

Chapter 5

Discussion

In this chapter, main findings and explanation of the study will be presented in 5.1. In 5.2, the results will be compared with other similar studies. Finally, a brief summary will be made in section 5.3.

5.1 Main Findings

The study aimed to examine the book reading strategies of upper-middle and low-income mother-child dyads. As mentioned in Chapter 4, three main differences can be found between the book reading strategies in mother-child dyads in two social classes.

(1) Upper-middle mothers tended to involve their children in the reading more by asking questions. However, low-income mothers tended to take the responsibility of most reading instead of inviting their children to participate in the activity. This claim can be supported by the higher proportion of requests for elaborate information in upper-middle mothers, and upper-middle children's higher proportion of responsive information. Low-income mothers, on the contrary, provided more information but

requested less. Consequently, their children participated less in the activity. Examples 50 and 51 illustrates the difference between upper-middle and low-income mothers in asking children to participate in the reading. Han-han's mothers in Example 50 used questions to involved Han-han in the reading, but David's mother in Example 51 read the story on her own and only asked for David's attention.

Example 50 (Upper-middle SES, child Han-han, 3;6, male)

Mother: 然後 把 小 寶貝 放 在 哪裡?

ranhou ba xiao baobei fang zai nali
then BA small baby put in where
Then where does [Carl] put the baby?

Child: <小 寶> [//] 媽媽的 床 上.

<xiao bao> [//] mamade chuang shang
<small baby> [//] mommy's bed upside
Mommy's bed.

Mother: 媽媽的 床 上 喔.

mamade chuang shang o
mommy's bed upside PAR
Oh, mommy's bed.

Mother: 哇 那 小 寶貝 就 喔 跳 跳 跳

wa na xiao baobei jiu o tiao tiao tiao
wow DEM small baby then PAR jump jump jump
覺得 好 舒服 喔.

juede hao shufu o
feel very comfortable PAR

Wow, that little baby jumps on the bed, and feels so comfortable.

Example 51 (Low-income, child David, 3;11, male)

Mother: 騎 騎 騎 騎 到 這 個 媽媽的 房間

qi qi qi qi dao zhe ge mamade fangjian
ride ride ride ride to DEM CL mommy's room

- 裡面 去 喔。
 limian qu o
 inside go PAR
 [The baby] rides [Carl] to mommy's room.
- Mother: 這 是 媽媽的 床鋪 對 不對?
 zhe shi mamade chuangu pu dui budui
 DEM be mommy's bed right not-right
 This is mommy's bed, isn't it?
- Child: 對.
 dui
 right
 Yes.
- Mother: 嘿嘿 他們 就 在 媽媽 床鋪 上 玩。
 heihei tamen jiu zai mama chuangu pu shang wan
 haha they then on mommy bed upside play
 Haha, they then play on mommy's bed.
- Mother: 有 沒有?
 you meiyou
 exist not exist
 Don't they?

(2) Results which show that upper-middle mothers had more non-immediate talk and more open-ended questions reveal that upper-middle mothers are high-demand mothers who challenge their children more. Compared to upper-middle mothers, low-income mothers had less non-immediate talk and less open-ended questions. They seem to demand their children less. Examples 52 and 53 show the how upper-middle and low-income mothers differed in giving children demands. When reading the same page on which the dog Carl uses hair dryer to dry the baby's hair, the upper-middle mother in Example 52 used open-ended questions asking for

cause and effect, but the low-income in Example 53 merely told her child what happened.

Example 52 (Upper-middle SES, child Bei-bei, 3;6, female)

Mother: 他 是 在 做 什 麼 事 啊?
 ta shi zai zuo sheme shi a
 3sg be DUR do what event PAR

What is he doing?

Child: 他 給 他 吹.
 ta gei ta chui
 3sg for 3sg blow

He helps him dry his hair.

Mother: 用 什 麼 吹?
 yong sheme chui
 use what blow

What does [he] use?

Child: 用 這 個.
 yong zhe ge
 use DEM CL

[He] uses this.

Mother: 用 這 個 啊.
 yong zhe ge a
 use DEM CL PAR

[He] uses this.

Child: 吹 他.
 chui ta
 blow 3sg

To blow on him.

Mother: 爲 什 麼 要 吹 他?
 weisheme yao chui ta
 why want blow 3sg

Why [does he] blow on him?

Child: 他 頭 髮 濕 濕 的.
 ta toufa shishi de
 3sg hair wet NOM

[Because] his hair is wet.

Example 53 (Low-income, child George, 3;11, male)

Mother: 狗狗 啊 拿 吹風機 幫 妹妹 吹 #
 gougou a na chuifengji bang meimei chui #
 doggie PAR take hair dryer help little sister blow #
 身體 啊.
 shengti a
 body PAR

The doggie uses hair dryer to dry the baby's body.

Based on De Temple (1994; 2001), high-demand mothers are more likely to have children with better language skills. It can be predicted that upper-middle children may acquire more advanced language skills in the future.

(3) Upper-middle children seem to have better conversational skills than low-income children. The claim can be supported by two facts. First, upper-middle children provided more elaborate information than low-income children did. Second, upper-middle children spent most of time providing new information (52%), but low-income children provided attention (31%) more than information (30%), as shown in Examples 54 and 55.

Example 54 (Upper-middle SES, child Hannah, 3;4, female)

Child: 對 <然後 他> [//] 然後 就 掉 到 魚缸
 dui <ranhou ta> [//] ranhou jiu diao dao yugang

- right <then 3sg> [/] then then fall RVC fish jar
 裡面 <去> [/] 去 掉 進去.
 limian <qu> [/] qu diao jinqu
 inside <go> [/] go fall enter-go
- Mother: 哦 他 掉 到 魚缸 裡頭 去了 怎麼 辦?
 o ta diao dao yugang litou qu le zeme ban
 PAR 3sg fall RVC fish jar inside go PFV how do
- Child: 他 把 他 拉 起來.
 ta ba ta la qilai
 3sg BA 3sg pull rise-come
 He pulls him up.
- Child: 他 自己 也 起來.
 ta ziji ye qilai
 3sg self also rise-come
 He himself comes up too.
- Mother: 哦 他 自己 也 起來.
 o ta ziji ye qilai
 oh 3sg self also rise-come
 Oh, he himself comes up too.

Example 55 (Low-income, child Tina, 3;9, female)

- Mother: 小 寶寶 跟 狗兒 一起 看 水族箱.
 xiao baobao gen gou'er yiqi kan shuizuxiang
 little baby with doggie together see fish jar
- Mother: 水族箱 裡面 有 好 多 魚 喔.
 shuizuxiang limian you hao duo yu o
 fish jar inside exist very many fish PAR
- Child: 嗯.
 en
 Mm
 Mm.

Hannah in Example 54 provided new information to the interaction, but Tina in

Example 55 only provided attention. Interaction goes on when two participants both

make appropriate contribution to the conversation. Upper-middle children's large amount of information provision contributed to the interaction, but low-income children could provide only attention. This may due to low-income children's limitation in language ability. The other possible reason is that upper-middle mothers provided scaffolding for children to elaborate more.

The three differences can be explained by mothers' education background.

Mothers in upper-middle class all obtained at least college education (12 of them had bachelor's degree, three had master's degree, and one got PhD), but the highest education background mothers in low-income group had was high school. (Among all low-income mothers, six of them received high school education, but two did not finish high school. Five of them finished junior high school, and one finished elementary school, one did not finish the second year in elementary school, and still one illiterate.) Low-income mothers were disadvantaged minority in cultural stimuli. They themselves did not read very often, not to mention about reading to children in appropriate ways. Their children thus got less access to prints and books. Compared to low-income mothers, upper-middle mothers provided children with better cultural stimuli which support children's language development.

Another reason might be the different beliefs upper-middle and low-income

mothers have about child-rearing. Traditional Chinese ways of child-rearing emphasizes authority and obedience. Adults often ask children to imitate and recite their utterances. It is viewed as a preparation for later schooling in which choral response and memorization are esteemed (Erbaugh, 1992). Low-income mothers resemble traditional Chinese parents in that they tended to look themselves as an authority in the activity and to ask children to listen to their reading. On the other hand, upper-middle mothers regarded children as a conversational partner like American parents do (Kato-Otani, 2003). They not only gave children more opportunities to speak, but also demanded them more by asking questions. Upper-middle mothers tended to treat their children as individuals, but low-income mothers treated children as dependent learners.

In addition, although three main differences exist, there are also similarities between groups.

(1) Upper-middle and low-income mothers provided similar amount of information about the story. It may reflect the fact that three-year-olds' language abilities were not sufficient to read the story on their own, so that mothers took most responsibility of reading and guiding the children to read. In Example 56, although Ai-qi's mother requested information from Ai-qi, the mother still provided a large number of new information and dominated the narration of the story. Yi-lin's Mother

in Example 57 represents most of low-income mothers in that she provided most of the new information.

Example 56 (Upper-middle SES, child, Ai-qi, 3;7, female)

- Mother: 喔 狗狗 把 麵包 給 撕 開 來。
 o gougou ba mianbao gei si kai lai
 oh doggie BA bread for tear open come
 Oh, the doggie tears [the packing of] the bread.
- Mother: 然後 把 裡面 的 麵包 拿 出來。
 ranhou ba limain de mianbao na chulai
 then BA inside NOM bread take exit-come
 Then [he] takes out the bread.
- Mother: 嗯 你 看 還 倒 黑黑的 飲料。
 en ni kan hai dao hehede yinliao
 Mm you see still pour black beverage
- Mother: <還> [/] 還 吃 什麼?
 <hai> [/] hai chi sheme
 <still> [/] still eat what
 What else [do they] eat?
- Child: 葡萄。
 putao
 grape
 Grapes.
- Mother: 葡萄 呀 還 帶 冰冰 奶 喔。
 putao ya hai dai binbin nai o
 grape PAR still take icy milk PAR
 Yeah, grapes, and some icy milk as well.

Example 57 (Low-income, child Yi-lin, 3;1, female)

- Mother: 然後 拿 麵包 給 他 吃 喔。
 ranhou na mianbao gei ta chi o
 then take bread for 3sg eat PAR
 Then [he] takes some bread for him to eat.
- Mother: 有 沒有?

- you meiyou
 exist not-exist
 Doesn't he?
- Mother: 土司.
 tusi
 toast
 Toast.
- Mother: 給 [/] 給 小朋友 吃 喔.
 gei [/] gei xiaopengyou chi o
 for [/] for little kid eat PAR
 For the baby to eat.

(2) Mothers from the two groups had no difference in the use of tag questions.

They may think it is a preparation for obedience and respect to authority that are needed in later school education, regardless of what social class they belong to. In Examples 58 and 59, both upper-middle and low-income mothers used tag question in their narration.

Example 58 (Upper-middle SES, child Jie, 3;7, male)

- Mother: 他 幫 他 擦 粉 對 不對?
 ta bang ta ca fen dui budui
 3sg help 3sg wipe powder right not-right
 He wipes powder [on his face], doesn't he?
- Child: 嗯.
 en
 mm
 Mm.
- Mother: 有 沒有?
 you meiyou
 exist not-exist
 Doesn't he?

Child: 有.
 you
 exist
 Yes.

Example 59 (Low-income, child Jing, 3;8, female)

Mother: 幫 狗狗 擦 粉 對 不對?
 bang gougou ca fen dui budui
 help doggie wipe powder right not-right
 [He] helps the doggie apply powder [on the face], doesn't he?
 Mother: 擦 痱子粉.
 ca feizifen
 wipe powder
 Apply powder,

(3) Although upper-middle children seem to involve in the reading more than the other group, they participated in response to mothers' requests. Upper-middle and low-income children had no difference in spontaneously providing information. One possible reason is that upper-middle mothers provided scaffolding for children, but low-income mothers did not. The scaffolding provided by mothers helped children speak more in a conversationally appropriate way, as in Johan's mother did in Example 60. Johan provided new information in response to mother's requests.

Example 60 (Upper-middle SES, child Johan, 3;6, male)

Mother: 這 回 呢 這 個 卡兒 又 想 做 什麼
 zhe hui ne zhe ge ka'er yao xiang zuo sheme
 DEM time PAR DEM CL Carl again want do what
 事情 啊?

- shiqing a
event PAR
This time, what does Carl want to do?
- Child: 聽 音樂.
ting yinyue
listen music
Listen to music.
- Mother: 哦 他 想 要 放 音樂 對 不對?
o ta xiang yao fang yinyue dui budui
PAR 3sg want want play music right not-right
Oh, he wants to play some music, doesn't he?
- Child: 對.
dui
right
Yes.

Like Johan, David in Example 61 did not provided spontaneous information either. He only showed signs of attention. In providing spontaneous information, children from the two groups did not differ.

Example 61 (Low-income, child David, 3;11, male)

- Mother: 又 到 客廳 裡面 開 這 個 什麼?
you dao keting limain kai zhe ge sheme
again arrive living room inside turn on DEM CL what
[He] goes to the living room and what [does he] turn on?
- Mother: 這 個 是 +...
zhe ge shi
DEM CL shi
This is +...
- Mother: 這 個 收音機 對 不對?
zhe ge shouyinji dui budui
DEM CL radio right not-right
This is a radio, isn't it?

- Child: 對.
 dui
 right
 Yes.
- Mother: 欸 開 收音機.
 ei kai shouyinji
 Mm turn on radio
 Mm, [he] turns on the radio.

The similarities between groups may reflect the common phenomenon of parent-child interaction in Taiwan. However, there might be other reasons. One possible reason is the internal variable of low-income group. As stated earlier, the education background of low-income mothers varies from illiterate to high school graduate. In addition, some of the low-income mothers came from China. These mothers had different social and cultural stimuli, and they may also have different ways of book reading styles. Although low-income group are composed of people from different backgrounds, it is a fact that the complexity in backgrounds influence children's language development. Another reason might be children's educational background. While upper-middle children all educated in one public kindergarten, low-income children involved in this study came from eight public preschool. The environment of the preschools and teachers' support of literacy development has impact on children's language behaviors.

Mothers from different social classes interact with children differently in joint

book reading activities. In this study, results show that upper-middle mothers involve children in the reading more by asking questions, but low-income mothers took charge of most reading and requested from their children only attention. This may reflect the education background and child-rearing beliefs upper-middle and low-income mothers have. The results also suggest that children's language performances can be enhanced by mothers' supports and encouragements.

5.2. Comparison of Other Relevant Studies

In this section, similar studies examining mother-child book reading styles were compared and discussed. Researches on similar topics suggest that mothers from different social-economic status use different ways when reading to children. This study on Mandarin-speaking mother-child dyads had similar results.

Snow et al. (1976) examined the speech of American mother-child dyads during book reading and free play in low, lower-middle, and upper-middle SES. They found that upper-middle parents produce more open-ended questions and fewer yes/no questions than the other two groups. These findings are similar to those found in present study in that parents from higher SES use more open-ended questions. The larger amount of open-ended questions, which challenge children's language ability higher, implies that upper-middle parents resemble high-demand parents in Haden et

al.'s term.

De Temple (1994) separated book reading talk of mother-child dyads into immediate and non-immediate talk. De Temple discovered that the amount of mothers' immediate talk is negatively related to three-year-olds' language ability, but that of non-immediate talk is positively related to three-year-old children's language ability. In addition, children's language background in preschool years is associated with their language ability in the future. In the present study, results show that upper-middle mothers produced more non-immediate talk than low-income counterparts, and that upper-middle children could produce longer utterances and more new information than low-income children. The present results seem consistent with those found in De Temple (1994) in that mothers who use higher percent of non-immediate talk help children develop language skills. It can also be predicted that children from upper-middle families will probably acquire better language ability in the future.

Kato-Otani (2003) compared the book reading styles of middle-class American and Japanese mothers. She found that American mothers requested more information from their children but Japanese mothers tried to make the activity easier by paraphrasing and describing the pictures. She further concluded that the differences were due to different child-rearing perspectives American and Japanese societies hold.

American mothers asked more cognitively demanding questions because they view children as independent learners, but Japanese mothers regard their children incompetent learners, so they help children learn. In this study, upper-middle mothers resemble American mothers and low-income mothers Japanese mothers in the amount of questions and challenges they gave to children.

Tang (1994) studied the influences of family and personal background on children's early reading abilities. He found that parents' education background, the extent of parent-child interaction in joint book reading, and the age of children when parents begin to read for them are positively related to children's word recognition ability. In the present study, education background also serves as a variable for social class. Tang's result lends support to the claim in the present study in that parents' education background influences children's language ability.

In a number of studies conducting the relationship between maternal styles and children's language development, results show that high-demand mothers seem to be more likely to acquire better language and literacy skill in the future (Wells, 1985; Heath, 1986; De Temple, 1994; Haden et al., 1996). It can be concluded that upper-middle mothers' reading styles are more beneficial to children's language learning.

5.3 Implication and Limitation

Results in this study indicate that upper-middle mothers tended to be high-demand mothers who are more likely to have children with better language skills. Other researchers had similar findings (Wells, 1985; Heath, 1986; De Temple, 1994; De Temple & Tabors, 1995; Haden et al., 1996; Chang, 2000). Mainstream parents frequently use a variety of successful book reading strategies that allow parents and children to engage in school-like interactions, but non-mainstream parents seem less successful in involving children in parent-child interaction. This may be due to non-mainstream mothers' limited abilities to provide linguistic stimuli that can facilitate children's language learning. Owing to this, some researchers developed an intervention program to help low-income parents read to children in proper ways. For example, Edwards and Garcia (1994) developed a program to assist non-mainstream parents to develop strategies needed when they read to children. They reported that parents who participated in the program became more confident in guiding their children in school-based literacy activities. In the study, results show that low-income mothers were limited in joint book reading strategies. It can also be used as a basis for development of intervention programs. In addition, it can also be used for parent education that aims to help parents assist children's literacy development.

There were some limitations of the study. First, this study focused on the

influence socio-economic status has on mother-child reading strategies, but due to the difficulty in finding subjects from low-income families, the number of preschools children attended could not be controlled. As mentioned earlier, while all upper-middle children attended one preschool in Taipei city, low-income children included in the study came from eight public preschools in Taipei city. Since low-income children attended different preschool education, they might receive different kinds of cultural stimuli. Second, two of the low-income mothers came from China, and one whole family immigrated from China to Taiwan. The different family background may lead to diverse beliefs in child-rearing perspectives on books and prints. However, the complexity in origins of low-income families more or less reflects the situation of nonmainstream families in Taiwan. It is important to study the internal variables in low-income groups, for example mother-child book reading styles of mothers from China and South Asia, because the increasing number of foreign brides and their children may form another cultural minority group in Taiwan. Lastly, due to the difficulty in data collection, only one home visit could be conducted. The only one visit may be less realistic and not a valid representation of everyday situation of parent-child interaction of that family, and the subjects may not in good condition on the day of home visit. It is certainly better to visit the family for more than once, but owing to time limit, home visit could only be arranged once.

The language ability of upper-middle children so far seem better than that of low-income children, but it is necessary to follow the language development of children included in the study in order to examine the influence different reading styles in preschool years have on future school performance and literacy skills. It is also worth to compare the book reading styles of upper-middle and low-income children from other groups in Taiwan in order to get a thorough view of the influence of social-cultural background on children's language development.

