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Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Issues in Applied Linguistics, 7(2)

ISSN

1050-4273

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Publication Date

1996-12-30

DOI

10.5070/L472005241

Peer reviewed

Pragmatic Issues Related to Reading Comprehension Questions: A Case Study From a Latino Bilingual Classroom

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This paper addresses some of the challenges which bilingual children transitioning to literacy in English may face when asked to answer reading comprehension questions which involve the interpretation and synthesis of information about story characters' thoughts or feelings. Understanding of a character's perspective may depend on inference, rather than lexical content presented in a text. Alternatively, prompt-questions may be framed such that lexical story content is required in the answer. Such questions involve cognitive/metapragmatic tasks related to linguistic competence in written English, as well as an understanding of the different types of knowledge associated with academic writing.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores some of the challenges which bilingual (Latino) children, when transitioning to literacy in English, may face when asked to answer certain types of reading comprehension questions. The types of questions at issue here are those which involve the pragmatic task of objectifying understanding of a story character's thoughts, feelings, or perspective on events within a story world. For example, children are often faced with questions designed to test story comprehension, such as the following: "How do you know (a character) felt (a certain emotion)?" or "Why do you think (a character) wanted or thought ... ?" These types of questions present children with several linguistic and pragmatic challenges related to literacy. For example, such questions may be asking them to draw *inferences* about the epistemic or affective state of a story character, based on clues which are very different from those of spoken language. Alternatively, reading comprehension questions may ask the reader to present evidence drawn from the written text to justify their *own* epistemic state, or to explain "how they know what they know" about a character's thoughts or feelings. These questions not only require children to distinguish their own perspective from that of story characters, but even more basically, to understand that this type of question is asking them for a different type of knowledge than questions which ask them to infer. Finally, reading comprehension questions may ask for the reader's *opinion*, which again involves a different type of knowledge from inference or factual recall. Such questions also require the reader to distinguish their own opinion from that of story characters, which, as the following discussion aims to illustrate, is not always easy for students transitioning into literacy in a second language.

DATA

Both videotape and written data were collected for this study. The data were collected in one fourth grade bilingual classroom in the Santa Barbara area. Ten children in this classroom were monitored over the course of one school year as they worked on a cooperative reading and writing task (CIRC)¹. Written data, i.e., the children's answers to their reading questions, were collected in both Spanish and English, but videotape was only collected after the children transitioned to working in English in the middle of the year.

Videotaped data consists of nine hours of small-group interaction. The videotapes represent six different days of classroom interaction, each session lasting approximately an hour and a half. During this time period, the children read a passage from a story in a basal reader, then were given reading comprehension questions² and asked to work on them together as a group. Each group consisted of four to six children. The teacher first reviewed the questions with the class as a whole, then gave the children forty-five minutes to an hour to write their answers. During the writing, the teacher circulated as a facilitator, answering questions when called upon.

METHODOLOGY

The videotapes were reviewed with an interest in locating instances of children's discussion of the task, which were then transcribed, along with the teacher's whole class review of the questions. Analysis of the resulting transcripts was a qualitative one, bringing to bear questions like the following: What questions do the children raise themselves? Do the children have questions about the prompt questions? Do the children's understandings of the prompt questions reflect the teacher's understanding of these same questions? How do the children resolve their questions? What grammatical forms, lexical items, or other linguistic aspects related to perspective or point of view, present difficulties for (or become a subject for discussion among) the children? What types of comprehension questions were the children more likely to ask for help with?

The children's written answers were examined to see how they resolved the questions reflected in the transcripts, as well as to see to what extent different students' answers varied, and whether they used inferencing as a question-answering strategy or quoted text content.

DISCUSSION

Inferencing

In contrast to spoken language, written text contains far fewer contextualization cues for readers as an audience to draw inferences from (cf. Gumperz, 1982). For example, in a spoken context, listeners have access to

paralinguistic clues such as voice quality, intonation, volume, etc., as well as non-verbal signals such as gestures and facial expression. But in written text, such clues are not always present. As Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz have stated:

The move into literacy requires children to make some basic adjustments to the way they socially attribute meaning to the events and processes of the everyday world in order to be able to loosen their dependence upon contextually specific information and to adopt a decontextualized perspective ... The move into literacy requires children linguistically to change their process of interpretation. (1981, p.99)

Clues in written text which readers may draw upon in making inferences about story characters' epistemic or affective states include dialogue as well as the actions of characters. Each of these types of "clue" constitute a different kind of evidential pathway (Ochs, 1990) from which readers gain knowledge about characters' epistemic or affective states. Other clues may lie in the reading comprehension questions themselves, which may lead or invite readers to make inferences which they might not otherwise have made.

Inferencing from written text, like conversational inferencing, is largely based on social knowledge, or knowledge which the reader brings with them to the reading context. Thus, inferences which readers draw may be very different from those which the designer of the reading comprehension question had in mind. Fillmore (1983) contrasts this type of inferencing, e.g., "interpretations which result from schematizations brought to the text to situate its events in common experience, but which do not follow necessarily from anything the text has provided ... [which are] shaped by the idiosyncratic experiences and imaginings of individual readers" (p. 11) with inferences which are clearly invited by the text.

Kang (1992) discusses how such "uninvited" inferences may be due to cultural differences which "blind" the reader to meanings the author intended," resulting in "the kinds of interpretations that make teachers sit back and wonder 'How in the world did this reader arrive at this interpretation?'" (p. 96). The following two examples illustrate this type of inferencing, showing how readers' inferences may vary greatly from those of the creators of reading comprehension questions.

Uninvited inferencing

The following reading comprehension questions refer to a story (in Spanish) about a moose who takes a job as a waiter in a restaurant, and manages to elicit compliments for his friend the chef Señor Breton (i.e., that he is "the best cook in the world") from the extremely reticent townspeople, who previously would only say "uh-huh" when asked about the food.

¿ Por qué crees que la gente del pueblo nunca la había dicho al señor Breton que era el mejor cocinero del mundo?

Why do you think the townspeople had never told Mister Breton that he was the best chef in the world?

Most of the children answered that the townspeople “didn’t think it was important” or “didn’t want to say anything,” etc., but one child wrote:

La gente le dijo eso porque le tenía miedo al alce.

The people told him this because they were afraid of the moose.

The above answer might be construed as “incorrect” by some evaluators in that there was no mention in the story of any of the townspeople being afraid of the moose character. But it is not too difficult to see how a child might draw this inference based on their own personal experience, or interpretation of the picture (of a great big moose) accompanying the text. The next example comes from the same story, and illustrates how another type of “uninvited” inference may be a result of readers’ own personal schematizations about characters’ motivations for acting in certain ways. The relevant text is as follows:

— ¿Han quedado satisfechos?— preguntó.

“Have you all been satisfied?” he (the moose) asked.

— Ajá! —dijo la gente del pueblo con las bocas llenas del pan de gengibre.

“Uh-huh!” said the townspeople with their mouths full of gingerbread.

— Perdón —dijo el alce—.

“Pardon?” said the moose.

— ¿Qué dijeron?

“What did you say?”

— Que todo estaba muy rico! —dijeron los del pueblo—. Nunca hemos comido tan bien.

“That everything was very delicious!” said the townspeople. Never have we eaten so well.

— Se lo diré al cocinero— contestó el alce.

“I will tell this to the cook,” answered the moose.

The question asked “Why did the moose say, ‘Pardon, what did you say?’” Four out of seven children inferred that the moose’s question was due to a somewhat mechanical cause, rather than a reason, i.e., that he couldn’t hear what the townspeople said:

El alce dijo “perdón” porque ellos estaban comiendo con la boca llena.

The moose said pardon because they were eating with their mouths full.

Three children attributed the moose’s utterance to a motivated reason, i.e.:

El alce quería que le dijeran “está rica”.
He wanted them to tell him it's delicious.

As Grice (1957) points out, in real interaction, participants must make decisions about whether their co-participants' utterances and actions are intended for a reason, i.e., to invoke some particular understanding from their audience, or are merely the result of a cause which they had no control over. Reading comprehension questions which ask children to infer why a character thought or felt a certain way also ask children to make these same kinds of decisions, only as readers, or “vicarious participants,” rather than actual participants in interaction. However, considering the fact that readers have far fewer contextual clues to base their inferences on (especially in “basal reader” textbooks, which are typically simplified in terms of syntax, plot, character development, etc.) than participants in real life interaction do, it is not surprising that readers' interpretations of a context may vary.

Inference based on dialogue

Inferring character's attitudes from reported speech seems to be one pragmatic task which the children in this study repeatedly had trouble with, as evidenced by the transcripts of their small-group discussions. For example, the following piece of transcript shows a small group working on a question which asks them to infer how a character felt; the question was: “How does Aunt Emma feel when her friends criticize her for having too many cats?” The children must base their inference on dialogue from the text, which stated:

Mr. James looked around. Cats were here, there, everywhere.
 Look at them,” he said. “They are ripping up everything.”
 “I don't care,” said Aunt Emma.
 “Everything is old anyway. I like to see them play. They make me laugh.”
 “You have too many cats,” said Miss Wilson. “People are laughing at you.”
 “Oh, shush,” said Aunt Emma. “I'm an old lady. I don't care what people say.”

The transcript of the children's cooperative group work is as follows:

- C: Bella,
 .. me ayudas a la dos?
 help me with number two?
 B: two, ((TEACHER APPROACHES))
 T: que?
 what?
 C: <X debe ser que me ayude en la dos X>, ((TO TEACHER))
 you have to help me with number two,
 que no entiendo,
 which I don't understand,

no =,
 que le entiendo la pregunta dos,
(it's that) I understand question number two,
 y no sé cómo contestarla.
and I don't know how to answer it.

- T: <READS How does Aunt Emma feel when her friends criticize her for having too many cats READS> ((T READS QUESTION))
 what do you think it means?
- C: He do not .. ^care?
- T: She doesn't care?
 okay,
 .. what's an answer?
- C: a-
- T: Why doesn't she care?
- C: becau=se,
- J: I know!
 [she's old].
- C: [he likes] cat,
 and he's all,
 a^lone,
- T: and ^she's all alone.
 [aunt is-
 ^aunt is a ^she.
 but you have to write that in a complete sentence.]
- X: [<P Aunt Emma feels when her friends .. crits.. her .. having too many cats P>],
- C: pero no-
 but-
 cómo le empiezo maestra?
how do I begin it teacher?
- H: complete sentence,
 you guys,
 in a complete sentence.

In the above example, the children seem to be having trouble deciding which statement made by Aunt Emma in the text is the appropriate one to include in the answer, i.e., "I don't care," "I'm an old lady," or "I like to see them play," etc. Some of the children inferred a causal relation between the first two statements and wrote "Aunt Emma doesn't care because she is an old lady." This answer may seem to fall under the category of "uninvited inferences," but note that it is a complete sentence, and one which is considerably easier for second-language-learners to process than "Aunt Emma doesn't care when her friends criticize her for having too many cats."

Below is another example in which inference depends on an understanding of reported speech. The children ask the teacher for help, and even the teacher eventually decides that the task is too difficult. The text is from a basal reader version of the book *Amelia Bedelia*. Amelia Bedelia is a kooky lady who always

interprets idioms literally, and an appreciation of the humor in the story depends on inferencing to a great degree. Amelia has been hired by the Rogers family as a maid, and while they are out she wreaks havoc in their house. The relevant text is as follows:

“What’s next?” she read, “Pot the window box plants. Put the pots in the parlor.” Amelia Bedelia went outside. She counted the plants. Then she went into the kitchen. “My goodness,” she said. “I need every pot for this.” So she took them all. Amelia Bedelia potted those plants, and she took them inside ... Soon Mr. And Mrs. Rogers came home ... They went into the parlor.
 “All my good pots!” said Mrs. Rogers.
 “And bad ones too,” said Amelia Bedelia.
 Mr. Rogers looked at the wood box. He shook his head, but he didn’t say a word.

The reading comprehension question was: “Does Amelia Bedelia understand that Mrs. Rogers is upset because there are plants in her kitchen pots?” The answer must be inferred from her reply to Mrs. Rogers, i.e., “And bad ones too”; this time, there is no description of her epistemic state in the content of the text. The following transcript of their collaborative interaction reflects the children’s confusion:

- C: number three.
 <R does Amelia Bedelia understand XX- [X- X- R>] —
- A: [
 <R does Amelia Bedelia understand that Mrs. [2 Rogers,
- C: [2 Maestra, ((C RAISES HAND))
 me ayuda en la three 2]?
Teacher, help me with number three?
- A: <X is upset because there are plants X> R>? 2]
 ... (3)
 <R did Amelia Bedelia understand R>,
- X: ... (2) ^doesn’t,
- C: [maestra me ayuda en la three]?
 W: [
 <R does Amelia Bedelia] unde=rstand,
 that,
 Mr. Roger is,
 upset because,
 [there are in her kitch-]—
- C: [cómo le empezamos number three]? ((To T))
how do we begin number three?
- T: <R does Amelia Bedelia [2 ^understa=nd 2] that Mrs. Rogers is
 [3 upset 3] because [4 there are ^plants 4] in her .. pots?
- W: [2 ^no= 2]!

[3 no= 3],

[4 I thi=nk 4],

I think Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand.

T: ... why=.

A: [no ^dice why].

it doesn't say why.

X: [XXX]?

W: ... no dice why.

T: ... okay,

but tell me why.

A: why.

X: no se dice.

it doesn't say.

T: okay remember sh- M—

Mrs. Rogers says <Q those are all my good pots Q>!

and then what does Amelia Bedelia say?

J: ... and- and- ^old ones,

[too].

T: [yeah],

and your bad ones too,

so she doesn't understand,

that she's upset 'cause of her good pots,

she just thinks she's saying,

<Q oh yeah,

those are my good pots Q>,

not like,

<H> <Q LO those are my good ^po=ts LO Q>!

so,

you could say,

um,

I think that Amelia Bedelia does ^not understand,

or,

I ^don't think that Amelia Bedelia understands,

...(1)

A: <X because X>,

X: [understand],

T: [Mrs. Rogers],

you could just end it after Mrs. Rogers,

you don't ^have to gi- give why,

there are so many questions,

you don't have to give me why. ((T LEAVES))

...(4)

In the above example, the teacher relies on voice quality as a cue to index the two possible interpretations of Mrs. Rogers' affective state: one relatively normal and the other marked by low pitch and exclamatory intonation. Voice quality is one contextualization cue (Gumperz 1992) which speakers rely on in spoken inter-

action in order to infer each other's communicative intent. It is a contextualization cue which readers do not have access to in the above example except in the limited form of the exclamation mark at the end of Mrs. Rogers' utterance "all my good pots!" The teacher in this example begins to try to explain that the character Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand the meaning of Mrs. Rogers' excited voice quality, but apparently she decides not to complicate the issue any further by trying to lexicalize this distinction. She decides to simply accept their inference (that Amelia Bedelia doesn't understand) without any further explanation of how they as readers arrived at this knowledge state, apparently since in this case the evidential pathway (through dialogue) is too difficult to explain.

Inference based on characters' actions

Another type of evidential pathway which readers may have to base their inferences about characters' epistemic or affective states on is that of the characters actions, as opposed to dialogue. The following two examples illustrate some of the difficulties which the children in this study had with this type of question.

In the following example, the children first read a story about a boy whose teacher assigned him the task of drawing something which nobody had ever seen before. The relevant text is:

Durante los diez minutos siguientes hizo siete dibujos
During the next ten minutes he drew seven more drawings.

más. No hubo manera de hacer que por lo menos uno pareciera
He didn't have a way of making sure that at least one would

algo jamás visto antes. ... Enojado, Jaime arrugó sus
seem like something never seen before ... Angry, Jaime

dibujos y los hizo una bola. Luego se dirigió a
crumpled his drawings into a ball. Then he headed over to

la Srta. Miranda y le dijo:—Todavía no he terminado los cinco dibujos.
Miss Miranda and said to her: "I still haven't finished the five drawings."

The comprehension question was:

¿Cómo se sintió Jaime cuando terminó los dibujos? ¿Cómo lo sabes?
How did Jaime feel when he finished the drawings? How do you know?

The above is a two-part question. It is asking the reader not only to infer something about a characters' affective state, but to specifically explain the evidential pathway which leads to their own knowledge state (which in this case is based on the character Jaime's action of crumpling his drawings into a ball). Thus, the second part of this question is asking the children to distinguish their own

knowledge state from that of the story character Jaime. Out of five children who answered this question, only one understood what kind of information it was asking for, as she wrote:

Jaime se sintió muy enojado. Yo sé que estaba muy enojado porque hizo las papeles en bala.

Jaime was very angry. I know that he was very angry because he made his papers into a ball.

The other four children, however, do not appear to have understood what kind of information the question was asking them for, as they made inferences about why Jaime was angry, but did not explain what cues in the story (i.e., what actions) led them to their own knowledge states. They wrote the following two answers:

Jaime se sintió enojado porque no sabía qué dibujar.

Jaime felt angry because he didn't know how to draw.

Jaime se sintió enojado porque no quería que la maestra le dijera eso.

Jaime felt angry because he didn't want the teacher to tell him (to do) this.

In the next example, the comprehension question "How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise?" is in reference to a story about a little old lady who hears a noise in her house late at night, and suspecting a burglar, bravely goes downstairs to get one of her cats before calling the police. The teacher goes over the relevant sequence of events in the text with the whole class before assigning them to work collaboratively in small groups:

[TEACHER REVIEWS QUESTION WITH THE CLASS]

- T: okay,
who wants to read number two?
Renata?
- R: <R How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the- R>
- T: how do you know that she's not afraid of the noise?
... you'll have to look in the book.
- A: I know why.
- T: Do you already know?
- X: No-
- T: Remember she opened the door=
she wasn't afraid of the noise,
she opened the door,
- A: the cats [were <X with her X>.
- T: [she walked out],
she went with the cats to find the burglar.
- A: because the cats were with her.
- T: were ^with her,

a=h,
 that's a good idea-
 Amado says maybe because the cats were with her she wasn't afraid.

[SOME MINUTES LATER, THE CHILDREN ARE WORKING ON THIS QUESTION]

- C: la dos.
 number two.
 <R How do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?
 I know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the-..
- B: ay tú qué escribes en la,
ay what did you put for,
- C: burglar is her X,
 it- wha- a burglar=r,
 or- burg-.. burglar,
- B: yo puse,
I put,
 burglar was in the house of Aunt Emma?
- C: <R how do you know Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?
 Aunt Emma,
- B: Aunt Emma,
 ...<1> Aunt Emma .. is not,
 ... afraid,
 ... <3> to,
 the noise,
 because,
- A: <R how do you know that Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise R>?
 Aunt Emma is not afraid of the noise,
 because the cats were with her.
- M: becau=se,
 because her cat was with her.

The answer “Aunt Emma was not afraid because her cats were with her” attributes a perspective to Aunt Emma, but it does not explain how the reader arrived at their own perspective, or what their evidential pathway was, which is what the question “How do you know ...” is really asking for. The because-clause in this example offers a possible cause of Aunt Emma’s state of mind, not of the reader’s. This type of confusion concerning the interlacing of intersubjectivity in reading comprehension questions which ask about characters’ states of mind occurred frequently in the data collected for this study.

Inferencing based on “leading” questions

The above example also illustrates how reading comprehension questions can be “leading,” or may force students to draw inferences which they might not otherwise have drawn. For example, regarding the story about Aunt Emma and the burglar, the previous comprehension question asked “What did Aunt Emma

do when she heard the noise?" One child wrote: "Aunt Emma called the police because she was so scared of that noise." Obviously, this child had inferred from the story, perhaps based on her own schematizations about burglars in the house, that Aunt Emma was (and should have been) afraid. But the very next question asked her: "How do you know that Aunt Emma wasn't afraid of the noise?", and in response, she wrote what all the other children wrote, i.e., that Aunt Emma wasn't afraid. The way that the question was framed presents the information that "Aunt Emma wasn't afraid" as presupposed, thus leading students to accept this inference as fact, with no choice but to find some way of rationalizing it in their answer.

Objectification of knowledge source

The last two examples also illustrate how some reading comprehension questions ask students for a specific type of information in addition to simple inference, i.e. "How do you know...?" These questions specifically ask readers to say something about their own knowledge state regarding story characters or other aspects of the text. Students need to understand the difference between questions which ask for their perspective vs. those which ask them about perspectives of story characters. In addition, such questions ask students to objectify their source of knowledge, by identifying what it was in the text which led them to a particular knowledge state.

Reading comprehension questions which ask readers to present evidence for their *own* knowledge state specifically requires an objectification of knowledge source. As Ochs (1990) has discussed, indication of the source, as well as degree of certainty, of knowledge, plays a major role in the activity of academic writing. As Ochs states, context-specific language socialization occurs through participation in context-specific activities, as "children in different communities come to understand what constitutes knowledge, what a person can know and what a person cannot know, what are the legitimate linguistic paths to knowledge, who can travel those paths and who cannot" (1990:300). In terms of Ochs' observations concerning legitimate paths to knowledge, it would seem to be crucial to students' ability to succeed that they be able to distinguish exactly what type of knowledge reading questions are asking for, and to know when inferencing is an appropriate question-answering strategy as well as when it is not.

Questions asking for opinion

Reading comprehension questions may ask readers for their *opinion*, as when modal verbs such as "is supposed to," "can," "must," and "should" index the existence of (or departure from) a normal expectation (Tannen, 1979). Such questions often ask readers to relate their opinion to such social norms or expectations, requesting yet another type of knowledge. Again, readers need to be able to separate their own opinion or perspective from that of the character involved.

In the following example, once again, this proved a confusing task for some

children. In response to the reading question "Do you think Aunt Emma should have looked for Baby Bear?" (one of her cats, who was downstairs with the burglar), the children's written answers were the following:

- a. I think Aunt Emma shouldn't get Baby Bear because he was with the burglar.
- b. I think Aunt Emma shouldn't look for her cat because Baby Bear was with the burglar.
- c. I think that Aunt Emma will looked for Baby Bear because she miss one cat.
- d. I think that Aunt Emma is going to look for the baby bear because she likes cats.

The first two answers above reflect an understanding of the frame invoked by the modal verb "should," i.e., that the question is asking for the reader's opinion about Aunt Emma's action in light of an expected norm (e.g., that her actions may have been somewhat foolhardy). The last two answers, however, indicate *Aunt Emma's* perspective on her action, rather than that suggested by the prompt (i.e., of a reader whose expectations may have been violated by her actions). They appear to reflect a misunderstanding of the pragmatic frame created by the modal verb *should*, leading to a confusion concerning the type of knowledge which is being asked for.

CONCLUSION

In answering reading comprehension questions about characters' states of mind, children are faced with several linguistic and pragmatic challenges. One is that of learning to separate their own perspective and knowledge state from that of the character. Another is that they must learn to distinguish whose perspective the question is asking for. A third is that of understanding what type of information the question is asking for, i.e., whether the question is asking for a specific piece of text content, or for an inference, or for opinion.

Examination of the children's written answers in this study suggests that they do not always recognize what type of information reading comprehension questions are asking for, nor whose perspective or knowledge state they call for. The children's confusion concerning these points is evident in their written Spanish answers as well as their English ones, which seems to indicate that learning to understand these pragmatic issues regarding written language may be a general developmental challenge for children, rather than simply one related to learning a second or other language. However, the fact that children are dealing with these pragmatic and linguistic challenges in a new language undoubtedly compounds the challenge for them, since the semantic and pragmatic implications of verbs like know, think, feel, etc. vary across languages and cultures (Chafe & Nichols, 1986). Children transitioning to literacy in a new language must learn not only the

basic semantic meanings of verbs such as know, believe, realize, etc., but their *metapragmatic* implications as well. As Silverstein (1993) defines the term, "signs functioning metapragmatically have pragmatic phenomena ... as their semiotic objects" (33). In other words, epistemic verbs such as *know*, *believe*, *realize*, etc. also point to, or index, pragmatic information (above and beyond their semantic content), including how they relate to perspective or evidential pathway in written text (i.e., do they index an omniscient author, etc.). In addition, these verbs work to index degree of certainty, or the speaker's perspective in relation to that of the subject of the sentence (Field, in press).

The data in this study suggest that the children involved are developmentally at a point where all of these pragmatic issues related to written text are within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), as their answers vary in appropriateness, or reflect a less-than-fossilized understanding of what the questions are looking for. An understanding of what aspects of a task children find challenging is extremely useful knowledge, both for teachers and for educators involved in creating classroom literacy materials such as reading comprehension questions. Presenting children with appropriately challenging tasks (i.e., with tasks within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1979; Bruner, 1985)) should be a goal of good educational practice; however, an important part of the learning process includes scaffolding on the part of the teacher, at those points where the learner needs help from an expert. Therefore, one suggestion which might be offered based on this study is that it might be useful for teachers to focus on some of the issues raised here, such as what kind of information reading comprehension questions such as "How do you *know* ..." vs. "Why do you *think*...", etc., are asking for, when reviewing questions with students. Another useful practice might be the drawing of inferences concerning characters' states of mind from text dialogue as well as from the physical actions of characters, since students appeared to have particular difficulty with these tasks. Also, discussion about distinguishing the reader's perspective or knowledge state from that of the different characters in the story might be useful as well. All of these pragmatic skills related to written language appear to be ones which fourth-grade children are in the midst of acquiring, thus they would be appropriate points of departure for instruction, or scaffolding, in literacy. As Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976) initially discussed in their seminal paper on scaffolding, they had in mind the expert helping the child with parts of the task that are at the moment beyond the child's actual level of competence, by supplying the necessary "framework" etc. for the child to build on. Other theorists coming from the perspective of practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; Lave & Wenger, 1991) might also suggest that learning, like any social activity, is a negotiated process in which experts (or teachers) stand to learn something as well. This would seem to be particularly true of discussions of inferencing, in which tacit (or less conscious) knowledge becomes the explicit focus of conscious attention. Just as learners stand to benefit from discussion of "how they know what they know," teachers also stand to benefit from talking to their students about their unique perspectives and inferences drawn from texts.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ This research was made possible by grants from the Linguistic Minority Research Center of the University of California and the Spencer Foundation. I would also like to thank Richard Durán and John Gumperz for making their data available to me, as well as Paola Bentivoglio and Jack Du Bois for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² The transcription system used is that of Du Bois et al. 1992. See appendix for an explanation of symbols.

APPENDIX

Symbols for Discourse Transcription (Du Bois et al. 1992)

Intonation unit	<CR>
Truncation	-
Overlap	[]
Subsequent Overlap	[2 2]
Final intonation	.
Continuing intonation	,
Appeal	?
Accent	^
Lengthening	=
Long pause	...()
Medium pause	...
Short pause	..
Inhalation	(H)
Exhalation	(Hx)
Glottal stop	%
Laughter	@
Laugh quality	<@ @>
Quotation quality	<Q Q>
Reading	<R>
Researcher's Comment	(())
Uncertain Hearing	<X X>
Indecipherable syllable	X
Italics	<i>translation</i>

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