

Review

McCabe, Allyssa, and Chien-ju Chang (eds.) 2013. *Chinese Language Narration: Culture, cognition, and emotion**

The use of narrative is an important part of any language and culture. As an organized account of a sequence of events, narrative merges aspects of language, culture, cognition, and emotion. The book *Chinese Language Narration: Culture, Cognition, and Emotion*, edited by Allyssa McCabe and Chien-ju Chang, represents one of the few recent works that provides an in-depth study of Chinese language narration. It deals with major issues of narration from the perspective of cross-cultural comparisons, the development of narrative with children in L1 and L2, as well as with individual differences. In particular, it offers an insightful view of the features of narration by Mandarin Chinese speakers.

1. Summary of the book

The book contains seven chapters, and begins with an Introduction, which describes the organization of the book and briefly outlines the findings presented in each chapter.

In the first chapter, "Narrative self-making during dinnertime conversation in Chinese immigrant families," Koh and Wang analyze six normal, everyday dinnertime conversations with preschool-aged children, which were recorded by mothers from Chinese immigrant families (in America) and European American families respectively. It was found that Chinese immigrant families made more frequent mention of events and the people involved to draw more attention to their children's moral and social misbehavior and rules, and they also significantly talked more about their children's internal states -- their opinions, feelings and thoughts-- than did European American parents. This indicates that Chinese immigrant parents were not only concerned with communal values of the oriental societies by cultivating their children's development of an interdependent self, but also concerned with western value of individualism by encouraging the expression of an independent self. In the American context, the Chinese immigrant family seems to maintain the oriental value of an interdependent self, and to "overshoot" to accommodate the western emphasis on the independent self by encouraging development of a bicultural self. Although the

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findings illustrate cross-cultural variation in the characteristics of parent talk in narration, future analysis on its consequence on children's development of a bicultural self in narration, I believe, would be revealing.

The second chapter, entitled "Evaluation in Mandarin Chinese children's personal narratives," analyzes and compares the frequency and proportion of evaluation in narratives by Mandarin-speaking children from Taiwan aged 3-9 years, and English-speaking American children aged 4-9 years. Chang and McCabe state that evaluation is an essential part of narration, in which the speaker tells the listener about the causes and meaning of the narrated events and their feelings toward them, in addition to other information regarding the context and component events of the occurrences. The results show that there are cultural variations in the development of evaluation in narration between the two groups. The result indicates a significant age effect in terms of the percentage of evaluation per narrative comment and the average number of evaluation clauses in Mandarin-speaking children. Secondly, while about fifty percent of narrative comments produced by American children were evaluative at all ages, only thirteen to twenty-five percent of narrative comments were evaluative in the youngest and the oldest group of Taiwanese children respectively. Thirdly, compared with Euro-American children, Mandarin-speaking children were less inclined to tell what the events meant to them, but more inclined to tell collections of experiences instead of single experiences. The difference has cultural implications in regard to the onset and development of autobiographical memory, in which evaluation, which is composed of different subcomponents, might be a key index.

In the third chapter, "Chinese and English referential skill in Taiwanese children's spoken narratives," Sung and Chang examine and compare Taiwanese EFL sixth-graders' referential strategies, including introduction, maintenance and switching, in storybook narration of a wordless storybook, *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer 1969) in Chinese and English respectively. The results indicate that the EFL children have difficulty in making appropriate referential choices in L2, particularly in the context of L2 referent introduction, in which the obligatory indefinite article was often omitted. This error was partly attributed to L1 transfer because the bare nominal is acceptable in Chinese in the context of referent introduction, whereas the determiner *a/an* is obligatory with a singular count noun in English. The elicitation of narration in children's L1 and L2 provides a unique opportunity to look into the use of referential skills between children's L1 and L2, and the potential transfer phenomenon that might operate in the L2 learners' system. The findings have valuable pedagogical implications for EFL literacy instruction in Taiwan.

In Chapter Four, "Global and local connections in Mandarin-speaking children's narratives: A developmental study based on the frog story," Sah conducted a

cross-sectional study to track developmental progression in relating narrative events by using connectives at both the local and global levels by Mandarin-speaking children. The wordless picture book, *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer 1969), was used to elicit narrative data. The results indicate that the 5-year-olds lacked the skill in encoding plot and planning components by using connectives at both the local and global levels, whereas the 9-year-olds improved their global skills, but were still poor at integrating event components and in chaining a sequence of events at the local level. The adults were able to relate events at both levels, and to elaborate more to achieve thematic coherence. The improvement in encoding global connections by the older children might be related to the development of perceptual, conceptual and on-line linguistic processing, and be universal in children with different language backgrounds, as the author suggested. As children develop their cognitive ability, they become more able to perceive narrative structure as globally coherent instead of as a sequence of unrelated discrete events. Hence, the load of on-line linguistic processing becomes less heavy, and this might contribute to their better performance in narration.

In Chapter Five, “Socioeconomic differences in Taiwanese children’s personal narratives: Conjunctions, internal state terms, and narrative structures,” Lai compares 5-year-old middle-class children to those from two working-class groups: typical working-class Taiwanese and working-class children whose mothers were foreign brides from Southeast Asia (the cross-border marriage group). A socioeconomic effect on children’s narration ability was found, suggesting that middle-class children have better vocabulary, use of temporal connections, and narrative structure with a logical or chronological sequence than working-class children. There were, according to the author of the chapter, some unconventional combinations of words for connective functions that were exclusively used by the cross-border marriage group, perhaps due to the influence of maternal speech. The findings of this study have valuable implications for literacy skill instruction, particularly for children from a working-class background.

Chapter Six by Zhang, “A study of narrative development of young Chinese children with specific language impairments aged four to six years,” traces the narrative developmental patterns of Chinese children with specific language impairments (SLI) in comparison with their typically developing (TD) peers in the dimension of structure, evaluation, and temporality. Personal narratives were used in the study for analysis without providing a prior structure, such as from a wordless picture book. As Zhang reports, the children with SLI exhibited a significantly lower level of narration in terms of length, components, and appropriate use of codas, and evaluations to express internal emotional states. Although children made progress in narrative skills in terms of length, components, and codas of narration between four

and six years, the ability to make evaluations developed more slowly, and constituted the primary area of difficulty. Given the heterogeneity of SLI symptoms, narrative deficits of different children might be manifested in different aspects of narrative types, and this needs to be further investigated to capture its complexities.

Chapter Seven by Hsu, Cheung, Wang, and Chou is entitled “Narratives of Mandarin-speaking patients with schizophrenia,” which compares the narratives of Mandarin-speaking adults with schizophrenia with peers without schizophrenia in terms of eight dimensions: topic maintenance, event sequencing, reasonableness, background information, evaluation, referential skill, conjunctive cohesion, and overall narrative pattern. As Hsu *et al.* note, individuals with schizophrenia produce significantly shorter narratives, with better performance in event sequencing and referential skill, but poorer ability in the other six dimensions. When telling stories from picture books, they used significantly fewer connectives and mental verbs, and had difficulty assessing the needs of the listeners. The results reveal some compromised abilities of narration in individuals with schizophrenia. I believe that the findings reported in Chapters Five through Seven have valuable clinical implications to further investigate the effect of potential treatment on the improvement of narrative formation in patients.

2. Further comments

Narration is a complex process, which involves not only the ability to sequence event components of past experiences or stories into a coherent text but also the ability to make clear references via appropriate linguistic devices. The two aspects are well presented in this book; nevertheless, the variables of interactional patterns between children and listeners, social functions, mutual knowledge, linguistic encoding of accessible elements, and the role of prosody that also come into play to influence narration were not adequately addressed, and could be explored more carefully.

First, the way that children develop narrative ability is conditioned by the factor of parent-child interactional patterns during conversation and the social function of children’s narration. Since narrative is a relational activity, parents’ utterances of different kinds would elicit different responses from children, and affect their development of narration. Hence, how children respond to parents’ talk of different kinds (e.g., topic extension, topic switch, elaboration, correction, repetition, questioning, and emphasis) in different Mandarin-speaking communities could help shape children’s narrative process. In the study by Koh and Wang, the focus of their analysis was on parents’ utterances and the way how they contributed to their

children's narrative self-making. However, since the interactional patterns between parents and children exert greater influence on children's narrative self-making process, more elaborate qualitative data of culture-specific interactional patterns between children and parents would help account for cross-cultural variations, particularly in the way that children develop narrative structure as a response to others (McCabe & Peterson 1991; Luo, Snow, & Chang 2012). Besides, narratives are also often analyzed as a particularly significant genre for representing the identity of culture and the inner self to fulfill various social purposes (Bamberg 2006; McAdams 2013). Examination of how children responded to their parents' talk for specific functions in different social situations would help unravel the role of social functions in children's meaning-making strategies cross cultures or across socioeconomic backgrounds of different types.

Mutual knowledge has long been considered a variable that affects the encoding of the information status of referents mentioned in narration, and needs to be taken into account. In narration, the choice of appropriate devices for referent introduction and tracking constitutes another essential narrative ability, one which requires the speaker's consideration and assessment of the listener's current knowledge to facilitate the imparting of information. In studies on narratives, data is elicited with or without a prior structure such as wordless books. It has been noted that the encoding of the information status of referents may be constrained by the factor of mutual knowledge (Prince 1981; Clark & Marshall 1981), which affects selection of the linguistic form.

According to the Prague school linguistics, first mention is often indicated as new via use of indefinite articles in English and the equivalents in different languages, while subsequent mention is often encoded as given. However, based on a model that goes beyond the dichotomy of given/new structure, when interlocutors share a textual or situation/physical context, such as a shared storybook reading, first mention is indicated neither as given nor new, but as accessible (Baumann & Grice 2006), for which specific encoding devices are used to represent different degrees of givenness. When both the speaker and listener share mutual knowledge, use of linguistic expressions might be different from when the listener is blind to the content of a narrated book or experience. Hence, mutual knowledge in the encoding of accessible referents needs to be considered in the study of narration across ages and languages.

In addition, for subsequent mention, the number of intervening clauses after the first mention may also affect the status of the mentioned events or references, depending on how easily the listeners can be assumed to have access to the entity from their memory representation structure. Determination of appropriateness in the use of linguistic devices and narration structure are far more complex than as were

originally expected. Narration is a decision-making activity in which the listener's state of understanding is constantly assessed by the speaker, who then decides what to be included, and what form to select in order to adhere to Grice's maxims of cooperative principles (Mey 2001). The extent to which the listener is assumed to be cognizant or familiar with the story or personal experience affects the content of narrated events and the choice of linguistic devices for referent encoding. In the study by Sung and Chang, children's production of narration was elicited by using a wordless story book. Since the interlocutors shared the storybook to be narrated, to what extent mutual knowledge might be a confounding factor affecting the encoding of referents by children was not clear. Also, in the study by Lai, by using the interview protocol, children from the three social classes were asked to tell their past experiences to the researcher, who had spent several days in the children's schools before the research. However, the extent to which the researcher was assumed by children to be familiar with or cognizant of their personal experiences was not clear. This might be a factor contributing to the variations in children's production of narrated events.

In many languages, in addition to syntactic and morphological means, prosodic patterns also play an essential role in referring expression (Baumann & Grice 2006), though it is not a universal feature, and does not appear in Basque and some tonal African languages (Erteschik-Shir 2007). Besides, the realization of prosody and its referring function also exhibits variations across languages (Lambrecht 1994; Gussenhoven 2004), and merits further investigation. For example, it has been noted that information marking via prosody may be manifested in an accented word, and the type of accent it receives (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990). Halliday (2005) proposes that in English, contour type and the accompanying local pitch range of mid-low to low is used to signal givenness, mid-to-low pitch is used to signal newness, and high to low pitch is used to signal contrastive newness. Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg (1990) note that in American English, increasing degrees of givenness are conveyed by different pitch accent types: H* (representing a high tone aligned with a stressed syllable) for newness, L+H* for addition of a new value, !H*, H+!H* for accessibility, L*+H for modification of assumed knowledge, and L* or no accent for given. In other words, different patterns of intonation are used to indicate information status.

In a similar vein, in Mandarin Chinese, the prosodic prominence of the focal accent can also be used to mark newness/focus, which carries the heaviest stress (Shen, 1990; Xu, 2004). According to Liu and Xu (2005), focus in both Mandarin Chinese and English can be realized through a tri-zone pitch range control: expanding the pitch range of the focused component, suppressing (compressing and lowering) the

post-focus components and leaving the pitch range of the pre-focus elements neutral (largely unaffected) (Wang & Xu 2006). However, Chinese is a tonal language, which relies on lexical tone, length, and intensity, instead of accent and boundary tones, to realize focused constituents (Shen, 1990). Mandarin Chinese and English, moreover, exhibit cross-linguistic differences in the function of focal accent (Chen, Chen, & He 2012). In English, while focal accent is often used to indicate newness for referent introduction, it can indicate both given and highlighted new information in normal SVO-sentences, and topic-comment constructions in Mandarin Chinese, regardless of the position, in which the referent occurs (Xu 2004). Hence, without considering the role and function of prosodic patterns for referring expressions in narration, the interpretation based on the use of syntactic or morphological devices would be obscure.

In addition, syntactic and morphological means may be associated, or interact with prosodic cues (Weber, Grice, & Crocker 2006). It has been noted that prosody may interact with a referential nominal to indicate the different status of referents. The interaction between syntactic expressions and intonation can give rise to a nondichotomous scale of given/new of referents (Dahl 1976; Allerton 1978; Gundel, Hedberg & Zacharski 1993). Take the following Chinese sentences for example, where uppercase indicates emphatic stress:

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----|
| (1) | you-ge | LAOREN | bang-le | wo. |
| | have-CLASSIFIER | old.man | help-ASPECT | me |
| | ‘An old man helped me.’ | | | |
| (2) | nei-ge | LAOREN | bang-le | wo. |
| | that-CLASSIFIER | old.man | help-ASPECT | me |
| | ‘That old man helped me.’ | | | |
| (3) | nei-ge | laoren | bang-le | wo. |
| | that-CLASSIFIER | old.man | help-ASPECT | me |
| | ‘The old man helped me.’ | | | |
| (4) | ta | bang-le | wo. | |
| | He | help-ASPECT | me | |
| | ‘He helped me.’ | | | |

In (1), the generic indefinite noun *LAOREN* ‘old man’ clearly represents a new idea.

But, in (2) and (3), the definite NPs *neige laoren* ‘that old man’ differs in degree of givenness/newness. When the noun phrase in (2) is pronounced with a separate falling group, i.e. stress, it may indicate that the noun is to be recalled from the relatively distant past of the text or recesses of the mind as off-stage by Dahl (1976) and semi-new by Allerton (1978). In other words, the addressee is expected to remember that there was an old man but perhaps not to have known without reflecting. On the other hand, the noun phrase in (3) has a rising intonation, indicating that the addressee is expected to recall without effort the old man, because it has been stated or made obvious in the more recent past as on-stage by Dahl (1976) and as semi-given by Allerton (1978). In (4), the noun phrase is reduced to a proform *ta* ‘he’, which is most likely to be given. In other words, while an indefinite nominal with a numeral classifier in Mandarin is used for referent introduction, unstressed distal demonstratives can function as a definite article (Li & Thompson 1981; Tsao 1990). Accompanied by the following stressed or unstressed nominal, it can be used to indicate the given referent as the entity to be recalled from the relatively distant past or the given referent as the entity to be recalled without effort from the relatively recent past (Li & Thompson 1981). Although the acquisition of tone is accomplished within a relatively short period of time by Mandarin-speaking children (Li & Thompson 1977), the use of stress and intonation for reference is not fully mastered till very late (Chen 1998). In the book reviewed, examination and interpretation of referential strategies used by children or adults were solely based on vocabulary, morphology and sentence structure in most works, without taking into account use of prosody, which is sometimes used to disambiguate syntactic structures (Weber et al. 2006) to express specific pragmatic intention. In view of this, in future studies, examination of referential forms in narration could be expanded by incorporating the accompanying prosodic patterns to help reveal another valuable facet of narrative features as children develop strategies in narration.

In L2, the developmental patterns in narrative structure and referential strategies might be further affected by cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variations in language and culture, leading to transfer and interlanguage variations. In literature, different types of transfer patterns have been identified, such as forward (from L1 to L2), backward (from L2 to L1), deviation (from monolinguals) differentiation (separate strategies in L1 vs. L2), amalgamation (merging L1 and L2 strategies), etc., which are potential sources contributing to inter-language variations due to bi-directional cross-linguistic influences (Stavans 2003). In the study by Sung and Chang as reported in this book, it was found that some of Taiwanese EFL children’s errors in English referential forms were attributed to L1 interference. To my knowledge, the study constitutes one of the few representative studies of Taiwanese EFL children’s

L1 and L2 referential strategies in oral narrative performance. However, although their bilingual narrative data provided an intriguing opportunity to study the complexity of Taiwanese EFL children's L1 and L2 referential use, their performance was not further compared with native adult Chinese and English monolingual controls'. It is suggested that in addition to the comparison of EFL children's performance in L1 vs. L2, further comparison between L2 children's performance with native adult English and Chinese monolingual controls', together with supporting statistic evidence, could be made to further identify other types of transfer patterns that might operate in children's narrative systems in L1 and L2 as sources of interlanguage variations (Pavlenko & Jarvis 2002).

Despite the above-mentioned aspects, this book encompasses a wide range of significant issues regarding Chinese language narration, including cross-cultural variations, Mandarin-speaking children's narrative development in L1 and L2, and individual variations in narrative abilities among Mandarin Chinese speakers from different socioeconomic classes, and with specific language impairments, or schizophrenia. This valuable book can be highly recommended to any parent who wants information about children's narrative abilities, and to any researcher who is interested in intricate linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and emotional facets of Chinese language narration across age and social groups, together with individual differences, as well as cross-cultural variations.

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