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Do task type, task language and level of proficiency play a role in EFL learners' narrative discourse production?

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Abstract: This study was an attempt to examine the relationship between task types including picture, comic picture book and short film retelling and the narrative discourse performance of the learners. In addition, the language of elicitation (that is Farsi as the first language and English as target language) and learners' level of proficiency were investigated. For this purpose, 20 intermediate and 20 advanced level Iranian EFL learners were selected who produced 240 narrative samples. A picture adopted from a visually rich painting by Garza (1990), a comic picture book called "Frog, where are you?" (Mayer, 1969) and a short silent film were used as the instruments of the study. The narrative discourse produced by the learners was analyzed for their grammaticality, productivity and complexity. The results of statistical analyses revealed that except for productivity, the grammaticality and complexity components had a significant and positive relationship with tasks. Moreover, a significant main effect for discourse dimensions and discourse and task interaction were found suggesting that only picture book and film retelling led to better discourse narration in terms of all dimensions of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity. The results also indicated that the discourse dimensions of learners' narrative production showed variation with regard to level of proficiency and language of elicitation. Detailed analysis of the results and their implications are further discussed.

Keywords: Narrative discourse, level of proficiency, language complexity, grammaticality, productivity.

1. Introduction

It has latterly been a great deal of attention on narrative discourse by reason of its availability among diverse cultures and societies. All human beings have their own stories and tales to be narrated distinctively in a way that, depending on different language and cultural communities, there will be differences in their narrative discourse production; nonetheless, all the narratives elicited by different people within various societies have the same organizational features which render them all cluster around one sort of discourse according to Barthes and Duitis (1975).

Planning extended or text-level discourse is required in telling a story; those narrating a story must plan, organize, generate meaning and monitor their message for coherence using natural language beyond the sentence level (Hadley 1998). Some researchers have referred to the verb tense, the amount of given information, the sequence of action, and the story length as the factors which result in a fund of variation among the discourse produced by narrators. It is additionally suggested that language learners produce different narrative samples in their L1 and L2 (Bayley & Pease-Alvarez 1997; Guiterrez-Clellen 2002). Cultural difference is also an important issue concerning variation in narrative discourse of language learners; as Fiestas and Pena (2004) asserted in their study cultural differences play a large role in the types of the narratives that children produce in the light of the fact that children learn from the narrative examples produced by their families and their cultures. Hence, it can be concluded that narrative styles vary across different languages and cultures.

An overview is provided below of the effect of linguistic differences and how they contribute to learners' narrative discourse capabilities. In addition, other factors such as task type and learners' level of proficiency are also discussed.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Task and narrative discourse

The interactionist model of language acquisition is based on the assumption that learning is more likely to occur when interactional difficulties between speakers cause communication modifications that

facilitate the understanding of both the language that learners are exposed to and the one they produce (Long 1996). This negotiation of meaning is argued to simultaneously bring about a more focused attention to L2 form on the part of learners in order to attain the desired communicative act (Doughty 2001). Several scholars have encouraged the use of tasks in language instruction to achieve a focus on form embedded within a meaningful communication (Skehan 1996; Ellis 2003; Van den Branden 2006). Based on the speech acts theory (Austin 1962), task-based units can be classified into different sets of communication such as identifying, describing, comparing, and narrating of information in response to pictures, passages or realia from target language context.

For instance, Pica (1987) in a study found that learners produced more discourse in open-ended and interactive tasks that required collaborative work since learners could easily take part in communication in groups. In addition, when the task is asked for the exchange of information, learners could make more modifications to the discourse regarding the fact that each learner was required to share information. The findings of this study clearly show that when the task design is appropriate to the context, learner led discourse provides participant roles that elicit more negotiation and active contribution than the teacher led discourse.

Moreover, proponents of learner led discourse production in task-based pedagogy have contended that such a context can lead to a maximum of pushed output and a focus on target structures (e.g., Fotos 2002; Loschky & Bley-Vroman 1993).

In sum, tasks with different specificities and design features for different contexts and pedagogical purposes can yield different outcomes. It is suggested that authentic tasks that mirror real life use of discourse be applied to the classroom so that more natural samples of learner language use and discourse can be elicited (Toth 2011).

2.2. Language proficiency and narrative production

Learners who are developing their first (L1) and second (L2) language skills can demonstrate differences in their narrative skills and

comprehension tests, which can partly account for their performance in narrative recall tests in academic settings. In spite of this significant process, very little research exists on the narrative skills of Persian-speaking learners of English who are in the process of becoming bilingual or trilingual in English. These learners are likely to show distinct levels of competence in L1 and L2. However, since the learners are commonly tested in the second language, educators might not be capable of identifying whether the failure in academic achievement is connected to restricted L2 proficiency or to particular language learning needs and goals.

With regard to the predictability of oral language proficiency and the storytelling abilities of the subsequent academic and literacy success of individuals, it is significant and essential to measure English language proficiency and oral narrative discourse in learners' educational process to assist them in their language developmental trends. The present study was therefore an attempt to examine the language proficiency of foreign language learners to identify their weaknesses or strengths in narrative production and provide implications for educators.

Numerous scholars agree that the most complicated category of narrative discourse is fictional narrative (e.g., McCabe, Bliss, Barra, & Bennett, 2008). Fictional narratives can be produced orally by means of a spontaneous story which was heard or read before. Story recall tasks are utilized by researchers to examine the components of narrative formation in either language decoding or encoding due to some methodological causes (Nicolopoulou 1997). Nicolopoulou (1997) refers to the value of sociocultural approach in the evaluation of the place of storytelling in learners' formation of reality and the development of identity at both the personal and larger societal levels. The application of both the linguistic and sociocultural models in the investigation of the learners' narratives can present opportunities for the understanding of the complex elements of narratives.

With regard to the linguistic complexity of oral narratives, it seems predictable that the majority of researchers and educators attempt to obtain samples of storytelling as a way to measure the oral language

proficiency of individuals. Narration has been identified as a method for the evaluation of language skills. As an instance, oral narration skills before school can predict the oral language development (Price, Roberts, & Jackson 2006; Schneider et al. 2006; Stadler & Ward 2010; Wellman et al. 2011) and it can also be a fundamental ability for the development of reading skill (Price, Roberts, & Jackson 2006; Westerveld & Gillon 2008)

For example, the study carried out by Feagans and Applebaum (1986) indicates that children with higher narrative abilities could outperform on reading and math tests compared to their peers with lower narrative skills. Consequently, the investigation of children's storytelling abilities can have implications for the diagnosis and prediction of their future language proficiency in academic settings.

In another study, Miller et al. (2006) probed if tests of oral language proficiency such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency and discourse tests can predict the reading performance within and across languages in bilingual children. The result of this study showed that English oral narration skill improved Spanish reading performance and Spanish oral skills improved English reading scores.

2.3. The study
This study seeks answers to the following questions:
1. Is there any significant relationship between task types (picture, comic picture book, and short film retellings), and the narrative discourse of L2 learners?
2. Is there any significant relationship between learners' language proficiency (intermediate and advanced), and the narrative discourse of L2 learners?
3. Is there any significant relationship between learners' language of elicitation (Farsi and English), and the narrative discourse of L2 learners?

3. Method
3.1. Participants
The participants of the present study included male and female Iranian adult EFL learners. The participants' native language was Farsi

who learned English as a foreign language in different language institutes in Tehran. Since one of the goals of the present study was to investigate the probable effect of learners' language proficiency level on their narrative discourse production, the participants' level of language proficiency was determined by the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). As a result of OPT, 20 intermediate and 20 advanced learners were selected; thus, a total of 40 Iranian adult EFL learners on the whole took part in this study.

3.2. Instruments
3.2.1. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to have homogeneous groups of participants in terms of their language proficiency level, participants were administered the paper-based OPT (version II, by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate) test. The test included 60 multiple choice questions and learners were allowed 30 minutes to complete it. Learners' level of proficiency was identified according to the scores they obtained – those who made a mark between 30-47 were considered to be in the intermediate level, and those who received a score between 47-60 were considered as advanced language learners.

3.2.2. Narrative tasks

Participants in this study were given a number of different tasks. All the tasks were performed in both the learners' first language that is Farsi, and the target language, English. The primary task was inventing a short story based on a picture. The picture was a visually rich painting by Garza (1990), reflecting a group of people celebrating a party, accompanied with relatives enjoying themselves outside in the yard (See Appendix A). This picture stimulus is also investigated by Fiestas and Pena (2004), who obtained and studied narratives from bilingual children. It needs to be noted that picture retelling task is a task type with the specificity of presenting learners with the least contextual support to build their stories around. Hence, participants performed the book task in a way that their narratives were hinged upon a comic picture book called "Frog, where are you?" (Mayer, 1969). It comprised of 30 pictures which all together led to a unique and coherent story about a little boy who missed his frog and had an adventure looking for

it everywhere around (see Appendix B). Participants discovered the plot of the task by accomplishing the task successfully through having all the pictures included in their narratives together with connecting all the pictures together.

The second task which was the comic picture book retelling provided more contextual support since participants were given the opportunity to look at a complete picture book to write their stories. Put another way, they were shown several pictures based on which they created their stories.

As the last narrative task, the participants were asked to retell a film. Participants watched a short silent film with no dialogue, like a type of sound track. Thus, the narratives produced by the learners were based only on what they saw in the film, since no dialogue occurred during the short film. The film narrative stimuli was a five-minute silent movie called "The Man and the Thief" (McDonald, D., McOmish, F., Plunkett, J. 2011). The film's storyline was a coherent one – it was about a boy and a girl trying to catch a train, meanwhile the girl's bag was stolen in the train station while she was sitting beside the boy; and the story kept going by the boy's attempt to have the bag of the girl back (see Appendix C).

3.3. Procedure

As mentioned above, each participant was exposed to a picture, a comic picture book, and a short silent film to narrate stories. The participants were given information about the procedure of the study and that their narrative samples would remain anonymous throughout the study. Only 5 participants withdrew from the study which resulted in being excluded from the final sample population. The participants were first measured on their level of proficiency and were assigned to intermediate and advanced levels. After the assignment of the participants into proficiency groups, they took part in interviews which required them to orally carry out the narrative tasks. During the interview procedure, participants directly spoke into the tape recorder on account of not being affected by any social interaction with the interviewer.

It needs to be stated that participants were required to start telling their narratives right after the time they finished either looking at pictures or watching the short film, with a relaxed preparatory time to reduce the participants' anxiety.

Additionally, all the three types of narrative tasks were undertaken with the examiner in attendance, prompting the participants by saying: "Please tell me what is happening in the story" for the narratives performed in English, and   for the narratives performed in Farsi.

For the picture retelling task, learners were given a copy of a picture of the painting by Garza (1996) to look at and coherently construct their stories accordingly, trying to include all the details of the picture in their narratives. For the comic picture book, participants were asked to observe all the pictures available in the book and when they thought they were ready to share their narratives, they started producing their stories in a way that all the narratives rested upon the pictures of the book. As the final task, the short film was shown to the participants who enjoined to recount the film's plotline by narrating what the film's story was concerned with, after watching the silent film to the end.

3.4. Transcription and coding

All 240 narrative samples were audio recorded - the researcher was obliged with a portable tape recorder - so that the researcher was able to transcribe the oral narratives into the written corpora. After the transcription of the narratives, the oral language output was examined and coded with respect to complexity, productivity, and grammaticality.

The inter-rater reliability of the data was also ensured. The second rater randomly re-transcribed 5% (12 narrative samples) of the narrative transcripts which were in 100% agreement with the researcher's transcriptions. Moreover, the inter-rater coding reliability was determined by using Cohen's Kappa test in order to assure that complexity, productivity, and grammaticality measures were done reliably. The rater segmented, coded, and scored 30% (72 narrative samples) of the transcribed data, applying the under-mentioned procedures and the results of the random selection of the corpus were

checked against those of the researcher. The reliability for inclusion of particular story elements – complexity – was 87%, the estimated reliability for C-unit segmentation over and above the total number of words – productivity – were 82%, and finally re-scoring the grammaticality of the utterances by the rater revealed a reliability of 85%. In essence, the inter-rater reliability appeared to be within reasonable expectation limits.

3.4.1. Complexity, grammaticality and productivity

In order to determine the complexity of the elicited narrative discourse, samples were coded for the information corresponding with story grammar elements. Each story was coded for story grammar elements in a way that the researcher coded the narrative samples by dissecting whether participants used the target elements including setting, initiating events, internal response, plan, attempt, consequence and ending; scoring 0 or 1 for each individual element, from least to most complex (e.g. in Fiestas and Pena 2004; Olszwski 2013). For specific definition of each story grammar element see Table 1.

Table 1: *Story Grammar Elements*

Component	Code	Description
- Setting	SET	Introduces the main characters and tells where the story takes place
- Initiating Events	IE	A statement of problem
- Internal Response	IR	Thinking or feeling statement
- Plan	PLN	A character's plan to achieve aims
- Attempt/Action	ATT	An attempt to solve the problem
- Consequence	CON	The result of the attempt or action, an outcome
- Ending	END	A resolution of the problem, can also be a summary statement

Source: Fiestas and Pena 2004, 158.

In addition, the productivity of the narratives were coded by identifying the mean length of C-units in words (MLC-words), number of C-units, over and above number of total words (NTW) (e.g. Fiestas

& Pena 2004; Fiestas et al. 2005; Heilmann et al. 2010; Olszwski 2013).

Finally, grammaticality measures were accomplished through deciding whether each utterance (i.e., C-unit) is either grammatical [G], ungrammatical [U] or influenced [I] according to Owens (2001). Grammatical utterances are considered to be in accordance with grammatical rules e.g. subject-verb agreement, verb tense, pronoun and article use, etc. A detailed list of the criteria for all the three categories of [U], and [I] for participants' L2 are presented below in Tables 2 and 3. While calculating the percentage of grammatical utterances in narrative samples, influenced utterances were considered as grammatical (e.g. Fiestas & Pena 2004; Fiestas et al. 2005; Olszwski 2013). Besides, it needs to be stated that as to the stories narrated in Farsi, the grammaticality measure was applied by an expert in Farsi language and literature.

Table 2: *Criteria for Grammaticality Ratings: English*

Grammatical Error	Example
Article number substitution	A frogs live there.
-Article and noun number disagreement	Those child were happy.
- Article omission	Lady wanted to catch train.
- Nonobligatory plural –s	Frog were there in the valley.
- Irregular plurals marked with -s	Uncle's childrens were all happy.
- Nonobligatory regular past -ed	It was last night that we invite my sister.
- Irregular past tense verbs marked with - ed	The rubber raned away quickly.
- Nonobligatory regular third person singular present tense –s	The girl go to buy a ticket.
- No use of noun-verb inversion for questions	Frog is missing?
- Demonstrative pronoun number substitution	Those bee were attacking them.
- Preposition omission	
- Preposition substitution	Dog and boy fell the floor.
- Possessive pronoun number substitution	Children were playing to each other.
- Possessive pronoun gender substitution	The boy and the dog were staring at his frog.
- Verb omission	They left the frog with her family
- Verb person substitution	The dear frightened.
- Tense substitution error	Frog were not there.
- Verb over regularization	The girl went to the bench and sit near the boy.
- Wrong pluralization of nouns	The dog goed to the jungle.
- Switched pronoun "in" and "on"	It was the guilts of the boy.
- No subject-verb agreement	The boy finds the frog on a hole.
	The dog and the boy faces many problems.

Table 3: *Farsi-Influenced English Utterances*

Form	Example
- Code switching - Omitted article - Choosing inappropriate article - No use of noun-verb inversion for questions - Farsi-influenced English words included in an utterance - Nonobligatory do-insertion in question	"سیزده به در " party. Dog found bee hive. He went to a automatic ticket machine. The frog is missing? Her father took a birthday party for her. You enjoy the party?

Moreover, a detailed list of the criteria for all the three categories of [U], and [I] for participants' L1 –Farsi- are presented below in tables 4 and 5 below:

Table 4: *Criteria for Grammaticality rating: Farsi*

Grammatical Error	Example
جمع بستن کلمات فارسی با "جات" -	روی میز انواع خوراکی ها، شیرینیجات و میوه جات بود.
جمع بستن کلمات فارسی با "ات" -	پسربچه و سگ برای پیدا کردن قورباغه شان به سمت باغات یا شایدم جنگل راه افتادند.
عدم تطابق فعل و فاعل -	درخت های فراوانی در جنگل بود.
دراز گویی -	پدر مشغول تهیه کردن غذا بود.
به کار بردن تنوین برای کلمات فارسی -	دختر ناچارا توی صف بلیط منتظر موند.
به کار نبردن حرف اضافه مناسب -	آنها (پسر بچه و قورباغه) رسیدن برکه.

Table 5: *English-influenced Farsi Utterances*

Form	Example
- Code-switching	ممکنه به خاطر جلس بودن سگ باشه. (jealous) اون دختر میخواست از تیکت ماشین بلیط بگیره (ticket machine)

4. Results

To examine the first research question, which dealt with task-types – picture, a comic picture book, and a short film – making a mark on participants' production of narratives, the oral data was initially transcribed, segmented, coded, and scored for measures of productivity, grammaticality and complexity. The descriptive statistics concerned with the first research question and learners' narrative discourse types are represented in table 6.

Table 6: *Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Discourse across Task Type*

	task	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Productivity	picture	121.4618	98.21141	80
	picture book	249.2693	119.52448	80
	film retelling	151.8591	56.55776	80
	Total	174.1967	109.32591	240
Grammaticality	picture	19.2750	18.79535	80
	picture book	29.1125	18.21322	80
	film retelling	26.6000	15.42446	80
	Total	24.9958	17.95962	240
Complexity	picture	4.5375	1.71327	80
	picture book	5.8750	1.58613	80
	film retelling	5.2750	1.90917	80
	Total	5.2292	1.81854	240

The results of descriptive statistics show that in productivity, the mean scores of picture book (M = 249.26, SD = 119.52) was higher than the film retelling (M = 151.85. SD = 56.55), which were both higher than the picture tasks (M = 121.46, SD = 98.21). In grammaticality, too, the mean score of the picture book (M = 29.11, SD = 18.21) was more than film retelling (M = 26.60, SD = 15.42), with both exceeding the picture task (M = 19.27, SD = 18.79). The same result is observed in the complexity dimension, with the picture book (M = 5.87, SD = 1.58), and film retelling tasks (M = 5.27, SD = 1.90) having a higher mean score compared to the picture task (M = 4.53 SD = 1.71).

Investigating the relationship between task types – picture, picture book, and short film – and the type of narrative discourse was done

through the test of point-biserial correlation. Tables 7 and 8 below show the results of the point-biserial correlation:

Table 7: *Descriptive Statistics for Discourse Types and Tasks*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	N
Productivity	174.1967	109.32591	240	2
Grammaticality	24.9958	17.95962	240	2
Complexity	5.2292	1.81854	240	2
Tasks	2.0000	.81820	240	2

Table 8: *Point-biserial Correlation Results for Discourse Types and Tasks*

		Productivity	Grammaticality	Complexity	Tasks
Productivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.342**	.417**	114
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.079
	N	240	240	240	240
Grammaticality	Pearson Correlation	342**	1	.058	167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.369	010
	N	240	240	240	240
Complexity	Pearson Correlation	.417**	.058	1	166*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.369		010
	N	240	240	240	240
Tasks	Pearson Correlation	.114	.167**	.166*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.079	.010	.010	
	N	240	240	240	240

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As Table 8 demonstrates, except for productivity ($p > 0.05$), the grammaticality and complexity components have a significant, positive and weak relationship with tasks ($p < 0.05$).

Moreover, productivity has a significant, moderate and positive relationship with both the grammaticality and complexity components respectively ($p < 0.05$, $r = 0.34, 0.41$). However, the grammaticality and complexity types do not have a significant correlation ($p > 0.05$).

In order to compare the narrative scores across the task types, a one-way repeated measure ANOVA was computed. Table 9 below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 9: Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Narrative Discourse across Task Type

Source	discourse	TypeIII Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
discourse	Linear	3426003.616	1	3426003.616	766.776	.000	.764
discourse * task	Linear	349954.259	2	174977.129	39.162	.000	.248
Error(discourse)	Linear	1058931.588	237	4468.066			

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated statistically significant difference between the narrative dimensions, F (1, 237) = 766.77, p = .000). The results of this analysis revealed a significant effect of discourse dimensions (F(1,237) = 766.77, p = .000) and a significant discourse-task interaction, F(2,237) = 39.16, p = .000, suggesting that only picture book and film retelling led to better discourse narration in terms of all dimensions of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity.

The results of Tukey post-hoc test are reported in table 10 to isolate the exact points where differences between the dimensions occurred.

Table 10: *Tukey Test Results for Narrative Discourse across Task Type*

(I) task	(J) task	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Picture	picture book	-46.3275[*]	5.38234	.000	-59.0219	-33.6331
	film retelling	-12.8200[*]	5.38234	.047	-25.5144	-.1255
picture book	Picture	46.3275[*]	5.38234	.000	33.6331	59.0219
	film retelling	33.5075[*]	5.38234	.000	20.8131	46.2020
film retelling	Picture	12.8200[*]	5.38234	.047	.1255	25.5144
	picture book	-33.5075[*]	5.38234	.000	-46.2020	-20.8131

Based on observed means,
the error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1158.783.
* the mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The results of Tukey post-hoc corroborate the findings of descriptive statistics, indicating that there are statistically significant differences between the task types in all dimensions of narrative

discourse (p = 0.000). More specifically, there are differences between picture and picture book (p = 0.000), picture and film retelling (p = 0.04), and picture book and film retelling (p = 0.000).

Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of the mean percentages for the three task types in narrative discourse.
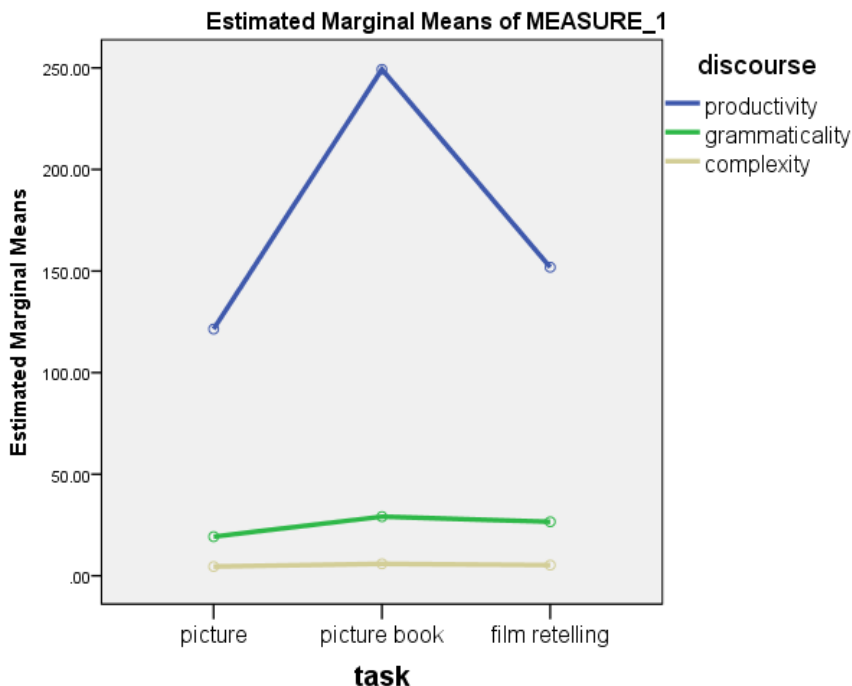

Figure 1: Narrative discourse across task type

4.1. Narrative discourse and language proficiency

In order to purvey an answer to the second research question apropos the narrative discourse production across intermediate and advanced language proficiency levels, L2 participants were put in two groups of advanced and intermediate language proficiency levels, ground in the scores they achieved in the placement test (OPT) they sat. Afterwards, the participants in two language proficiency level narrated their stories around the narrative stimuli – picture, picture book, and short film. The audio recorded stories were transcribed, segmented,

coded, and scored for the measures of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity of participants' narrative discourse. The results of the descriptive statistics are reported in Table 11.

Table 11: *Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Discourse across Proficiency Levels*

	proficiency	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Productivity	intermediate	143.9806	76.76110	120
	advanced	204.4128	127.55825	120
	Total	174.1967	109.32591	240
Grammaticality	intermediate	24.5750	18.51262	120
	advanced	25.4167	17.45659	120
	Total	24.9958	17.95962	240
Complexity	intermediate	4.0917	1.67028	120
	advanced	6.3667	1.11471	120
	Total	5.2292	1.81854	240

The results of descriptive statistics show that in productivity, the mean scores of advanced level (M = 204.41, SD = 127.55) was higher than the intermediate level (M = 143.98. SD = 76.76). In grammaticality, too, the mean score of the advanced level (M = 25.41, SD = 17.45) was more than intermediate level (M = 24.57, SD = 18.51). The same result is observed in the complexity dimension, with the advanced level learners (M = 6.36, SD = 1.11) outperforming the intermediate peers (M = 4.09, SD = 1.67). These results are to be expected that advanced learners had better performance on narrative tasks in comparison with intermediate L2 learners' performance on the narrative tasks, yet the degree to which the three discourse dimension – productivity, grammaticality, and complexity – are different in size in each language proficiency level, seems to be of great interest.

In order to compare the narrative scores across the task types, a one-way repeated measure ANOVA was computed. Table 12 below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 12: *Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Narrative Discourse across Proficiency Levels*

Source	Discourse	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
discourse	Linear	3426003.616	1	3426003.616	623.664	.000	.724
discourse proficiency	Linear	101467.972	1	101467.972	18.471	.000	.072
Error (discourse)	Linear	1307417.874	238	5493.352			

The repeated measures ANOVA additionally highlighted statistically significant difference between the narrative dimensions, F (1, 238) = 623.66, p = .000. The results of this analysis revealed a significant effect of discourse dimensions F(1,238) = 623.66, p = .000 and a significant discourse-proficiency interaction F(1, 238) = 18.47, p = .000, suggesting that as expected the proficiency level had an effect on the discourse narration, with advanced level learners performing a better discourse narration in terms of all dimensions of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity in spite of the fact that language proficiency level did not affect the discourse dimensions equally. Figure 2 clearly exhibits the differences.
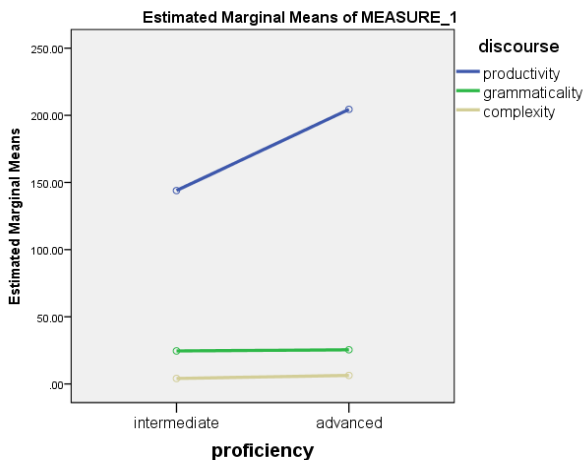

Figure 2: Narrative discourse across proficiency levels

4.2. Narrative discourse and language of elicitation

To appraise the discourse narration of L2 learners subject to their language of elicitation, English and Farsi, learners yielded their narrative samples once in English and once in Farsi. As defined in the former research questions' analysis, the recorded data were transcribed, segmented, coded, and scored for the discourse measures of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity. The results of descriptive statistics are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: *Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Discourse across Language*

	language	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Productivity	English	174.5606	106.17163	120
	Farsi	173.8328	112.83646	120
	Total	174.1967	109.32591	240
Grammaticality	English	19.7500	12.49420	240
	Farsi	30.2417	20.88544	120
	Total	24.9958	17.95962	240
Complexity	English	5.0500	1.80499	120
	Farsi	5.4083	1.82188	120
	Total	5.2292	1.81854	240

The results of descriptive statistics show that in productivity, surpassing all our expectations, the mean scores of participants' L2 - English language- (M = 174.56, SD = 106.17) was higher than Farsi language (M = 173.83, SD = 112.83) which was their mother tongue. In grammaticality, however, the mean score of Farsi language (M = 30.24, SD = 20.88) was more than English language (M = 19.75, SD = 12.49) as expected. Similarly, in the complexity dimension, Farsi language had a higher mean score (M = 5.40, SD = 1.82) compared to English language (M = 5.05, SD = 1.80).

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was carried out in order to trace the differences in the discourse dimensions of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity with regard to the learners' language of elicitation while telling the stories. The results of one-way repeated measures ANOVA are reported below.

Table 14: *Repeated Measures ANOVA Results for Narrative Discourse across Language*

Source	discourse	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
discourse	Linear	3426003.616	1	3426003.616	578.762	.000	.709
discourse language	Linear	35.387	1	35.387	.006	.038	.000
Error (discourse)	Linear	1408850.459	238	5919.540			

The repeated measures ANOVA highlighted statistically significant difference between the narrative dimensions, $F(1, 238) = 578.76$, $p = .000$. The results of this analysis revealed a significant effect of discourse dimensions ($F(1,238) = 578.76$, $p = .000$) and a significant discourse - language interaction ($F(1, 238) = 0.006$, $p = .03$), suggesting that the language variable had an effect on the discourse narration, with a better productivity in English and a higher grammaticality and complexity in Farsi. These differences are clearly illustrated in Figure 3.
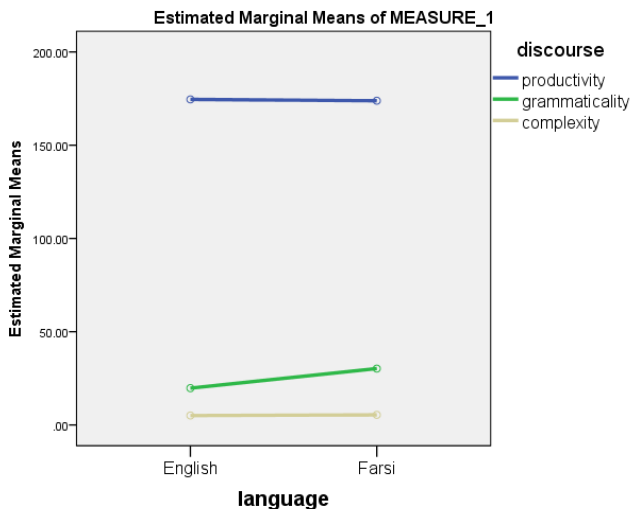

Figure 3: Narrative discourse across language

5. Discussion

The ultimate goal of the present study was a thorough investigation of any probable differences in L2 learners' production of narrative discourse induced by the task types – a picture, a comic picture book, and a short film – language proficiency level, intermediate and advanced together with language of elicitation, Farsi and English.

The result uncovered evidence of some sort, proving that L2 learners were more ascendant in the production of narrative samples when they were exposed to the comic picture book. Referring back to the descriptive statistics for narrative discourse across task types, the final result is vivid enough, suggesting that the comic picture book task had the highest mean score concerning productivity, grammaticality, and complexity. Afterwards, it is the short film narrative task which resulted in the production of more complex, more grammatical, and more productive pieces of narratives compared to the picture narrative task's results.

The aforementioned results raise the possibility that the selected picture stimulus was not probably highly culturally relevant to the Iranian culture – by reason of showing a traditional Mexican-American family birthday party in which a piñata is represented (see appendix A) which may have occasioned fairly short discourse samples. Hence, it can be concluded that participants in all probability did not fully comprehend the cultural diversity demonstrated in the picture task and the product of such a thing was that participants did not include cultural and traditional issues while narrating their stories based on the picture stimuli. Hereby, a conclusion can be drawn about the point that in future studies a more culturally relevant picture need to be used as a narrative stimulus so that better results are drawn.

The final task the participants dealt with was generating a story based on a short silent film. The final result suggests that participants' stories were not as long as the stories generated around the picture book in terms of productivity and mean length of C-units (MLU). They were additionally not as complex as the stories narrated based on the picture book stimulus in terms of including particular story grammar elements. However, the result of short film elicitation exceeded the picture

elicitation results in terms of the length of the stories as well as story complexity.

There is still room for argument over the results of the short film task and those of the comic picture book stimulus. In spite of the fact that the use of a short film is believed to end in more utterances in comparison with the picture and the comic picture book (Pavlenko & Jarvis 2002; Fiestas & Pena 2004), the results of the short film elicitation task seemed to be atypical in the current study. Although, the contextual support of the short film was the most among the two other narrative stimuli used in this study, participants did not produce long pieces of narratives and the narratives were not even as complex as those created around the comic picture book. One distinct possibility might be concerned with participants' narrating the short film plot after completely watching it; in other words, participants were in need of increased dependence on their memory by virtue of narrating the story after the time they watched it. It might occur that they could not distinctly remember the precise details of the short film story line. Participants were under the stress of the interview session and could not recall the short silent film in detail due to the fact that they created their stories from memory.

Hence, they produced shorter narratives and less complex ones as a result. Yet, when participants were provided with the comic picture book, each and every detail of the story was available for them in the book; they had the chance to survey them all. Besides, it is likely that the above mentioned results are the inevitable corollary of the book oriented education system in Iran. Language learners might not be acquainted with handling the short film elicitation technique in order to produce a productive and complex story. In conclusion, there is one more point under discussion which is in regards to the short film not being a dazzling activity and task to be accomplished by learners. Participants' short narratives and their inclusion of fewer story grammar elements in their oral narrative samples was perhaps the result of lacking enthusiasm for the short silent film.

The results related to the second research question revealed that a direct connection was established between language proficiency level

and the produced narrative discourse as expected. English proficiency level had a bearing on the sample narrative discourse the participants generated. Such a result is in relation to all the three discourse dimensions of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity. Accordingly, those who attracted the label of advanced language learners yielded oral narrative samples which were significantly different from those produced by intermediate language learners in terms of length, the number of grammatical utterances, and whether or not specific story elements were included in L2 learners' narratives.

Expounding more on the statistical results, advanced language learners were highly successful in eliciting longer stories in terms of the total number of the words in stories, the number of c-units along with the mean length of c-units. Results also provided information about narratives' macro structure, in particular, story complexity. Language learners in advanced group produced more complex samples of narratives in which there were more stories, grammar elements included. Hereby, advanced learners' piece of narratives tended to be more coherent and elaborated in comparison with the stories told by intermediate language learners.

In essence, apropos of whatever has been discussed as regards the second research question, it is not contrary to the expectations that advanced L2 learners demonstrated greater proportions of grammatical utterances in that the advanced group used a more native-like language with lower percentage of ungrammatical utterances. At large, these results uncovered the fact that L2 learners who had lower language proficiency did not catch up with their peer group who had a higher L2 proficiency level in terms of narrative discourse.

There is a strong possibility that the previously mentioned findings are indicative of a by-product of variety as to the extent to which learners had been exposed to their L2. Advanced learners spent more time tackling their L2; they were more proficient, therefore.

Making a comparison between advanced L2 learners and intermediate L2 learners performing on narrative tasks, the other possibility might be related to the issue that learners with lower

language skills in English had a nodding acquaintance with narrative tasks compared to advanced L2 learners who were more familiar with accomplishing narrative tasks due to the amount of time they spent learning that language.

In general, it was writ large that learners' language proficiency level in English made inroads into their narrative discourse in terms of productivity, grammaticality, and complexity in advance of conducting the research. Thus, the findings turn to be more conclusive provided that illuminating details are imparted vis-à-vis the discourse dimension – productivity, grammaticality, and complexity – which widely fluctuated subject to L2 language proficiency skills. Despite the fact that advanced learners used desperately more words and that their utterances turned to be much longer than those of intermediate learners, the amount of their grammatical utterances do not differ from one another as much as the eye-catching differences in the productivity dimension, akin to the statistical results related to the complexity of narratives across learners' L2 proficiency skills.

The results in connection with narrative discourse across L2 proficiency level is a testimony to the profound impact of the language instruction habit learners were under, upon the stories they narrated. L2 learners in all likelihood concentrated on their speech to be fluent rather than keeping their attention on their grammaticality. It can be argued, on the balance of probabilities, that regardless of the participants' language proficiency level, L2 learners do not show any interest in following grammatical rules. Learners tend not to care about their grammatical mistakes at the expense of making fluent speech (Patten, 1999).

In spite of the fact that the literature is limited in depth with regards to the variety in narrative discourse rendered by different L2 proficiency level, the results of the second research question, all in all, support Olszewski's idea (2013) that "children with more language experiences would perform higher on narrative tasks, than children with lower initial language proficiency" (126). According to Olszewski (2013), children with lower English language proficiency have more difficulty in producing sharp and coherent pieces of oral language.

The results parenthetically confirm what Olszewski (2013) ascertained apropos children's narrative samples subject to their inclusion of particular story elements in his longitudinal study. He argued that an individual uses a basic communication skill so as to recall the story elements in their narratives. The result of his study revealed that children with higher English language proficiency demonstrated higher basic communication skills which resulted in their better performance on narrative tasks.

The last research question of this study oriented towards scrutinizing the differences documented in L2 narrative discourse across the language in which the narratives were elicited – Farsi and English. Learners performed on all the three narrative tasks in both their mother tongue, Farsi, and their target language, English; ipso facto, this research question proposed pursuing if the narrative discourse produced by L2 learners is under the influence of the language in which the stories are narrated.

Based on such a presumption that Farsi was the participants' mother tongue, in advance of doing the study it was perfectly natural to lend credence to this statement that L2 learners would present more brilliant performance on narrative tasks the time they generate their stories in Farsi. Nonetheless, the statistical results related to the third research question proved the former surmise not being confirmed.

The results of the third research question fell short of expectations regarding that those stories elicited in English were more productive in terms of the total number of the words, the length of C-units together with the number of C-units; yet the results obtained for narratives told in Farsi were quite otherwise. The mean score of productivity for the stories in Farsi was lower in comparison with the mean score of stories told in English. Taking into account that participants' mother tongue was Farsi, participants' lower degree of grammatical mistakes in stories generated in Farsi was not surprising.

The results of language of elicitation affecting L2 learners' narrative discourse in terms of story complexity attested that the stories produced in Farsi encompassed more story grammar elements and consequently

they were more complex; such a result is a compelling evidence that the time participants narrated stories in Farsi they tended to be more straight and to the point despite of the fact that Farsi stories were shorter in length, proving that there was no correspondence between the quality of the narratives and their quantity.

The differences appearing in narrative discourse across language of elicitation have been previously authenticated by experts. Melzi (2000), as cited in Fiestas & Pena (2004) in a study compared the narrative style of Central American and European American mothers and their children. In the end he reached the conclusion that the conversational aspect of narration was a cornerstone for Central American mothers, while European American mothers focused their attention on the structural and organizational features of the narratives of their children. Such a result suggests that sociocultural role of narrative style vary from culture to culture. Fiestas and Pena (2004) parenthetically drew a conclusion from the result of their study and reported that there was a bicultural difference in children's narrative style in terms of story complexity as "narrative contextualization may be culture specific" (162).

5.1. Conclusion and Implications

One of the most awkward aspects of language learning process is considered to be speaking in the second language, and teachers have always been in search of apposite speaking activities which are advantageously useful to be applied in classroom contexts. Taken into account the above-mentioned issue, the findings of this study, which has appeared to be within the wider framework of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), propose that narrative tasks serve as valid and relevant activities encouraging students in talking more in the classroom. In this study L2 learners were provided with three different narrative tasks. They yielded three stories upon a picture, a comic picture book, and a short film; it was proved that comic picture book and short film elicitation stimuli are more successful in challenging students in their learning of the second language.

Moreover, according to Olszweski (2013), "given the linguistic complexity that is inherent in oral narratives, it is not surprising that

researchers and educators frequently elicit fictional narratives as a way to assess oral language proficiency and the ability to tell stories, as narration has also been identified as a predictor of language skills (10).

All in all, classrooms are the best to accommodate L2 learners with developing the abilities to coherently construct and perform their narratives similarly to the native speakers of that target language (Pavlenko, in press).

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Appendix A. Narrative Task 1: The picture Stimulus

Appendix B. Narrative Task 2: The Comic Picture Book Stimulus
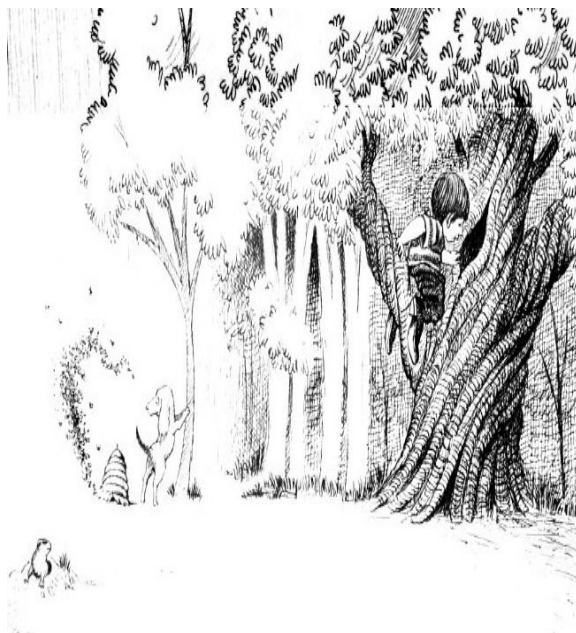
Appendix C: Narrative

Task 3: The short Silent Film Stimulus