

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The language development and later academic achievements of children from low social economic status (SES) have been the focus of many researchers because these children fall behind those from higher SES in school performance. Although low SES children's language might be as complex and well-structured as that of higher SES children, their reading ability and literacy skills lag behind higher SES counterparts (De Temple, 1994; 2001; Dickinson & De Temple, 1998). The reason for this phenomenon might be the lack of cultural stimuli (Huang, 1994; Tang, 1994), and language background in early childhood might also play an important role in children's language and literacy development (Ninio, 1980b; Snow, 1983; 1991; Snow & Ninio, 1986).

Due to the culturally disadvantage of low income children, Snow, Dickinson, and Tabors initiated a longitudinal research project called *The Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development* in 1987. This research project aims to investigate low-income children's home and school interaction, together with their

language development, with particular focus on the relationship between decontextualized language skill, reading ability, and literacy skills. The results of Snow and her colleagues have shown that language experiences in early childhood have impact on language and literacy development (De Temple, 1994; 2001; Tabors, 1995), and that decontextualized language skills are positively related to later reading abilities in school (Snow, 1983; 1991; De Temple & Beals, 1991).

Furthermore, besides the project of Snow, Dickinson, and Tabors, many other researchers have focused on parent-child interaction in book reading. Book reading has been proved to facilitate children's learning vocabulary (Ninio, 1980a; 1983) and decontextualized language skills (Snow, 1983; 1991). In addition, during book reading sessions, children can learn how to use books and experience the joy of reading with parents. The social and emotional climate of joint book reading, especially the warmth shared by parent and children at home, was associated with children's school readiness skills (Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). The positive experiences encourage and enable children to read more, and can thus gain from written texts the knowledge about the world.

However, most of the studies on parent-child interaction and book reading were conducted in Western backgrounds. Few were made to examine the interactive language in Taiwanese parent-child reading times. Since cultural difference, social

class, and language background all influence interactional styles, it is valuable to investigate parent-child book reading interaction patterns in Taiwan. Moreover, since low SES children are at higher risk of poor achievement in school, social class was chosen as a variable in this study. Parent-child dyads from families of two social classes, upper-middle SES and low SES, were included in the study.

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate styles of mother-child book reading interaction in two different social classes. The result may show the reading styles of mothers and children from low SES families and upper-middle SES families in Taiwan. It is hoped that the results may be served as a basis for intervention programs for low SES families and young children's literacy education. It is also hoped that the study may lead to a better understanding of the importance of parent-child interaction, and thus urge parents to reconsider their talking styles with children.

1.2 Research Questions

There are two research questions involved in the study.

- A. What interactive strategies do mothers from upper-middle SES and low SES families use when reading books with their children?
- B. What kind of information is discussed in mother-child book reading interactions in upper-middle SES and low SES families?

1.3 Organization of the thesis

The thesis examines mother-child book reading styles in two social classes in Taiwan. In Chapter 2, related studies will first be reviewed. Three main topics will be mentioned in Chapter 2: the importance of child-directed speech (CDS), parent-child interaction, and the influence of social class on language acquisition. Among all the researches to be reviewed, topics related to parent-child book reading will be of main concern. In Chapter 3, subjects, materials, procedures, and coding schemes will then be discussed. Results will be shown in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 a discussion will be given in terms of explanation of results and limitation of the study, as well as similarities and differences with other studies. Finally a conclusion will be made in Chapter 6.