

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Question

Though some studies have focused on Mandarin-speaking children's narrative development, there has been no study exploring the use of evaluative devices across different narrative genres. It is also important to know what kinds of evaluative devices are embedded in preschoolers' narratives and how they vary with age. By answering the following research questions, the present study attempts to explore the development of Mandarin-speaking children's evaluative language from age five and a half to six. The first seven questions concern quantitative changes in preschoolers' evaluative skills; the last question relates to qualitative shifts.

1. Do the basic narrative measures increase with age?
2. Do children use more evaluative devices with increasing age?
3. Do children employ a larger variety of evaluative devices over time?
4. Do different narrative tasks interact with preschoolers' use of evaluative devices?
5. How do Age and Gender effects manifest themselves in the development of evaluative language in preschoolers' narratives?
6. Is there an order of difficulty for the use of various evaluative devices?
And what is it like?
7. Do children display different developmental trajectories for evaluative devices from age five and a half to six?
8. Do preschoolers exhibit qualitative shifts in their use of evaluative devices in narratives?

3.2 Hypothesis

Based on the afore-reviewed literature and the preliminary findings of my pilot

study, the general hypotheses are put forward to answer the research questions of the present work.

1. The Mandarin Chinese-speaking preschoolers' basic narrative measures tend to increase over time.
2. These preschoolers will include more evaluative devices and apply a greater variety of such devices in their narratives with increasing age.
3. Preschoolers will use evaluative devices differently in different narrative tasks.
4. There are differences in preschoolers' use of each evaluative device over time and between genders.
5. There is an order of difficulty for the use of various evaluative devices.
6. Our preschoolers display different developmental profiles regarding evaluative devices in narration.
7. There are qualitative shifts in preschoolers' use of evaluative devices over time.

3.3 Subject

Twelve Mandarin-speaking children, six boys and six girls, chosen from nursery schools, participate in the present study. All subjects are from similar middle-class socio-economic backgrounds. They are all normally developing children, with no learning disabilities, no speech or hearing problems. The mean age of the children is 5;5 months at the first session of data collection, and 5;11 months at the last session. Six children are firstborns and the other six are laterborns (Table 3.1).

Earlier studies have shown that preschoolers display a considerable growth in narrative skills from age 2 to 6 (Bamberg, 1987; Chang, 1998, 2000; Minami, 1996; Peterson and McCabe, 1983). Drawing on the developmental data from a variety of languages, investigators indicate that 5- and 6-year-olds can produce well-ordered narratives, and provide a variety of evaluation (Minami, 1996; Peterson and McCabe,

1983; Bamberg and Damrad-Frye, 1991). For instance, on the basis of 1124 personal narratives of children, Peterson and McCabe (1983) find that, by 6 years of age, most children are able to produce good stories. From the data of 20 Japanese preschoolers, Minami (1996) observes that 5-year-olds, compared with younger children, begin to apply evaluation in the adult-like way. Similarly, Chang (1998) notices that 6-year-olds use clearer references and more temporal connectives and sequencers in their narratives than younger children.

Table 3.1. Age, gender and birth order of subjects

Pseudonym	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Gender*	Birth Order**
CJY	5; 6	5; 9	6; 0	1	1
CRS	5; 4	5; 7	5; 10	2	2
CY	5; 6	5; 9	6; 0	1	1
KHC	5; 4	5; 7	5;10	1	1
LCF	5; 7	5; 10	6;1	1	1
LCY	5; 7	5; 10	6;1	2	2
LTC	5; 3	5; 6	5;9	1	1
TK	5; 3	5; 6	5;9	2	2
TSY	5; 7	5;10	6;1	1	2
TYH	5;6	5; 9	6;0	2	2
WTH	5;4	5; 7	5;10	2	1
YK	5;3	5; 6	5;9	2	2
Mean	5;5	5;8	5;11		
Range (max)	5;7	5;10	6;1		
Range (min)	5;3	5;6	5;9		

* 1 = female preschooler; 2 = male preschooler ** 1 = first-born child; 2 = second-born child

Researchers in the field of child development also indicate qualitative shifts in cognitive abilities around 6 years of age. Most notable among all is Piaget (1969), who claims that children's thought changing from pre-operational to concrete operational stage around this age. Moreover, the findings from a number of empirical and theoretical studies also support that there are qualitative shifts in cognition between 5 and 7 years of age (for review, see White, 1965).¹ Thus, I follow children around age five and a half for six months because they may display growth in the use of evaluative devices and may demonstrate qualitative shifts in this period of language development.

3.4 Material

This project includes two narrative tasks. One of them involves fictional narratives. In order to control the content of the fictional narratives, we use a twenty-four-page story book entitled *Frog, where are you* (Mayer, 1969) as the material to elicit fictional narratives from subjects. This book is chosen not only because it becomes a worldwide research tool which renders the cross-cultural comparisons possible, but also because it is wordless and its structure has been extensively analyzed (Bamberg, 1987; Bamberg and Marchman, 1990).

The frog story represents a typical children's story with a hero, a problem, a series of actions following this problem and a happy ending. More than that, its content and context are age-appropriate to preschoolers. This picture book is suitable to our research goals since it depicts an elaborate series of events which allow the narrator to relate to various topics, to take different perspectives on events, and to have different levels of cognitive inferences between events (Berman and Slobin, 1994: Chapter IB). Moreover, this story involves causality and emotions which are appropriate for examining children's use of evaluation.

The rationale for using the same book for three data-collecting sessions is that children are more likely to employ evaluative language when reading familiar books than new ones (Chang, 2000). Preece (1987) also remarks upon the strengths of ‘repeat performances’.² That is, the repetitions of this sort provide insights into what elements in a narrative a child considers worth describing. Furthermore, repeat performances afford the opportunity for us to make comparisons of the similar narration delivered on different occasions.³

In the other task, the experimenter elicits personal experience narratives from the preschoolers. Earlier studies point out that children are interested in pain, gore and mishaps (Peterson and McCabe, 1983; Chang, 2001). Miller and Sperry (1988) find parallel results in the personal experience narratives they collected, in which negative events comprise the largest category. Among these events, physical harm accounts for nearly half of all episodes. Accordingly, in the present project, prompts related to physical harms or pains are used to elicit personal experience narratives for these topics may evoke extensive narrative production. By doing so, we can compare our results with findings from previous studies. The procedures employed to elicit narration in these two tasks are stated in the following section.

3.5 Data Collection

The whole activity follows Peterson and McCabe’s (1983) prompting techniques. Rapport is first established in the observation period in schools. The interviews are carried out individually with each child. An initial warm-up conversation is followed by two narrative tasks in which the child is expected to produce. The narrative data are collected at three time points when the subjects are of mean ages 5;5 (Time 1), 5;8 (Time 2), and 5;11 (Time 3). Order of the narrative tasks children asked to perform is randomized. The entire interviews are

audio-taped and subsequently transcribed.

For the personal narrative task, Chang's (2001) data collection procedure is followed. Two types of prompts are used to elicit personal experience narratives. The first type is 'open prompt', which consists of prompting questions related to experiences of physical harms or pains, such as 你有沒有受過傷? 'Have you ever got hurt?' or 你有沒有打過針? 'Did you ever get an injection?' If the open prompt fails to elicit narratives, the second type, the 'structured prompt', is used. The structured prompt consists of an anecdote that the interviewer narrates to the child. The anecdote is followed by the question like 你遇到過這樣的事情嗎? 'Did you have similar experience?'

Children's fictional narratives are elicited on the basis of the wordless book, *Frog, where are you*. The rationale of using one picture book is to provide children with a common content to talk about. The subjects are first asked to look through the entire book to get a sense of the episodic structure. Then, they are asked to tell a story while looking at the pictures.

The purpose of the tasks is to assess children's narrative skills in the absence of adults' scaffolding, thus any verbal intervention from adults should be avoided. Great care is thus taken to minimize the experimenter's verbal feedback. In addition, a deliberate effort is made to maintain the interaction as a conversation instead of an interrogation. To these ends, once the child begins to produce narratives, personal or fictional, the experimenter gives only general, neutral prompts, such as 喔 'uh-huh', 然後呢 'and then', 對 'yes', 還有呢 'anything else', 好!繼續 'okay! go on', or verbatim repetitions of a portion of the child's last utterance, to maintain as well as facilitate the interaction.

3.6 Coding

The evaluative elements play an important role in narrative production, for they carry the point of the story. Through them, children reveal their feeling and attitude towards the narratives. A number of studies have used Labov's (1972) criteria to assess evaluative language in children's narratives (Peterson and McCabe, 1983; Bamberg and Damrad-Frye, 1991). Adapted from previous studies of evaluation (Chang, 2000; Chang, 2001; Lin, 1993; Miller and Sperry, 1988; Peterson and McCabe, 1983; Wang, 1998) and developed from the collected data, seventeen types of evaluative devices are classified in the present project (see Appendix A for a summary inventory list of all the codes). This coding system is based on the assumption that it is a good display of children's evaluative ability and is intended to be a method by which the data are organized. The definitions and examples for each type are given below.

(1) Character speech (CAS). This category encompasses two types of character speech: direct and indirect speech. This is an effective way to highlight and dramatize key points in a narrative. Also, this device is used by the narrator to distance him-/herself from the plot-line.

Example: 小 男孩 說: 「你 好,青 蛙 先 生。」
xiao naihái shuō: 「ni hao,qingwa xiānshēng」
The boy said, "Hello, Mr. Frog."

(2) Comparison (COM). Through comparison, the narrator signals attitudes or emphasizes certain elements in a narrative.

Example: 這 個 球 比 較 大。
zhè ge qiú bǐjiào dà.
This ball is bigger.

(3) Conditional connective (CON). This device signals a situation which may exist

or whose possible consequences the narrator is considering. Connectors such as 如果 'if' and 除非 'unless' belong to this category.

Example: 如果 他 踢 我, 我 就 會 哭。
ruguo ta ti wo, wo jiu hui ku.
If he kicks me, I will cry.

(4) Compulsion words (CPW). Narrators often use this device to evaluate what went on so that they can justify their behavior. This category includes expressions such as 叫我 'ask me', 讓我 'make me', 准我 'allow me', etc.

Example: 媽媽 不 准 我 哭。
mama bu zhun wo ku.
Mom does not allow me to cry.

他 讓 他 的 狗 安 靜。
ta rang ta de gou anjing.
He makes his dog quiet.

(5) Causal explanation (CSE). The connectors 因為 'because', 所以 'so', 因此 'therefore', and 結果 'as a result' are used to link events or states and at the same time provide causal explanations. As Chang (2001) indicates, CSE unveils the implicit relationships between events and makes known the motivation for a particular action. The connector 因為 'because' is excluded if it is used merely as a conjunction with no possible causal meaning.

Example: 我 沒 抓 好, 所 以 就 摔 下 來 了。
wo mei zhua hao, suoyi jiu shuai xialai le.
I didn't grasp it, so I fell down.

(6) Evaluative word per se (EVA). This refers to words themselves are evaluative. This category encompasses some adjectives, adverbs, nouns and a few verbs, such as 美 'beautiful', 醜 'ugly', 乾淨 'clean', 髒 'dirty', etc.

Example: 他是個 髒 小孩。
ta shi ge zang xiaoihai.
He is a dirty kid.

小青蛙跳得好 高。
xiao qingwa tiao de hao gao.
The frog jumps so high.

(7) Evaluative connective (EVC). This device includes connectors which signal additive or concessive meaning. It is additive because it refers to an event or a situation which is an addition to what had previously mentioned. On the other hand, concessive meaning reveals when the connector signals the upcoming of an unexpected situation or event (Wang, 1998). The frequently used examples are 還是 'or' and 可是 'yet'.

Example: 可是 這是蔡小琪的衣服。
keshi zhe shi caixiaoqi de yifu.
Yet these are Tsai Hsiao-chi's clothes.

(8) Exaggeration (EXA). In terms of EXA, the narrator makes a situation, quality, or feature appear greater, more obvious, or more importantly than it actually is.

Example: 他走路像是 地震 一樣。
ta zoulu xiang shi dizhen yiyang.
He walks as if there is an earthquake around.

(9) Expression of intentions (EXI). This device is used to express the narrator's/ story character's intentions, hopes, or desires. The frequently used examples are 希望 'hope', and 想要 'would like'.

Example: 我 希望 我媽媽再買一個。
wo xiwang wo mama zai mai yi ge.
I hope that my mom will buy one more.

(10) Explicit negation (EXN). This device is used to inform the listener of either personal or general expectations which were not met in the situation.

Example: 我爸爸沒有把小狗照顧好。
wo baba mei you ba xiao gou zhaogu hao.
My father did not take good care of the dog.

(11) Frames of mind (FOM). This is another general means of evaluation in children's narratives, which includes descriptions of internal mental, emotional and physical states, such as 認為 'think', 感興趣 'be interested in', 喜歡 'like', 生氣 'angry', 頭暈 'dizzy', etc.

Example: 我以為那是我的球。
wo yiwei na shi wo de qiu.
I thought that was my ball.

他喜歡這個球。
ta xihuan zhege qiu.
He likes this ball.

小男孩就生氣了。
xiao nanhai jiu shengqi le.
The little boy was then angry.

(12) Hedges (HEG). Hedges function as distancing remarks which suggest non-commitment to the truth value of the proposition, such as 好像 'seem'. Or, some adverbs, such as 有一點 'a little', 一些 'a bit', are used as hedges for their lowering effect, which usually scale downwards from an assumed norm (Quirk et al., 1985).

Example: 這好像是他的青蛙。
zhe hoaxing shi ta de qingwa.
This seems to be his frog.

我 有 一點 難過。
wo you yidian nanguo.
I am a little sad.

(13) Intensifier (INT). This device functions as either an amplifier or an emphazier. Amplifiers are the degree adverbs which denote a high degree on an assumed norm. There are a number of amplifiers in Mandarin Chinese, such as 最 ‘most’, 太 ‘too’, 非常 ‘very’, 這麼 ‘so’. Regarding emphaziers, they are used to manifest emphasis and convey subjective evaluation of the narrator. They indicate extreme qualities not allowing gradation and hence increase the force of the proposition (Lin, 1993). A few adverbs belong to this category: 當然 ‘of course’, 一定 ‘certainly’, 真正 ‘really’, and 都 ‘so’.

Example: 你 這麼 厲害。
ni zhemo lihai.
You are so great.

我 當然 要去。
wo dangran yao qu.
Of course I will go.

(13) Exclamations and utterance-final particles (PAR). Words such as 喔 ‘oh’, 啊 ‘ah’ and 哇 ‘wow’ can be used as either exclamations or utterance-final particles to signal a speaker’s attitude and communicative intentions.

Example: 哇! 這麼 長。
wa! zhemo chang.
Wow! It is so long.

這 個 好 痛 喔!
zhe ge hao tong o!
This really hurts!

(15) Repetition (REP). This device refers to the same word/phrase repeated more than one time. It is used for emphasizing or suspending a specific action, not for adding any new information or for clarification of pronunciation. Labov (1972) values the efficacy of REP in narration, though repetition is fairly simple from syntactic viewpoint.

Example: 我爸爸 一直跑 一直跑。
wo baba yizhi pao yizhi pao.
My father keeps running and running.

(16) Sound modification (SOM). This category includes two strategies. One is using onomatopoeia words. The other involves paralinguistic means such as using a higher pitch or elongating particular words.

Example : 門鈴 叮咚 叮咚 響。
menling dingdong dingdong xiang.
The door bell rings: ding-dong ding-dong.

蜜蜂 飛 呀 飛。(飛 with higher pitch)
mifeng fei ya fei.
Bees fly and fly.

(17) Verbal qualifier (VRQ). This device is used to mark onset or duration of an action.

Example: 我媽 一直 在叫我。
wo ma yizhi zai jiao wo.
My mom keeps calling me.

我就 開始 跑。
wo jiu kaishi pao.
Then I began to run.

3.7 Data Analysis

The transcriptions follow the guidelines of Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) (see examples below). In order to verify transcription accuracy, nine transcripts, with three from each time point of data collection, are randomly selected and are fully transcribed and coded by another native Mandarin Chinese speaker. Cohen's kappa statistic is used to assess inter-rater reliability. Inter-rater agreement result is 91%.

Example: *CHI: 我 很 喜歡 牠。
wo hen xihuan ta.
I like it very much.
%cod: \$ INT
\$ FOM

*CHI: 媽媽 叫 我 安靜。
mama jiao wo anjing.
Mom wants me to be quiet.
%cod: \$ CPW

*CHI: 風箏 非常 漂亮。
fengzheng feichang piaoliang.
The kite is very beautiful.
%cod: \$ INT
\$ EVA

After the transcriptions are done, quantitative as well as qualitative analyses are given to assess preschoolers' development of evaluative skills. For the quantitative part, a number of Child Language Analysis (CLAN) programs and statistical analyses are used to answer the research questions. For instance, *FREQ*, and *MLU* programs of CLAN are applied to provide basic length measures, such as number of words, number of different words, number of utterances, and mean length of utterances. We also employ *FREQ* program to compute the frequency of each evaluative device so as

to provide distributional patterns of evaluative devices for different ages, genders and narrative tasks. The three-way ANOVA (an analysis of variance) is run on the data with the between subject factor of Gender (two levels: female and male), and within subject factors of Task (two levels: fictional narrative and personal narrative), and Age (three levels: Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3). Significance is considered if $p < 0.05$. Then, LSD post hoc comparisons are performed to further examine the differences between variables. For the qualitative part, illustrative excerpts are given to display children's use of evaluative devices.

NOTES

¹ According to White (1965), children display adult-like thought at the age of six. It is also around this age that children begin to generate adult-like narrative structure. From then on, children inhibit the strategy of saying whatever comes to their mind. Instead, they plan their narratives to be more comprehensible to their listeners.

² In Preece's work (1987), the same narrator may produce repeat performances in which the narratives share the same topic and contain similar content.

³ In the present work, though preschoolers repeatedly narrate the frog story throughout three time points, only two children, at Time 3, are able to make explicit and appropriate connection between target events. Regarding quantitative part, though the subjects have repetitive linguistic stimulation, they are on the equal grounds and still display developmental differences. Taken together, our results suggest that individual differences and developmental progression may not be masked by such repeat performances or learning effect.