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978-0-521-88375-7 - Spanish-Language Narration and Literacy: Culture, Cognition, and Emotion

Edited by Allyssa McCabe, Alison L. Bailey and Gigliana Melzi

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Introduction

ALISON L. BAILEY, ALLYSSA McCABE, AND GIGLIANA MELZI

A first task is to define the term used to describe the individuals we are talking about in this book. The primary term we have chosen is *Latino*; as the broadest and most inclusive term (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002), it reflects the complex issues involved in the identities of Spanish-speaking people – issues such as citizenship, ethnicity, race, native language(s), politics, gender, social class, and generation. The term *Latino* has all too often been used in American research to refer exclusively to individuals immigrating to the United States from a country in the Spanish-speaking regions of the Americas and the Caribbean. Instead, in this book we are expanding the use of the term to also include individuals who are still living in their country of origin across Spanish-speaking Latin America. In this way, we align ourselves with the use of the term *Latino* in Latin America itself (i.e., as an abbreviation of *Latino Americano*). In choosing the primary term *Latino*, we in no way mean to minimize the ethnic, political, social preference, and ideological orientations of individual authors and/or Spanish-speaking communities across the United States who may call themselves Chicano, Hispanic, Mexicano/Mejicano, and so forth. For an insightful personal discussion of these nomenclature issues, see Shorris (1992).

The common thread of the contributions to this volume is that they portray the development of narrative in Spanish either in monolingual or bilingual settings. All participants have a rich and complex background involving a mix of cultures, a strong sense of the importance of family, and numerous other cultural values that are identified in this introduction and concluding chapters. All chapters also involve children who are developing typically. Our decision to focus on these children stems from a real need to provide detailed information about typical narrative development in Spanish-speaking children to teachers, researchers, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals working with children. There is far too little information about narrative development in Latino children despite its identification as a critical precursor to literacy development in English-speaking children (e.g., Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001) and, therefore, a cornerstone

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of academic success. As we mentioned earlier, without such knowledge, Latino children are at risk of having their cultural differences from European American culture mistaken for deficits and their deficits not properly identified. Moreover, practitioners need to work with the cultural grain of students who genuinely lag behind their peers in order to optimize chances for successful treatment. This volume makes explicit which aspects of narration are valued in the broad Latino community.

In the context of the United States, some argue that there is an overrepresentation of Spanish-speaking children enrolled in special education programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Much of the research conducted on Spanish-speaking children has looked at those who are identified using labels such as Specific Language Impaired or Delayed. This volume is an explicit effort to redress that tendency.

That said, Spanish-speaking children are not a monolithic group by any means. Lipski (1994) has a detailed discussion of linguistic variation in *The World's Spanishes*. Thus, our book includes diverse populations, including (1) U.S. Americans whose families come from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador; and (2) Latin Americans in Peru, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Venezuela. We also have some participants from mixed backgrounds. This diversity is representative of Latino communities around the world. We include a range of Spanish varieties spoken as a first language, along with diverse bilingual and trilingual communities, whose linguistic repertoires might include Spanish, English and indigenous languages such as Quechua (as used in Peru) or Quichua (as used in Ecuador).

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PART ONE

PARENT–CHILD NARRATIVES

GIGLIANA MELZI

Children develop narrative abilities through the interactions they have with others on a daily basis. The conversations shared between caregivers and children during these interactions serve as a primary sociolinguistic context in which children gain mastery of the skills necessary to produce and share a coherent story in later years. The language used during these conversations both reflects cultural norms and serves to socialize children into culture-specific practices (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Interest in family narrative practices across cultures has increased in the last few decades and studies from various disciplines have contributed to our understanding of the multiple ways in which children across the world develop narrative skills (e.g., Fivush & Haden, 2003; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Despite this interest, however, few studies have investigated Latino families' narrative interactions (e.g., Eisenberg, 1985; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Torres, 1997) and, to our knowledge, even fewer have gone beyond U.S. borders. The first five chapters of this volume address these gaps by examining the multiple ways in which Latin American and U.S. Latino parents contribute to their children's development.

In chapter 2, Caspe and Melzi examine how mothers from three different countries – Peru, Puerto Rico, and the United States– share a wordless book and support their 3-year-olds' participation in the creation of the story. Like personal narrative conversations, book-sharing interactions constitute an everyday context in which mothers and children share stories together. However, book-sharing interactions have received relatively less attention from investigators interested in children's development of narrative skills. Caspe and Melzi's results show that mothers from each cultural group support their children's interactions in distinct ways. Not only were there the expected cultural differences in the narrative discourse used by the U.S. American and Latin American dyads, but there were also differences between the two Spanish-speaking groups. Their findings underscore the heterogeneity of Spanish-speaking Latin American populations.

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Narrative is a genre of oral discourse and thus has its origins in the earliest social exchanges between the child and important others. In chapter 3, Stansbery examines these origins by investigating cultural differences in the everyday routines between Costa Rican and U.S. American mothers and their 6-month-old infants. Stansbery's microanalysis of both the verbal and nonverbal content of routine interactions, such as bathing and feeding, shows cultural differences in early sociocommunicative patterns, setting the stage for later culture-specific discourse and narrative practices.

Most of the research on the social origins of children's narrative skills has focused on mother–child conversations. The lack of research with other family members, such as fathers, gives us an incomplete picture of family narrative practices. The few studies with U.S. European American fathers' discourse have shown differences in the ways mothers and fathers engage their children as well as in the topics they choose to highlight during narrative conversations (Buckner & Fivush, 2000; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996). In chapter 4, Cristofaro and Tamis-LeMonda address the neglected contribution of fathers in children's narrative development. Their results show both similarities and differences in the topics mothers and fathers choose to discuss with their preschool children and draw our attention to the role of narratives in children's cultural socialization.

The seminal work of Labov and Waletzky (1967) on conversational narratives has served as a springboard for contemporary studies on children's narratives. In their work, they identified two major functions in the stories we create and share with others: referential and evaluative. The final two chapters in this part address the evaluative function of the narratives shared by mothers and children from two South American communities. The evaluative function of narratives – that which transmits subjective interpretation of the experienced event – plays a critical role in various socioemotional and cognitive aspects of children's development (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). In chapter 5, Fernández and Melzi examine gender and age variations in the use of one type of evaluation – internal-state language – across two narrative contexts. In chapter 6, King and Gallagher examine the use of evaluative morphology and emotion words in the narratives shared by Andean Ecuadorian mothers and their preschool-aged children. Taken together, these two studies illustrate how culture-specific expectations about gender are embedded and transmitted in the narratives shared by parents and children.

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Cultural Variations in Mother–Child Narrative Discourse Style

MARGARET CASPE AND GIGLIANA MELZI

Key Words: mother-child narratives, Latino children, Spanish, mother-child book sharing, cultural variations

ABSTRACT

Children develop narrative ability in the context of the conversations they have with significant others, mainly family members. Within these conversations, children acquire language and literacy and become socialized to the discourse patterns, beliefs, and values of the community in which they live. Recent research has begun to highlight that Latino mothers scaffold their children's narratives differently than might mothers from other cultures. The goal of the current study was to explore how Peruvian, European American, and Puerto Rican mothers of comparable socioeconomic backgrounds, living in their country of origin, scaffolded their children's narratives in a semistructured book-sharing paradigm. Specifically, the study addressed two main questions: (1) Do variations exist in the styles that Puerto Rican, European American, and Peruvian mothers use to engage their children while sharing a wordless children's picture book? (2) Are there cultural preferences in these styles?

As part of a larger study, 45 mothers were visited in their home and asked to share a wordless children's picture book with their children. Book-sharing interactions were audiotaped, transcribed, and verified using a standardized format and coded at the utterance level. Results of a cluster analysis revealed two book-sharing styles that hinged on the degree to which mothers provided or requested narrative information from their children. Storytellers provided rich narrative information to their children and took control of the narrative, whereas storybuilders coconstructed the story with their children, creating a story together. The book-sharing style that mothers adopted was associated with culture. Peruvian mothers were more likely to adopt a storytelling style, whereas European American and, to a lesser extent, Puerto Rican mothers were more likely to adopt the storybuilding style. Findings demonstrate the heterogeneity

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and similarities among different Latino groups and are discussed in relation to implications for educational programs for families and their young children.

INTRODUCTION

Mother:	<i>Había una vez un niño que cuidaba mucho a su ranita, ¿verdad?</i>	Once upon a time, there was a boy that took care of his frog, right?
Child:	<i>Sí.</i>	Yes.
Mother:	<i>Y el perrito estaba jugando con la ranita. Está pensativo. Parece que le dejaron abierta la jarra y la ranita se salió. Y el nene estaba durmiendo. ¿Con quién está durmiendo el nene aquí?</i>	And the dog was playing with the frog. He looks thoughtful. It seems like they left the jar open and the frog left. And the boy is sleeping. Who is the little boy sleeping with here?
Child:	<i>Con el perrito.</i>	With the dog.
Mother:	<i>Y ¿qué pasó?</i>	And what happened?
Child:	<i>Se cayó.</i>	He fell.
Mother:	<i>No, mira lo que pasó.</i>	No, look what happened.
Child:	<i>Se rompió.</i>	It broke.
Mother:	<i>¿A la ranita qué le paso? Se fue, ¿verdad?</i>	And to the frog, what happened? He left, right?
Child:	<i>Y estaba ahí.</i>	And he's there.
Mother:	<i>Sí, pero la ranita se escapó. El nene comienza a buscar a la ranita.</i>	Yes, but the frog escaped. The boy then begins to look for his frog.

In the previous excerpt, Rosalie, a 3-year-old Puerto Rican girl, and her mother begin to tell the adventures of a young boy and his dog as they search for the boy's mischievous frog, who escaped from a jar. In conversational contexts such as this one, young children around the world begin to develop the ability to construct and share stories. Narrative is a language-based tool that helps humans organize thoughts and past events in memory, ultimately aiding individuals in the understanding and interpretation of their experiences and surrounding world. Early narrative is important because it is linked to the knowledge and skills young children need to transition into conventional readers (Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf, 2004; Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995). Narrative is also important for development in other cognitive and socioemotional areas, such as abstract thinking and self-concept (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Fivush & Nelson, 2006; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Yet there is great individual and cultural variation in the manner and style in which narrative contexts are structured and the discourse adult conversational partners use to scaffold children's storytelling abilities. Adult scaffolding styles, in turn, influence greatly children's expectations of a meaningful story and the ways in which they organize and

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share their narratives. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Spanish- and English-speaking monolingual mothers living in three different countries – Peru, Puerto Rico, and the United States – guided their children’s narratives as they shared a wordless children’s picture book. In particular, we consider the similarities and differences in the ways that two groups of Latino mothers scaffold their preschoolers’ narrative skills.

Sociocultural View of Narrative Development

Children’s narrative competence emerges in the context of the conversations and stories children have with significant others in their life, primarily those in their family. Based on a Vygotskian (1978) developmental perspective, parents’ linguistic contributions scaffold their children’s participation in conversations, allowing children to take part in interactions that are richer and more complex than those children could handle alone (Fivush, 1991; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). Over time, children begin to internalize these patterns of narrative discourse and construct their own stories based on the styles utilized by their parents and their community.

Research has examined the ways that parents, mainly mothers, scaffold children’s narratives in a variety of conversational contexts – most commonly in personal narrative conversations and book-reading exchanges. Results from studies investigating middle-class European American mothers’ personal narrative conversational styles have shown individual differences in the ways that mothers support children’s narrative construction. For example, some mothers adopt an elaborative style, engaging in long, richly embellished conversations even when their children do not provide much in the way of spontaneous recall (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1994; Reese et al., 1993). They ask many questions and offer many details about the events experienced, continually adding new information to cue memory or sequence events for the novice narrator (Bailey, Moughamian, McCabe, & Reynolds, 2005). Other mothers adopt a repetitive (or low elaborative) style, engaging in short conversations during which they provide little descriptive information. In contrast to the highly elaborative mothers, these mothers use a redundant, test-like mode of questioning and probe children for specific pieces of information in the absence of many cues (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988; Haden, 1998; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Peterson & McCabe, 1994; Reese et al., 1993). These differences in parental style have been shown to influence both the quantity and quality of narratives produced by preschool children. Researchers have found, for instance, that a more elaborative style is related to children’s production of longer narratives and better memory about the past (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). Moreover, mother–child conversations that are characterized by demanding, decontextualized utterances also enhance children’s literacy skills, especially print concepts, vocabulary, and story comprehension (Reese, 1995).

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Similarly, researchers have observed individual variations in maternal narrative styles during other narrative contexts – namely, mother–child picture-book reading interactions. Like personal narrative conversations, book-reading interactions provide an opportunity for researchers to understand how mothers and children share stories together. However, unlike personal narratives, book-reading interactions are textual or pictorial. Thus, they are more structured and governed by a predetermined plot that allows researchers to investigate the extent to which mothers adhere to and orate the story at hand or deviate from the prescribed plot through extratextual and nonnarrative comments. For example, Haden, Reese, and Fivush (1996) examined a sample of European American middle-class mothers reading books with their young children and found that maternal book-reading styles fell into one of three types: describers (who describe and elaborate), collaborators (who invite their children’s participation), and comprehenders (who ask children for predictions and inferences). These maternal styles of reading were linked to children’s later literacy. Controlling for children’s initial language skills, children of mothers using a comprehender style had higher vocabulary and story comprehension skills 2½ years later compared with children of mothers using a describer style, whereas children of collaborators had stronger decoding skills in comparison to describers (Haden et al., 1996).

Taken together, research on maternal scaffolding across different contexts has helped build a case that the use of positive feedback, the asking of many questions and fewer directives, and an emphasis on discussion and elaboration of concepts are beneficial for children’s development (Eisenberg, 2002; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Sénéchal, 1997; Whitehurst et al., 1988). This question-and-answer style is usually considered important because it prepares children for the cognitive style emphasized in American schooling (Heath, 1983). However, these characteristics of effective maternal instruction are most commonly observed in middle-class European American families and have been derived from studies with families of this background. Cultural variations must be considered.

Cultural Variations in Maternal Narrative Scaffolding

Interest in family narrative practices has increased in recent decades and across various disciplines, contributing to our understanding of the multiple ways in which children across cultures are socialized to construct and share stories (Fivush et al., 2006; Miller, Cho, & Bracey, 2005; Ochs & Capps, 2001). Preferred communicative patterns of a particular culture or group reflect important differences in beliefs, values, norms, and practices. Therefore, as children become communicatively competent, they are learning not only the structure of their language but also a set of conventions for language interaction embedded in and reflective of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of their community (Garret & Baquedano-López, 2002; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a). Subsequently, children

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develop a general communicative competence that is appropriate to their community. They can then use these competencies like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge.

The cultural differences in communicative patterns are especially salient in situations that include children. These interactions are influenced not only by general norms and values upheld in the larger community but also by the specific beliefs and practices related to children and their development (Garret & Baquedano-López, 2002; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b). For instance, the status and role of children in particular groups vary (e.g., lower status versus higher status), leading to different ways of socializing children and engaging with them in conversations (e.g., situation-centered versus child-centered). As a specific example, European American families often prefer to adopt a child-centered upbringing style, considering infants from (or even before) birth to be equal conversational partners. Therefore, in linguistic interactions, parents use self-modifying strategies, such as employing simplified language and fine-tuning their speech to children's linguistic abilities. By contrast, the Mayans of Mexico (Brown, 2001) prefer to adopt a situation-centered upbringing style. Mayan children are either not directly addressed by adults or, when engaged in conversation, are expected to adjust to the demands of the situation. Cultural groups can also differ in specific literacy practices and language routines used with and around children. For example, telling stories through picture books with young children is considered an appropriate literacy activity for European American mothers but is considered more of a "school-like" activity for Mexican American immigrant mothers (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). Therefore, daily parent-child book-sharing among certain Latino subcultures might not be a practice that is customary or encouraged.

Much of the research exploring cultural variations in maternal narrative scaffolding style has focused on comparisons between East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) cultural groups and English-speaking Western societies and primarily in personal narrative conversational contexts. Findings from these studies show that East Asian mothers discourage children from producing elaborated and lengthy narratives by limiting the extent to which children are allowed to introduce their own topics. Parents often interrupt children as a way to keep their contributions succinct (Minami & McCabe, 1991, 1995; Mullen & Yi, 1995) or ask repetitive or test-like questions of their children, providing them with little opportunity for elaboration (Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000). East Asian mother-child conversations, as well, tend to be more hierarchical, with the mother taking a more active role in narrating, whereas European American dyads are more likely to coconstruct, with mother and child being equal participants in the conversation (Wang et al., 2000).

The few studies examining a different conversational context (i.e., book-reading) have also noted cultural differences in the types of supports provided to children that stem from variations in cultural ideologies. Kato-Otani (2004),