Parent-Child Dialogic Reading: A Conversation Analytic Case Study

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Abstract
A large body of work has addressed the positive impact of parent-child interactive reading (also referred to as dialogic reading or shared reading) for children's language and literacy development. What has been lacking in research is how interaction takes place in a parent-child read-aloud. How interaction takes place is the domain of conversation analysis (CA), an approach which studies turn-taking in naturally-occurring conversations for the moment-by-moment organization of interaction as oriented to by the interlocutors. Using a CA lens, this article centers on a focused analysis of a dialogic read-aloud of one picturebook between a mother and her 7-year-old daughter, both of whom are speakers of English as a foreign language. In the stretch of dialogue examined in this article, the discussion is about the title of the picturebook and how it might relate to the cover picture. The analysis highlights the sequential organization of the dialogue, and the findings reveal that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction between the two interlocutors. Most interestingly, the analysis showed that the child is able to playfully resist the mother's insistence on how to interpret the story portrayed on the cover picture, and also closely monitored the sequential progression of the dialogue as gleaned from her turn design. The study argues for the detailed analysis of parent-child read-aloud interactive practices to come to a better understanding of how dialogues can contribute to the construction of meaning, particularly as children learn about image-text relations as a part of their expanding literacy practices.

Keywords: Dialogue Reading, Interactive Reading, Shared Reading, Conversation Analysis, Picturebook Read-Aloud

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Introduction

Interactive read-aloud, frequently referred to as shared reading (e.g., Zhang, Djonov, & Torr, 2016) and dialogic reading (e.g., Cohrssen, Niklas, & Tayler, 2016), is "an approach in which the story itself is used as a springboard for adult-child dialogue and extended thinking" (Lennox, 2013, p. 363). The large body of work in this field has invariably confirmed the positive impact of adult-child shared reading on children's language and literacy learning (e.g., Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Morgan & Meier, 2008). To date, research on adult-child reading has mainly developed in two distinct but related strands, i.e., interactive read-alouds between a teacher and her students in the classroom and dialogic reading between a parent and her child at home.

Teacher-Student Shared Reading

Literature on teacher-student interaction during whole-class shared reading encompasses two main areas. Studies either seek to extract the types of things that teachers do to elicit meaningful responses, i.e., focusing on teacher practices (e.g., Maine & Hofmann, 2016; Pappas, Varelas, Patton, Ye, & Ortiz, 2012), or they examine the correlation between teacher questions and student answers (e.g., Collins, 2016; Dunst, Williams, Trivette, Simkus, & Hamby, 2012). Together, these two lines of research on teacher-student interactive reading illuminate not only what kinds of teacher practices can best promote student contribution but also the impact of specific ways of teacher questioning on the likely type of student responses.

Many studies have sought to examine interactive read-alouds from the perspective of teacher practices. For example, Wiseman (2011) focused on what makes a discussion interactive, and found four effective practices on the part of the teacher, including confirming student responses, modeling ways to engage with texts, extending ideas shared by students, and building meaning around the text and its discussion to students' lives. Other studies have been mainly concerned with the types of teacher questions, either literal or inferential. As van Kleeck (2006) explained, literal content refers to "information that is perceptually present in the pictures of a book or directly stated in the text" while inferential content refers to "information about objects, actions, or events that are not directly available from the perceptual sense of the picture or in the text of a book" (p. 282). Zucker, Justice, Piasta, and Kaderavek (2010) examined preschool teacher-student read-aloud interaction and found that children are more likely to give inferential responses when teachers asked inferential rather than literal questions.

Parent-Child Dialogic Reading

As Haggstrom (2020) observed, research on parent-child read-aloud has seldom examined the interactional aspects of the shared reading, but rather, have unvaryingly concentrated on how such practices impact upon children's language and reading development. These studies have consistently confirmed the positive impact of dialogic reading on different aspects of children's cognitive development.

Studies have also documented parent reading behaviors in an effort to identify best practices (e.g., Neuman, 1996; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Bojczyk, Davis, and Rana (2016), for example, differentiated between reading strategies (such as labeling or asking wh-questions as examples falling on either end of the spectrum) that promoted low, medium, or high levels of

child participation. Kuchirko, Tamis-LeMonda, Luo, and Liang (2016) focused on the different cognitive demand of the questions that mothers ask (i.e., whether these questions are referential, story-specific or open-ended questions) and their influence children's contributions in book discussions. Unfailingly, these studies found that questions requiring interpretation of the story and extended answers from children are superior in their capacity to stimulate children's engagement in text discussion and should serve as the guiding principle for parents during shared reading.

Despite obvious contextual differences between teacher-student (in the classroom) and parent-child (outside of school) shared reading, there are numerous parallels in the interaction between these two types of adult roles. For instance, research on parent-child reading have also examined parental use of inferential versus literal language (e.g. Tompkins et al., 2017) and have reported similar and comparable results to studies of teachers and students discussed earlier. Another way in which parent-child and teacher-student interactions are similar concerns the discourse types that occur between both in and out of school of adult-child dialogues. For example, as with Lennox's (2013) observation that classroom interaction during read-alouds often follow the "initiation, response, and then evaluation" pattern (p. 384), Zhang el al. (2016) also found that mothers' interaction with children during reading habitually involve "the Initiation/Question-Response-Feedback/Evaluation structure typical of classroom discourse" (p. 440). They explained this to be because, like teachers, parents are also better-informed and more knowledgeable than their young children, and therefore are inevitably in a position to "actively initiat[e] conversations with the children and offe[r] feedback to children's contributions" (p. 440).

A Conversation Analytic Perspective

As stated earlier, research on interactive read-aloud has developed in two distinct but related strands, i.e., shared reading between teacher and students in the classroom and dialogic reading between parent and child. What the aforementioned discussion has revealed is that these two strands of research are not only overlapping in their concern but have also yield similar findings in these areas: best practices for promoting child contribution, the beneficial effect of inferential questions on the complexity of child response, and adult-led initiation-response-evaluation pattern of interaction. What has consistently been missing in both these strands is the focus on the moment-by-moment details of interaction, that is, a conversation analysis (henceforth CA) perspective that zeros in on *how* adult-child dialogues proceed sequentially. This is the focus of the current study.

Very few studies of adult-child shared reading (either between teacher-student or parent-child) have been conducted following CA principles. One rare example is Freebody and Freiberg (2001), whose research investigated adult-child interaction both in and out of school. Through a conversation analytic approach which emphasized "unmotivated looking" (Davidson, 2012, p. 36) without imposing a priori categories on the data, they found "distinctive set[s] of interactional rights and responsibilities enacted" (p. 230) by the teacher-students and the parent-child whose shared reading practices they examined. Specifically, the former oriented to the teacher's "text-interpretive authority" while the latter oriented to the parent's "word-saying authority" (p. 229). In other words, the students followed the teacher's lead in an attempt to discover the one correct way to understand the pictures and words in the picturebook as interpreted by the teacher while the child sounded out letters and words in an attempt to arrive at a correct pronunciation as guided by the parent. (Note that this study follows Nikolajeva and Scott's (2001) conceptualization of

"picturebooks" as a distinct type of iconotext with particular sets of image-text relations, and therefore, spells picturebooks as one word rather than two words.) What is significant about Freebody and Freiberg's (2001) findings is that all the adult and children they studied, in ways unique to their contexts, "co-ordinated interactional rights and responsibilities" to jointly produce the social practice of shared reading.

While there has been much more interest in recent years in the conversation analytic view of classroom interaction (e.g., Gardner, 2019; Mehan1979; Tanner, 2017), these works have rarely focused on interactive read-aloud practices per se. Even less attention has been paid to the interactional practices of parent-child dialogic reading from a CA perspective. The current study fills the gap in this area of research by studying the "interactional rights and responsibilities" (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001, p. 228) enacted by a parent and her child during their shared reading, with the goal of illuminating the "characteristic ways that participants orient to and display the interaction" (Buttny, 1998, p. 47) as doing dialogic reading. The results of this research add to the documentation of the range of practices in conversations in a rarely studied context. This research is guided by the following questions:
● What interactional rights and responsibilities are oriented to and displayed by the parent and child co-participants in their shared reading of picturebooks?
● Relatedly, how are the co-participants' rights and responsibilities realized in the sequential context of the talk-in-interaction?

Method

The current research is a conversation analytic study of talk-in-interaction in the context of a parent-child shared reading, focusing on the sequential unfolding of the conversation and the roles and responsibilities oriented to by the parent and child, respectively. Data comes from a larger study of video-recordings of the shared reading between a mother-child dyad (myself and my daughter, who was seven years old at the start of data collection) over a period of 14 months from June 2019 to August 2020. During this period, a total of 125 books were read. Generally, each shared reading lasted between 30 to 90 minutes, averaging around 1 hour each time/day a recording was made. The data consists of an estimated 131 hours of video-recorded picturebook discussions, making up a large corpus of longitudinal video-recordings of naturally occurring conversations in a parent-child shared reading situation. The shared reading discussions were conducted in English. While English is a foreign language for my daughter, she is able to comprehend and express herself in the language, as can be seen from the two excerpts below.

In the analysis of the data, the recordings were viewed multiple times and transcripts were made following CA conventions (see Appendix). The recordings were viewed along with the transcripts following the next-turn proof procedure (Sacks et a., 1974) in order to examine how each interlocutor understood what the other said (in the prior turn) as displayed in how they responded (in the next turn). In other words, any claim the CA analyst makes should always find evidence not in "theoretically-driven assumptions" or "pre-determined features of context" (Hutchby, 2019, p. 3), but rather, in the "observable structures and features of the participants' talk and other conduct, through which the analysts may be able to infer the participants' own understanding" (Mori and Zuengler, 2008, p. 17). Following this principle, the recordings were viewed with an open mind in order to look for particular phenomena of interest. After the phenomenon has been identified, the recordings were viewed again in order to collect all the instances of the particular phenomenon. The analysis identified the

importance of the sequential context of interaction in realizing the rights and responsibilities of each participant of the talk.

Results and Discussion

In what follows, I will discuss one dialogue between the mother and her child concerning the possible story portrayed on the front cover (and also the back cover) of the picturebook *My Friend Rabbit* by author and illustrator Eric Rohmann. (In the two excerpts below, M stands for "mother" and C stands for "child." They will be referred to as Mom and Sophie, which is the child's name.)

[Excerpt 1: My Friend Rabbit (lines 67-90)]

67	M:	Oh:: I see::. Just like this. ((*gestures catching*))- The mouse
68		catches the- the ball [and then what.]
69	C:	[Yeah but then] suddenly (.) the plane fell
70		and then the mouse died. ((*looking at M and smiling*))
71	M:	Hey:::: that is not a good story. Hey who is the narrator.
72	C:	(3.0) The mouse.
73	M:	Ye::ah. How can the mouse narrate if he died in the plane crash,
74	C:	=Huh huh [huh huh huh huh]
75	M:	[like you suggest.]
76	C:	Huh huh huh huh. $And then the rabbit was very sad and he
77		cried and cried and then he died too::.$
78	M:	Yeah but who would be telling the story.
79	C:	Huh huh [huh huh]
80	M:	[My] {((*gesturing at book*))- Friend °Rabbit°}
81		$So that cannot be it.$ Let's take a look {((*turns the book
82		to look at the back cover*))- at the back cover.} Oh let's
83		{((*shows front cover of book to camera*))- show. Maybe they
84		did not die. Look at the two of them.}
85	C:	°Yeah. °
86	M:	{((*shows back cover of book to camera*))- They're quite happy.}
87		Wha- what's happening in the picture, {((*turns the book to look
88		at the back cover*))- in this [picture] }
89	C:	{((*looks at the book*))-[They are] com- going ho::me,
90		skipping ho::me}

The analytical focus here begins at line 67 (see Excerpt 1), before which Sophie, with Mom's prompting, was sharing her thoughts about the possible plot of the story based on the front cover. Sophie suggested that the rabbit and the mouse were playing catching the ball, with the rabbit throwing the plane, and then throwing the ball, and the mouse piloting the plane to

catch the ball. Mom then asked, in line 67, "the mouse catches the ball and then what?" In line 69, Sophie continued with her story, saying "but then suddenly the plane fell and then the mouse died." She then looked at Mom and smiled, suggesting that she is being playful with the storytelling.

Line 71 is an interlocking organization, i.e., a turn that includes "two (or sometimes three) components, combining in the same turn the last part (the second pair part of an adjacency pair or a sequence-closing third) of one sequence and the first part of a next sequence" (Schegloff, 1986, p. 131). Here, mom first responded to the plot suggested by Sophie before she pursued a justification by asking "who is the narrator?" After Sophie responded that the narrator is "the mouse" (line 72), Mom confirmed the answer, with prolonged stress, before then moving on to elaborate on her question by spelling out the gap in the logic that she saw: "How can the mouse narrate if he died in the plane crash?" (line 73). Subsequently, in line 74, continued into line 76, Sophie filled her slot, made conditionally relevant by Mom's question in line 73, first with laughter, and then with a response. However, interestingly, Sophie's response did not address Mom's question, but ignored the question completely, and pursued her own telling of the story. Specifically, she began her answer (in line 76 after the laughter) with the connective "and," which showed that she is not answering the question Mom posed in her preceding turn, but rather, is continuing her own previous talk. In essence, Sophie's turn in line 76 followed her own previous turn in lines 69-70, displaying that the intervening talk by Mom may have interrupted her narration of the plot.

Mom continued to pursue an answer to her question by responding (in lines 78 and 80): "Yeah, but who would be telling the story? My Friend Rabbit." Niemi (2014) explained that there are two types of "yeah but" utterances based on the prosodic relationship between the "yeah" and "but": the integrated and the non-integrated, depending on whether the two parts are verbalized as the same or separate intonation phrases. When pronounced as "the same intonation phrase with the disagreeing utterance", i.e., the integrated usage, the "yeah" has a weaker acknowledging force and "can merely signal recipiency" (p. 55). This is the case with the "yeah but" in Mom's pursuit in line 78, which first signalled the receipt of Sophie's previous turn before going on to counter it with her own question, a reformulation of line 71. This is actually the third time Mom issued such a pursuit, first in line 71, then again in line 73, and finally yet again in line 78. In each, the question is phrased differently, as contingent on its first pair part. In response to Mom's pursuit in line 78, Sophie only laughed (line 79), without providing any verbal reply. Mom then prefaced her next turn (line 81) with "so" (i.e., "So that cannot be it") to signal that her turn is the upshot of what she oriented to as Sophie's agreement (i.e., the laughter in line 79). As Raymond (2004) has found, *so*-prefaced utterances can "articulate the upshot of prior talk" and functions to "pursue a limited range of actions from their recipients" (p. 186). In this case, Mom does not even invite further discussion from Sophie but immediately followed with evidence for her own assertion by referring to the back cover that shows that "they did not die" (lines 83-84), to which Sophie promptly agreed (in line 85). Their dialogue then digressed into a discussion about cartoons, wherein the type of picture shown on the back cover is often found. Due to limited space, this digression in the dialogue is not discussed here, as it does not immediately pertain to the focus of the current analysis.

In line 138 (see Excerpt 2), Mom attempted to bring the conversation back to their previous discussion in lines 81-84 (regarding what the picture on the back cover showed about the fate of the two protagonists). The *so*-preface can be understood to signal that what is said in this turn emerged from incipiency (Bolden, 2009). That is, "'so' is one solution available to the

interlocutors for dealing with a common interactional problem: how to show that the current utterance is occasioned by something other than the immediately preceding talk" (p. 996), which in this case was about how cartoons sometimes end with a circle getting smaller and smaller. Sophie, however, treated this *so*-prefaced question as "the upshot of prior talk" (Raymond, 2004, p. 186), answering that this type of picture means "it's a cartoon." Mom then used a "yeah but" utterance to indicate her disagreement with Sophie's interpretation and then to revised her question.

Mom's turn in lines 146-148 and 150 were both *so*-prefaced, indicating the "upshot of prior talk" (Raymond, 2004, p. 186). This was also the case in her turn in line 158 ("so what do you think happened," using the *so*-preface to suggest to Sophie that she should come up with a different plot about what happened in the story based on their immediately prior agreement (in lines 146-149 and especially lines 150-155) that no one died. Interestingly, even though Sophie agreed (in line 155) that both characters are still alive at the end of the story, she repeated her answer, in line 159, that "the plane crashed." Moreover, this was prefaced with "I said," which stressed that she was sticking to her original proposed plot that the plane crashed. The "I said" shows that Sophie was insisting on her original proposed plot rather than her inability to understand their previous discussion (summed up by Mom in line 154). This is evidenced by the fact that when Mom again pursued a different answer from Sophie by issuing a challenge in her response in lines 160-161, Sophie revised her answer to one that fitted with the result from their previous discussion (summed up by Mom in line 150-154 and again in line 160-161), saying "and then the plane landed and they both went home" (line 162).

[Excerpt 2: My Friend Rabbit (lines 138-168)]

138	M:	((*shows back cover to C*))- So when we see this type of picture,
139		we can guess it means what.
140	C:	(1.0) It's a cartoo::n
141	M:	Yeah, but- uh- <u>when</u> ((*put the book down with back cover*
142		*facing up*)) in the cartoon do they show this.=
143	C:	=The last part.
144	M:	Yeah, the end, [right?]
145	C:	[Yeah]
146	M:	Yeah. So they began {((*points to front cover and shows*
147		*camera*))- like this,} and then they ended {((*shows back cover*
148		*to camera*))- like this.
149	C:	Yeah
150	M:	So ↑<u>thank</u>↑fully no one died in the [plane crashed]
151	C:	[hehehehehehe]
152	M:	like you $suggested$. ((*turns book to look at the back cover and*
153		*then immediately shows back cover to camera and then puts the*
154		*book down*))- It means they're still alive at the end.}
155	C:	°Yeah. °
156	M:	Yea:h.
157	C:	[heh heh heh heh heh]
158	M:	[So, wha- what- what do] you think happened
159	C:	(1.)I said the plane crashed. [heh heh heh]
160	M:	[Yeah, well,] apparently it did not
161		{((*briefly shows back cover to camera*))-crash look}
162	C:	And then the plane landed and they both went home.
163	M:	Oh, landed safely.
164	C:	((*nods*))- huh huh huh
165	M:	Okay. Maybe. That's why {((*pointing to the front cover*))- he
166		could- the mouse could tell} the story, right? [My]=
167	C:	[°Yeah. °]
168	M:	=friend rabbit.

Note the turn design (Drew, 2013) in Sophie's response in line 162. Line 162 is a revision of Sophie's answer to Mom's question in line 158 ("So what do you think happened"). She revised her answer from "I said the plane crashed" (line 159) to "and then the plane landed and they both went home" (line 162). There is no reason, in the sequence from line 158 to line 162, for Sophie to have designed her answer in line 162 to have been prefaced with "and then." The significance of the design of this turn can only be understood sequentially, taking into account of the conversation from the beginning of the transcript. In line 73, when

questioned by Mom about "how can the mouse narrate if he died in the plane crash," Sophie prefaced her answer in line 76 with "and then" to ignore Mom's challenge and oriented her answer as following immediately from her narration in lines 69-70. In line 162, by prefacing her answer with "and then," Sophie is linking her revision not only to Mom's prompt in lines 160-161, but also, retrospectively, to Mom's prompt in lines 73-75 and also line 68 (in the last part "and then what"), essentially revising her own answer in lines 76-77 and also in lines 69-70. This sequential choreography on Sophie's part shows her intense engagement with the progression of the discussion throughout this whole stretch of dialogue, displaying her awareness and acknowledgment that the whole stretch of talk has been to solve the "problem" identified by Mom in line 73 ("How can the mouse narrate if he died in the plane crash") and yet again in lines 160-161 ("apparently it did not crash") as a result of her answer (in lines 69-70) to the question that Mom originally posed in line 68 ("and then what"). In other words, Sophie's answer in line 162 not only is a revision of her answer in line 159 but is also a revision of her answer in lines 69-70. Thus, the sequential organization connects the whole stretch of talk as systematic and orderly throughout the many smaller sequences in which the discussion unfolded.

Sophie's response (accompanied by laughter) in line 159 also suggests, retrospectively, that her laughter in line 79 could have been *doing* the same thing as what she did/said in line 159, i.e., insisting "I said the mouse" as her answer to the question posed in line 78, which was a reformulation of the question posed in line 71. This laughter signalled her insistence, albeit in jest, on her own plot development even though it may not be the one proposed by Mom (in her challenges posed in lines 71, 73, and 78 about who can be telling the story if the mouse died, especially when the title of the book is "My Friend Rabbit"). In line 159, Sophie upgraded her insistence by more explicitly spelling out her resistance to Mom's focus on story and picture logic as warranted by the back cover. In other words, even though one could already have interpreted, at the moment when the conversation proceeded to line 79, what Sophie implied by using only laughter to fill in her slot, it is in the sequential account (i.e., many sequences later in line 159) that one finds verbal evidence to further support the interpretation.

Conclusion and Implications

In the parent-child reading interaction examined above, the mother oriented to her rights and responsibilities to manage the direction of the discussion and to hold her child accountable to her interpretation of the front cover. The child, correspondingly, oriented to her responsibility to follow the mother's line of questioning as the locus of discussion, but at the same time, also her rights to interpret the picture and insist on her own ideas. Thus, text-interpretive authority in this parent-child dyad was negotiated and co-constructed by the co-participants. The child's text-interpretive authority was challenged by the mother when it defied the logic set out in the title and in the back cover. Thus, the sequential unfolding of the discussion was realized in the mother's pursuit of accountability in the child's text-interpretive authority as that which should be warranted by the clues provided by in the pictures on the front and back covers.

In particular, the child's "interactive options" (Freebody & Freiberg, 2001, p. 228) were not limited to only that of a follower. The child repeatedly insisted on her own plot creation even when she agreed that there were holes in the logic of her plot. This occurred in three instances in three different ways: First, she filled in her slot, which was supposed to be an answer, by continuing with her narration as if she had not been interrupted by her mother. Second, when

challenged again by the mother, she only filled in her slot with laughter. Finally, towards the end, the child clearly resisted the mother's request to revise her proposed plot. Thus, it would be interesting to look for how much this characteristic of conversation (i.e., resistance as one of a child's interactive options) occurs in the rest of the data as a possible feature of this parent-child shared reading.

These findings demonstrate that a lot goes on in a parent-child dialogic reading than language and literacy skills being developed when viewed through a CA perspective. The findings also show that examining interactional practices through the CA method of looking at sequential unfolding of conversations is a worthwhile focus in parent-child reading research. Moreover, how children go about insisting on their own text-interpretive authority under the general boundary of the parents' text-interpretive control should be explored further in future research.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Transcript notations

(.)	Untimed perceptible pause between or within a turn
(# of seconds)	The time, in seconds, of a pause between or within a turn
underline	Stress
CAPS	Very emphatic stress
↑	High pitch on word
.	Sentence-final falling intonation
?	Yes/no question rising intonation
,	Phrase-final intonation (more to come)
–	A glottal stop, or abrupt cutting off of sound
:	Lengthened vowel sound (extra colons indicate greater lengthening)
=	Latch
[ ]	Overlapped talk
°soft°	Spoken softly/decreased volume
> <	Increased speech
( )	(empty parenthesis) transcription impossible
(words)	Uncertain transcription
$words$	Spoken in a smiley voice
(( ))	Comments on background, skipped talk or nonverbal behavior
{(( ))- words.}	{ } marks the beginning and ending of simultaneous (indicated by the dash) occurrence of the verbal/silence and nonverbal; the absence of { } means that the simultaneous occurrence applies to the entire turn
Huh	Laughter
Heh	Laughter
(.hhh)	Inbreath

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