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Five-year-olds' book talk and story retelling: Contributions of mother–child joint bookreading

Jennifer Yusun Kang, *Korea University*
Young-Suk Kim, *Florida State University and Florida Center for Reading Research*
Barbara Alexander Pan, *Harvard Graduate School of Education*

ABSTRACT
This study examined the participation of preschool children (mean age 5;1) in two literacy-related activities – talking about a book with their mothers and subsequent independent retelling of the story. Sixty-two mother–child dyads from low-income families participated. Analysis of bookreading and story retelling transcripts revealed wide variability in extratextual talk during bookreading by both children and mothers. Children's responsive, but not spontaneous, extratextual book talk was closely associated with maternal types of talk. Children's story retelling skills were not related to the types of talk they produced during bookreading, but were predicted by the extent to which mothers encouraged their active participation during joint bookreading. Implications for bookreading intervention programs are discussed.

KEYWORDS
Elicitation strategies; joint bookreading; mother–child dyads; story retelling

INTRODUCTION

In school, children are required to display two different skills around bookreading: the ability to talk about what they read and to demonstrate comprehension by summarizing or retelling what they have read. Preparation for these two kinds of literacy activities, then, would ideally include practice in being active conversational partners during bookreading, as well as practice in retelling. Adult–child joint bookreading in the preschool years may serve as a context for children to develop just these skills, with caregivers playing a crucial role in shaping the language context and engaging children in meaningful interactions. In fact, previous studies have shown that joint picture book reading is an essential activity that promotes children's language and literacy skills (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Ninio, 1983; Raikes et al., 2006; Snow, 1983; Sulzby & Teale, 1987; van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton, & McGrath, 1997; Whitehurst et al., 1994). However, little attention has been paid to explaining exactly what it is that each partner does during joint bookreading that may promote children's language skills. Thus, this study aims to investigate the interaction patterns and verbal behaviors of mothers *and* children during joint bookreading and examine how they relate to children's story retelling skills.

Parents' elicitation strategies during joint bookreading

Research on parental bookreading with toddlers and preschoolers tends to have one of two primary foci: *frequency* of the home bookreading activity (addressing such questions as what parent/child characteristics are associated with more frequent bookreading) and *quality* or *style* of bookreading interactions (asking questions such as whether parents differ in the strategies they employ or the styles of interaction they demonstrate during bookreading with their children). Studies focusing on the former are generally based on parental self-report and often include families of diverse socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and home language backgrounds (e.g., Bradley, Corwyn, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). In contrast, research addressing what actually happens during bookreading has for the most part focused on the practices of white middle-class mothers (Haden, Reese, & Fivush, 1996; Hammett, van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2003; van Kleeck et al., 1997). Parents of other socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds make their way into the spotlight only infrequently, as in the studies by Anderson-Yockel and Haynes (1994), de Temple and Snow (1996), and Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, and Brody (1990).

Previous studies of mother–child joint bookreading interactions have revealed variation in bookreading styles both across and within social class. For example, Ninio (1980) examined mother–child joint bookreading dyads from middle- and lower-class Israeli families and found differences in the types of questions asked: middle-class mothers asked more 'what' questions, whereas low-SES mothers more frequently asked less-demanding 'where' questions that could be answered simply by pointing. Examining variation within social class, van Kleeck et al. (1997) have

claimed that there is no single interaction style typical of middle-class families. Both Haden et al. (1996) and Hammett et al. (2003) identified multiple parent bookreading styles among middle-class parents, with the amount of extratextual talk being one dimension of variation observed.

Studies of bookreading in low-income families in particular have demonstrated mothers' sensitivity to children's age, vocabulary knowledge, and text genre. De Temple and Snow (1996) found that low-income mothers' overall maternal talk during bookreading decreased with child age. Pellegrini et al. (1990) showed that black mothers participating in Head Start differentiated their bookreading strategies by text genre and as a function of children's vocabulary competence. Likewise, Neuman's (1996) study of Head Start mothers in joint bookreading with their children revealed that genre and predictability of text influenced patterns of bookreading interaction. Despite considerable research documenting maternal language behaviors during joint bookreading with children, little work has focused on the relationship between mothers' and children's verbal behaviors during the same bookreading session.

Children's verbal behavior during joint bookreading

Examining children's patterns of participation during mother–child joint bookreading, Yaden, Smolkin, and Conlon (1989) identified questions about illustrations as the most prevalent questioning behavior displayed by middle-class children. However, because they did not analyze parental behavior, they did not address potential relationships between maternal and child behaviors in the bookreading context. As one of the few studies specifically investigating the influence of maternal behaviors on child participation during bookreading, Hockenberger, Goldstein, and Haas's (1999) intervention study with low-income dyads revealed that children's own comments and statements increased as a result of mothers being trained to link book content to the child's life. In a study conducted with 24-month-old children, Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992) found no significant correlations between children's and mothers' language behavior during bookreading.

There has been no research, however, with either middle-class or low-income families that has investigated how mothers' specific linguistic behavior and scaffolding strategies relate to characteristics of preschool children's linguistic and participatory behaviors during the same interactions. For example, we do not know whether mothers' open-ended or yes/no questions are related to children's provision of certain response types during joint bookreading; nor do we know whether mothers who probe for children's own interpretation of the story events are more likely to have children who are more verbal and responsive during joint bookreading. Thus, there is a need to examine both parent and child contributions during the same joint bookreading interaction. In this regard, Fletcher and Reese (2005) call for more research on how children's 'spontaneous,' as well as nonspontaneous, behaviors and their level of participation during joint bookreading relate to their language development. The current study examines these relationships with respect to children's oral retelling.

Mother–child joint bookreading interactions and children's retelling skills

Story (re)telling skills are crucial for children's success in school, given that preschoolers' story telling skills have been shown to predict their later literacy development and academic success (Feagans, 1982; Graesser, Golding, & Long, 1991; Snow, 1983; Snow & Dickinson, 1990). Paul and Smith (1993), for example, showed that story telling skills at age 4 were one of the best predictors for later school outcomes for children who were at risk for school success. Snow, Tabors and Dickinson (2001) also showed that narrative production by low-income children in kindergarten predicted 4th- and 7th-grade reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge.

Children learn to tell and retell stories through language socialization in the home (Kintsch & Greene, 1978; Pritchard, 1990). There is ample evidence that maternal scaffolding and elicitation are related to children's narrative production (e.g., Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1992; Pratt, Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1988). There has also been the suggestion in the literature that the dynamics of mother–child interactions during joint bookreading may promote children's ability to produce coherent stories (Engel, 1995; White & Low, 2002). However, joint bookreading has been seldom considered as a potential context to promote children's story telling skills.

Children listening to stories read aloud may learn how narrative features are used and organized (Sulzby, 1985). Knowledge of story structure and written discourse features are resources that children can then draw on in comprehending and producing narratives themselves (Purcell-Gates, 1988). Moreover, which of the book features (e.g., vocabulary, narrative components, interpretive thoughts) mothers emphasize and how (e.g., through questioning, statement, repetition) may relate to children's incorporation of such elements in their own story retellings. Reese (1995), for example, examining middle-class mothers' talk during joint bookreading, found that mothers' increasing elicitation of description and labeling during joint bookreading was predictive of children's retelling skills. However, she did not examine other maternal behaviors such as elicitation of narrative structural features, scaffolding strategies, or use of linguistic features, and their potential relationship to children's retelling. Cornell, Sénéchal, and Broda (1988) also showed that children acquire both the content and structure of stories through parent–child joint bookreading experiences, but their study included only middle- and upper-class families, and their focus was more on exploring the effectiveness of testing and repetition of bookreading rather than on how what mothers and children do during the bookreading discourse actually influences children's retelling. Low and Durkin (2001) found that children of mothers who are highly elaborate during joint bookreading recall more story elements, but they did not examine children's retelling discourse itself and instead focused on the amount of recall. White and Low (2002) examined mothers' story construction during joint wordless picture book reading and its relation to children's independent story retelling, and showed that previewing by the mother helped both the mother and the child in creating a coherent story. However, as they used wordless books, the researchers were not

able to investigate how mothers deal with and deliver a given story presented in the text (as is in books for preschoolers) and what kinds of verbal strategies mothers employ by going beyond what is given in the text in order to ensure children's comprehension of the story and promote book awareness.

When (re)telling a story, the child not only needs to include necessary narrative components and organize those in a coherent manner, but also needs to handle linguistic properties appropriately in order to set an anchored tense, refer to the story characters correctly with appropriate reference terms, use connective conjunctions to achieve story coherence, and so on. In fact, it has been shown that the kinds of narratives valued in school are decontextualized narratives that can stand alone (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). In order to produce such stand-alone narratives, children need to have control of formal linguistic devices, including cohesive devices, as well as knowledge and mastery of narrative components and content (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Studies on children's use of third-person references, for example, revealed the effects of SES and cultural background, implying the influence of socialization differences that were practiced through mother–child dyadic activities such as narrative construction and joint bookreading at home (Hemphill, 1989; Hickmann, 1991; Hickmann & Schneider, 1993). Although the management of such linguistic and narrative features may be facilitated through exposure to books and participation in joint bookreading, no study has investigated the relationship between joint bookreading interactions and the inclusion and use of such linguistic features in children's own story (re)telling.

In sum, the ways in which the characteristics of adult caregivers' and children's linguistic behaviors during bookreading may relate to children's story retelling, especially in populations other than middle-class families, remains relatively unexplored. Most research on parent–child joint bookreading has focused on what white middle-class mothers do during joint bookreading, without examining children's contribution to the same interaction. In addition, the relationship between joint bookreading interactions and children's story retelling is understudied, although in principle such retelling could be expected to reflect what the child has internalized from the bookreading experience. Hence the current study sought to address this gap in the literature, as well as to contribute to the still-limited body of research on parent–child bookreading interactions in low-income families. To do so, this study sought to describe the specific bookreading interactional patterns and elicitation strategies employed by a sample of low-income mothers, their relationship to the children's language behavior during the same interaction, and possible associations between maternal and child bookreading behaviors and children's subsequent story retelling.

Specific research questions were:

RQ1: How do low-income mothers' verbal behaviors vary during bookreading interactions with their preschoolers? How do their children's verbal behaviors vary during the same interactions and in subsequent story retelling?
RQ2: Is children's verbal behavior during bookreading associated with mothers' amount and type of talk?
RQ3: How is mothers' talk during joint bookreading related to children's story retelling abilities? Are features of children's story retelling associated with the amount and types of mothers' talk during joint bookreading?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 62 low-income mothers and their preschool-aged children (36 boys and 26 girls) being followed as part of a larger national longitudinal study on the effectiveness of Early Head Start (EHS; ACF, 2002; Love et al., 2005). At entry to the study, families were living in rural New England and qualified for public assistance. Families enrolled in the study during the mother's pregnancy or before the target child's first birthday and were randomly assigned to either the program or comparison group. The current study reports on data collected in the spring before children were eligible to enter kindergarten and includes all families who agreed to be videotaped engaging in mother–child activities, including joint bookreading and story retelling. Early Head Start is a two-generation federally funded program that seeks to enhance child development and family well-being, but unlike other programs such as Even Start, does not promote bookreading specifically. Forty-four percent of the present sample were families originally assigned to receive EHS services. Families were predominantly white (95%) and identified English as their home language (100%). Mothers' education ranged from 9 to 18 years, with a mean of 12.68 (*SD* = 1.74). Children's ages ranged from 4;7 to 5;8 (mean 5;1).

Procedure

The EHS study included child assessments, parent interviews, home observations, and childcare observations. The present study used demographic data and bookreading data from the spring before children were eligible to enter kindergarten. Mothers were videotaped at home as they and their child read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1983). The mothers and children were familiar with the book because they had an opportunity to read the same book when the child was 36 months old (see Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005, for description). Before the recording took place, the mothers were told, 'You and your child may have read this book together on one of our earlier visits. We'd like you to take a few minutes now to read it together again.' *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was chosen because its predictive and repetitive nature lends itself to child participation. The child's retelling session, also videotaped, occurred after the child had completed an approximately 10-min assessment of emergent literacy skills following the joint bookreading session. The child was told, 'The last thing I'd like you to do today is to tell me the story that you and your mom read earlier. If you want, you can look through the book as you're telling the story. Try to tell it so that another little boy or girl who hasn't read this book would understand the story.'

Transcription and coding

The videotaped bookreading interactions and children's retelling were transcribed verbatim into the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) (MacWhinney, 2000). The unit of analysis for the joint bookreading sessions was each utterance

produced by the mother and the child during bookreading. Utterances that were simply reading the text or were unrelated to the bookreading were excluded from the analysis. Each book-related utterance produced by the mothers and the children was coded using an adaptation of coding schemes from previous bookreading research (de Temple, 1994; Haden et al., 1996; Kato-Otani, 2004). Coding addressed the types of information mothers requested and provided, the types of questions they asked, their communicative scaffolding strategies, and the types of utterances children produced. The child's story retelling was coded for the number of main events recounted, narrative structural features, and use of linguistic features.

It should be noted that the constructs that were identified and coded for in joint bookreading and children's story retelling were quite different in nature. Whereas coding for children's story retelling focused more on the narrative aspects and story grammar (such as the inclusion of setting, problems, solution, etc.), coding for joint bookreading did not capture such story grammar features because we were primarily interested in the kind of extratextual talk dyads engaged in. None of the mothers evidenced attempts to construct their own narrative based on the text. Rather, most mothers focused on monitoring children's comprehension through checking children's vocabulary knowledge, drawing their attention to the pictures, asking interpretive questions, and so on. Thus, while most mothers drew children's attention to certain narrative components (i.e., events, description, character delineation, etc.), none of them focused in their extratextual talk on story grammar features, perhaps because the story was already constructed in the text. Likewise, coding for the use of cohesive markers and evaluative devices was done only for children's retelling, and not for mothers' and children's extratextual talk during the joint reading. The kinds of talk mothers and children produced during joint bookreading were mostly simple questions and answers or short statements, as they were not 'telling' the story but were talking 'about the story' beyond the text. In other words, they were not producing an extended discourse that would require appropriate use of cohesive markers such as connectives and third-person referents to mark anaphora. Reflecting these differences in the two types of discourse that were analyzed, the coding schemes were developed separately to capture the specific characteristics of the two tasks.

Maternal utterances during joint bookreading were coded as one of the following:

- *Vocabulary, labeling, location:* Utterances about the location of objects, name of objects, or definition of a word (e.g., 'Where is the egg?,' 'Look, it's a cocoon.').
- *Event:* Utterances that request or provide information about story characters' actions (e.g., 'What did he do next?').
- *Evaluation and description:* Utterances involving evaluation or description of the story, actions of the character, or events in the story (e.g., 'Did you like the story?,' 'Do you think he was lonely?,' 'That's a big caterpillar!').
- *Interpretive questions/information:* Utterances that interpret or paraphrase story-lines, make or request predictions, or make text–reader links (e.g., 'Why do you think he got a tummy ache?').

- *Open-ended prompts:* Utterances that trail off so as to solicit child contribution (e.g., 'A . . .,' 'Then, . . .,' 'And . . .').
- *Counting/days of the week:*[1] Utterances involving counting or information about days of the week (e.g., 'What is after Monday?,' 'How many pears did he eat?').
- *Communicative scaffolding:* Strategies such as repetition (e.g., Child: 'Look at that;' Mother: 'Oh, look at that'); back-channeling (e.g., 'uh-huh,' 'yeah,' etc.); and expansion (e.g., Child: 'An egg;' Mother: 'There is an egg on that leaf, right.').
- *Book-focus talk:* Utterances having to do with book knowledge, such as the title or name of author, or those that explicitly mark the beginning/end of the book (e.g., 'By Eric Carle,' 'The end'); book-engagement talk (e.g., 'Turn the page,' 'Do you want to read this book?'); and print-related utterances (e.g., 'Do you know what this says?').

In addition, each question asked by the mother was coded as either an open-ended *wh*-question (e.g., 'What is he doing now?') or a closed-ended *yes/no* question (e.g., 'Is he eating again?').

Child utterances were coded as being either in response to a mother utterance or as unsolicited, initiatory utterances. Responses were further subcategorized as one of the types outlined above (Vocabulary/labeling; Event; Evaluation/description; Open-ended prompt; Interpretive; Counting/days of the week; Book-focus), or as spontaneous repetition of mother utterance. Children's exact repetitions of mothers' utterances were also tallied separately. The total number of child spontaneous, unsolicited utterances served as a control variable in the regression analysis.

Children's story retellings were coded for instances of the following:

- Story structural features (Peterson & McCabe, 1983) included in the story:
  - Introduction (e.g., 'This story is called "The Very Hungry Caterpillar".').
  - Orientation: utterances that described the setting (place, time and character introduction/description) of the story.
  - Identification of the main character (e.g., 'There was a little caterpillar.'[2]).
  - Identification of two main problems (e.g., 'The caterpillar was so hungry' and 'he got a stomachache.').
  - Identification of resolutions for the two problems (e.g., 'So he ate so many things,' 'He felt better after eating a leaf,' etc.).
  - Closing (e.g., 'That's the end,' 'That's it.').

The maximum possible score for story structural features was 8, as inclusion of each feature scored one point.

- Number of possible six main story line events included: identification of each main event scoring one point and the maximum possible score for this category was 6.
- Microlinguistic features:[3]
  - Cohesive devices: (1) appropriate use of reference for first-mention of a third-person, (2) appropriate use of tense, and (3) use of connectives (i.e., no use of connectives, use of basic connectives such as 'and' or 'and

then,' and use of more sophisticated connectives such as 'but,' 'so that'). The score for the use of reference for first-mention of a third-person ranged from 0 (no first mention) to 3 (nonpresupposing introduction using indefinite article + full noun phrase, i.e., 'a caterpillar'); achievement of an anchored tense scored 1, whereas a failure to have a consistent and correct use of either past or present tense scored 0; scores for the use of connectives ranged from 0 (no connectives) to 2 (inclusion of sophisticated connectives other than 'and,' 'so,' and 'then').

- Evaluative devices: Use of evaluative markers such as intensifiers, character delineation, adjectives, emotion words, and so on, were identified and counted. There were eight evaluative devices that were coded for presence or absence, and each present evaluative device scored one point.

Taken together, the maximum possible score for microlinguistic features was 14.

In order to see how children's overall story retelling performance across the above three constructs (i.e., inclusion of story structural features, identification of main events, and use of microlinguistic features) relate to joint bookreading dyads, a total story retelling score was computed by adding scores from each coding subcategory. In the correlational and regression analyses, this total story retelling score was used as well as the individual scores from each of the three constructs.

A total of 62 joint bookreading transcripts and 46 story retelling transcripts were used in the analysis. Sixteen children's retelling sessions were unusable either because the child refused to retell the story or produced no relevant data.

Interrater reliability

Approximately 20% of the mother–child dyads and children's story telling data was randomly selected to test the reliability of the designed coding system. Two researchers coded the selected subsample independently for each of the codes described in the previous section. Cohen's κ (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986) ranged between 0.81 and 0.94.

RESULTS

Variability among mothers and children in amount and type of talk during joint bookreading and story retelling

In this section we address the first research question, having to do with variation in verbal behavior by mothers and children during bookreading and by children during story retelling. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for mothers' and children's utterances in total and by type during joint bookreading. On average, mothers produced 23 extratextual utterances (i.e., those that were not verbatim reading of text) during the joint bookreading, but there was large variation (*SD* = 16.52). One mother chose to simply read the text and engaged in no extratextual talk. The most frequent types of mother utterances were open-ended prompts,

communicative scaffolding, vocabulary/labeling, and book-focus talk, each of which accounted for approximately 20% of the utterances. Both open-ended prompts and communicative scaffolding are maternal utterances that encourage child participation. Vocabulary/labeling, too, can be thought of as providing opportunities for child participation, both when mothers elicit labels and when they provide novel labels that the child might imitate. Very few maternal utterances were related to story events or their interpretation, perhaps because appreciation of this particular book does not crucially depend on understanding a complex story-line. Interestingly, despite prominent emphasis in the text on days of the week and numbers (e.g., *On Monday he ate through one apple . . . On Tuesday he ate through two pears*), mothers devoted little extratextual talk to days of the week or counting.

Large variation in utterance type was observed also for children; standard deviations for most child utterance types were at least twice the size of the means. Among child utterances, the most frequent type of child utterance was responses to mother's open-ended prompts (M = 3.52, 18% of child talk), perhaps reflecting the highly predictable structure of the particular book used as well as child's

Table 1 Means (standard deviations) for mother and child utterance types during joint bookreading (N = 62 dyads)

	M	SD
Mother		
Number of utterances	23.24	16.52
Vocabulary/labeling	5.10	5.75
Events	0.31	0.93
Evaluation and description	1.10	1.69
Open-ended prompt	4.55	6.89
Interpretive information	1.85	2.50
Counting/days of the week	0.94	1.93
Communicative scaffolding	4.55	4.46
Book-focus	5.08	2.97
Child		
Number of utterances	19.53	4.18
Response to mother utterances		
Vocabulary/labeling	1.79	2.45
Event	0.06	0.25
Evaluation and description	0.21	0.55
Open-ended prompt	3.52	5.37
Interpretative information	0.69	1.11
Counting/days of the week	0.44	1.07
Repetition of mother utterances	2.15	3.49
Unsolicited child utterances	10.39	10.33

Table 2 Means (standard deviations) for child story retelling features (N = 46)

	M (SD)	*Range*	*Maximum possible score*
Story structural features	2.39 (1.87)	0–7	8
Recounting events	2.87 (1.34)	0–6	6
Microlinguistic features	6.80 (2.13)	2–12	14
Total	12.07 (4.57)	2–23	28

cooperation with their mother's request on open-ended prompts. The second predominant type of child utterance was their voluntary repetition of mother utterances (M = 2.15, 11% of child utterances). This may be mirroring children's probably unconscious attempt to learn from and internalize maternal language behaviors, as well as their active participation, during joint bookreading.

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of children's performance in story retelling. Examination of the data revealed that, on average, children were able to tell three main events out of six and were able to incorporate about two story structural features (usually, identifying the main character and a problem). In retelling the story, children in this sample tended to use anchor tense appropriately, that is, adhering to a single past tense time frame. Use of connectives tended to be restricted to relatively unsophisticated connectives such as 'and.'

Relationship between mother and child talk during joint bookreading

Our second research question asked the extent to which amount and type of maternal talk during joint bookreading were related to children's amount and type of verbal contributions during the same interaction. On average, mothers and children participated approximately equally in talk about the book, with children producing about 20 utterances during the joint bookreading. Mother and child amount of extratextual talk was highly correlated (r = 0.60, $p < 0.0001$). In other words, mothers who produced more utterances beyond simply reading the book tended to have children who produced more utterances about the book.

Table 3 shows bivariate correlations between mother and child utterance types during joint bookreading. Interestingly, none of the maternal utterance types was correlated with the child's independent contributions during the joint bookreading. A separate analysis of wh- and yes/no questions posed by the mother also showed no relationship to child spontaneous verbalization (r = 0.66, p = 0.61).

On the other hand, when children's responsive utterances were examined, we found a high degree of association between mother and child utterances of a given type. For example, mother utterances about events were highly correlated with child event utterances (r = 0.75, $p < 0.001$); mother utterances that provided evaluations and descriptions were highly correlated with child's evaluation/description utterances (r = 0.50, $p < 0.001$); mother's utterances regarding counting and days of the week were correlated to the child's inclusion of such aspect in his/her

Table 3 Bivariate correlations between mother and child utterance types during joint bookreading (N = 62 dyads)

	Events	*Evaluation/ description*	*Vocabulary/ labeling*	*Interpretive information*	*Counting/days of the week*	*Open-ended prompts*	*Communicative scaffolding*
Child unsolicited contributions	0.06	0.07	–0.06	0.00	–0.95	–0.12	–0.01
Child solicited contribution							
Event	0.75***	0.35**	0.31*	0.23†	0.12	0.10	0.26*
Evaluation/description	0.09	0.50***	0.06	0.08	–0.05	–0.09	0.05
Vocabulary/labeling	–0.01	–0.05	0.08	–0.07	–0.02	–0.13	–0.13
Interpretive information	–0.04	–0.06	–0.01	0.01	–0.05	–0.09	–0.13
Counting/days of the week					0.82***		0.09
Child repetition of mother	–0.10	0.10	–0.19	–0.17	–0.05	–0.03	–0.12

†$p < 0.10$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

own speech ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$). This result regarding the correlations between mother's and child utterances on counting and days of the week coincides with Tare, Shatz and Gilbertson's (2008) finding that children as young as age 2 were already able to respond correctly to parents' questions about abstract terms including colors, time, and number. As noted earlier, mothers in this study devoted relatively less attention to counting and naming days of the week, although those are prominent features of the given book. However, the high correlations between mothers' prompt about and children's responses to counting and days of the week reveal that joint bookreading could serve as an important context that mothers can utilize for instruction of such abstract terms and concepts. On the whole, significant correlations between mothers' and children's utterances of given types indicate that children in this study appear to be responding in an appropriate, topic-related manner to maternal requests and prompts for particular kinds of information.

Relationship between talk during bookreading and children's story retelling

Our third research question asked about potential relationships between talk during bookreading and children's subsequent story retelling. The results are presented in Table 4. Correlations between maternal extratextual talk and child story retelling revealed that mothers' open-ended prompting during joint bookreading was positively associated with child overall story retelling performance ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), as well as with more specific aspects such as number of story structural features ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$). Both maternal question types were also associated with all of the story retelling measures. These cross-task associations offer support for the idea that children may be using mother talk to internalize a schema for what a story is like, and subsequently drawing on that implicit knowledge in their own story (re)telling.

On the other hand, the only type of children's utterances that showed significant association with their own retelling was their voluntary repetition of mothers' utterances, which had significant positive relations with children's overall retelling abilities ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$) and with their inclusion of specific events in particular ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). No other utterance types produced by the child showed correlations with story retelling measures. By repeating mothers' utterances during joint bookreading dyads, children may have developed awareness of important story structures and content that supported their later retelling.

Regression analyses that controlled for mother education level, child age and gender, and the child's spontaneous verbal contribution during joint bookreading were undertaken to examine the predictive power of maternal and child utterances in explaining children's story retelling skills. A taxonomy of multiple regression models where mother and child variables were entered together or alone was fitted for each of the four story retelling measures (story structural features, microlinguistic features, mentioning of major events, and total story retelling score), testing the predictive power of each of the maternal and child variables analyzed. Despite some correlations observed earlier between mother and child utterances during joint bookreading and child story retelling, the only variables that proved to be

Table 4 Bivariate correlations between mother and child utterance types during joint bookreading and features of child's story retelling (N = 46)

	Total story retelling scores	*Story structural features*	*Recounting events*	*Microlinguistic features*
Mother requests				
Events	–0.03	–0.12	–0.17	0.08
Evaluation/description	–0.05	–0.01	–0.12	0.03
Vocabulary/labeling	–0.18	–0.07	–0.26†	0.07
Interpretive information	–0.19	–0.11	–0.27†	–0.10
Counting/days of the week	–0.08	–0.08	–0.12	0.02
Open-ended prompts	0.31*	0.34*	0.22	0.23
Communicative scaffolding	0.19	0.21	0.04	0.19
Wh-questions	0.47**	0.37*	0.61***	0.00
Yes/no questions	0.48**	0.37*	0.62***	0.41**
Child responsive contributions				
Events	–0.03	–0.01	0.13	0.00
Evaluation/description	–0.06	0.02	–0.14	–0.07
Vocabulary/labeling	–0.15	–0.13	–0.17	–0.12
Interpretive information	–0.24	–0.22	–0.21	–0.16
Counting/days of the week	–0.13	–0.17	–0.17	–0.14
Child unsolicited contributions	0.09	0.19	0.15	–0.05
Child repetition of mother	0.31*	0.21	0.49**	0.26†

†$p < 0.10$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

significant predictors for child story retelling measures were mothers' open-ended prompts and frequency of questions, regardless of question types (i.e., wh- and yes/no questions). The best fitted model for each measure is identified in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that frequency of maternal questions is a significant predictor for each of the four story retelling measures. Specific questions types (i.e., wh- and yes/no questions) were not significant predictors. In predicting children's total story retelling scores, mothers' open-ended prompts explained only about 18% of the variance, but adding frequency of questions increased the predictive power of the model by an additional 28%, thus explaining 46% of the total variance together. Each of the subcomponents of story retelling skills – story structural features; microlinguistic features including correct tense use, conjunctions, and evaluative devices; and recounting of major events – were strongly and positively predicted by mothers' open-ended prompts and frequency of questions.

None of the other child or maternal variables explained variance in any of the four aspects of child story retelling performance. This suggests that merely engaging in book-related conversation and commenting about the book may not be enough to promote children's story telling skills. Rather, inviting the child to be an active

Table 5 Parameter estimates for maternal variables in predicting story retelling, controlling for child age, mothers' years of education, child gender, and number of child unsolicited contributions (N = 46)

	Outcome variables			
	Total story retelling scores	*Story structural features*	*Microlinguistic features*	*Events*
Intercept	10.15	6.48	0.86	3.53
Control variables				
Age	–0.02	–0.06	0.06	–0.06
Mother's years of education	0.06	–0.13	0.15	0.14
Child's gender	–1.31	–0.57	–0.69	–0.04
Child's unsolicited contribution	0.05	0.09	0.02	0.03
Predictor variables				
Mother's prompting	0.33**	0.12**	0.11*	0.07**
Frequency of questions	0.59***	0.16**	0.20**	0.19***
R^2	0.46	0.36	0.38	0.53

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

participant during joint bookreading, by providing open-ended prompts and asking abundant questions, is more facilitative of child's oral story telling abilities.

DISCUSSION

The current study contributes to the literature on parent–child bookreading by focusing particularly on children's participation in extratextual talk. Although the potential influence of the child partner is routinely acknowledged, little research heretofore has examined this aspect of joint bookreading. Somewhat surprising to us was the finding that children, on average, contribute nearly as much talk as mothers in the joint bookreading interaction. As was the case for mothers, individual children varied greatly in the extent to which they produced book-related talk. For example, one child did not produce any such talk, while another child produced 52 extratextual utterances.

Children whose mothers produced relatively more extratextual talk tended to do so themselves as well, suggesting that these children are learning that books are for discussing as well as for reading, which has important implications for their later school experiences. Of course, in the absence of longitudinal analysis, one cannot say for sure who is influencing whom. It may be that each partner is influencing the other in a transactional way over time, resulting in the evolution of a dyadic 'style' of interaction around books that is either primarily adhering to the text or moving beyond it.

As has been reported earlier for middle-income mothers (Hammett et al., 2003) and for low-income mothers of younger preschoolers (de Temple & Snow, 1996), most mothers in the current sample went beyond reading of the text to engage in at least some talk with their preschoolers. However, variability among mothers was quite large. On average, the amount of maternal talk in the current sample (23.2 utterances) was somewhat smaller than that observed by de Temple and Snow among low-income mothers reading the same book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. However, it is worth noting that those researchers found that maternal talk was greater at child age 3;6 than at child age 4;6. Children in the current sample were somewhat older still (average age 5;1). Thus, results observed here are in keeping with the notion that mothers tend to produce less talk in reading books with older children (Heath, 1982), perhaps ceding more airspace to the child or relying more on the text itself.

In the current sample, substantial variability was also observed in the *types* of utterances mothers produced during bookreading. For most utterance categories, the standard deviations were equal to or larger than the mean, a finding that has also been reported for middle-class parents reading books with their preschoolers (Hammett et al., 2003; van Kleeck et al., 1997).

Mothers who engaged in more book-related talk with their children seemed to draw on multiple strategies for engaging their children in understanding and talking about the book. They talked about objects and their names, discussed events in the story, solicited children's interpretations and predictions as well as offering their own, and used communicative scaffolding to acknowledge and build on what the child said. Some of these engaging mothers relied on strategies particular to the book being read (e.g., using open-ended prompts to invite the child to chime in), whereas others did not. Thus, mothers, either consciously or unconsciously, were modeling various types of book-related talk and showing different aspects of the book to which children should be attending.

Of interest is the absence of a strong relationship between maternal talk and children's *initiatory* talk during bookreading. Maternal scaffolding and communicative support such as back-channeling and repetition of the child's utterances were not related to specific kinds of child book talk. Nor were wh- or yes/no questions predictive of particular types of child utterance. On the other hand, children's *responsive* utterances were positively associated with particular maternal utterance types such as talk about events, description, and routines, e.g., counting. Therefore, it seems that children are replying 'in kind' to maternal verbal requests and getting practice in the specific types of talk mothers initiate. Preschoolers in this sample seem to be developing the ability to engage collaboratively with an interlocutor in book-related talk, both contributing independently and responding appropriately. Mothers who frequently engage in a variety of types of book talk may be preparing children for one of the main literacy activities in school, talking *about* books.

A second contribution of this study was the investigation of children's story retelling. Teachers in elementary school often rely on children's retellings or summaries of text as an index of their reading comprehension. But how *do* children learn to retell? We reasoned that children's talk during bookreading, and perhaps mothers' talk as well, might predict the quality of children's later retelling. Contrary

to our hypothesis, children's talk during joint bookreading was not predictive of their story retelling. In fact, neither children's spontaneous talk, nor their responses to maternal requests for particular types of information, had any predictive power for story retelling. However, two maternal language behaviors – asking questions and open-ended prompts – were significant predictors for several specific aspects of children's story retelling, as well as their overall performance. In other words, although maternal talk seems to have little relation to children's language behavior during joint bookreading itself, these two features do seem to facilitate children's retelling, explaining about half of the variance in children's story retelling skills. Furthermore, the asking of questions itself seems to be more important than the information mothers specifically attempt to elicit. More importantly, the forms and types of questions mothers ask were not as crucial as the amount of questions asked in total in predicting children's story retelling skills. Open-ended prompts that leave an utterance suspended as an invitation to the child to chime in also seem particularly facilitative of children's retelling. We speculate that the significant role of prompting found in this study may be attributed to a number of factors. First, prompting requires the child to actively participate and be attentive to the task at hand. The child is likely to be alert throughout the interaction because he or she has responsibility for completing the 'story.' At the same time, the child is required not only to pay attention to the story structural features, the details about the story being told, and the linguistic features used in the story, but also to produce them. Thus, it is not surprising that mothers' prompting predicted children's story retelling skills.

Children's repetition of maternal utterances during joint bookreading was also related to their retelling. This may indicate that the child's willingness to be an active participant during joint bookreading and his/her unconscious or conscious effort to acquire and imitate adult language behaviors is an important resource for story telling ability. Such an association also suggests the potential of intervention programs designed to improve qualities of book-related talk to influence the story telling skills children will need in school.

In sum, this study highlighted maternal language behavior and modeling during joint bookreading as resources for preschool children to draw upon in practicing two important literacy-related activities they are likely to engage in at school – talking about a book and story retelling. Children's ability to produce extratextual talk about a book is closely associated with the type of information mothers ask for during joint bookreading. On the other hand, children's story (re)telling skills are closely related to the extent to which mothers invite the child to be active and participatory joint book-readers by asking numerous questions and prompting them to complete sentences from the book.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Some limitations should be noted. The book used, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar,* follows a set structure using a highly predictable language pattern. The advantage of such a book is that it is engaging and probably encourages children's participation

in joint 'reading.' It also may encourage mothers to solicit children's participation through the prompting strategies described earlier. It is entirely possible that dyads would have interacted and participated differently with a different book. However, because we did not observe the dyads engaged with another book that might be less amenable to open-ended prompts, it is unclear whether this strategy is generally favored by mothers like those in the present sample. It is also unclear whether participation in such prompting routines would be predictive of children's retelling of a different kind of book. Given previous studies that have documented genre effects on parents' elicitation strategies (Stadler & McEvoy, 2003), more research is needed to elucidate particular kinds of prompting that occur during reading of varied kinds of books, and their effect, if any, on children's participation and story retelling.

Familiarity with the book being read influences how mothers and children interact during joint bookreading (Anderson-Yockel & Haynes, 1994; Haden et al., 1996). In this study, all dyads had some familiarity with the book because it had been used in earlier rounds of data collection. However, it is likely that some dyads were more familiar than others with the book. Having no information about the extent of previous familiarity with the book, we were unable to assess the possible influence of this factor.

Despite these limitations, this study augments the rather slender body of existing research on children's verbal participation during bookreading with parents or other adults and provides a look at interrelationships between bookreading and another literacy activity, story retelling. This study confirms and complements previous studies showing beneficial effects of joint bookreading on children's language development (de Temple & Snow, 2003; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lawrence, 2004; Reese, 1995; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The specific verbal behaviors and strategies mothers and children demonstrated during joint bookreading predicted multiple aspects of children's later story retelling. Although further research is necessary, mothers' prompting strategy and question-asking appear to play an important role in children's story retelling, particularly for a book similar to the one used in the study. Prompting may be an effective strategy in engaging and sustaining children's attention; mothers who do not prompt spontaneously could be encouraged to incorporate this strategy in joint bookreading. At the same time, the most effective mothers employed a variety of verbal behaviors and strategies, beyond just prompting, that engaged children's participation in bookreading and prepared them to produce more detailed and linguistically sophisticated story retellings. The study showed positive relations of the *frequency* of certain maternal language behaviors, such as prompting, to child retelling; but the *quality* (i.e., pragmatic appropriateness, grammatical accuracy, language complexity, and so on) of such language behaviors was not analyzed. Thus, for a more conclusive finding, a study that investigates the quality as well as frequency of maternal and child verbal behaviors is needed.

Some low-income mothers in this study were engaging in the kinds of language behaviors during bookreading that have been shown to be facilitative of children's language and literacy development, behaviors very similar to those that are 'taught'

in dialogic reading and other intervention programs. Such intervention programs might build on this valuable resource by using parents who already have these behaviors in their repertoire in the role of peer coaches.

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1. Although this particular element has not been examined in other joint bookreading studies, and is not a prominent narrative feature, we decided to include it in our analysis, considering the characteristics of the book we used. Counting and naming the days of the week are important elements that unfold the story and could motivate the mothers to take the opportunity to teach or remind children of this particular knowledge. Since it was our interest to investigate what mothers focus on as well as their verbal strategies in doing so, this particular code is included in order to examine whether low-income mothers in this study focus on instructional, as opposed to narrative, elements of story reading. Tare et al. (2008) showed that mothers did some overt teaching with color, number, and time-related words in their child-directed speech. But there has been no study that looked at mothers' verbal behaviors with those specific terms during joint bookreading.
2. Mothers' utterances such as 'That's a big caterpillar' during joint bookreading were coded as a provision of descriptive information, because it was her extratextual comment on the illustration, and not an introduction of the story character within a narrative. On the other hand, the child's utterance 'There was a little caterpillar' during story retelling served as a formal introduction of the main character of the narrative and was coded as identification of the character. Therefore, although similar in content, the purpose and function of the utterances differ and were coded as different constructs.
3. Microlinguistic features were coded only for children's retelling and not for maternal or child utterances during bookreading, because coding of such features is only possible for extended narrative discourse. However, mothers were not expected to and did not construct narratives during the bookreading session, as we did not use a wordless picture book.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Jennifer Yusun Kang
Department of English Language Education, Korea University,
SungBuk-Ku Anam-Dong, Seoul, Korea
E: jenkang@korea.ac.kr
