A CASE STUDY OF PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION IN THEIR READING ACTIVITY

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Abstract
Parents play an important role in the character-shaping of their children, and it is mostly processed during the parent-child interaction. Children can be deeply influenced at home in terms of mother tongue, ideology, habit, or personal behavior. Hence, parent-child reading activity has been used as a popular mode that offers an opportunity to affect children purposely. However, many parents are confused about the way to interact with their children, either verbally or not. This study tries to look into this problem by observing a real case. The conversation between a parent and a child is audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The result shows that equal power distribution can be found in this particular case, and there are two identities that the child can find herself, i.e., teacher and student. In addition, the mother adopts a number of strategies to help fulfil her expectation, such as reading material selection, teaching ideological lessons, child's language development, evoking imagination, and praising strategy. The findings may provide implications for parents who are confused about how to interact with their children properly and effectively.

Keywords: parent-child interaction, reading activity, conversation analysis

Introduction

Parents are the initial and most important teachers for their children in terms of not only teaching basic knowledge, but also other aspects such as teaching mother tongue, ideology, and they even influence their children's personality to some extent explicitly or implicitly. For instance, it is found that parents are conveying information on social status implicitly to children everyday (Lauren & Marion, 2008). Children are taught mostly not by the instructions from parents, but through interactions between parents and children. When children are asked to join a conversation with their parents, the read-aloud occasion does provide them an opportunity for their identity production (Margaretha, 2020). Hence, a popular home interaction, parent-child reading activity, emerges that has been practised by many parents to nurture their children. During this activity, parents and children may interact with each other in terms of both the content and the language it uses. However, a number of people have not managed to realize the importance of this activity and are not willing to develop this activity as a routine parent-child interaction or if they do, there is still no remarkable effect due to their lack of objectives during the special parent-child interaction. Many variables may determine the effects on children, including the materials parents choose, the way parents behave, and particularly the discursive practice of parents. This study looks into a particular case using conversational analysis in attempt to reveal what an effective interaction between parents and children could be. Based on the reality in current family context and previous studies, three research questions are proposed:

i) What is the power distribution in this particular case of parent-child reading interaction?

ii) How does the child build her own identity in this reading activity?

iii) What strategies does the parent employ to facilitate the parent-child interaction and what are the parent's purposes of employing those strategies?

Literature Review

The investigation of child language has a long history. Researchers are now inclined to put their lens on children's discursive practices and especially situated interaction between either adult-child or child-child interaction. The study of child discourse in terms of ethnographic study and sociolinguistic study are increasingly popular, and there are so far a rich source of studies on such issues which focus on different aspects such as family life, child self-identification, parent-child interaction, peer children talk, and so on. This study will merely focus on parent-child interaction.

The pragmatics of family life

Family works like a child's first classroom in their life, where all the adults perform as the teachers in the classroom. After birth, an infant tends to learn behaviors and languages, the two crucial means by which they process their cognitive analysis of the world, from the adults, usually parents, in front of their faces. Thus it is family where children listen to utterances and learn how to construct their narratives which reflect the past, present, and future events (Health, 1983). However, behaviors and languages used in families vary to a large extent, and people tend to ignore the power of discursive practices within family context, so children are produced in quite a difference between families in terms of personal habits including the way they behave, the language they use, their attitude towards others in society, their ideologies to this world, and so on.

Ervin-Tripp et al. (1984) looks into family talk in terms of pragmatic conventions and argues that language is the crucial means that family members use to establish interpersonal relationship. They point out a variety of factors that affect their choices of discursive practice including context, identity, power, and emotional involvement. Ervin-Tripp et al. (1990) investigate family members' choice of request forms and the degree of power the request has to the addressees, and they argue that the power of a request is determined by different variables like the cost of the request, the degree of indirectness of the request, the identity of the addressor, and the identity of the addressee. For instance, children may not employ indirect strategy or polite strategy with their parents as they employ with other social members because they have special emotional involvement with their parents (Wootton 1997). Hence, the pragmatic choices of children reflect their discourse knowledge which is necessary for them to become competent communicators in different social settings. However, some children might still employ such strategies with their parents because their family members tend to do so in their daily life, while some other children might neither employ such strategies to other social members, nor to their family members also because their family members tend to do so in their daily life.

Directive-response interaction is another field that intrigues many researchers. For example, Goodwin and Cekaite (2013) investigate directive-response interaction in terms of getting a child to go to sleep. Children may accept parents' directives and may as well not comply in a number of ways, e.g. refusing, bargaining, delaying, or even ignoring, and they argue that children's emotion plays a central role. Parent-child communicative project like getting children to go to sleep is considered as a habit by the author which usually is less determined by the personality of children, but more by how parents produce their directives. If the parents give their directives as an order, some children might simply observe but this would exert a negative influence on the development of the children's personality, while more children are likely to resist so that parents are most possibly fail to reach their final goal.

Blum-Kulka (1997) looks into dinner-table talk in American and Israeli middle class families in terms of turn taking, and the results show that most children are only likely to gain the floor when they are allowed or invited, and in addition, there exists cultural differences in the interpretation of others' interruption as involvement or as inappropriate turn taking. Ochs and Taylor (1995) concentrate on the structure of family members' participation in dinner time

storytelling activity in American white middle class families, and they find mothers and children often play the roles of story teller, while fathers usually perform as the one to evaluate others' actions. This finding help the family distinguish powers between family members. Both of the above mentioned studies present an unequal power between parents and children on dinner table, which belongs to the typical power distribution and is considered by the author as proper practice in some situations like when children commit a serious mistakes, but inappropriate in most situations like dinner-table talk. This is a daily normal family gathering and provides an opportunity for parent-child interaction to promote parent-child affection. In those situations, parents are supposed to share an equal family status with children, and respect should be expected to be reciprocal.

The construction of self-identity

As little infants grow up, they are increasingly to have an awareness of their own position in the family as well as others' positions mainly through their gradual acquisition of language. In a diary study by Shatz (1994), whose research object is her own grandson, she finds that as the development of her grandson's linguistic competence, he tends to become a socialized individual. For example, when he was three years old, in one family gathering, he looked all around and said "I think you call this a group" (Shatz 1994: 191). This utterance proves that he has the ability to recognize the status of each individual and the essence of a family group, meaning that he has built up his own identity among the family members. Their tendency of mental reflection on their own identity, others' identity, possibility of events in the future, etc. can be assisted by their growing control of grammatical features such as modality, verb aspects, and the use of complement verbs (Koymen & Kyratzis, 2014). By looking into the use of self-reference forms and agentive causality, Budwig (1990) also asserts that it is only through discursive practice that children can learn their self-identity, build their self-identity, and identify others' identity. At the same time, their construction of self-identity can be largely influenced by their caregivers due to the caregivers' style of discursive practice. For example, when adults guide children by saying "you must not interrupt when your parents are in a conversation" or "you have to take whatever your parents suggest", children would recognize themselves as in a weak position in the interaction with adults; while when parents guide children by saying "if you have any insights in your mind, feel free to break in" or "I don't make decisions for you, but I can offer my suggestions", children would recognize themselves in the equal position with their parents.

According to the literature discussed in the above paragraph, through discursive practice, children are able to build a sense of self awareness in the family, and their feelings of their own positions in the family vary a lot depending on the parents or caregivers ideologies, attitudes, and their linguistic impact on the children. Therefore, family daily linguistic interaction does play an important role shaping children's personality, ideology, and their linguistic habits, making parent-child interaction become remarkably worth investigating. At the same time, it's not only researchers who realize the worthiness studying parent-child, but also parents who similarly consider parent-child interaction as an effective approach promote parent-child relationship and help educate children as well. Particularly, parent-child reading activity is one of the examples that are popular among parents across cultures.

Parent-child interaction and reading activity study

Parent-child interaction is a universal phenomenon which can be studies from a variety of perspectives. Parents' discursive practice with children may impact on children unintentionally, on the other hand, intelligent parents often use utterances pragmatically in order to fulfil the objective of guiding their children.

Lauren and Marion (2008) look into parent-child interaction styles in Middle Childhood in order to find whether there are difference between genders and between social classes. Their results show that mothers tend to produce more affiliative utterances then fathers, while fathers produce more assertive utterances than mothers; fathers and mothers both produce more affiliative utterances with sons but more assertive utterances with daughters. Middle class parents tend to more affiliative in their interaction style than parents of working class. The

differences between genders and between classes can not be found among children's utterances. From this study, we may tell that in parent-child interaction, parents' discursive styles are usually vary based on their own gender and social class as well as the gender of their children. Nevertheless, there is no such a tendency among children's linguistic practice. Apart from gender and social class, culture also plays a role in determining parent-child interaction. Burns and Radford (2008) conduct a study of parent-child interaction in three Nigerian families. The study reveals those Nigerian families' preference for instructional conversation with their children like a teacher teaching in the classroom. It illustrates how parent-child interaction enhances children's language development without disrupting the naturalness and purpose of the talk. This is a specifically situated case of immigrants in the UK, so developing children's linguistic competence becomes the concentration of parents, indicating the contextual and cultural influences on parents' objectives in parent-child interaction. Another study by Huang (2012) checks Mandarin parent-child interaction in terms of parental other-repetition, and the result shows that various types of repetition are used by parents for a range of communicative purposes, including asking for clarification, asking for confirmation, confirming the receipt of information, targeting a next action, and paraphrasing children's utterances. This other-repetition strategy characterizes the child-directed speech and reflects parents' intention of fostering interaction.

There are also works having been done on the topic of parent-child reading activity. Guo (2017) analyzes the discourse in parent-child reading in rural areas of China. Its results show that finds that in parent-child reading, first, parents play the predominant role, whereas children are in a passive position; second, attentions are always given to the the text itself instead of introducing more information beyond the text; third, interactions between parents and children are limited by parents' poor performance in questioning. Implications can be drawn are 1) parents should invite children as the center of the reading activity; 2) parents should extend knowledge from the books; 3) good quality questions would have more effects on the result of the reading activity. A recent study by Margaretha (2020) conducts a multimodal interactional analysis of interaction between parent, child, and picture book. The results emphasize the importance of the reader and the reader's skills. In addition, it also introduces the benefit of reading aloud in the production of children's identity in the reading activity when children are asked to participate in a conversation. Both of the studies indicate criteria of being a good parent in the reading activity, however, the part of children is always like to be ignored by researchers. Therefore, this study, with a particular case as the main research object, examines how the child identifies herself in the parent-child reading activity, i.e. her self-identity construction. Then the strategies used in this case are found out to investigate what are the parent's purposes of employing these strategies.

Research Method

Research design

In order for the research questions to be answered, the parent-child reading activity between one mother and one child from China is video recorded. The activity is video recorded three times for around 5 minutes each, and the language they use is transcribed by the author into written form. Then the language is translated into English by the author as well. Conversational Analysis is adopted to look into the detailed information from the parent-child reading activity, and finally, for the mother's strategic purpose to be elicited, Speech Act Theory is also necessarily applied.

Participants

The participants are from the author's family, the mother as the wife and the child as the daughter of the author. The mother is 37 years old majoring in preschool education and now works as a teacher in a training center. The daughter is 4 years and 3 months old who is a currently a preschool student. They develop parent-child reading activity as a routine in their daily life after they get on bed every evening but before they sleep. It is such a habit that even the daughter would sometimes urge the mother to read a book for her when it is the high time.

Instruments

The materials read by the mother are all stories that suit the child very well and some of them are edited with beautiful pictures to demonstrate what's going on in the story. The stories are written in Chinese. Their interactive activity is video recorded by the author with a cellphone for further analysis, and this has been consented by both the mother and the daughter. Their parent-child reading activity is video recorded for three times in three evenings respectively.

Data analysis

After the three video clips are produced, they are all transcribed into written forms and are translated into English based on the necessity of writing the report. The data are analyzed under three themes which are drawn from previous literature review and also are the topics of the three corresponding research questions: power distribution, the child's construction of her own identity, and the mother's conscious adoption of interactive strategies. After the data are analyzed from the three perspectives, implications of the findings are discussed as well.

Results and Discussion

Power distribution

There is no doubt that parents always have more power than children not only because they are the parents, but also due to their richer knowledge and personal experience. Moreover, all parents would like to teach all what they know to their children in order for them to make progress and have an affluent enough knowledge foundation. However, in reality, parents are to end up with different effects on their children as a result of their different discursive strategies and practices when they are intending to do that. Language does play an important role in this particular progress of educating. We can find examples from following that reflect what the mother does when she is facing power distribution issue.

Conversation One:
M=mother C=Child
1)M: what's this?
2)C: Spring festival beast.
3)M: Shall we read this one?
4)C: En...(nod her head)
5)M: Chuxi ("chu"means to eliminate in Chinese), also named Spring Festival Eve. Long long ago ... all the villagers are afraid of his very much! Wow, look! How frightened they are! Ya, look at this child. Her braid stands up!
6)C: She is so frighted that her braid stands up.
7)M: Yes. Every year...this year when they are escaping...(interrupted)
8)C: He's gone bad.
9)M: Let's find it together....The boy asks curiously...(interrupted)
10)C: (sneeze)
11)M: Oh, wow, 100 years old (a meaningful metaphor for a sneeze)! Are you also frightened by the beast? Hehehe...
12)C: Hehehe...
13)M: Every time Xi sees us burning bamboos here, he escapes in a hurry. This is his escaping.
14)C: He is also afraid of red colour.
15)M: Wow, he is also afraid of red colour. Take a look. Wow, the kid jump up with joy...

In Utterance 1 and 3, the mother asks her child about the selection of their reading material rather than making a decision for her which can benefit the child in many ways. For example, the child may always have her own idea when a problem emerges and make her own

decision, and from another perspective, by being asked about the child's opinion, the child can feel a respect from the mother, and she may do the same thing to her mother, as well as to others. This is an illustration of an equal power distribution. From Utterance 5, we can find that the mother reads and demonstrates the story in an even more excited mood than the child. This child-like behavior shortens the distance between parent and child so that they tend to interact with each other as if a pair of close friends. Especially in Utterance 11, when the child sneezes suddenly, the mother makes fun of this incident by asking "are you also frightened by the beast". The result is that both of them burst into laughter for quite a while. Children in this daily interaction with their parents would always be willing to communicate with their parents either they are trapped in a trouble or they reach some cheerful achievement. If, on the contrary, parents refuse to show enough respect to children, make decisions for them, talk in an assertive way with them, the children would not be likely to share their thoughts or other things with parents.

Parents are the ones who take more power in terms of family status, knowledge, and personal experience, but it's not an intelligent choice for them to always stay in a powerful position in the family, because if they would like the children to grow healthily and in the trajectory of their expectation as well, they have to be aware of their family power distribution. There is an old saying that "where there is an oppression, there is a resistance".

Self-identity construction

Identity is in fact closely related to power. The power of a teacher leads to people's recognition of student identity. Will the power of a parent also lead to our recognition of child identity? To the author's point of view, both teachers and parents can work in different identities depending on different contexts. For example, teachers can be teachers in a classroom setting, whereas they can also be friends with students outside the classroom. Similarly, parents can be parents when it is necessary for them show their power, but in more circumstances, parents can also be friends with their children.

Conversation Two:
M=mother C=Child
1)M: Let's take a look. Oh, what's wrong with it? What is it? Is it tear or sweat?
2)C: Sweat.
3)M: Sweat? Okay. Why is it unhappy? Was it criticized by its mother? It doesn't matter. Don't be upset. Mother criticized you because she wants to help you become the better you. Why was it criticized?
4)C: Because she breaks the fish jar and the fish and water are out.
5)M: Yes, they are out. Then the fish will be no longer in water. What will happen to them?
6)C: I don't know.
7)M: They are born to live in water. They can breathe and swim freely in water. If there is no water, they would not be able to breathe and swim. Then their lives would end. The mother is caring about the little fish, right?
8)C: Yes.
9)M: So there is always a reason why the mother criticizes you. She wants to help you become the better you. Wow, who is it?
10)C: The mother.
11)M: What's wrong with the mother?
12)C: She is angry.
13)M: Why is she angry? Let's find out. What is it doing?
14)C: Sleeping.
15)M: It's 10 o'clock. You are still sleeping!
16)C: It's time to get up!
17)M: Yes. It is criticized because of getting up late. Look! It is in such a sleepy appearance. Everybody would like to wake up naturally in the morning, but if you don't get up on time, you would not have enough time to brush your teeth, wash your face, and have your

breakfast. Rushing to school in a hurry would harm your body and also pose yourself in danger. If you always get up late, your life would be in a great mess.

In this clip of interactive reading, a number of questions are found from the utterances of the mother. In Utterance 1, three successive questions are asked by the mother referring to the same issue, which sounds like the mother doesn't have the knowledge and she needs her child's help to make it clear that "what it is on earth". Actually, the mother is pretending to be weak in knowledge foundation and is in the urgent need of the child's instruction. This showing weakness strategy provides the child with an opportunity to be the instructor and the child would also identify herself to be knowledgeable. She might not realize that in her subconscious mind, she has been recognized as a qualified teacher by herself, which significantly raises her self-confidence. The child in fact gives an incorrect answer because since the fish is unhappy, the correct answer to the question is tear. However, the mother does not point out the mistake, for example, by saying "no, you are wrong" or "no, it's not sweat", instead, she continues her successive questions and offers prompts within her questions like "was it criticized by her mother?" and she answers by herself: "It doesn't matter. Don't be upset. Mother criticized you because she wants to help you become the better you". Then the mother keeps asking questions in Utterance 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13, but she makes it not sound like a teacher is asking questions to a student. What the child may perceive is that the mother is curious about everything in the story and trying to find answers to everything from her. Therefore, the child may think "it's necessary for me to give a hand and teach my mother the knowledge".

Despite of the strategy used by the mother, the child indeed does not have all the knowledge. Responding to child's lack of knowledge could be another crucial issue that also influence the child's construction of self-identity. It has been mentioned that in Utterance 3, the mother responds to a wrong answer by giving no response. Another example is in Utterance 6, when the child say "I don't know". In this occasion, the mother delivers all the knowledge and ends with a confirmation question. A similar example is in Utterance 17 where the mother delivers a long speech in attempt for the child to learn a lesson from it. The child, this time considering herself as a student in her subconscious mind, listens carefully and accepts the explanation naturally. It proves again the hypotheses that parents' discursive practices are deeply impacting on children's construction of self-identity.

Parent strategies

Although the mother allows the freedom of the child to select a story to read, she still imposes the will of herself by providing a limited series of stories. Selecting materials can be the first strategy parents take in parent-child reading activity. However, merely meaningful materials do not guarantee a significant and successful parent-child interaction in story reading. Every utterance from parents should be evaluated carefully to exert the possibly largest influence on children.

Conversation Three:

M=mother C=Child

1)M: The queen would hold a peach party in the palace. When Sun WuKong learned that he was not invited to the party, he was very angry. Look! He is so angry!

2)C: that he is not good-looking.

3)M: Yes (laugh), he is not good-looking. People become ugly whenever they get angry, right? And then, he...he was so drunk that he was tottering here and there when leaving (laugh), tottering (laugh)

4)C: tottering

5)M: What is it like?

6)C: (Stand up, and pretend to walk unstably)

7)M: Wow, this is tottering, right? (laugh) then, he......he saw the emperor was sitting in his throne, then he rushed up to beat him. The emperor was shocked. He immediately asked Buddha for help to surrender Sun Wukong. Do you think they would succeed? in surrendering him?

8)C: (think for a while, and wave her head)

9)M: Let's find out...having win the first battle, Sun WuKong was very proud of himself...he made a bet with Buddha, if he managed to fly away from Buddha's five fingers, he would be the emperor. He is so arrogant right? Finally, he was less powerful than Buddha. He tried his best again and again but failed all the time. Then what happened?

10)C: He was pressed under the Wuxing Mountain by Buddha.

11)M: Yeah, he was pressed under the Wuxing Mountain by Buddha. You are so correct. Give you a big "like". This is the result he has to bear.

One strategy that can be identified in Utterance 1 and 3 is that the mother tries to teach the child lessons in the process of reading stories. It is actually an ideology or an attitude towards life that people need to control their emotion when it is unstable, otherwise, something bad would happen. In Utterance 9 and 11, a similar strategy can be found that by emphasizing the cause and result occurring to Sun WuKong, the mother tries to teach the child another lesson that people should learn to be modest even if they have superpower or super-ability, because arrogance would also lead to a bad ending.

Another strategy is found in Utterance 3, 5, and 7. By asking "what is tottering like", the child is expected to perform it and add it to her vocabulary knowledge, and actually she fulfilled her expectation. This is an important role that parent-child reading activity should play in the language development of children.

The mother also cultivates her child ability of imagination by asking a question like "do you think they would succeed, in surrendering him?". The child is guided to think independently about possible consequences, which would improve their logical thinking.

The last strategy from this mother is to praise. In Utterance 11, when the child manages to give an expected answer, the mother presents great joy and gives her a praise very excitedly. Praising is the strategy that has the power to convert a child from bad to good. A child who sings very well are very likely to give up singing if parents tell him that he is really a terrible singer. A child who never steals is likely to become a thief in reality if he is considered to be a thief mistakenly. On the contrary, if a child's strength in some aspects is magnified and kept being praised, even he has more weaknesses than strengths, he will increasingly become strong in aspects of his weaknesses. During the whole process of parent-child interaction, parents' discursive practices do play the crucial role.

Conclusion

This is a case study that examines parent-child interactive reading activity and the findings can be identified from three perspectives. First, equal power distribution is found in this case of parent-child interactive reading, and it is usually expected as well whenever it is not necessary to show parents' power in parent-child interaction in all other contexts. The effective method to reach this goal is to show enough respect to children so that they are more willing to communicate with their parents on the occasions of either troubles or cheers. Second, there are two identities that the child can find herself, which are teacher and student. From another angle, friend can be an additional identity for both parent and child since they share equal power in this context. Third, the mother adopts a number of strategies to help fulfil her expectation, such as reading material selection, teaching ideological lessons, child's language development, evoking imagination, and praising strategy. The limitation of this study is that there is only one case, so no comparison can be made and a limited number of strategies can be identified. Further study can involve more families to draw more implications.

Acknowledgements

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