mean score. In the case of IPO and ICH, participants from the study of Soto and Hartmann (2006) fluctuated from inappropriate to appropriate rates. On the one hand, some participants "lacked structure… concrete supporting details… evaluative and elaborative comments in the narratives were limited or absent" (Soto & Hartmann, 2006, p. 468); on the other, some other participants "provided details to their narratives in a variety of forms... supporting details was a clear strength (Soto & Hartmann, 2006, p. 469). Thus, IPO and ICH, referred to as explicitness, resulted as variable discourse coherence, in partial congruency with the present study.

The study of Fiestas and Peña (2004) analyzed the narratives of Spanish-English speakers from Hispanic backgrounds and informed that more than 75% of narratives samples incorporated consequences whereas less than 50% possessed an ending. The latter result means that IPO was the most underachieved dimension, in complete conformity with the results of the current research. As for the former finding, it implies that ICH outperformed the other dimensions, unlike what was found in the present investigation.

Nordberg et al. (2015) encountered that 87% of the subjects of their study demonstrated appropriate topic maintenance and reached appropriate event sequencing scores. As for explicitness (IPO and ICH), 60% were incapable of producing fully explicit and elaborate narratives. Likewise, in McFarland's (2013) study, participants "were fairly evenly distributed in terms of their performance on topic maintenance and event sequencing with notably fewer demonstrating appropriate levels of informativeness" (p. 138). The few existing studies (McFarland, 2013; Nordberg et al., 2015; Soto & Hartmann, 2006; Tsai & Chang, 2008) that were found on the databases of indexed journals with these measures, are congruent with the current study in the fact that IPO and ICH are the most problematic dimensions relating oral discourse coherence in conformity with the Narrative Assessment Profile.

### *Limitations of the study*

This study had three major limitations. Firstly, participants' initial level of oral proficiency was not assessed, which constitutes a missing controlling factor in oral discourse coherence and oral fluency improvement over time. However, the first data collection point of the study somewhat served as such, depicting participants' initial level of oral proficiency. Secondly, after each data collection of oral narrative tasks participants were provided with feedback; feedback could also influence oral discourse coherence and oral fluency improvement along with other confounding variables which were not controlled. Thirdly, as case study research, there was no control group to ensure that findings are generalizable or directly influenced by the intervention.

### *Recommendations for future research*

Although oral narratives constituted a valid and reliable instrument to improve overall oral proficiency over time, they were supported by feedback; therefore, it is recommended to implement this instrument (oral narratives) by itself since feedback could also influence oral proficiency improvement. Additionally, it would be interesting to investigate oral narratives within a task-based language teaching approach to improve oral narrative performance.

Also, it would be productive to replicate this study with a greater number of participants and with a control group to obtain findings that are generalizable. Furthermore, it is recommended to adjust the Narrative

Assessment Profile Modified Criteria for it to be suitable for both types of oral narratives measurement. Finally, the findings of this case study encourage an avenue for further research within this exploratory scope of oral narratives in EFL.

## Conclusions

After analyzing EFL Chilean preservice teachers' oral discourse coherence and oral fluency through the implementation of oral narrative tasks over the course of four months, it could be concluded that oral narrative tasks might constitute a valuable instrument for enhancing both constructs over time. A significant impact of oral narrative tasks on oral discourse coherence and fluency improvement was evident since data collection point 3, along with a large effect size on oral discourse coherence.

Oral personal experience narratives did not always fit the Narrative Assessment Profile, especially in the case of ICH dimension, in which the complication (story conflict) indicator was occasionally excluded, thus leading to the exclusion of the resolution (result of the happenings) often. In a narrative of real events (oral personal experience narrative), sometimes the conflict is not necessarily expressed because the events are narrated just the way they happened, no dilemma must be developed to narrate the characters' experience. However, a fictional narrative (nonreal/imaginary events) is more likely to be embellished with a conflict for the story to fulfill its purpose.

Hence, the Narrative Assessment Profile may be a technical cause for oral personal experience narratives to be rated more negatively than oral fictional narratives. In addition, the evaluation (explicit meaning of some events with respect to others) indicator of ICH dimension was the most frequently omitted in both oral personal experience and fictional narratives. These results led to conclude that participants might still be developing story representation in the target language or did not have enough control of the linguistic resources needed to verbalize such utterances.

Finally, an emerging dysfluency that was sort of an in-between mixture of a reformulation and a false start arose from participants' oral narrative performance and was defined in the present study as false reformulation. This finding represents an important contribution to the state of the art of L2 utterance fluency; false reformulation constitutes a new measure and dysfluency indicator of L2 oral fluency with implications in L2 teaching and research.

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# Appendix 1

## Oral Narrative Tasks Validation

ITEMS QUALIFICATION REFERENCE TEMPLATE

According to the following indicators, rate each of the items accordingly.

| Category | | Qualification | Indicator |
|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity<br>The task is easily understood, that is, its syntax and semantics are adequate. | 1 | Does not meet the criteria | The task is not clear. |
| | 2 | Low level | The task requires many modifications regarding the use of words according to their meaning or their ordering. |
| | 3 | Moderate level | A very specific modification of some of the terms of the task is required. |
| | 4 | High level | The task is clear, it has adequate semantics and syntax. |
| Coherence<br>The task has a logical relationship with the objective or indicator it is measuring. | 1 | Does not meet the criterion | The task has no logical relationship with the objective/indicator. |
| | 2 | Low level | The task has a tangential relationship with the objective/indicator. |
| | 3 | Moderate level | The task has a moderate relationship with the objective/indicator it is measuring. |
| | 4 | High level | The task is completely related to the objective/indicator it is measuring. |

ANSWER SHEET TO VALIDATE INSTRUMENTS

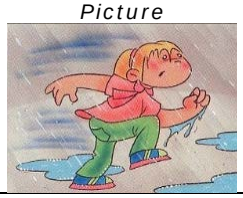
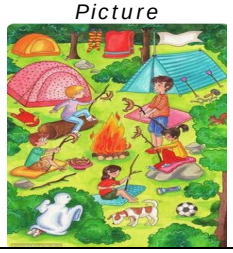
NAMES AND SURNAMES OF THE RATER:

ACADEMIC FORMATION:

AREAS OF EXPERTISE:

INSTITUTION:

Please, tick where applicable.

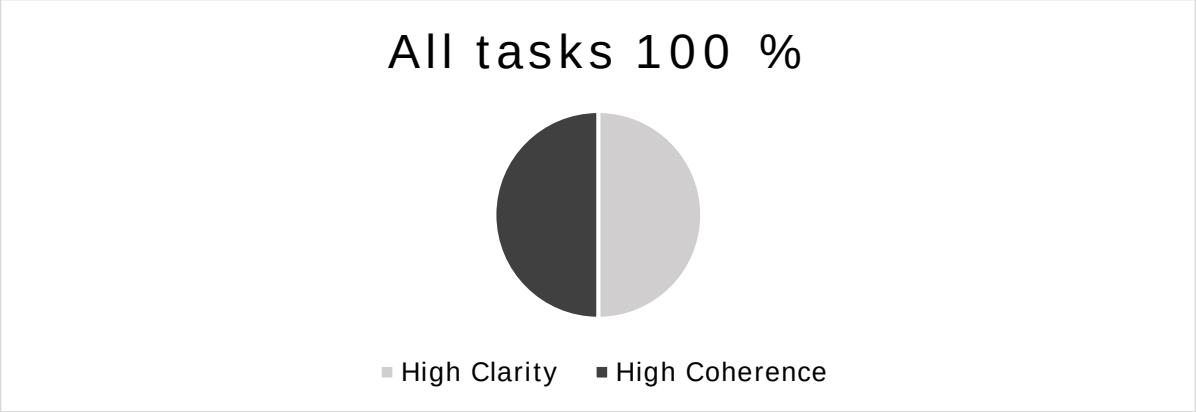
| Items (Oral fictional narratives) | Clarity | | | | Coherence | | | | Observation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Task 1.* Look at the picture and tell me a story about it. Take two minutes to prepare yourself and remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Picture*<br>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| *Task 2.* Look at the picture and tell me a story about it. Take two minutes to prepare yourself and remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Picture*<br>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| *Task 3.* Look at the picture and tell me a story about it. Take two minutes to prepare yourself and remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Picture*<br>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Task 4.* Look at the picture and tell me a story about it. Take two minutes to prepare yourself and remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Picture*<br>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Items (Oral personal experience narratives) | Clarity | | | | Coherence | | | | Observation |
| Read the task and take two minutes to prepare yourself. Remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Task 1*<br>Narrate/tell an anecdote about your last vacation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Read the task and take two minutes to prepare yourself. Remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Task 2*<br>Narrate/tell a story about the last celebrations for the Independence Day in Chile | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Read the task and take two minutes to prepare yourself. Remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Task 3*<br>Narrate/tell a story about your last family meeting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Read the task and take two minutes to prepare yourself. Remember that you can talk no longer than three minutes.<br>*Task 4*<br>Narrate/tell a story about the last time you went out to have fun with your friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |

Observations:

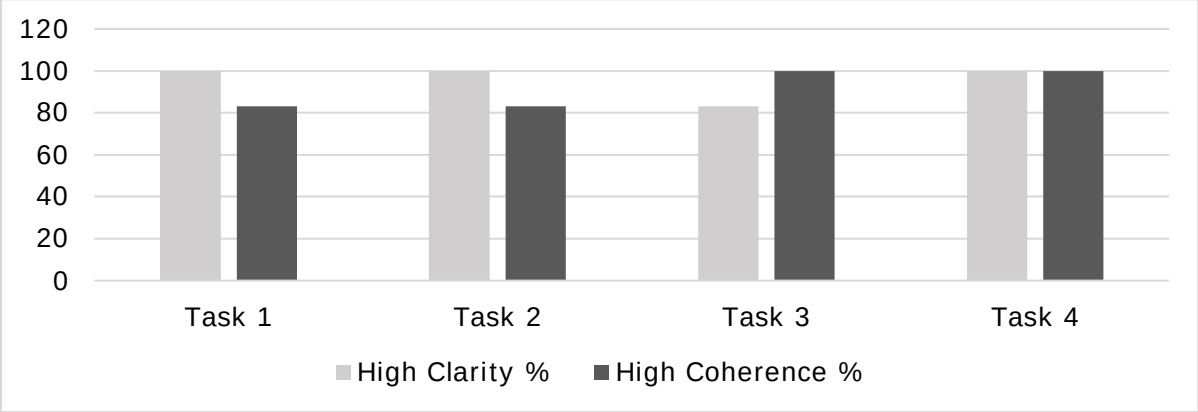
## Appendix 2

### Expert Judgment Agreement for Oral Fictional Narrative Tasks




## Appendix 3

### Expert Judgment Agreement for Oral Personal Experience Narrative Tasks



# Appendix 4

## Narrative Assessment Profile Modified Coding Criteria

| Narrative dimensions | Coding criteria | Participant 1 |
|---|---|---|
| *Topic maintenance* (refers to how well all the various utterances in a narrative relate to a central theme) | 2 = Almost all utterances on topic (Appropriate)<br>1 = Most on topic; off-topic associations, e.g., likes, dislikes, etc. (Variable)<br>0 = Most utterances are off-topic and/or topic is difficult to discern (Inappropriate) | |
| *Event sequencing* (involves the order of presentation of events in which events must be presented in either chronological or logical order) | 2 = All events in chronological order. (Appropriate)<br>1 = Most events chronologically ordered (Variable)<br>0 = No chronological ordering (or most not in order) (Inappropriate) | |
| *Informativeness-police officer* (implies factual information of the type and level of detail required by a police officer) | 2 = All specific information necessary to understand experience is provided or implied; credit should be given for easily inferred information (Appropriate)<br>1 = Most specific information provided but omissions of a few important points (for example, beginning, middle, or resolution), - leaving the listener with some questions as to what happened (Variable)<br>0 = Not enough information (or too much information) to make sense of what happened (Inappropriate) | |
| *Informativeness-chef* (requires the narrative "ingredients" which constitute the recipe for a good narrative, specifically: *1) orientation indexed by time, place, situation, and participants; 2) complication indexed by the conflict generated from the events and happenings and 3) evaluation indexed by meaning and significance of some events).* | 2 = All three ingredients must be present and appropriate in proportion; they provide enough information, leaving no gaps and/or creating no "noise" that impedes understanding (Appropriate)<br>1 = Two ingredients are present without important gaps (Variable)<br>0 = One or no ingredients are present (Inappropriate)<br>Ingredients are orientation, complication, and evaluation | |

# Appendix 5

## Fluency Analytic Rubric

| Criteria | Participant 1 | Participant 2 | Participant 3 | Frequency analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Silent pauses* (the silent breakdowns of the speech made by the speaker during a period longer than five seconds) | | | | |
| *Reformulations* (the speaker's immediate self-corrections after his/her utterances during the speech) | | | | |
| *Repetitions* (the speaker's consecutive repetition of words or phrases in her/his speech without adding, removing, or replacing new words) | | | | |
| *False starts* (the speaker's aborted utterance which is restarted with a change of mind but within the same line of thought) | | | | |