

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, related studies and researches will be reviewed and discussed. In section 2.1, the role of child-directed speech in child language acquisition will first be described. Then in section 2.2, the main concern will be parent-child interaction and its effects on language development. In section 2.2, book reading, an important type of parent-child interaction will then be discussed in terms of its styles and influences on language development. In section 2.3, social variable will be added to examine the impact of social classes on language development. Finally a brief summary will be made in section 2.4.

2.1 The Importance of Child-directed Speech

Though developmental psycholinguists have not yet achieved general agreement on the explanations of language acquisition, there is a consensus on the importance of language input. All researchers agree that language acquisition start with exposure to appropriate input. In most cultures, the linguistic input that children receive is provided in the form of motherese or child-directed speech (CDS). Since

CDS has many characteristics that can help both interlocutors focus on the same topic, adult use it to children in order to get better understanding and communication (Brown, 1977).

Many researchers have similar findings. Garnica (1977), for example, discovered that phonological exaggerations of CDS, such as high pitch, variable intonation contour, and prosodic stress, improve intelligibility and thus guarantee better communication. Sachs (1977) also reported that adults hold infants' attention and strengthen the emotional bond between themselves and babies by using prosodic features of CDS. She further explained that prosodic features of CDS match infants' perceptual abilities and thus enhance communication. Although these studies were focused on mothers and infants from middle class families in Western cultures, and not all cultures exaggerate prosodic features when adults talk to young children, it is no doubt that at least in most cultures that have been examined, some prosodic features in mother speech help adults and children communicate.

Moreover, many studies have shown that CDS is beneficial to children's language development. For example, Kemler-Nelson, Hirsh-Pasek, Jusczyk, and Wright-Cassidy (1989) suggested that prosodic features in baby talk, such as exaggerated intonation and stress, help infants to discriminate and segment units of speech. Cross (1977) found that mother's speech is tuned to suit child's language

skills in every aspect. The less the child comprehends, the more the mother expands. Cross concluded that input is potentially organized to facilitate children's acquisition process. Snow (1994) and Carroll (1999) reviewed a series of studies on the relationships between child-directed speech and child language development, and they both observed that mother speech modifications are facilitative in children's learning language-specific features such as auxiliaries and the formation of wh-questions. Universal aspects of language, such as semantic categories of agent and patient seem less sensitive to environmental variables than language-specific features.

Although researchers in language acquisition have not discovered direct relationships between mother speech and certain aspects of children's language learning (Snow, 1994), researchers in language acquisition have found the facilitative role of child-directed speech in children's language development. The phonological, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of CDS are all modified to help children learn how to communicate with language.

2.2 The Importance of Parent-child Interaction

Input is crucial in language learning, but input only is not sufficient for language acquisition. As Snow (1977a) stated, "language acquisition is a result of a process of interaction between mother and child which begins early in infancy, to

which child makes as important a contribution as the mother” (p. 31). Children have to involve in communication with others so that they can learn how to talk in different situations to different addressees. The involvement is not only crucial for language development, but also significant for their cognitive and social skills. Vygotsky (1978) also stated that children learn language through interaction with others, in which they gradually internalize socio-cultural values and social routines.

Other researchers reported similar results. Snow (1977b) examined the conversation between mothers and babies. She found that mothers view preverbal infants’ burp, smile, and vocalization as turn-taking. However, as the child grows older, mothers raise their criterion for what counts as a turn. They respond to the child when the child contributes to the conversation. Snow’s discovery showed that the nature of language acquisition is the need for communication. Parents do not provide language lessons for young children, but rather attempt to keep conversation with their children. On the other hand, based on the desire to communicate with others, children learn to use language for social purposes. Language acquisition is merely a by-product of this attempt. Children cannot learn language without interacting with others.

The result of Sachs’s research (1983) on displaced references also supports the argument that the interaction is the basis of language acquisition. Displaced references

are the references that refer to out-of-sight objects or previous events. Displaced reference is a later acquired linguistic competence for the cognitive difficulty of mentioning about something that is not physically present. Sachs found that when children begin to show signs of efforts to understand parents' displaced references, parents provide them with more examples of this kind of references. She explained that parents' increasing use of displaced reference further supports children's linguistic and cognitive development of the form. Gradually children acquire the use of displaced reference with parents' help. Tomasello and Farrar (1986) also found that parent-child communication about objects that are within the child's attention provides children with predictable referential context that makes child-mother interaction meaningful and thus facilitates vocabulary learning. These studies all showed that parents support children's learning of language in interaction.

Ratner and Bruner (1978) explored the interaction of two mother-infant dyads in social exchange games, such as peekaboo, hide-and-seek, and build-and-bash. These games are those in which adults and children can formulate routinized, predictive game structure. Ratner and Bruner found that the repetitive situation in social exchange games can provide a "scaffold" for children's activities as well as a model of linguistic rules. The linguistic forms occurred in these games serve as basis for future language use. Interaction in predictable contexts makes children and

mother's language meaningful and thus scaffolds language learning.

Lieven's study (1994) strengthens the point that interaction is essential in language acquisition, even in cultures that adults seldom talked to infants. Lieven reviewed and compared several researches investigating children from cultures in which they are not often talked to, for example Kaluli and Trackton. Lieven found that children in such cultures imitate and memorize routinized, recurring segments in adults' conversation. Although children are not addressed to, they try hard to arouse adults' attention and to participate in communication with others by imitating and memorizing recurring segments. Lieven concluded that children learn language only in an environment in which they can make some sense of and of which they are a part. Interaction with others helps children acquire the ability to communicate by providing meaningful contexts.

2.2.1 Book Reading and Language Development

Among many types of parent-child interactions, book reading is one of the most documented activities that researchers have focused on. As many researchers have noted, book reading to young children correlates to early literacy and later academic success in school (Ninio, 1980; Wells, 1985; Heath, 1986; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Panofsky, 1994; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; De Temple, 2001). Parent-child

book-reading is positively associated with language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2001).

Parent-child book reading is a highly routinized activity (Ninio & Bruner, 1978). Complex language skills are acquired in this activity. During book reading children can shift from mere labeling to discussing about a certain event, and then to discussing precursors and consequences of an event. In addition, children can learn how to use books and get to know the symbolic meanings of books and pictures (Snow & Ninio, 1986). On the other hand, parents' talk in book reading is more complex in structure and content. It is possible that books limit both participants' attention to a single joint topic, so parents can elaborate and devote more in narrating and commenting on one fixed event. Since elaboration and comment need more advanced language skills, children are exposed to more various and advanced language uses in a meaningful context (Snow, Arlman-Rupp, Hassing, Jobse, Joosten, & Vorster, 1976; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991).

Children can also enhance their vocabulary size during book reading. Mothers establish a routinized dialogue for the activity of picture labeling in which they use a number of labeling formats (for example, *what*-questions or labeling sentences) to help children name items in pictures during book reading sessions. Such maternal

inducement provides children with meaningful and recurrent contexts that can help them map meanings onto linguistic forms. From the routinized dialogue, children can not only learn object names but also acquire the social interactive pattern for questions and answers (Ninio, 1980a; 1983).

In book reading, children can also develop decontextualized language skills which are related to later reading and writing ability. Decontextualized language skills are the abilities to produce and comprehend language without contextual cues. For example, a child can clearly refer to her “teddy bear” instead of just say “this” or “that” when her teddy bear is not physically present. Young language learning children depend on information about physical context to make reference, but children with decontextualized language skills can refer and comprehend items and events that are not here-and-now. The skills are essential to children’s abilities of explaining, writing, narrating, and oral presentation (Snow, 1983; 1991). Snow (1983) further proposed that increase in literate interaction in preschool children’s homes helps young language learners establish reading abilities, of which decontextualized skill is a part.

In sum, during book reading, children can enhance language abilities and reading skills. In addition, children get an access to books and learn how to use books and prints. Through reading, children stretch beyond actuality to imaginary worlds, in

which they are invited to try to experience events or objects that might never occur in their everyday life. In addition, book reading can make unfamiliar objects meaningful to children and enhance their learning about the world. Once they obtain the abilities of language and reading, they can acquire knowledge of various kinds through independent reading processes.

2.2.2 Different Styles of Book Reading

Book reading is beneficial to children's language and literacy development. However, parents may have different styles of telling young children stories. Such differences have impact on children's verbal behavior. Heath (1986) emphasized that different speech communities have diverse ways of organizing and teaching children how to read. Children thus experience different literacy exposure and therefore grow up as communicatively different individuals. Heath further stated that low-class children's lack of literacy exposure may result in future difficulties in school.

De Temple and Tabors (1995) investigated 290 low-income mothers' speech during book reading, and found that mothers displayed four distinct book reading styles. The four styles include (1) straight readers: mothers who read aloud but seldom pause to discuss the book; (2) standard interactive readers: mothers who pause during the reading and discuss the story with the child and then continue; (3) non-readers:

those who only talk about the book, but do not read the story; (4) recitation readers: those who read the text word by word, and request the child to repeat the word or phrase after it was read. The four styles reflect mothers' assumption about the purposes of looking at or reading books with young children. On the other hand, children with different styles of mothers experience different extents of language during book reading. They encounter different levels of verbal interaction and discussion, quality of questions and comments, and demands for language use. All of those have an impact on their language development.

De Temple (1994; 2001) further categorized parent-child conversation in book reading into immediate talk and non-immediate talk. Immediate talk refers to talk about contextually available items or event. In book reading, immediate talk includes picture description, labeling, simple narration of story, and other talk immediately related to the book or story. Non-immediate talk refers to extended talk about the story, including explanation, inference, prediction, and connection between the story and other worlds. Non-immediate talk, owing to its lack of available context, requires more advanced language and cognitive skills. De Temple argued that mothers who use a high percentage of immediate talk when reading to their children tend to have children who get low scores in kindergarten literacy measures. On the other hand, mothers who provide and request more non-immediate information have children who

obtain better decontextualized language and literacy skills. In other words, the more parents demand in joint book reading, the better language and cognitive skills the children will acquire.

Haden, Reese, and Fivush (1996) also found two parental book reading styles that resemble the categorization of De Temple (1994; 2001). One type of parents, low-demand parents as they called them, focus only on books. They spend most of the time describing pictures, narrating, and labeling. The other type of parents is called high-demand parents. High-demand parents encourage children to predict, infer, explain, and connect the story with real life experiences. In other words, they encourage children to use more advanced, more complex language skills which resemble decontextualized language skills discussed in previous section. Talk of low-demand parents is similar to De Temple's immediate talk, and that of high-demand parents to non-immediate talk. Haden, Reese, and Fivush (1996) reported that children of high-demand parents may acquire better decontextualized language skills. Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001) also discovered that mothers' use of decontextualized language is associated with children's vocabulary size because of its high cognitively demanding nature.

Compared to the abundant researches in Western cultures that have been focused on parent-child book reading, few similar studies were conducted in Taiwan.

Tang (1994) found that the extent of parent-child interaction in joint book reading is positively related to children's vocabulary learning. Chin (2000) compared book reading interaction between mothers and their 3-year-old children, and that between mothers and their 5-year-olds. Chin discovered that mothers of 3-year-olds tend to use more directives, more labeling, and more pretend activities in narrating storyline. On the other hand, mothers of 5-year-olds are more likely to narrate the story word by word and discuss the content with their children more than mothers of the other group. Chin proved that mother changed reading styles as their children grow.

Chang (2000) analyzed Taiwanese parent-child book reading styles and children's language performance. Her findings are similar to the results of Snow (1983; 1991) and Haden et al. (1996) in that high demand mothers have children with better decontextualized language skills and narrative performance.

2.3 Language Acquisition and Social Class

Language use varies with social classes, and so does language addressed to children. Members of different social, cultural or ethnic groups may have different ways of home book reading. Snow et al. (1976) examined the speech of low, lower-middle, and upper-middle SES parents to two-year-olds in reading and free play. They found that upper-middle parents produce more open-ended questions and fewer

yes/no questions than the other two groups. They also discovered that parents from higher SES tend to use fewer directives. Hoff-Ginsberg (1991) also discovered similar tendency in directive use and social class.

Ninio (1980b) investigated 40 Israeli mother-infant dyads from low and high SES on book reading behavior. Ninio found that mothers from low and high SES behave similarly in establishing “routinized dialogue” when reading picture books. Routinized dialogue, as Ninio explained in her previous study (Ninio & Bruner, 1978), is a kind of recurrent talk about a picture, which involves (1) a participant getting the other’s attention on a picture; (2) the first participant attempting the other to label; (3) the first participant providing feedback, if the attempt is successful; (4) the first participant label the picture, if the attempt fails. However, Ninio (1980b) further discovered that the two groups of mothers differ in their teaching styles of vocabulary learning. Low SES mothers seemed adequate for their children’s current language development, but their teaching styles are not future-oriented, not sensitive to changes of children’s needs, and not sufficient enough to provide adequate input for children to develop more complex and advanced language skills rapidly. Ninio concluded that low SES mothers’ relative lack of skills in eliciting labeling may result in their children’s less firmly established vocabulary than high SES counterparts in the future.

Different cultures may also have different parent-child book reading styles.

Anderson-Yockel and Haynes (1994) investigated book reading strategies of working class African American and white mother-toddler dyads. They found that mothers from both groups have similar behaviors in description, labeling, giving feedback, attentional cues and directives, but white American mothers significantly asked yes/no and wh-questions more frequently than African American mothers. Since the use of questions is an important teaching strategy, relatively small amount of questions in African American mothers may affect their children's language development.

Bus, Leseman, and Keultjes (2000) analyzed Surinamese-Dutch, Turkish-Dutch, and Dutch low SES parent-child book reading interaction and parents' beliefs. They noted that the less important reading is to the parents, the less extended talk they will produce in joint book reading. In addition, children of such parents are inclined to initiate new topics, such as labeling or picture description, that are cognitively low-demanding. Consequently the topic of these interactions is limited to the story itself instead of moving on to related topics. They also found that ethnic group serves to be an important factor for how parents support and respond to children, and they concluded that the different beliefs parents from different ethnic groups hold are the root for how parents interact with children.

Kato-Otani (2003) compared the home book reading talks of American and Japanese middle class mother-child dyads. She observed that American mothers tend

to have more interactions with their children, and they challenge their children more than Japanese counterparts. On the other hand, Japanese mothers try to make reading task easier for children to comprehend. She concluded that the differences may reflect two diverse perspectives on book reading: Americans believe children are ready to learn, but Japanese think children are dependent on parental assistance in learning.

There are only a few researches examining the relationship between social background and children's language development in Taiwan, and most of the researchers used questionnaires and tests. Tang (1994), for example, investigated the influences of family background on preschool children's language development. He found that parents' education background is positively related to children's vocabulary learning. Huang (1994) studied the reading styles of mothers living in city and suburban areas and its relations with children's language abilities. She discovered that mothers living in city and suburban areas do not differ in teaching styles, but their education background does. She further suggested that joint reading, discussion about life experiences help children in developing language skills.

Studies on the influences of social classes on language development revealed that social class influence the language addressed to children. It can be summarized that higher SES or mainstream parents demand their children higher during book reading. Consequently, their children may display more advanced and complex

language skills than low SES or non-mainstream children.

2.4 Summary

Input and interaction is crucial for language learning children. However, different styles of input and interaction influence language development in diverse ways. Joint book reading, an important interactive activity in preschooler's home, has been shown to facilitate language development and later literacy skills. Researches on the relationship between social class and maternal speech revealed that parents from higher SES display better skills in talking to children.

However, most of the studies on parent-child interaction were conducted in Western cultures. Few studies on similar topics were conducted in Taiwan. Even fewer on book reading were made. The present research aimed to investigate the styles of mother-child book reading interaction in two different social classes in Taiwan. Haden et al. (1996) and De Temple's (1994; 2001) categorization of non-immediate talk and immediate talk (or high/low demand) will be used to differentiate styles of book reading. Further, social class was chosen as a variable. Since many researchers have noted that children from low SES families have fewer linguistic and culture stimuli and that their language abilities and later academic achievements are poorer than those from high SES, this study attempted to investigate

the different book reading styles of parents and their children from low and high SES.

Research method will be stated in detail in the following chapter.

