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TALKING ABOUT THE PAST: HOW DO CHINESE MOTHERS ELICIT NARRATIVES FROM THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN ACROSS TIME

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This study investigates maternal interactive strategies and types of information discussed in mother child conversation about the past, with special focus on mothers' eliciation styles across time. The relationship between the mother's interactive strategies and children's narrative skills concurrently and later in development was also examined. Sixteen children, 8 boys and 8 girls, and their mothers living in Taipei, Taiwan were interviewed when the children were 3;6, 3;9, 4;0, and 4;3. The child was asked to tell joint personal anecdotes with the mother at each visit. Over time there is no systematic change in maternal interactive strategies and amount of narrative information elictied by the mothers. Maternal approval to the child's talk, elaborative requests, and provision of information are correlated with children's narrative ability. These results may suggest implications for classroom instruction in the US and provide guidelines for parents and preschool teachers in Taiwan. (*Narrative, Mother-child Interaction, Chinese Children, Chinese Mothers, Scaffolding*)

INTRODUCTION

Using a social interactionist model, this study aims to explore the narrative performance and interactions between Mandarin Chinese-speaking mothers and children in conversation about the past over a nine month period, with special focus on maternal elicitation styles across time. Vygotsky (1978)

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held that the development of children begins in social interactions in which competent adults guide children's participation. As children develop, the adult scaffolding diminishes and eventually children can complete a task on their own without support. Based on Vygotskian theory, the mother-child joint conversation model has been used to examine children's internalization of the scaffolding strategies provided by their mothers.

According to research on English-speaking parent-child conversations, young children's independent narrative skills originate in dialogic contexts between children and competent adults, in many cases their mothers (Fivush, 1991; Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Reese & Fivush, 1993). In talking with their children, mothers apply different scaffolding strategies, in Bruner's term (1975), to support their children's talk. These strategies, such as initiating topics for conversation, providing the context for such topics, providing information, modeling, elaborating, and clarifying what their children say, show relationships with young children's independent narrative competence later in development.

Maternal scaffolding strategies vary across mothers. Among white, middle class Americans, some mothers may use a directive, topic-switching, and low-elaborative style in conversation with their children about the past. These mothers tend to ask repetitive questions, to use a great many directives, to change topics for discussion frequently, and not to elaborate on the child's responses (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991). Other mothers tend to ask questions with new information supplied, to focus on one topic for discussion, and to expand upon the child's talk. These mothers have been labeled as conversation-eliciting, topic-extending, or high-elaborative mothers (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991).

It is important to examine change and/or consistency in mothers' scaffolding strategies as their children become more competent. Previous research with U.S. mothers suggests that individual mothers can be consistently classified as high-elaborative or low-elaborative in joint personal anecdotes over time (Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). Virtually all mothers, however, show an increase in elaboration over time.

In research in North America, mothers' scaffolding techniques show a relationship with their children's synchronous and later narrative skills. Children whose mothers display a high-elaborative style produce longer, and more elaborated narratives than children with low-elaborative mothers (Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). According to the study of Peterson, Jesso, and

McCabe (1999), children with economic disadvantage show growth in their vocabulary and narrative skill after one year of intervention of their mothers' elicitation styles of narratives. They encouraged the intervention mothers to have more narrative conversation with their children and to ask more open-ended and context-eliciting questions. A number of studies also found that mothers who use many evaluations, orientations, and connectives in conversations with their children have children who often use these devices in their speech (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987; Fivush, 1991; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1994; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). It is not clear, however, whether such relationships hold cross-culturally.

Mothers' scaffolding strategies may also reflect broader cultural styles of regulating interaction with children and may in addition reflect mothers' cultural preferences for particular narrative styles (Minami & McCabe, 1995; Mullen & Yi, 1995). For example, Japanese mothers may request less descriptive information from their children in joint personal anecdotes than do English-speaking mothers (Minami & McCabe, 1995). This suggests that explicitness is not so emphasized in Japan as that in the U.S. In the past, silence was also regarded as "gold" in communication in China. In modern Chinese writing, however, provision of explicit descriptive information about an event, such as when/where the event happens and who/what is involved, is considered as essential (Fang, 1994; Li, Cui, & Wang, 1992; Liu & Sun, 2002). Moreover, according to the study of Miller and her colleagues, Chinese-American mothers may embed more explicit moral messages in their talk to their children than low-income African American and working-class white groups (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990). Thus, it is important to broaden the cultural focus of research on maternal support for children's narrative development.

In view of the kinds of cross-cultural differences in narrative styles which have already been documented, it is of special significance to describe culturally-specific styles of maternal scaffolding in Chinese. The body of research on social origins of narrative skills at home, however, is mainly limited to mothers in the United States. We know almost nothing about the techniques Chinese mothers use to facilitate their children's narrative competence. This study aims to fill this gap in research on maternal interactive strategies in joint personal anecdotes.

METHOD

Research Questions

This project is designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What interactive strategies did the mothers employ in conversation with their children about the past? How did the strategies develop over time?
2. What types of information were discussed in the mother child conversation?
3. What is the relationship between the mothers' interactive strategies and children's narrative skills concurrently and later in development?

Subjects

Sixteen Mandarin Chinese-speaking children, eight boys and eight girls, and their mothers living in Taipei, Taiwan participated in this study. The mean age of the children was 3;6 at the start of this study and 4;3 at the last session. All children came from middle class families, i.e., their mothers were college or graduate school educated.

Procedures and Data Collection

A female research assistant visited the children in the home at four time points when they were 3;6 (Time 1), 3;9 (Time 2), 4;0 (Time 3), and 4;3 (Time 4) months of age on average. At each visit, the mother was asked to elicit one personal anecdote from her child. The personal anecdotes are defined as "stories about personal experience, about real events that have happened in the past" (McCabe & Peterson, 1991, p. 226). The mother was encouraged to get one rich, elaborate account of past experience from the child and to interact with her child in as natural a way as possible.

The whole process of performing the task was audio taped. The audiotapes were transcribed in Chinese characters in their entirety using the codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) rules of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES). Then the transcripts were coded with original Chinese and analyzed applying the Child Language Analysis (CLAN) software programs (MacWhinney, 2000; MacWhinney & Snow, 1985).

Measures

All maternal and child utterances in the joint personal anecdotes were coded for interaction and narrative structure. Narrative structure coding was designed to categorize types of information requested/provided by the mothers and children in joint personal anecdotes; interaction coding was designed to examine the interaction between the mother and the child, focusing on (1) the strategies the mother uses in eliciting a personally experienced story from the child, and (2) the child's responses to the mother's strategies.

Narrative structure coding. Types of narrative elements appearing in the child's and mother's talk in the joint personal anecdotes were categorized at the clause level (Berman & Slobin, 1994). According to Berman and Slobin (1994), the clause is defined as "any unit that contains a grammatical unit containing a predicate" which "expresses a single situation (activity, event, or state)" (p. 657). Their definition of clause is applicable to Mandarin Chinese sentence construction in general, so their clausing rules were used to code the data. Six types of narrative elements were categorized based on an adaptation of high point structure (Hemphill et al., 1995; Labov, 1972; Peterson & McCabe, 1983):[1]

(1) Complicating action (event): clauses which refer to events or actions that advance the narrative (e.g., then I ate our peanuts.)

(2) Orientation: talk about descriptive or durative information related to who/what is involved in the narrated events and when/where the events take place (e.g., the little sister's name is Cheng, Yu-ru.)

(3) Evaluation: clauses which are non-events and contain only evaluation such as description of internal states (expression of emotions, cognitions, and physical states), intentions (e.g., want, hope), compulsions (e.g., have to, must), explicit negatives (e.g., not), etc.

(4) Speech: clauses which include direct or reported character speech (e.g., the doctor said (I) should eat less.)

(5) Coda: clauses which serve to mark an explicit conclusion (e.g., that's all.)

[1] The examples for all coding categories used in this study are real examples taken from the actual data.

(6) Narrative unclassifiable: clauses which seem to be continuing in the narrative sequence but are unclassifiable (e.g., and then ... and then ...)

Talk about the immediate physical and social context and external to the narration of the story was coded into two categories, relevant non-narrative talk (talk which is related to the narrative) and irrelevant non-narrative talk (talk which is completely irrelevant to the narration of the story).

Interaction coding. Utterances, instead of clauses, were used as the coding unit in interaction coding. The coding system was adapted from McCabe and Peterson (1991) and Reese and Fivush (1993) and developed from the actual data, including the following categories:[2]

(1) Topic initiation: questions or statements serving to introduce a topic for discussion (e.g., let's tell something about checking out our books.)

(2) Open-ended questions requesting information: open-ended questions requesting the interlocutor to provide more information about the topic under discussion. This category was further classified as either elaboration or repetition questions. Elaboration questions are the questions with addition of new information or questions with incorporation of the information that the interlocutor has already provided (e.g., Mother: what doctor did (you) see? Child: an eye doctor. Mother: why did you need to see an eye doctor?). Repetition questions, on the other hand, are repetition of a question that has already been asked (e.g., Mother: who did we go with that day? Mother: who did we go to the Transportation Museum with that day? Mother: who did we go with?)

(3) Yes/no questions requesting information: yes/no questions requesting the interlocutor to provide more information about the topic under discussion. As in the case of open-ended questions, this category was also sub-divided into elaboration (e.g., Mother: what was on the bus? Child: people. Mother: did (you) see the hangers?) and repetition questions (e.g., Mother: then did we go home? Child: yes. Mother: then did we go home?).

[2] The categories for every coding system are mutually exclusive.

(4) Memory prompts/directives: questions or statements requesting the interlocutor to say more but not supplying new information (e.g., Mother: tell me.)

(5) Provision of information: statements or tagged questions serving to extend, continue or summarize the topic under discussion (e.g., Mother: what is Long-an Primary School? Child: there was a playground at Long-an Primary School. Mother: there was a big playground at Long-an Primary School.)

(6) Yes/no response: yes/no answers to yes/no questions, including nodding or shaking head (e.g., Mother: did you use many colors? Child: yes.)

(7) Request for evaluation: questions requesting the interlocutor's perspective on the reported event (e.g., Mother: how did you feel riding in the pirate boat?).

(8) Provision of evaluation: statements providing evaluation of the reported event (e.g., Mother: how did you feel (when you) ate the ice cream? Child: it was cold.)

(9) No response: refusal to the interlocutor's question or request, including "I don't know" and "I don't remember"

(10) Attention: statements showing listener attention (e.g., Mother: what else did you do after coloring the pictures? Child: then I gave gave it to the doctor. Mother: then you gave it to the doctor.)

(11) Clarification: questions asking for clarification of what the interlocutor just said (e.g., Child: because there was a hole, which means we sat in the back. Mother: a hole? Mother: what do you mean (there was) a hole?)

(12) Agreement/approval: agreement or approval of what the interlocutor said (e.g., Mother: we walked and walked and what did we find? Child: a motorcycle. Mother: yeah right right right right right right right!)

(13) Revision: statements or questions revising, correcting, disputing, or challenging what the interlocutor said (e.g., Mother: what did you eat? Child: ate ate ate the ghost house. Mother: nonsense.)

(14) Future talk: statements or questions commenting on a future occurrence of the event under discussion (e.g., Mother:do you want to go next week?)

(15) Associative talk: statements or questions not specifically about the particular event under discussion but relating to the event in a tangential way, such as general knowledge talk, fantasy talk, metamemory comments, and factual associative talk concerning a past event in connection to the present moment (e.g. Mother: what does a tadpole become? Child: a frog.)

(16) Off topic talk: utterances completely unrelated to the topic under discussion, including request for attention, regulative talk, etc. (e.g., Child: I want to watch the video. Mother: no.)

Reliability of Coding

Twelve transcripts out of 64 randomly selected were independently scored by another native Mandarin speaker. Cohen's kappa statistic was used to estimate inter-rater corrected-for-chance agreement. Results of inter-rater agreements for narrative structure and interaction coding were 93% and 88% respectively.

RESULTS

Topics under discussion. The topics under discussion in the joint personal anecdotes over time were examined. All the topics under discussion were initiated by the mothers and the majority of the mothers elicited only one story from their children at each time point. The topics occurring most frequently over time were family outings/trips (44%) and school activities (13%). More than half of the stories were devoted to these two topics. The other topics discussed included visit (11%), injury (4%), playground (5%), toy/pet (5%), etc. Most of the joint personal anecdotes involved positive affect; only a few were concerned about negative experiences, such as injury stories.

Maternal interactive strategies. The frequency of the mothers' interactive strategies in the joint personal anecdotes at each time point was first examined. One way ANOVA was then performed for each major interaction code to determine if there was significant difference in maternal interactive

TABLE 1
Mean frequencies and standard deviations of maternal interactive strategies in joint personal anecdotes over time (N = 16)

	Time 1 (3;6)		Time 2 (3;9)		Time 3 (4;0)		Time 4 (4;3)		
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F* (3, 60)
Open-ended laboration question	17.50	11.29	16.56	15.95	16.69	8.46	17.88	10.35	0.05
Open-ended repetition repetition question	9.13	7.47	5.19	7.46	9.00	7.97	5.50	9.17	1.14
Yes-no elaboration question	7.13	5.19	5.69	6.60	5.88	5.48	5.81	5.92	0.21
Yes-no repetition question	2.25	2.32	0.94	1.06	0.44	1.09	0.81	1.64	3.83*
Memory prompt/ directive	5.00	10.73	3.75	7.25	8.81	8.67	2.69	2.92	1.82
Provision of information	9.31	5.47	9.75	7.97	9.88	8.41	8.50	6.95	0.12
Request for evaluation	2.44	2.66	2.19	2.37	3.00	3.58	2.31	2.21	0.27
Provision of evaluation	2.06	2.08	2.00	2.39	2.25	1.81	2.00	2.28	0.05
Agreement/ approval	1.56	2.22	1.06	1.98	2.31	3.42	1.13	1.67	0.91
Attention	14.25	8.02	15.50	12.07	13.00	6.40	18.75	11.42	1.02
Clarification	2.75	2.77	2.63	3.96	1.81	2.46	1.88	1.59	0.48
Revision/challenge	1.31	1.35	2.00	2.61	2.00	3.08	1.50	2.07	0.35
Associative talk	8.81	8.81	12.31	14.52	19.50	20.48	7.19	5.58	2.59
Off topic	9.19	12.12	4.00	5.83	8.19	9.49	1.69	1.96	2.90*

*$p < .05$

strategies over time. Table 1 outlines the mean frequencies, standard deviations, and F values of the major interaction coding categories in the mothers' speech at each time point.

Within each time point, the mean frequencies of open-ended elaboration question and attention were quite high, which implies that the mothers, in general, asked a great many open-ended questions to extend the topics under discussion and showed considerable attention to the children's talk. In comparison to total number of maternal questions for information (i.e., open-ended elaboration question, open-ended repetition question, yes-no elabora-

tion question, and yes-no repetition question), the frequencies of the mothers' provision of information became much lower over time. The total number of maternal questions for information were about three or four times higher than the mothers' provision of information at each time point. This suggests that the mothers understood their role as getting the child to narrate, not co-constructing the story.

Across time, the mean occurrence of each maternal interaction variable fluctuated. Except for yes-no repetition question and off topic talk, the F-values of all the other variables were quite low and the p-values were larger than 0.05, indicating that there was no significant difference in the maternal interaction variables across the four time points. The results might reflect high variability and the absence of any systematic change in maternal interactive strategies with the child age.

Previous research found an increase in children's provision of and request for new information and a decrease in their off-topic comments over time in mother-child joint conversation about the past (Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). If mothers were responding to such changes in children's narrative ability over time, there may be a decrease in maternal request for information and memory prompts/requests over time. Within the relatively short time span of this study, however, no such pattern was evident. In addition, given large differences in children's initial narrative skills and their rates of growth, no consistent pattern of maternal change in strategy could be expected.

The children's response to maternal interactive strategies. The children's response to maternal interactive strategies in the joint personal anecdotes was also examined. Table 2 displays the results.

As Table 2 exhibited, within each time point, provision of information occurred most frequently and its occurrence was much higher than other response variables. This indicates that the children, on average, were willing to participate in conversation about the past and to supply the information requested. Over time, the children did not show a stable decrease or increase in their responses but significant differences were found in amount of associative talk. According to the analysis of variance performed, differences in frequencies of associative talk ($F(3, 60) = 3.80$, $p < 0.05$) across the four time points reached statistical significance. However, there was no significant difference in provision of information, provision of evaluation, provision of yes/no response, no response, and off topic talk over time.

TABLE 2
Mean frequencies and standard deviations of the children's responses in joint personal anecdotes over time (N = 16)

Variable	Time 1 (3;6)		Time 2 (3;9)		Time 3 (4;0)		Time 4 (4;3)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F* (3, 60)
Provision of information	15.94	6.27	23.94	14.83	19.38	8.43	25.38	11.56	2.57
Provision of evaluation	1.38	1.50	3.00	2.99	3.63	3.86	3.19	2.90	1.79
Yes/no response	5.56	4.44	5.06	4.71	3.88	3.56	5.25	5.15	0.43
No response	3.00	4.82	2.56	3.39	4.44	5.43	3.13	4.77	0.48
Associative talk	5.06	6.94	7.81	8.33	13.38	8.47	6.75	5.39	3.80*
Off topic	5.50	6.61	3.38	4.84	5.44	6.27	1.75	1.81	1.90

*$p < .05$

Narrative structure. Types of information scaffolded by the mothers and provided by the children over time were examined and are presented in Table 3.

Within each time point, the narrative information the mothers scaffolded most frequently was complicating actions. Orientation and evaluative information occurred the second and the third most frequently. The occurrences of reported speech, coda, and narrative unclassifiable talk were all quite low in the mothers' talk and in some dyads, even lower than for the children's talk. Across the four time points, there was no significant difference in total number of narrative clauses and in clauses of each type of narrative talk produced by the mothers, suggesting high variability and absence of systematic change in the amount of narrative information the mothers elicited over time.

In contrast, the children produced fewer narrative clauses and fewer clauses of complicating action talk, evaluation, and orientation talk than the mothers. The frequencies of complicating action, orientation, and evaluative information in the children's talk also ranked high within each time point, as was observed in the mothers' talk. Yet, across the four time points, differences in number of narrative clauses ($F (3, 60) = 3.47$, $p < 0.05$) and frequencies of complicating action talk ($F (3, 60) = 5.92$, $p < 0.001$) reached statistical significance.

TABLE 3

Means and standard deviations of narrative components in joint personal anecdotes over time

Variable	Time 1 (3;6)		Time 2 (3;9)		Time 3 (4;0)		Time 4 (4;3)		F (3, 60)	
	Mother (*SD*)	*Child* (*SD*)	*Mother* (*SD*)	*Child* (*SD*)	*Mother* (*SD*)	*Child* (*SD*)	*Mother* (*SD*)	*Child* (*SD*)	*Mother*	*Child*
Narrative clauses	56.25 (26.94)	*22.81* (*8.46*)	48.88 (33.21)	*35.50* (*22.97*)	57.00 (34.11)	*29.00* (*15.27*)	54.06 (33.74)	*41.13* (*18.15*)	0.21	3.47*
Non-narrative clauses	46.81 (28.33)	*30.50* (*14.06*)	45.06 (37.78)	*33.88* (*21.57*)	59.75 (31.30)	*41.06* (*14.54*)	39.00 (20.06)	*30.69* (*18.44*)	1.35	*1.28*
Complicating action	26.69 (14.34)	*9.25* (*3.87*)	23.75 (19.49)	*14.56* (*11.58*)	23.69 (18.65)	*9.44* (*6.66*)	28.44 (17.26)	*21.06* (*11.90*)	0.28	5.92***
Evaluation	7.63 (6.22)	*2.69* (*2.39*)	7.31 (5.82)	*4.69* (*5.25*)	7.88 (7.03)	*4.44* (*4.60*)	6.88 (7.19)	*4.81* (*5.08*)	0.07	*0.78*
Orientation	20.38 (12.54)	*7.75* (*4.78*)	15.88 (11.92)	*11.75* (*8.00*)	22.44 (12.54)	*12.06* (*6.39*)	15.44 (10.93)	*11.69* (*6.37*)	1.31	*1.59*
Speech	1.13 (1.96)	*0.25* (*0.58*)	1.06 (1.91)	*1.19* (*1.76*)	1.94 (2.24)	*0.44* (*0.89*)	2.13 (3.69)	*0.56* (*1.21*)	0.73	*1.86*
Coda	0.00 (0.00)	*0.06* (*0.25*)	0.06 (0.25)	*0.32* (*1.20*)	0.13 (0.34)	*0.13* (*0.50*)	0.00 (0.00)	*0.31* (*0.48*)	1.28	*2.05*
Narrative unclassifiable	0.44 (0.73)	*2.81* (*2.61*)	0.81 (1.47)	*2.69* (*2.63*)	0.94 (1.29)	*2.50* (*3.12*)	1.19 (1.05)	*2.69* (*2.39*)	1.15	*0.04*
Non-narrative: relevant	36.56 (21.48)	*21.88* (*10.22*)	39.63 (32.56)	*27.19* (*18.37*)	49.94 (25.62)	*32.19* (*11.30*)	36.38 (19.09)	*26.50* (*17.85*)	1.03	*1.28*
Non-narrative: irrelevant	9.63 (12.82)	*5.56* (*6.59*)	4.25 (6.26)	*3.69* (*6.10*)	8.50 (9.75)	*5.56* (*6.11*)	1.75 (1.98)	*1.88* (*1.96*)	2.86*	*1.64*
Unclassifiable	0.63 (0.81)	*3.06* (*2.29*)	1.19 (1.52)	*3.00* (*2.68*)	1.31 (2.02)	*3.31* (*3.36*)	0.88 (1.15)	*2.31* (*2.27*)	0.74	*0.41*

*$p < .05$ ***$p < .001$

Relationship between maternal narrative styles and interactive strategies and the children's narrative skills. This section focuses on investigation of the relationships between (1) the elements of narrative structure in the mothers' and the children's talk, and (2) the mothers' interactive strategies and the children's ability in constructing narrative components. The interaction and narrative structure coding systems included a great number of variables. In order to reduce the complex data sets, major codes and summary variables such as elaboration questions (open-ended and yes-no elaboration questions) and repetition questions (open-ended and yes-no repetition questions) were used for correlation analyses. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to determine levels of association and $p < 0.05$ was set as the significance levels for all correlations.

Narrative structure

The relationship between the mothers' narrative performance and the children's narrative performance in conversation about the past was first examined. The significant correlations of the major narrative components, i.e., complicating action, evaluation, orientation, speech, and coda, between the mothers' talk and the children's talk are listed in Table 4.

Across the four time points, there were several significant positive correlations between the mothers' talk and the children's talk. Over time, the mothers' orientation talk was consistently correlated with the children's orientation talk (Time 1: $r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$; Time 2: $r = 0.90$, $p < 0.001$; Time 3: $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$; Time 4: $r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$), which suggests that the mothers who requested/provided durative information had children who included more durative information in their joint personal anecdotes. The relationships between the mothers' talk and the children's talk in other narrative components were not correlated consistently over time.

More importantly, two significant correlations between the mothers' talk and the children's talk regarding time-lag relationships were observed. The mothers' provision/request for speech talk at Time 1 was significantly correlated with the children's inclusion of speech talk ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$) at Time 3; the mothers' provision/request for evaluative information at Time 1 was significantly correlated with the children's supply of evaluation talk ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.05$) at Time 4.

TABLE 4

Significant correlations between the mothers' talk and the children's talk in major narrative components in joint personal anecdotes

	Mother's talk														
	Time 1 (3;6)					*Time 2* (3;9)				*Time 3* (4;0)				*Time 4* (4;3)	
Child's talk	eva	ort	spe	nar	act	eva	ort	spe	nar	eva	ort	coda	nar	ort	spe
Time 1															
ort		.73**													
Time 2															
nar				.80***											
act					.53*										
eva						.60**									
ort							.90***								
spe								.73***							
Time 3															
nar									.54*						
eva										.80***					
ort											.52*				
spe			.54*												
coda												.68**			
Time 4															
nar													.81***		
eva	.51*														
ort														.71**	
spe															.55*

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Note.

nar = narrative clauses, act = complicating action, eva = evaluation, ort = orientation, spe = speech

Relationship between interactive strategies and narrative structure. The relationship between the maternal interactive strategies and the children's ability in constructing narrative components was also examined. Table 5 shows the significant correlations between the major variables:

A great number of significant synchronic correlations were observed between the maternal interactive strategies and the children's narrative components. One of the important findings was that at each time point, the mothers' approval or/and attention to the children's talk (Time 1: $r = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$; Time 2: $r = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$; Time 3: $r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$; Time 4: $r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) and the mothers' request for information to elaborate the topic under discussion (Time 1: $r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$; Time 2: $r = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$; Time 3: $r = 0.53$, $p < 0.05$; Time 4: $r = 0.56$, $p < 0.05$) were significantly correlated with the children's provision of orientation information and most of the correlations were quite high. This suggests that the mothers who approved and paid attention to the children's talk and the mothers who produced questions with addition of new information or with incorporation of the information that the children had already provided had children who included more orientation information in their utterances over time. Furthermore, the mothers who clarified or revised their children's talk at Time 1 ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.05$) and Time 2 ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$) and the mothers who provided information about the topic under discussion at Time 3 ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.05$) also had children who produced more orientation talk at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 respectively.

Five significant time lag correlations were observed between the mothers' interactive strategies at Time 1 and the children's narrative components at Time 3: the children's complicating action talk was significantly correlated with the mothers' earlier approval/attention to the children's talk ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$), the mothers' earlier request for/provision of evaluation talk ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.05$), and the mothers' earlier elaboration questions ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.05$); the children's evaluation talk was significantly correlated with the mothers' earlier provision of information ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$); the children's durative talk was also significantly correlated with the mothers' earlier provision of information ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.05$). There were two significant correlations found between the mothers' interactive strategies at Time 1 and elements of narrative structure in the children's talk at Time 4: the children's evaluative talk was significantly correlated with the mothers' earlier elaboration questions ($r = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$) and the children's orientation talk was signifi-

TABLE 5

Significant correlations between maternal interactive strategies and the children's construction of major narrative components in joint personal anecdotes

	Maternal interactive strategy															
	Time 1 (3;6)					*Time 2* (3;9)					*Time 3* (4;0)				*Time 4* (4;3)	
Child's talk	appatt	clarev	inf	teva	elareq	appatt	clarev	inf	elareq	repreq	appatt	inf	teva	elareq	appatt	elareq
Time 1																
durative	0.77***	0.55*			0.65**											
Time 2																
event									0.60**	0.57*						
evaluation								0.57*								
durative						0.84***	0.70**		0.84***							
Time 3																
event	0.54*			0.58*	0.56*											
evaluation			0.76***								0.85***	0.76***	0.74***	0.63**		
durative			0.55*								0.72***	0.57*		0.53*		
Time 4																
evaluation					0.63**										0.62**	0.56*
durative	0.52*														0.72***	0.56*

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Note.

appatt = approval/attention, clarev = clarification/revision, inf = provision of information, teva = request for/provision of evaluation, elareq = open-ended/yes-no elaboration question, repreq = open-ended/yes-no repetition question

cantly correlated with the mothers' earlier approval/attention to the children's talk ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that the mothers' approval and attention to the children's talk, the mothers' requests with addition of new information, and the mothers' provision of new information to elaborate the topic under discussion might play an important role in promoting the children's subsequent narrative skill. Supportive, attentive, and elaborative mothers were more likely to have children who demonstrated better ability to construct narrative components later in development.

It is worth noting that no significant correlation was observed between the mothers' memory prompts/directives and the major narrative components in the children's talk over time. In addition, there was only one significant correlation between the mothers' repetition question and the children's complicating action talk. Both imply that the mothers who asked memory prompts, directives, and repetition questions were likely to have children who tended not to include the major narrative components in the joint personal anecdotes.

Types of maternal interactive styles in joint personal anecdotes. Variation in Chinese maternal interactive styles in conversation about the past with the children was found in this study. Ways that characterize the U.S. and Canadian mothers' scaffolding strategies may not capture the full range of what Chinese mothers do. As stated, work on English-speaking mothers in the U.S. found two discrete maternal conversational styles: high-elaborative (or topic-extending) and low-elaborative (or topic-switching) (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991). In this study, four types of maternal techniques for conversing with their children were observed: supportive and evaluative, repetitive and directive, revising and challenging, and topic-switching. The following excerpt shows a mother whose eliciting style was supportive and evaluative:

Excerpt (1): supportive and evaluative (child: Jian-wei, 4;0, girl)

1 Mother: when we were eating the ice cream, do you remember who we ran into?
2 Mother: do you remember?
3 Mother: we were eating and then who came over?
4 Child: (I) don't know.
5 Mother: a papa came, pushing a what?
6 Child: a little baby.
7 Mother: yes right do you remember?
8 Mother: and then what?
9 Child: (I) don't know.

10 Mother: after that did you get anything?
11 Child: get?
12 Mother: what did you share with him?
13 Child: jello.
14 Mother: oh yes right.
15 Mother: and then oh I remember!
16 Mother: after we finished eating the ice cream, what did you do?
17 Child: (I) went to ride the kong kong kong (refers to a toy car they rode).
18 Mother: kong kong kong right, was it fun?
19 Child: yes.
20 Mother: what was it like?
21 Mother: what did papa say?
22 Child: very exciting.
23 Mother: oh exciting.
24 Mother: why?
25 Child: look here.
26 Mother: is this the place you fell that time?
27 Child: yes.
28 Mother: is it?
29 Mother: really?
30 Mother: did you get run into?
31 Child: mmhm.
32 Mother: yes.
33 Mother: papa held you so tightly but you still get run into?
34 Mother: yes.
35 Mother: it was too exciting to ride that car, wasn't it?
36 Child: mmhm.
37 Mother: after riding that car we went to climb the mountain, didn't we?
38 Mother: do you remember that we saw something fun when we went to climb the mountain?
39 Mother: when we walked and walked and climbed the ladders, what did we find when we walked half way up?
40 Child: a motorcycle.
41 Mother: oh yes yes yes yes yes yes yes.

Excerpt (1) was a passage taken out from a story about a family trip to an amusement park jointly told by a girl Jian-wei at 4;0 and her mother. Jian-wei's mother was successful in getting Jian-wei to tell the story. She asked questions with provision of contextual information to help her child to recall the event, such as "when we were eating the ice cream, do you remember who we ran into?" in line 1. Also, Jian-wei's mother approved (e.g., "oh yes right," in line 14) and elaborated on Jian-wei's responses (e.g., "and then what," in line 8) to maintain and extend their discussion about the event. In response to

Jian-wei's reply "I don't know" in lines 4 and 9, Jian-wei's mother supplied substantive information to help Jian-wei recollect the happenings (see lines 5, 10, 12). In addition, the comments of Jian-wei's mother in many places in the excerpt were evaluative (see lines 18, 24, 35, 38). Through requesting and providing evaluative information, Jian-wei's mother helped Jian-wei to express her internal states and to capture the significance of the narrated event. Overall, Jian-wei and her mother co-constructed a rich, evaluative joint personal anecdote.

In contrast to the mothers who were elaborative and provided/requested evaluative comments in their conversation about the past with their children, some mothers tended to be repetitive and more directive. Excerpt (2) serves as a good example of a directive style:

Excerpt (2): repetitive and directive (Child: Zhong-liang, 3;10, boy)

1	Mother:	come here tell mom.
2	Mother:	you didn't tell mom how fun the computer was, how can I buy you a computer?
3	Child:	the computer was fun.
4	Mother:	you only said (it) was fun but you didn't say how fun it was and why you liked to play.
5	Child:	right.
6	Child:	because because ...
7	Mother:	because what?
8	Child:	because ...
9	Mother:	why do you like to play the computer?
10	Child:	because ...
11	Mother:	what do you play on the computer?
12	Mother:	you forgot.
13	Mother:	you don't remember.
14	Mother:	then the computer wasn't fun.
15	Mother:	was it?
16	Mother:	if (it) wasn't fun then (we) won't buy it.
17	Child:	buy!
18	Child:	(it) was fun.
19	Mother:	you didn't tell me what was fun about it.
20	Mother:	tell mom how fun it was and why you liked to play.
21	Mother:	what?
22	Mother:	what did you like to play so much?
23	Child:	because the games (I) played were all on the computer.
24	Mother:	you liked to play on the computer, why did you like to play?
25	Mother:	what was fun about the computer, tell me.
26	Child:	the computer was fun so I I decided.

27 Mother: what was fun?
28 Mother: you can't say.
29 Mother: if you don't know how to say then we won't buy (the computer).
30 Child: buy (it)!
31 Mother: then say!
32 Mother: otherwise how can I know why it was fun?

In Excerpt (2), Zhong-liang's mother utilized a very different strategy to ask her son Zhong-liang (age 3; 10) to tell an experience about playing with the computer. She was extremely persistent in requiring Zhong-liang to answer why he was interested in playing with the computer throughout the excerpt. Zhong-liang had difficulty in answering his mother's request at the beginning (lines 6, 8, and 10). Yet, instead of providing support, Zhong-liang's mother repeated her question once and again and even threatened not to purchase a computer for Zhong-liang because he was not able to answer her question. In line 23, Zhong-liang finally gave his mother a reason why he was interested in playing with the computer, "because the games (I) played were all on the computer." His mother, however, continued to ask him the same question rather than expand upon his response. The tenor of the whole passage was truly confrontational. Neither information nor evaluation was given in this excerpt.

Furthermore, revising or challenging the child's response was a tactic observed in the directive mothers' conversation with their children. Zhong-liang's mother displayed this strategy in the latter portion of the same dialogue about playing with the computer with Zhong-liang:

Excerpt (3): revising and challenging (Child: Zhong-liang, 3;10, boy)

1 Mother: when you drove the car, did you pass through a tunnel?
2 Child: yes.
3 Mother: did you pass through a castle gate?
4 Child: yes.
5 Mother: what else did you pass through?
6 Child: (I) passed the zoo too.
7 Mother: oh the zoo.
8 Mother: did you go to play?
9 Child: (I) also passed mom. (child laughs)
10 Mother: nonsense.
11 Mother: and then?
12 Child: (I) passed my little brother too.
13 Mother: what showed up on the monitor after you got to the end?
14 Child: airplanes.

15 Mother: nonsense.
16 Mother: how could airplanes show up when you were driving?
17 Child: ugh!
18 Mother: were there a lot of numbers tell you?
19 Mother: to tell you you to ...
20 Child: turn here to turn there to turn here.
21 Mother: when you drove, after you finished driving, did it show how many kilometers you had driven?
22 Child: thirty kilometers.
23 Child: and fifty kilometers.
24 Child: and sixty kilometers.
25 Child: and seventy kilometers.
26 Child: and eighty kilometers.
27 Mother: did it tell you what place you came in?
28 Child: and ninety kilometers.
29 Mother: did it tell you what place you came in?
30 Mother: what place did you come in?
31 Child: second place.
32 Mother: how could you be in second place?
33 Mother: In second to last place is more like it.
34 Mother: don't hit me.

In contrast to Excerpt (2), in Excerpt (3), Zhong-liang's mother asked for details about Zhong-liang's driving experience game on the computer and Zhong-liang replied to his mother's questions. It appears that Zhong-liang's mother, nevertheless, did not accept some of his answers. In lines 10 and 15, Zhong-liang's mother challenged his response with the negative comments "nonsense," despite the fact that Zhong-liang was laughing and he might be joking (see line 9). In lines 32 and 33, she even teased Zhong-liang by questioning that he could be in second place in the racing game. Obviously Zhong-liang was annoyed by his mother's feedback. He responded with "ugh" in line 17 and hit his mother after she teased him. Although Zhong-liang's mother was more successful in getting Zhong-liang to tell the story in Excerpt (3), the passage sounded just as confrontational as Excerpt (2) or even more so.

Another strategy used by the mothers in conversing with their children about the past was topic-switching. Some mothers tended to switch topics of discussion, especially in face of the children's no response or minimal response. Excerpt (4) is a representative example:

Excerpt (4): topic-switching (Child: Wang-gang, 4;3, boy)

1	Mother:	did you go to Pupu's house?
2	Child:	yes.
3	Mother:	did you like Pupu's house?
4	Child:	yes.
5	Mother:	what was there at Pupu's house?
6	Mother:	tell me what you played at Pupu's house.
7	Child:	played xxx toys (I) played with his toys.
8	Child:	okay.
9	Mother:	do you live in Miaoli?
10	Child:	no.
11	Mother:	then you went to Miaoli, have you ever been to Miaoli?
12	Child:	yes.
13	Mother:	what was there in Miaoli?
14	Child:	(I) don't know.
15	Mother:	okay have you ever been to a restaurant?
16	Child:	yes.
17	Mother:	what was there at a restaurant?
18	Child:	juice, hamburger, ice cream, French fries, popcorn, cake, ice cream, and and vegetables and meat.

Excerpt (4) was selected from a dialogue between a boy Wang-gang at age 4;3 and his mother. In such a short passage, Wang-gang's mother switched topics three times (lines 1, 9, and 15). She first requested Wang-gang to tell a story about his visit to a friend's home. Wang-gang provided the information requested, but his mother abruptly switched the topic to another one. The new topic was sustained for only 6 lines (from lines 9 to 14). In response to the child's reply "I don't know," Wang-gang's mother switched the topic of discussion again. In this study, most mothers initiated and maintained one topic in the joint personal anecdotes. A few mothers, such as Wang-gang's, however, tended to elicit more than one topic over time even when their children were willing to participate in the conversation.

It should be emphasized that different maternal interactive styles might coexist in the dialogues of the same mother-child dyads. Mothers indeed varied in their tendency to employ a specific scaffolding style and often used diverse scaffolding strategies.

DISCUSSION

Maternal scaffolding strategies

Over time, no systematic change in maternal scaffolding strategies employed in joint personal anecdotes was found. The results of this study suggest that at least for this age span and this narrative context no consistent pattern of change in Mandarin Chinese-speaking mothers' interactive techniques and types and amount of information requested and provided in the dyadic context can be expected. This finding is different from previous research on English-speaking mothers' scaffolding styles during joint personal anecdotes (Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993) but is consistent with Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith's work on book reading styles in low-income mothers in the U.S. (1992). Age span examined may be one point of difference in these studies. Reese, Haden, and Fivush examined mother-child conversations about the past over two and half years, whereas the mother-child book reading interactions in the study of Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler and Smith were observed when the children were three and four years old. The period of investigation in Reese, Haden, and Fivush's study is much longer than that in the work of Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler, and Smith and in the present study. This implies that change in maternal scaffolding may only be obvious over a somewhat longer period of time.

In their cross-cultural study, Miller, Wiley, Fung, and Liang (1997) found that Mandarin-speaking mothers and caregivers told stories about the child's past transgressions in their ordinary talk at home more frequently than European American mothers. The present study, nevertheless, finds little evidence of talk about the child's transgressions in the joint personal anecdotes. There was only one mother who tried to encourage her child to tell his experience of being spanked by his father – one narrative exchange out of 64 observed. Not surprisingly, the child refused to answer, and the mother then switched topics. Transgressions imply violation of rules, which usually invoke negative feelings. Yet, as stated, the topics elicited by the mothers in this study, in general, involved positive emotion rather than negative affect while conversing with children about the past.

Another finding worth to noting is that great variation was observed in the elicitation styles of Mandarin Chinese-speaking mothers in this study. Although those mothers were well-educated and had the same ethnic back-

ground, the styles they chose to interact with their children in talking about the past were somewhat different. This finding suggests that each dyad needs to be perceived as a unique one. It will be detrimental to overlook Chinese maternal narrative participation strategies with stereotypical assumptions and neglect individual differences.

Relationship between maternal scaffolding strategies and children's narrative skills

With respect to relationships between maternal scaffolding strategies and children's narrative skills, two important findings were gained from the correlation analyses. First, at a given point in time, Mandarin-speaking mothers' requests for or provision of orientation talk are significantly correlated with amounts of orientation talk provided by their children in joint personal anecdotes. In other words, the mothers who request or supply more orienting and descriptive information in their conversation about the past might have children who include more of this kind of information in their narratives. Chinese mothers' support for orientation in narration reveals the important role that decontextualization plays in the acquisition of modern Chinese literacy (Fang, 1994; Li, Cui, & Wang, 1992; Liu & Sun, 2002). This finding is consistent with what Peterson and McCabe observed in their research on North American mother-child collaborative conversation about the past (McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1994).

Second, as the intervention study conducted by Peterson, Jesso, and McCabe (1999) suggests, this study found that maternal interactive styles might influence the children's narrative performance. For example, Mandarin Chinese-speaking mothers' approval of or attention to the children's talk and elaborative request for information in the joint personal anecdotes is found to be significantly correlated with the children's provision of orientation information over time. Moreover, maternal approval/attention and elaborative requests for information in the joint personal anecdotes employed at the start of the study are also found to be significantly associated with the children's provision of complicating action talk at 4;0. Maternal provision of information might also be helpful for the children's subsequent narrative skill. As stated in the results sections, the mothers' provision of information is significantly correlated with the children's evaluative and orientation information at 4;0 in the joint personal anecdotes.

These findings regarding maternal interactive tactics suggest that supportive, elaborative mothers engaged in processes of (1) approving and showing attention to the children's utterances, (2) asking the children's questions with addition of new information or incorporation of the children's previous response, and (3) supplying new information to extend, continue or summarize the topic under discussion, are more likely to facilitate the children's construction of narratives both concurrently and later in development. In contrast, maternal memory prompts without offering new information, frequent directives, and repetitive questions are found to play an insignificant role in promoting the children's narrative competence. Similar findings are evident in past research on mothers in the U.S. (Fivush, 1991; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993; Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999). Unexpectedly, the relationship between the mothers' scaffolding strategies and the children's independent performance later in development is not apparent. Again, this may be attributable to the short time span of this study. As Reese, Haden, and Fivush observed in their research (1993), when the children they studied were 3;4 and 3;10 months of age, no significant correlations were seen between maternal scaffolding strategies and the children's narrative responses. When their children were 4;10 to 5;10 months old, however, significant relationships between maternal elaborativeness and the children's memory responses were found. Their findings and the present study both suggest that internalization of the narrative skill scaffolded by the mother may require a long period of time.

Conclusions

Using a social interactionist model, this project enriches our knowledge of the social origins of Mandarin Chinese-speaking children's narrative skills at home and their development in relation to maternal scaffolding. As suggested, a number of maternal scaffolding techniques predict the children's narrative ability concurrently and at later time points. Such information can be translated into better guidelines for parents and preschool teachers in Taiwan. Also, as a number of researchers have argued, preschool children's narrative competence supports later literacy and academic performance (Feagans, 1982; Snow, 1983; Snow & Dickinson, 1991). Thus, investigating maternal scaffolding strategies deepens our understanding of one way that Mandarin-speaking mothers may help their children prepare for later schooling.

Moreover, this study may have implications for classroom instruction in the U.S. (McCabe, 1996). As shown in previous studies (McCabe, 1996; Minami, 2002), children from different countries in the U.S. manifest different narrative styles. It is important for classroom teachers to be sensitive to these differences. Asian Americans are now the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S. With increased immigration from Asian countries, particularly from China and Taiwan, knowledge about home support for narrative talk in Mandarin-speaking families can increase teachers' understanding of Chinese adult-child language patterns.

Nevertheless, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the time span for observation in this study is too short. Change in both maternal scaffolding and children's performance may only be obvious over a long period of time. Second, the sample size is clearly too small to support substantial inferential statistical analysis and limits the generalizability of the findings. In future study, more subjects should be included. Third, this project only examines interactions between mother and child. Even though mothers are the primary caregivers in Taiwan, children are exposed to many other people, including fathers, siblings, preschool teachers, and baby-sitters who might also have an impact on children's narrative development. Fourth, this study focuses on a dyadic context, but interactions do not happen in dyadic contexts only. Polyadic contexts for narrative elicitation and exposure, such as family mealtimes, are also worth examining. In order to fully understand the change in the children's narrative ability and the maternal scaffolding styles during the preschool years and their relationships, these issues should be examined over a longer period of time.

Given these limitations, however, this project represents a first step in exploring preschool Mandarin Chinese-speaking children's narrative development and maternal scaffolding strategies over time. The descriptive data and longitudinal analyses presented in this study can provide a basis for future research on Mandarin Chinese-speaking children's narratives and for cross-cultural comparative study.

AUTHOR NOTE

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