Research Article

Linguistic Output During Preschooler-adult Shared Book Readings with Culturally Familiar and Less Familiar English Speaking Adult Readers: A Pilot Investigation

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Abstract

This pilot investigation compared the linguistic output of typically developing bilingual preschoolers during shared bookreadings with a culturally familiar adult (CF, who spoke in English as a second language) and US English-speaking adult reader (i.e., culturally less-familiar adult, LF). Two books, matched for sentence length and content, were shared with the children; book presentations were randomized and counter-balanced. Scripted questions were included during reading interactions. The language output during the shared book readings was transcribed and analyzed for linguistic features including mean length of utterance (MLU), and type-token ratio (TTR). Data analyses demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the linguistic output of preschoolers in response to CF & LF adult during shared bookreading. However, on MLU & TTR, differences in children's responses were observed when they were read different books. The findings are discussed with its implications for cross-cultural research.

Background

Development of early language skills is essential for building up early literacy skills in preschool children. Literacy acquisition generally begins at an early age, long before the introduction of formal reading instruction. An early experience and exposure to books and participation in literacy and literacy-related activities with parents/caregivers are considered as important in the preparation of children for school-based formal instruction. One specific early literacy strategy that has caught much attention of researchers is story telling as well as story book reading to preschoolers in order to build on their vocabulary and language. Although there are a number of ways and means to facilitate the above, story book reading is considered as one of the most frequently recommended practices for building early language and literacy competencies (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The National Research Council (2000) recommends that educators and parents focus on shared bookreading throughout children's preschool and early school years. One

of the reasons cited for this practice is that reading aloud promotes children's vocabulary that is linked to their conceptual knowledge (Robbins & Ehri, 1994 amongst others). Effective interactive practices generally include questioning (Sénéchal, Thomas & Monker, 1995), expanding responses (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992), explanation of vocabulary (Elley, 1989), and both verbal and non-verbal responding (Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995). The defining features of shared storybook reading are high-quality storybook reading with activities designed to enhance the child's understanding of the story and to model more sophisticated language use. Research has also shown that repeated readings of stories are beneficial to children with 4% of target words learned from single readings and 10% to 15% more target words learned from multiple readings (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002; Penno, Wilkinson & Moore, 2002).

There have been many studies to provide evidence for the effectiveness of storybook reading to preschool children in their first language (for example, Teale, 2003). However, very few studies are

documented on story book reading with children who are English Language Learners [1] in classrooms (Garcia, 2000). As a result, the relationship between knowledge in second language vis-à-vis development of literacy skills during shared storybook reading is not well known to date. Research examining this relationship is necessary considering the fact that "half the world's population is bilingual" (Mackey, 1967). Majority of preschool English Language Learners are in English medium classrooms either because of the social circumstances or the prevailing educational policy. In such circumstances, the first language often plays a very limited or informal role in preschool programs. Therefore, research studies on specific ways to promote better literacy skills in ELL's are much needed apart from devising precise policy and guidelines for practice.

Shared Bookreading

As mentioned earlier, there has been a great emphasis in the past two decades to explore ways and means to help children get preparedness for literacy acquisition (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). One specific early literacy strategy that has caught much attention of researchers is not merely story telling but shared story bookreading to preschoolers in order to build on their vocabulary and language. There is a general consensus that both oral story telling or shared book reading with preschoolers help children to acquire vocabulary, language skills, and knowledge about the world in the course of conversation with responsive adults. Studies have examined the impact of oral storytelling (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998 among others) and shared book reading (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow et al.,1998; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Neha Lakshmish & Prema Rao, 2011) on development of literacy. The reports emphasize the advantage of shared story bookreading for facilitating early literacy growth. The interactive context in the above strategy that can be highly appealing and engaging for the child and the nature of storybook reading are found to provide a rich context in which print and other literacy conventions are emphasized.

Research on story book reading suggests that adult strategies used during shared reading provide greater opportunities for children's verbal participation while facilitating their language and literacy skills. There have been reports on acquisition of vocabulary in a second language by bilingual children when story books in the second language were provided to parents for home reading and the same was followed by classroom story bookreading (Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal, 2005). There are many children who attend preschools and public schools for whom English is not their native language. Since there are encouraging reports from crosslinguistic studies on oral language acquisition to support transition from home language to school language in young children (Pamela, 2014), it is very likely that similar effect may be seen on development of literacy as well in bilingual children.

There are many studies that support the development of early literacy skills through shared storybook reading. Adult-child shared storybook reading is a very important aspect of early childhood as this interaction provides a context to foster early literacy skills (Adams, 1990; Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Lonigan, 1994; Lonigan, Anthony, Bloomfield, Dyer, & Samwel, 1999). Through storybook reading, children develop vocabulary (Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995), phonemic awareness (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003), and print knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009) as well as an interest and motivation to read (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). These literacy skills are robust predictors of later reading ability (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson, & Foorman, 2004; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Because of the importance of shared storybook reading, a number of literacy interventions have also been developed for preschool children. For example, dialogic reading, print referencing (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999; Justice & Ezell, 2000).

The available literature on shared bookreading is much focused towards the listener and not the reader. The reader (teacher/adult) involved in shared bookreading also plays a significant role in the process. Given the fact that at least half of the world's population is bilingual (Mackey, 1967), it is quite likely that there would also be bilingual teachers who are involved in teaching monolingual preschool children (say, English language speakers). Literature is sparse regarding how monolingual children respond to bilingual teachers/adults particularly during shared bookreading. While children who are ELL's are the focus of investigation in the recent research on early literacy, the crucial dimension of children's responses to shared book reading to a teacher/adult who is not a native speaker of English (or any other language of the school) has not received much attention. Therefore, the major purpose of the present study was to examine the linguistic output of preschoolers during preschooler-adult shared bookreadings with US (monolingual English speaking) and non-US (bilingual with English as a second language) adult readers as bookreading behavior is said to vary depending on the cultural practices (Neuman, 1996; Hammer, Nimmo, Cohen, Draheim & Johnson,

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[1]The term English Language Learner refers to children who are in the process of acquiring English along with the language primarily used at home.

2005).

Further, it is well known that economic globalization changes the educational experiences of children (Garcia, 2009). The trend among the highly trained professionals to travel with their families to different countries around the world to consult and work for a few months to several years is scaling up in the recent decades. Employee's family also may travel and live in a new country during that period. It is also reported that nearly 3% of the world's population is transnational (Graddol, 2006) and that English is most often treated as an international language. As one example of this growing issue, the census data of the United States of America report that 2.4 million Indian immigrants reside in the United States as of 2015. This makes the foreign born from India the second-largest immigrant group after Mexicans, accounting for almost 6 percent of the 43.3 million foreign-born population (retrieved from https://www.migrationpolicy. org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states on December 14, 2017). Tsui & Tollefson (2007) report that English language is used widely in Asia as a result of which majority of children in India are bilingual in their home language as well as in English.

A child from India whose parent(s) are transnational employee(s) in say, the United States of America (or any other country) is likely to receive some of his or her education in a US school setting. Even if the child has learned English as a second language in India, the child must adapt to the US pronunciation and syntax/vocabulary variations when he/she is interacting with US speakers. Similarly, children learning English as second language in Indian school setting would also require adapting to the pronunciation, syntax/vocabulary variations of teachers of English who are learners of English as second language (non-native speakers of English) besides having relocated from different state(s) of India with their native-language induced pronunciation styles. Given this paradox in the context of Indian educational set-up, it is important for the children's family and school educators to work together to help children adapt as quickly as possible to the academic expectations and English-language as it will occur in the school setting. This study investigates the way in which young preschool children adapt to the questions during a book reading session when interacting with an adult that is more culturally familiar (i.e., one who looks and speaks in a way that is characteristic of an individual from the local community, a citizen of India who speaks English as second language) and an adult who is less culturally familiar (i.e., an English speaker who is a citizen of the US). The goal of this study was to more clearly understand how young bilingual children adapt to culturally familiar and less-familiar adults during shared bookreading. Child's participation during an adult-child bookreading is a particularly relevant context to examine children's ability to adapt to different adult readers. We consider children's responses when reading with an adult who is more culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar reader to address the above.

This study addresses the following question: Are there variations in children's linguistic abilities when communicating in English during shared bookreading interaction with a culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar adult?

The following null hypotheses were proposed to answer the above question: 1) There is no significant difference in the linguistic abilities of preschool children who are ELL'S during shared bookreading, and 2) There is no significant difference in the linguistic abilities of preschool children who are ELL'S while interacting with a culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar adult.

Materials and Methods

In order to examine the above hypotheses, the study was conducted on preschool children using a quasi-experimental design. The participants were employed for the study from a Montessori school in Mysore city, Karnataka, India.

Participants

Ten children in the age range of 53 to 63 months (mean age= 56.8 months; SD = 3.19 months) were selected from middle socio economic status families (Venkatesan, 2009) located in Mysore city, Karnataka, Southern India. All the children were from families speaking Kannada as native language and learnt English as second language in the school setting. Children were enrolled in a Montessori preschool center. Children's eligibility for participation in the study was ensured through screening for adequacy in language development on the Computerized Linguistic Protocol for Screening (CLiPS, Anitha & Prema, 2008). A doctoral student (the third author), supervised and trained by the first author, evaluated the children prior to the book reading sessions. The scores on CLiPS for all the children were found to be within the norms set for the screening tool.

Tools for the study

Two books, Camey is sad (Book A; author: Pooja Srinivas) and Elephant and the goat (Book B; author: Archana Suthar) were selected for the current study to examine the linguistic abilities of preschool children who are ELL'S during shared bookreading. Both the books are highly illustrated and judged as being equally appealing to preschool children. The two books are equivalent in number of pages (Book A = 16, Book B = 16), number of sentences in the text {Book A = 98 (State-
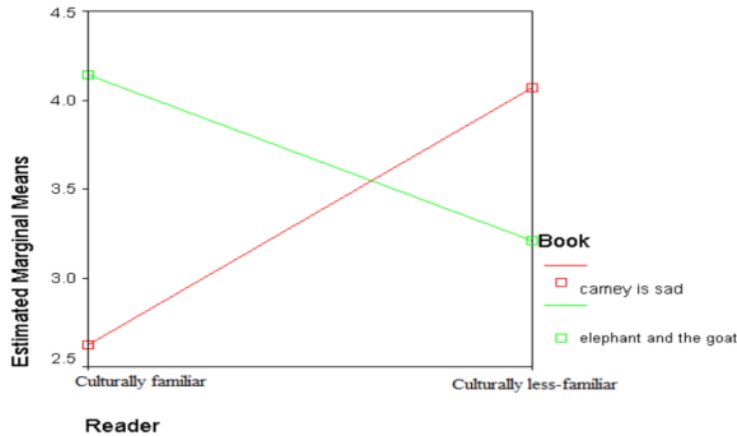
Figure 1: Estimated marginal means of MLU in morpheme for CF and LF Reader.

ments=81; Exclamations=10; Questions=7); Book B = 91 (Statements=87; Exclamations=0; Questions=4) and Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) (Book A = 8.48; Book B = 8.21)}. Specific questions were predetermined and scripted by the investigators. Questions represented a variety of concrete (e.g, "What fell down?") and abstract forms (e.g., "How does Camey feel?") . The study was designed wherein the readers (a) read the text, (b) asked the scripted questions, (c) responded to the children with a paraphrase of the children's utterances (e.g., Child: "Look at that rat!" Reader: "Oh a rat!"), or provided minimal encouragers to talk (e.g., "hmm," "yes," "I see."). (See Appendix for scripted questions).

Test Environment

Shared bookreading and interactions between the participant and the investigators took place in a quiet location at the preschool center.

Ethical consent

Bio-behavioural ethical procedures developed at the All India Institute of Speech and Hear-

ing, Mysore was followed to avail informed consent by the school authorities as well as from parents/caregivers with the help of Headmistress of the school.

Procedure

The books (Book A & Book B) were read to children by a culturally familiar and a culturally less-familiar adult investigators during shared bookreading study paradigm. The order of the adult-child readings (Culturally Familiar [CF] versus Less-Familiar [LF] reader)[2] and book selection (Book A versus Book B) was randomized and counterbalanced. The dyadic interactions were video-taped. A trained transcriber who was a doctoral candidate developed verbatim transcripts of all child and adult utterances during the two video-taped book reading sessions for each dyad. Only the spontaneous talk produced by the investigator and the participant around each book reading was transcribed; the adults' reading of the text was not included in the transcript. Running speech was parsed at the utterance level using the conventions described by Miller and Chapman (1996).

[2]Culturally Familiar [CF] and culturally Less-Familiar (LF) investigators were females in the age range 50-55 years. While CF was a native of the same state and district as of the participants and one who looks and speaks in a way that is characteristic of an individual from the local community [a citizen of India who speaks English as second language], the LF was less culturally familiar (i.e., an English speaker who is a citizen of the US). Both the CF & LF adult investigators ensured to follow the dress code of their culture during bookreading sessions

Table 1: Mean & SD for CF and LF readers

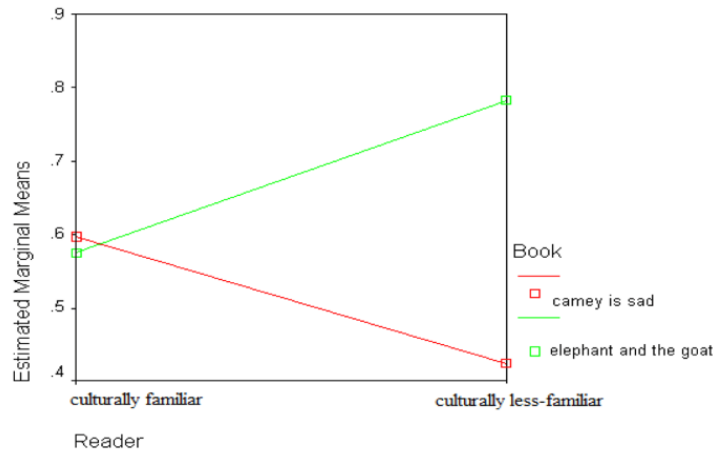| Sl. No.	Dependent variables	Culturally familiar (CF)		Culturally less familiar (LF)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Number of utterances	17.9	7.6	16.6	5.5
2	Number of Questions	1.4	1.7	2.1	2.2
3	Percent of questions	7%	8%	21%	29%
4	Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)	3.3	1.5	3.6	1.1
5	Type Token Ratio (TTR)	0.58	0.15	0.60	0.24

Figure 2: Estimated marginal means for TTR for CF and LF Readers.

The transcripts were then entered orthographically into the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT, V. 7.0). Inter-observer reliability of transcription was established by having a second trained observer who randomly selected and transcribed two transcripts (10% of the total sample). The second observer completed a second set of utterance-by-utterance transcripts. The third author compared the first and second version of the selected transcripts and calculated an agreement percentage by dividing the total number of agreements by the number of disagreements and agreements and multiplying this figure by 100. Agreement percentages for individual transcripts ranged from 97% to 98%, with an overall reliability of 97.5%. Five child and adult linguistic measures were computed using SALT language analysis software. Measures included the number of utterances, number of questions, percent of questions, MLU (in morphemes), and type-token ratio (Type-token ratio documents vocabulary diversity).

Results

The verbatim transcription of the participants' utterances were analysed using Systematic Analysis of Language Transcription (SALT, V. 7.0). Since the study was proposed to examine the variations in children's linguistic abilities when communicating in English during shared bookreading with a culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar adult, the large number of transcriptions was treated with statistical analyses as against the number of participants. The results are described and interpreted with reference to the five linguistic units that are relevant to understand communication behaviour of preschool children with Culturally Familiar (CF) and Less-Familiar (LF) adult readers during two matched book readings. The linguistic output (dependent variables) of children was compared in relation to two independent variables; reader (CF versus LF) and book (Book A versus Book B). The dependent variables included number of utterances, number of questions, percent questions, MLU in morphemes, and TTR. See Table 1 and Figure 1 for details.

The data was subjected to Univariate ANOVA

Table 2: F- values and p-values for the main effects and interaction effects

Sl. No.	Dependent variables - Linguistic units	Independent variables					
		Reader		Book		Reader×Book	
		F	p	F	p	F	p
1	Number of utterances	0.186	0.67	0.027	0.87	1.67	0.21
2	Number of Questions	0.56	0.47	0.10	0.75	0.10	0.75
3	Percent of questions	0.2	0.17	1.0	0.33	0.97	0.34
4	Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)	0.23	0.64	0.39	0.54	5.03	**0.04**
5	Type Token Ratio (TTR)	0.06	0.81	5.03	**0.04**	6.4	**0.02**

to consider main effects of readers (CF & LF), books (Book A & Book B) on the number of utterances produced by the children and their interactions. Table 2 indicates the F-values and p-values for the main effects and interaction effects. The results indicated that there was not a significant main effect of CF reader as compared to the LF reader on the number of utterances produced by the children with [F(1, 10) = 0.186, p = 0.67] (LF reader, M = 16.6, SD = 5.5; CF reader, M = 17.9, SD = 7.6). There was also not a significant main effect of books on the children's total utterances [F(1,10) = 0 .027, p = 0.87] as well as for reader×book interaction [F(1,10) = 1.67, p = 0.21].

Further, with respect to children's question formulation between the two readers [F(1,10) = 0.56, p = 0.47] (LF reader, M = 2.1, SD = 2.2; CF reader, M = 1.4, SD = 1.7), two books [F(1,10) = 0.10, p = 0.75] reader×book interaction [F(1,10) = 0 .10, p = 0.75] there was not significant main effect. There was also not a significant main effect of two readers [F(1,10) = 0.2, p = 0.17] (LF reader, M = 21%, SD = 29%; CF reader, M = 7%, SD = 8%), between books [F(1,10) = 1.0, p = 0.33], or reader×book interaction [F(1,10) = 0.97, p = 0.34] on children's percent of questions produced. Although there was not a significant main effect between readers [F(1,10) = 0.23, p = 0.64] (LF reader, M = 3.6, SD = 1.1; CF reader, M = 3.3, SD = 1.5) or between books [F(1,10) = 0.39, p = 0.54} for reader×book interaction effect [F(1,10) = 5.03, p = 0.04], a significant main effect was observed. When considering the TTR, there was not a significant main effect between readers [F(1,10) =0.06, p = 0.81] (LF reader, M = 0.60, SD = 0.24; CF reader, M = 0.58, SD = 0.15). However, there was a significant main effect for books [F(1,10) = 5.03, p = 0.04] (Book A, M = 0.51, SD = 0.18; Book B, M = 0.68, SD = 0.19). There was also a significant main effect for reader×book interaction [F(1,10) = 6.4, p = 0.02]. Figure 1 shows Reader×book interaction and Figure 2 shows TTR×reader×book interaction.

Discussion

The research question posed for the study was to examine the variations in children's linguistic abilities when communicating in English during shared bookreading interaction with a culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar adult. The number of transcribed utterances during shared bookreading of ten children who are ELL's indicated no significant effect of (p>0.67) CF & LF adults on children's overall linguistic abilities. However, with respect to specific linguistic abilities significant effect was evident for MLU (p<0.04) and TTR (p<0.04) for type of book, and interaction of reader×book (p<0.02). In view of the above results, the first null hypothesis stated as 'There is no significant difference in the linguistic abilities of preschool children who are ELL'S during shared bookreading' is only partially supported.

The second null hypothesis stated as 'There is no significant difference in the linguistic abilities of preschool children who are ELL'S while interacting with a culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar adult' was also partially supported. To specifically elaborate on the above findings, the bilingual children in the present study, when communicating with a culturally familiar versus less familiar adult, did not show significant main effect on certain linguistic units such as the number of utterances, question formulation, or percent of total number of questions. but main effect was seen for MLU & TTR in addition to reader×book interaction. The findings may be attributed to the nature of the study design conceptualized with scripted questions with minimal encouragers to allow children to verbalize.

Further, our analyses of utterances, however, demonstrated that the complexity of children's linguistic performance did vary in relation to the book and reader. First, there was a significant difference in TTR across books. This finding may be interpreted to suggest that although the books were selected to be equivalent, on the basis of number of pages, sentences and MLU, they may not have been equal in their "transparency" to young children and thus may not have provided equal opportunities for children to demonstrate their English vocabulary. We suggest that educators should use a variety of books during interaction with young bilingual children when assessing their vocabulary ability. Books that may be viewed by the adult as equivalent with respect to number of pages, sentences and MLU, may present subtle contextual differences that will implicate the child's ability to demonstrate his or her vocabulary skill.

Another interesting observation that ensued in the study was that there were variations in children's vocabulary output. While interacting with the culturally less familiar reader, their "vocabulary richness" (as measured by TTR) was not consistent across the two book readings. In contrast, the children's vocabulary richness stayed consistent during interaction with the culturally familiar reader. Since these books exemplified Indian cultural themes (e.g., parable-like stories with personified dialogue between animals) the culturally familiar reader may have provided subtle scaffolding that allowed the children to perform equally across the book readings; the US reader may not have been able to provide this support as the story themes were less familiar to a US reader. Differences in linguistic complexity were also demonstrated with regard to children's mean length of utterance. Children produced longer utterances with

Book B (Elephant and the goat) as compared to Book A (Camey is sad) when reading with the CF reader. In contrast, children had longer utterances with only Book A (Camey is sad) and not Book B (Elephant and the goat) with the culturally less familiar reader. The findings are in support of Neuman (1996), Hammer, Nimmo, Cohen, Draheim & Johnson (2005) who reported that shared bookreading behavior is said to vary depending on the cultural practices.

To summarise the results of the study, it may be said that very young bilingual children are able to adapt to different language partners during communication. While Wierzbicka (2003) had stated that different languages have different communicative styles and different norms of interaction, De Houwer (2009) reported that bilingual children are skilled at adapting language with different language partners. The encouraging finding of the study is that young children are likely to be interested in interacting with adult communicating partners regardless of their cultural familiarity. Bilingual children are likely to respond to differences in social or pragmatic expectations in a more- versus less-familiar interaction. The results of the present study indicated that preschool ELL's use of linguistic units in English, MLU & TTR in particular, did vary in response to two English speakers who differ in their degree of cultural familiarity, during an adult-child book reading interaction. This finding bodes well for the academic outcomes of young transnational children.

The findings of the study are important when considering the effects of a transnational education. If children move between academic settings (between settings that are more- or less-culturally familiar) differences in linguistic performance may occur. Educators should be aware of these potential variations and should be sensitive to support children in their changing academic environments. Apart from the perspective of education, the results of the study have a significant bearing on the role of speech-language pathologists in sensitizing the educators and policy makers on promoting literacy skills in young bilingual children in home and school environment through shared bookreading strategy.

There are a few limitations to this study. There was a limited pool of participants, only two books were used and five linguistic units were treated as dependent variables. However, despite the limitations, this study provides a first step in understanding and designing research to explore the linguistic challenges of children who are educated in a bilingual cultural setting and are likely to be exposed to less-culturally familiar adults in their educational experience.

Conflict of Interest: NIL

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APPENDIX

Questions

Book A:

1. Oh my! Look at the big snake!! (Low abstraction level)

2. What is Camey doing? (Low abstraction level)

3. Why did eagle swoop down? (Low abstraction level)

4. How did slithers get away? (High abstraction level)

5. How does Camey feel? (High abstraction level)

6. Where is slithers the snake? (Low abstraction level)

7. How does slithers the snake feel? (High abstraction level)

8. Oh! Look at the rat! (Low abstraction level)

9. Why is slithers the snake going after the rat? (High abstraction level)

10. What do you think about the story? (High abstraction level)

Book B:

1. Oh my! Look at all the sticks! (Low abstraction level)

2. What fell down? (Low abstraction level)

3. Why is Gopu worried? (High abstraction level)

4. What happened to the goat's leg? (Low abstraction level)

5. Oh! Look at the elephant! (Low abstraction level)

6. Why did KiTTu start to cry? (High abstraction level)

7. What is KiTTu eating? (Low abstraction level)

8. How did Montu help KiTTu? (High abstraction level)

9. How did the people act when they saw the Elephant? (High abstraction level)

10. How did KiTTu's mother feel? (High abstraction level)

11. What did you think about the story? (High abstraction level)