



# Taiwanese Mother's Talk During Shared Reading With Their Children



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Parental book reading embodies components such as predictability, structure, and scaffolding opportunities, which are important to language development (Clift & Hughes, 1986; Needlman, Klass, & Zuckerman, 2002). Many researchers have demonstrated that joint book reading positively influenced young children's acquisition of language literacy skills (Burgess, 1997; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angel, 1994; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). The importance of reading to children has been widely emphasized and studied in the mainstream culture; however, less is known about parental book reading to children in other cultures.

## Maternal Book Reading Studies

DeTemple (2001) studied maternal book reading styles and the impact on children's later language skills. Seventy-four English speaking children and their mothers from low-income families participated in this study. She found that mothers who used a higher percentage of *immediate talk* when reading to their preschoolers and kindergartners had children who achieved low scores on kindergarten measures of early literacy. On average, 43%-60% of the mothers' talk during the book-reading sessions was immediate talk and 11%-18% was *non-immediate talk*. The amount of immediate talk decreased when children were 4 years old compared to 3 years old. A larger percentage of mothers' talk was non-immediate when the children were 4 years old compared to 3 years old.

In Japanese culture, Minami (2002) studied the styles of maternal talking during book reading and the influences of these styles on children's talking. Twenty Japanese preschool children and their parents from middle-class living in Japan participated in this study. She found that the more the mother talked, the more immediate and non-immediate talk the mothers provided.

Chang and Lin (2006) conducted a study to explore Taiwanese mother-child book-reading interactions in low-income families. Mothers were asked to read the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969) with their children at home. The mothers mostly requested for children to respond and gave children feedback. While reading, the mothers and their children mostly talked about something that appeared in the book, but rarely talked about things that were not in the book. Moreover, most of the mothers only asked children to listen and answer questions. Overall, Taiwanese mothers usually asked their children to repeat and imitate parental narratives. They also asked their children to answer many questions about the content in the book.

**Purpose of the Study:** To evaluate maternal book reading with young children in the Taiwanese culture. The information may assist speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in their work with families who embrace the Taiwanese culture.

## Research Questions

1. Do Taiwanese mothers use more immediate talk, non-immediate talk, or text reading while reading to their preschoolers?
2. What type of immediate talk, non-immediate talk, and text reading do Taiwanese mothers tend to use the most?

## Participants

- Nine mothers and their children participated in this study.
- Children were aged from 3;2 - 4;6 (  $M = 3;9$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ).
- All participants were from northern and northeastern parts of Taiwan.
- All the mothers and children speak Mandarin Chinese.
- All the children were typically developing. All children scored

within normal limit on two language standardized tests: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) (2006) and Preschooler Language Disorder Scale-Revised (PLDS-R). None of the children had received special services.

Table 1. Characteristics of the children

Child ID	Age	Gender	Language	PLDS-R (percentile)	PPVT-R (standard score/percentile)
T01	4;6	F	Mandarin 100%	56	113/81
T02	4;4	F	Mandarin 100%	48	117/87
T03	4;1	M	Mandarin 100%	40	114/82
T04	3;6	F	Mandarin 50% Taiwanese 25% English 25%	59	112/79
T05	3;2	F	Mandarin 100%	45	113/81
T06	4;2	F	Mandarin 100%	56	105/63
T07	3;8	M	Mandarin 60% Taiwanese 30% English 10%	48	120/91
T08	3;4	F	Mandarin 100%	68	110/90
T09	3;4	F	Mandarin 100%	82	121/92

Table 2. Characteristics of the mothers

Mother ID	Language	Education	Occupation
T01	Mandarin 100%	vocational school	Housewife
T02	Mandarin 100%	vocational school	kindergarten teacher
T03	Mandarin 50 % Taiwanese 50%	high school	Housewife
T04	Mandarin 100%	high school	Housewife
T05	Mandarin 50% Taiwanese 50%	high school	Housewife
T06	Mandarin 50% Taiwanese 50%	high school	Housewife
T07	Mandarin 70% Taiwanese 20% English 10%	vocational school	nursing home staff
T08	Mandarin100	vocational school	Housewife
T09	Mandarin100	vocational school	Housewife

## Procedure

- The mothers were asked to read two books, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969) and *Goodnight Moon* (Brown, 1977) to their children in a quiet setting. *Goodnight Moon* was a "warm up" book.
- The talking was only analyzed while mothers and children read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.
- The reason for choosing this book was because it has been used in several studies conducted in different cultures and different SES groups.
- A video recorder and tape recorder were used to record the book reading.
- Two standard tests, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) (2006) and Preschooler Language Disorder Scale-Revised (PLDS-R) (2008), were given to the children to measure their receptive vocabulary and to identify quickly if the children needed a more comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of their communication skills.

## Categories of Maternal Talk

Maternal utterances during the book reading were transcribed and coded into two major categories: immediate talk, non-immediate talk, and text-related talk. **Immediate talk:** comments and questions that focused on the here and now; the topic of the talk was related to something that had just been read, focusing on information obtainable from each individual page of the book.

**Non-immediate talk:** using the text for recollections of personal experiences, comments or questions about general knowledge, or for drawing inferences and making predictions.

**Text-related talk:** talk that was tied to the writing or pictures in the book.

Text related		
Coding	Definition	Example
B:	Text	In the light of the moon a little egg lay on the leaf.
TB	Title	The Very Hungry Caterpillar
MB	Modified text	He ate five oranges but he was still very very hungry.
CB	Fill-in text; cloze text	On Monday, he ate through a--
SB	Simplified text	And then he went looking for food.

Immediate Talk		
Coding	Definition	Example
IA	Draw attention	And let's see here.
IIR	Request Labeling/locating objects in the text: This was defined as the mother asking the child to provide the name or location of the objects in the book.	Where is the butterfly?
I1A	Assertive Labeling/locating objects in the text: This was defined as the mothers providing the name or location of the objects in the book.	On the leaf.
I2	Fill-in-the-blank routine: This was defined as open-ended sentences in which the mother waited expectantly for the child to answer.	This is a _____?
I3R	Labeling pictures: This was defined as the mothers asking the children to provide the name of the pictures in the book.	the mother pointed at caterpillar and asked, "What's that?"
I3A	Labeling pictures: This was defined as the mothers providing the children the name of the pictures in the book.	He is a caterpillar.
I4R	Counting: This was defined as the mother asking the child to provide the number of objects in the book.	How many strawberries?
I4A	Counting: This was defined as the mother providing the child the number of objects in the book.	He ate five bites of the leaf.
I5	Draw attention to the illustration: This was defined as the mother's attempts to obtain the child's attention to the pictures in the book.	Look at the caterpillar.
I6A	Mothers make comments about the illustrations.	So many colors.
I6R	Mothers ask questions about the illustrations including colors, shape etc.	What color is this?
I7	Expansion: Mothers expand the child's speech.	The child said "Strawberry." The mother expanded "Red strawberries."
I8R	Request the child information about print knowledge	Who wrote it?
I8A	Provide information about print knowledge	Cheng, Ming Ching translated this book.

Non-immediate Talk		
Coding	Definition	Example
N1R	Recall: This was defined as the mother asking the child to provide the information about the story that was just read.	Do you remember what he ate on Monday?
N1A	Recall: This was defined as the mother providing the child the information about the story that was just read.	I remember the caterpillar ate an apple on Monday.
N2	Comments: This was defined as the mother providing or asking the child to provide opinions about the book.	The caterpillar ate too much, right?
N3A	Providing general knowledge: This was defined as the mother providing general knowledge.	The moon comes out during the night time.
N3R	Questions about general knowledge: This was defined as the mother asking questions that the child can answer based on general knowledge.	What can a butterfly do?
N4A	Real world connections/personal experiences: This was defined as the mother providing information about connecting the content of the book to the real life or the child's experiences.	This is your favorite.
N4R	Real world connections/personal experiences: This was defined as the mother asking questions about connecting the content of the book to the real life or the child's experiences.	That's a strawberry. We just ate some strawberries today. Did you like it?
N5A	Decontextualized analysis: This was defined as the mother providing the child information about explanations, inferences, or predictions about the book.	This might be mint flavor.
N5R	Decontextualized analysis: This was defined as the mother asking the child to provide explanations, inferences, or predictions about the book.	That night he had a stomachache. Why do you think he had a stomachache?
A	Agreement	You are right.
C	Correction	This is a watermelon, not a birthday hat.
Q	Questioning	Is this really an apple?
G	General comments	Let's read it again next time.
O	Other	

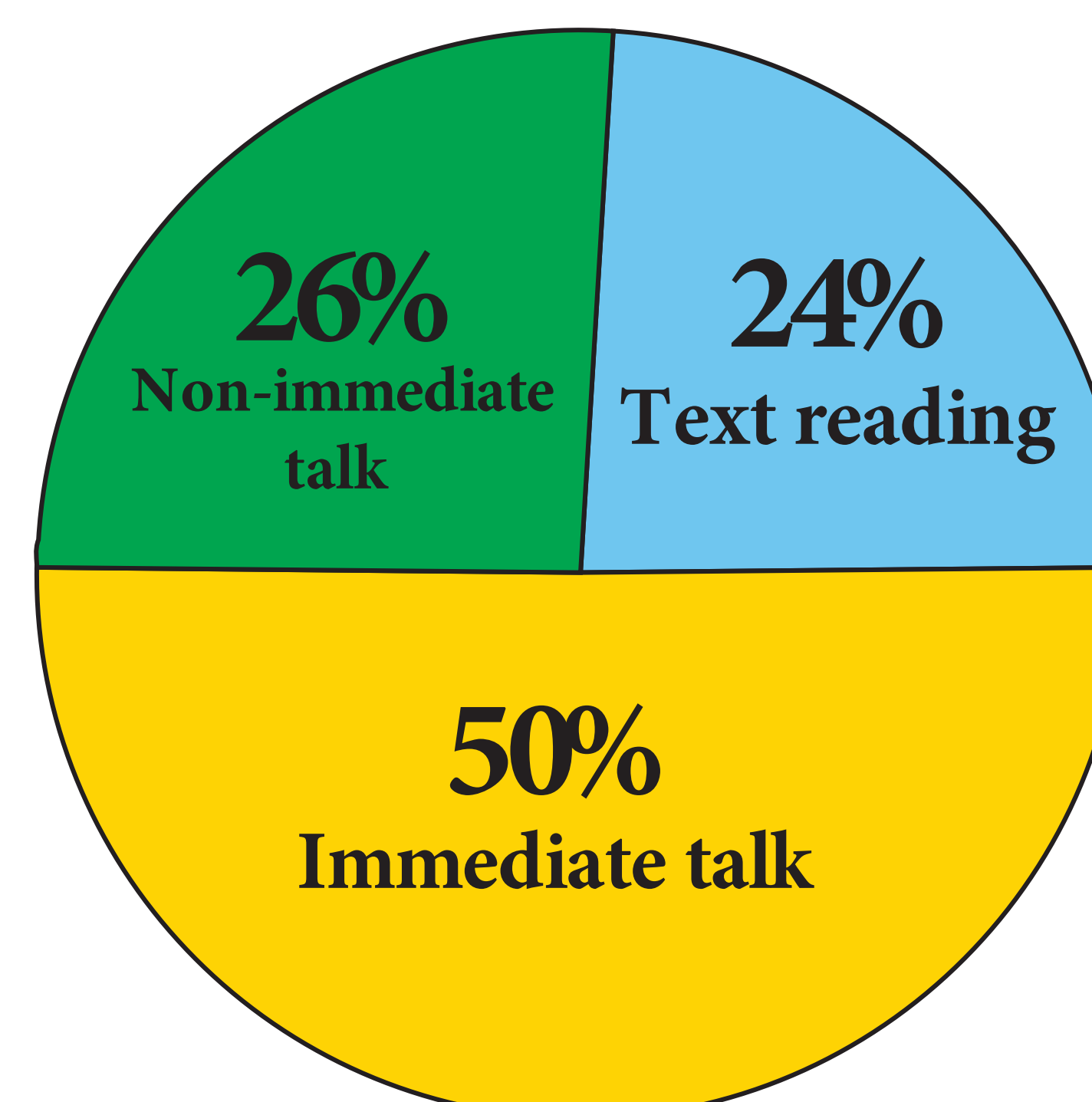
- The mothers' utterances were transcribed in Mandarin by the researcher from Taiwan who speaks Mandarin as her first language.
- The Mandarin transcription was then translated to English by the researcher.
- The English transcriptions were coded by the researcher and a trained graduate student.
- The researcher and the graduate student discussed the coding and came to an agreement if a disagreement was present. .

## Results

**Research question 1:** Do Taiwanese mothers use more immediate talk, non-immediate talk, or text reading while book shared reading with their preschoolers?

- Immediate talk was used more often than non-immediate and text-related talk

(p = .02 and .04 respectively)



**Research Question 2:** What type of immediate talk, non-immediate talk, and text reading did Taiwanese mothers tend to use the most?

- Most common type of immediate talk was **request for labeling pictures** (i.e., The mother pointed at the caterpillar and asked, "What's that?") (27.24%).
- Most common type of non-immediate talk was **request for decontextualized analysis** (i.e., That night he had a stomachache. Why do you think he had a stomachache?) (34.34%).
- Most common type of text reading was **text** (i.e., In the light of the moon a little egg lay on the leaf.) (51.85%).

Immediate Talk- percentage ranking		
Ranking	Category	Percentage
1	I3R Labeling pictures (request)	27.24%
2	I3A Labeling pictures (providing information)	10.12%
3	I7 Expansion	9.73%
4	I6A Mothers make comments about the illustrations.	9.13%
5	IA Draw attention	8.37%
6	I6R Mothers ask questions about the illustrations including colors, shape etc.	8.37%
7	I4R Counting (request)	7.20%
8	I5A Draw attention to the illustration	6.23%
9	I1R Request Labeling/locating objects in the text	3.89%
10	I9 Repetition	3.89%
11	I4A Counting (providing information)	1.8%
12	I2 Fill-in-the-blank routine	1.17%
13	I8A Provide information about print knowledge	0.97%
14	I1A Assertive Labeling/locating objects in the text	0.78%
15	I5R Use questions to draw attention to the illustration. Request the child information about print knowledge	0.78%
16	I8R Request the child information about print knowledge	0.39%

Non-immediate Talk- percentage ranking			
Ranking	Category	Percentage	
1	N5R Decontextualized analysis (request)	34.34%	
2	N2A Comments (providing information)	14.72%	
3	N5A Decontextualized analysis (providing information)	14.72%	
4	N3R Questions about general knowledge	12.83%	
5	N4R Real world connections/personal experiences (request)	9.06%	
6	N4A Real world connections/personal experiences (providing information)	6.04%	
7	N3A Providing general knowledge	6.04%	
8	N2R Comments (request)	1.89%	
9	N1R Recall (request)	0.38%	
10	N1A Recall (providing information)	0%	

Text Reading- percentage ranking			
Ranking	Category	Percentage	
1	B Text	51.85%	
2	MB Modified text	17.7%	
3	SB Simplified text	13.58%	
4	CB Fill-in text; cloze text	13.58%	
5	TB Title	3.29%	

## Discussion

Our findings are consistent with DeTemple (2001) and Chang and Lin (2006):

- Mothers used more immediate talk than non-immediate talk during shared reading.
- Mothers used requests for labeling the most in immediate talk.

Wu and Tseng (1985) stressed that a central part of Chinese parenting focuses on the ability of children to perform well in school. When children reached school age, the mother would provide the supports and motivation for them to do well in school and to ultimately meet the social and family expectations for success (Chao, 1994). The reason why Taiwanese mothers may have used immediate talk more than non-immediate talk might be that Taiwanese mothers tend to view book sharing as opportunities for teaching. Taiwanese mothers used requests for labeling pictures the most which is related to testing children's knowledge. They may be attempting to teach the skills and knowledge that children might need in schools during shared reading.

Our finding that immediate talk was used more than non-immediate talk by Taiwanese mothers is consistent with the results from studies of English speaking mothers from low income homes. Talking about things focused on the here and now during shared reading may be a similar characteristic across cultures. SLPs may expect that 3 and 4 year old children from Taiwan may respond better to questions and comments about things that appear in the book than things that do not appear during shared reading. Taiwanese children might have more experience answering questions about pictures and texts presented in front of them than using the text for recollections of personal experiences, comments, questions about general knowledge, or for drawing inferences and making predictions.

**Practical Implications:** Taiwanese mothers in Taiwan and English-speaking mothers in the US use similar types of talk when sharing books with their preschoolers. These findings are consistent in low-income families. Other socioeconomic levels may reveal different talk patterns.

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