

論 文

# The influence of parents' replies on children's speech in parent-child interactions while reading picture books: Focusing on the sentence-ending particle “Ne”

Yumi Tamase<sup>1</sup> and Masayo Yabunaka<sup>2</sup>

*1 Faculty of Education, Kochi University*

*2, Seitoku University*

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to consider the influence of the sentence-ending particle “Ne,” which parents uttered in response to their two-year-children's speech in parent-child interactions while reading a picture book. Thirty pairs of two-year-old children and their parents participated. The picture book had few characters; the parents read freely, and the children spoke freely. As a result, the following findings were obtained:

(1) There were two types of the sentence-ending particle “Ne”: the agreement “Ne” and the sharing “Ne.” Some parents uttered “Ne” not to confirm their children's knowledge but to obtain their consent to the explanation after describing a scene of the picture book to them (agreement-Ne). Others uttered “Ne” to share the feelings of their children after listening to the words voluntarily spoken by them (sharing-Ne). (2) The children whose parents replied with the “sharing-Ne” uttered more words than did the children whose parents seldom answered them with it in the picture book interactions.

## 1. Introduction

Children all over the world enjoy storytelling through picture books by adults. It is an important and pleasant experience for them. Through storytelling, children can acquire a rich image of the story, and feel the wonder of the words and pictures in it (Sato & Nishiyama, 2007). Previous research pointed out that the experience of having children listen to picture books during early childhood is related to the development of emotional and interpersonal relationships, and leads to subsequent subjective reading activities (Moriya, 1994; Ueda & Hamano, 2004).

In the 1970s, many studies were conducted on parent-child reading and listening activities using picture books. A typical setting used by many of these studies was one in which children had others read the picture books (Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Ninio, 1983; Moerk, 1985). On the other hand, Sulzby (1985) reported that two-year-old children were conscious of the characters in picture books and were able to communicate something to others while seeing the picture books. Thus, storytelling is an important experience for children because it enhances their ability to not only understand stories, but also communicate by using language.

Japanese early childhood education is regulated by the Kindergarten Education Procedure, which is published by the Japanese Ministry of Education. This procedure shows that there are ten desirable abilities that children acquire by the end of infancy: Healthy mind and body; Independence; Cooperativeness; Emergence of morality and a sense of respect for rules; Awareness of connections with society; Emergence of thinking; Concern for nature; Interest and feelings about quantity, figures, signs, character, etc.; Communication by means of words; and Rich sensibility and expression. The interaction with others through picture books is an important experience for enhancing children's ability to communicate by means of words.

Yabunaka, Yoshida, and Murata (2009) examined how parents respond to their children when they read picture books with few characters to them. They reported that not only parents, but also children, made utterances during the storytelling. However, they neither considered the children's utterances in detail nor examined the influence of parents' utterances on those of the children. Thus, the kind of parental utterances that promote children's abilities to communicate by means of words still remains unclear.

Japanese particles at the end of sentences such as "Ne" or "Yo" constitute the modality form that indicates how a speaker and a listener expresses concern about the proposition contents. Moreover, a speaker controls the interpersonal distance with a listener by using the ending particle (Inoue, 1999; Kiyama, 2017). Among the sentence-ending particles, "Ne" functions to express that a speaker is seeking acceptance and sympathy from a listener (Kajiwara, Amano, & Kondo, 2004).

When do young children begin to understand the function of the sentence-ending particle "Ne?" Yodogawa (2013) analyzed dialogues in a meal situation at a childcare group of two to three year olds and showed clearly that the sentence-ending particle "Ne" was used many times. She also reported that children continued the dialogue while asking for other children's sympathy using the sentence-ending particle "Ne." These prior studies suggest that in parent-child interactions while reading the picture book, the sentence-ending particle "Ne," which appears in parents' utterances, has a positive influence on the number of utterances made by the children.

The purpose of this study was to clarify the influence of the sentence-ending particle "Ne," which was uttered by parents, on children's speech in parent-child interactions while reading picture books.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The subjects of our study were twenty nine parent-child pairs living in the suburbs of Tokyo, comprising twenty nine two-year-old children (average age: two years and three months; twenty-four girls and five boys) and their parents (twenty eight mothers and one father; average age: 31.9 years). The parent-child pairs were selected according to the following procedures: first, we asked families who visited a childrearing support facility run by S University in M City to take part in a questionnaire. At the same time, we asked them if they would take part in a longitudinal research project. We then selected the families who had answered the questionnaire and agreed to take part in our longitudinal research project and established them as "research-cooperating families." All children were first-borns. At the time the families expressed their willingness to cooperate, the cooperating families received a briefing on the purpose and methods of this study, both in writing and orally, and gave their consent.

### 2.2. Materials

### 2.2.1. Picture book used

Rosie's Walk (by Pat Hutchins, translated by Shigeo Watanabe, and published by Kaisei-Sha Ltd., 1978), a book in which the story and themes unfold with pictures and short descriptive sentences but in which the pictures communicate the story was used for the storytelling.

Rosie's Walk is composed of 14 scenes and is drawn primarily in yellow-based colors. Rosie the hen is enjoying a leisurely pre-supper walk. A fox is chasing after her, but Rosie does not know this. Unwittingly, she leads him into one disaster after the other, and the fox ultimately flees for his life. There are no letters written on 6 of the total of 14 pages, and only one sentence is written on the remaining eight pages. The sentences are extremely short and describe only the simplest factual details about Rosie the hen's walk. However, the illustrations are wonderfully expressive and tell the reader everything. In other words, the sentence portions are elaborated upon to completion while the parents and children communicate with each other, or by having a child make up a story. The book is therefore a reading resource ideally suited for focusing on the subject of "narratives." We chose this picture book as the study material because we thought that parents and children could create stories, rather than sentences, from the pictures.

### 2.3. Procedure

The following is the content of the survey conducted as part of our longitudinal research project. The parents were asked to videotape, once a week, sessions in which they read a book aloud to their child, and vice versa. The storytelling was conducted and recorded at the homes of the parent-child pairs. Parents picked up their children, placed them on their knees, and turned the picture book to face themselves, as well as their children. Each parent decided how and when to read the picture book. The interactions between parents and children based on the picture book were recorded by the parents using mobile

phones. The survey was conducted from July to August, 2016.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Of the instances of parent-child interactions through a picture book that were recorded on videotape, we analyzed segments that began with a parent picking up a picture book and ended with the parent indicating completion of the session, either verbally by saying "That's all," or by an action (closing the picture book, for example). All the recorded images were transcribed into text to create a written record. In this survey, we analyzed a child's utterances that occurred while a picture book was being read aloud to them, using IUs (1 IU = 1 argument + 1 relationship) as our unit of utterance. The IU is an analysis unit that is commonly used in recent years in studies of understanding and sentences production.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The sentence-ending particle "Ne" in parents' utterances

Table 1 shows the average and standard deviation of the frequency of the sentence-ending particle "ne" appearing in parents' utterances. As mentioned above, parents made use of two types of the sentence-ending particle "Ne": the "agreement-Ne" and the "sharing-Ne."

After they explained the situation depicted in the picture book, some parents sought their children's agreement with their explanation by using the sentence-ending particle "Ne" ("agreement-Ne"). An example of the "agreement-Ne" is as follows.

<Examples of parent-child interactions about the "agreement-Ne">

In the third scene, The fox is chasing Rosie and is about to step on a large shovel on the road.

Parent: *Kore dounaruto? Gone! Hai mekutte.* ("What happens to this? Gone! Yes, turn the page, please.)

Table 1 Number of times parents uttered "Ne"

	Average	SD
Agreement -"Ne"	3.24	3.33
Sharing- "Ne"	2.10	2.57
Total	5.34	4.75

Child: (turn the page.)

Parent: *A, gan to nachatta. Itetete. Demo niwatorisan wa imasen. Tsugiwa oike no mawari wo gururi.* (Oh, he hit a shovel. He is aching. But there is no hen any longer. Next, the hen walked around the pond.)

Child: *Ikou!* (Let's go!)

Parent: *Kaerusan ga iru ne.* (A frog is here, isn't it?)

Without guiding or waiting for a child's spontaneous utterance, some parents explained the picture in the books to their children ("A frog is here, isn't it?"), and they sought their agreement with the statement by using the sentence-ending particle "Ne."

On the other hand, after hearing their children's voluntary words, some parents replied to their utterances and shared the children's feelings by using the sentence-ending particle "Ne" ("sharing-Ne"). An example of the "sharing-Ne" is as follows.

<Examples of parent-child interactions about the "Sharing-Ne" >

In the ninth scene, The fox is chasing Rosie. The hen is walking in front of a flour warehouse. A long string from the bag with a lot of flour is caught on the foot of the hen.

Parent: *Tsugi wa konahikigoya no mae wo sutasuta. A, kondo wa komugiko ga aru. Ashi ni nanika hikkakatte iru.* (Next, the hen is walking along the flour warehouse front. Oh, there's flour next. Something catches on a foot of the hen.)

Child: *Ah!*

Parent: *Niwatorisan kidukazu ni aruite imasu. Dou naru ka na? Basaan!* (The hen is walking without knowing anything. What happens to the hen? )

Child: *Ippa! Ippa!* (Much! Much!)

Parent: *Aru ne.* (There is much flour, right?)

Some parents heard their child's utterance (for example, "Much! Much!"), and they replied (for example, "There is much flour, right?") by using the "sharing-Ne," thereby

sharing their children's feelings.

Table 1 shows the average and standard deviation of the number of "agreement-Ne" and "sharing-Ne" utterances made by parents. An investigator and an evaluator independently rated the category of the sentence-ending particle "Ne," and the consultation coincidence rate was 88.3%. When a consultation result was inharmonious, further consultation was held to make a determination. When parents read the picture book to the children, they, on average, made "Ne" utterances five times. The parents were more likely to use the "agreement-Ne" rather than the "sharing-Ne" utterance.

### 3.2. The number of the children's utterance

We divided twenty nine pairs of parents and children into two groups based on the number of times their parents uttered the "sharing-Ne" when they read the picture book. Thirteen parent-child pairs in which the parent uttered the "sharing-Ne" twice or more were considered the high-sharing group, and sixteen parent-child pairs in which the parents had not uttered the "sharing-Ne," or had uttered it only once, were considered the low-sharing group.

Table 2 shows the number of IU in children's utterances in each group. A significant tendency was seen when we conducted a t-test corresponding to the scores of the children's utterances in the high- and low-sharing groups ( $t(27)=2.91, p<.01$ ) .

### 4. Consideration

The purpose of this study was to clarify the influence of the sentence-ending particle "Ne," which is uttered by parents in response to children's speech in parent-child interactions while reading picture books. In this study, it became clear that there are two types of the sentence-ending particle "Ne" appearing in the parents' narration during the parent-child interactions while reading picture books, and that the child to whom parents replied with the "sharing-Ne" uttered more words than did the children who seldom received "sharing-Ne" responses from their

Table 2 Number of IUs in children's utterances in each group

	Average	SD
High-sharing group	17.38	7.72
Low-sharing group	9.25	7.30

parents.

Why did the “sharing-Ne” uttered by parents have an affirmative influence on children's utterances? In client-centered therapy, it is said that the technique by which the feelings of the client are accepted promotes the free expressions of the client (Kanno, 1996). Clients will be able to express what they feel better if they feel that they are being accepted. Children who receive responses from parents who use the “sharing-Ne” in parent-child interactions while reading picture books feel that their remarks have been accepted and understood, making them more imaginative with the story.

Akita and Muto (1996) conducted a questionnaire survey on 332 mothers of kindergarten children to determine the importance of storytelling to children's development. They reported that there were many answers such as “the importance of storytelling is that children can fantasize or interact with parents,” as well as answers such as “the importance of storytelling is that children can learn letters, have the ability to read sentences, and acquire the knowledge necessary for daily life.” Thus, storytelling is not only an experience through which children acquire knowledge about letters and sentences, but also an experience through which children freely and imaginatively develop the story, feel accepted by their parents, and enjoy the time spent with their parents reading picture books.

In this study, the parents of the “high-sharing” group did not unilaterally convey stories to their children; rather, they shared the story with their children while including the children's speech.

<Examples of parent-child interactions in the “high-sharing” group>

In the ninth scene, a bag containing flour fell on the fox's head. The fox, which is buried in “white things,” is now unable to move.

Parent: *Kitsunesan komugiko ga ochichatta.* (Flour fell on the head of the fox.)

Child: *Awawa* (Bubble)

Parent: *Awawa ja naiyo. Komugiko dayo.* (It is not a bubble. It is flour.)

Child: *Awawa dayo!* (It is bubble!)

Parent: *Awawa mitai dane.* (It looks like a bubble.)

In the above example, the parent withdrew his/her interpretation, respected the interpretation of the child,

and sympathetically accepted the child's speech by using the sentence-ending particle “Ne.” By receiving such assistance from their parents, children will develop a rich imagination and feel encouraged to express more of what they think about the story.

In kindergarten education in Japan, it is emphasized that infants acquire words and expressions while familiarizing themselves with picture books and stories and that they enjoy talking by relating their experiences to and listening carefully to the speech of others. Storytelling is an important experience not only to understand the contents of the story and acquire greater knowledge, but also to communicate with words while understanding and respecting each other. The findings of this study revealed the importance of the empathic responses of adults in response to children's utterances during storytelling. In future studies, the effect of empathic response by others on the utterance contents of young children needs to be examined.

One limitation of this research was that there were few participants. In the future, we would like to increase our participant numbers and examine whether the sentence-ending particle “Ne,” which parents uttered in response to their children's speech in parent-child interactions while reading a picture book, is used differently according to children's ages.

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