

# Mothers reading children's books to preschoolers

## A Greek study

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**A B S T R A C T :** This article presents the results of a Greek study on the extratextual interactions between mothers and their preschoolers during repeated readings of the same storybook. Eleven (11) mothers with tertiary and eleven mothers (11) with secondary education read out loud the book “The three little wolves and the big bad pig” three times, once every three days and the fourth time they narrated it to their 4–5 year olds. All four times, which were recorded by the parents, were done in one-to-one settings, in their homes. Mothers with a tertiary education during the first reading made more extratextual interactions overall, as well as more verbal exchanges in the low-level abstraction categories: organizing the reading, names, clarifying, and in high-level abstraction category relating the story to real life. Mothers with secondary education during the second reading made more extratextual interactions overall, as well as more verbal exchanges in the low-level abstraction categories: clarifying and attention. Both categories of mothers progressively decreased their insertions with subsequent readings. During the first two readings mothers with tertiary education made more extratextual interactions overall, as well as more low- and high-level abstraction insertions, than mothers with secondary education. Children whose mothers had a tertiary education made more insertions overall, including more low- and high-level abstraction extratextual interactions, than the other preschoolers. It was found that all mothers and children had a high percentage of low-level abstraction extratextual interactions. More specifically, this was noted in the following categories for mothers: clarifying, feedback and names; for children: clarifying and asking for clarification. Nevertheless, mothers with a tertiary education and their children made more high-level abstract extratextual interactions in the category relating the story to real life than the others.

**KEY - WORDS :** Preschoolers, repeated reading, extratextual interactions


### INTRODUCTION

Literacy and the love for books are not inherited components of a child’s cultural development, but reinforced through the beneficial influence of their social environment (Vygotsky 1974). The earlier the child comes into contact with books through pleasant experiences, the

more likely it will develop a positive relationship with reading. That is why educators recommend adults should expose children to books from the age of 6–9 months and read to preschoolers two to three times a day (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, Kiefer 1997). This task initially is the responsibility of the family, which gradually is assisted by the wider social environment, especially the state through the education system (Melissa-Halikiopoulou 2005, Moraitou 1996).

The time parents spend reading to children has diminished over the years due to many social factors, one very significant influence is television viewing (Natsiopoulou & Melissa, 2006, Obessi 2006). Nevertheless, study results have shown television can contribute positively to

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children's books. For example, advertisements encourage children to request reading material that they have seen advertised on television (Natsiopoulou & Melissa 2007).

Many researchers (Burgess, Hecht & Lonigan 2002, Storch & Whitehurst 2001, Evans, Shaws & Bell 2000) agree that parents who read frequently to their preschoolers enhance their verbal and literacy skills. Burgess, Hecht, Lonigan (2002) found a positive relationship between how often parents read to kids and the child's development of certain abilities that eventually lead to increasing reading competence, such as oral language, letter-sound knowledge, phonological sensibility, and word decoding abilities.

In addition, children's active participation in reading significantly contributes to language development (Walsh 2006, Zevenbergen, Whitehurst & Zevenbergen 2003, Ewers & Brownson 1999). More specifically, instead of passively listening to a story, asking children questions while reading increases word comprehension. If questions asked required new word(s), this was found to increase vocabulary (Walsh 2006). Two techniques that facilitate active participation in reading include: (a) dialogic reading where the child takes on the narrator's role (Whitehurst & Lonigan 1998) and (b) repeated readings of the same story (Fletcher & Reese 2004).

The quality of verbal exchanges between parents and preschoolers during the reading is yet another factor of literacy development (Reese & Cox 1999, Haden, Reese & Fivush 1996). Haden, Reese, Fivush (1996) found that preschoolers whose middle-class mothers made high-level Abstraction Extratextual Interactions (AEIs) (e.g. relating the story to the child's life and predicting events) while reading to them, 2.5 years later had a richer vocabulary and were better at comprehending stories, than those whose mothers made low-level abstraction insertions (asking them to name objects and describe pictures). However, Justice (2002) observed that although vocabulary development was positively associated to the parents' questions during reading, it was not related to a high abstraction level of answers.

Furthermore, parents' verbal exchanges during reading were related to the type of text used in the book, as well as the child's familiarity with the story (Stadler & McEvoy 2003, Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton & McGrath 1997, Neuman 1996). Stadler & McEvoy (2003) maintained that when parents read storybooks

to preschoolers they focused more on the content (discussing illustrations, characters, events, or commenting on similar experiences), whereas when reading alphabet books their insertions were relevant to linguistic morphology. Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton & McGrath (1997) noted that when children were introduced to a new story, middle-class parents made low-level abstraction insertions (naming objects, describing actions), while as children became more familiar with the same story, parents made more Extratextual Interactions (EIs) of high-level abstraction (predicting and explaining actions and events).

Variations in EI existed even amongst parents of the same socio-economic backgrounds, both in the quantity and quality of insertions (Stadler & McEvoy 2003, Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton, McGrath 1997, Neuman 1996). Hammett, Van Kleeck, Huberty (2003) observed that the majority of parents of higher social status made relatively few insertions, referring mainly to story content, of both low and high-level abstraction extratextual interactions. Torr (2004) found that children whose mothers had a low educational level listened quietly to the story and only occasionally made low-level abstraction insertions. In contrast, children whose mothers had tertiary education made more EIs of high-level abstraction (bridging stories to personal experience, discussing emotions and wishes brought about by the story, making generalizations).

The present study aims at exploring whether the mother's educational level is related to the quality and quantity of insertions made during repeated readings of the same storybook.

## MATERIAL-METHOD

### Participants

The researchers approached mothers through their children's kindergartens. Mothers (n=29) who didn't have read the book "The three little wolves and the big bad pig" to their children were asked to participate in the study and twenty two mothers consented participation with their children in this study, seven (7) of the children were boys and fifteen (15) girls, aged 4-5 years old. Eleven (11) of the mothers had tertiary education, while the other eleven (11) had secondary education. Four (4) were between 23 and 29 years old and the rest (18) were aged between 30 and 40.

### Assessment process/procedure

All mothers read the book "The three little wolves and the big bad pig" for the first time, although 4 of the children mentioned seeing the book at kindergarten. Mothers were asked to read the book, in one-to-one sessions, three times (once every three days) and the fourth time they had to narrate the story, without the book. No recommendation was made to mothers about the approach they could use to read the book, nor how to tell the story. All repeated readings and narrations were done at their homes and tape-recorded by the parents.

### Book description

The book "The three little wolves and the big bad pig", Heinemann Young Books, London 1993 (Greek version: "The three little wolves", Minoas Publications 1994) is written by Eugene Trivizas, a well-known author in Greece and abroad. The story is a reversal of the folktale "The three little pigs" which is especially liked by Greek preschoolers (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis, Kyridis 2006a).

Rich illustrations also help children comprehend the text better. The language used is amusing with sentence repetition, rhyming, and puns. Even though some parents have expressed concern with violence that is depicted in the text and illustrations, the book has been enthusiastically received by kids.

We chose to use this book in our study because it is suitable for preschool aged children, as it has an equal balance of text and illustrations, and a pleasant writing style. The above characteristics of the book make it enjoyable for both the children and their parents.

### Coding extratextual interactions

The EI in the three readings and the narration were coded on the basis of content and were examined separately for parents and children. The specific coding procedure was based on previous research (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis, Kyridis 2006a) and was involving the following extratextual interaction categories.

With regard to mothers' insertions, coding involved the following categories:

1. Attention. EI with a view to drawing children's attention by calling the child's name ("Can you hear me, Kostas?") or by drawing his attention to an illustration ("Look at this pig!").

2. Names. EI with a view to making children familiar with the names of objects, incidents, characters, and setting ("These are the wolf cubs").
3. Asking about names. Questions about the names of objects, incidents, characters, etc., of the story ("What is the pig holding?").
4. Feedback. EI that aims at praising, confirming, or correcting children's extratextual interaction ("Yes, the pig has befriended the wolves". "The benches? This is not a bench. It is a scaffolding").
5. Repetition. Verbatim repetition of children's words or phrases (child: "a friend", mother: "a friend").
6. Elaboration. EI through which a child's words or phrases are elaborated by adding extra information (child: "This is a door", mother: "This is the door of a safe deposit box").
7. Organizing the activity. EI through which children are kept intrigued by story ("We'll see further down").
8. Prediction. Questions asked to a child with a view to giving information about facts and incidents in the story that have not yet been mentioned ("What kind of house are they going to build?").
9. Relating the story to real life. Commentary and questions to children with a view to relating the plot of the story to everyday experiences and informing them about facts and objects in the story ("No, they do not have a tap. Do you see that they have a bathtub as we do?").
10. Recalling information. Questions to children in order to make them recall incidents and details in the story.
11. Clarifying. EI with a view to motivating picture description, word explanation, and interpretation of characters' attitudes ("Here, he is even dancing!").
12. Asking for clarification. Questions that motivate children to describe or interpret the characters' attitudes in the story ("Why do you think he was happy?").
13. Letters and writing. Mothers are pointing at different letters, naming them, highlighting words or sentences (child: "What is this?", mother: "This is the word to").

With regard to the children's EIs, coding involved the following 10 of the 13 categories made by adults:

1. Names. Children name objects, incidents, characters ("The big bad pig").
2. Questions about names. Children ask about names of objects, incidents and characters ("What's this?").

3. Repetition. Children repeat the exact words or phrases that the narrator/reader has used.
4. Relating the story to real life. Children relate incident in the story to their own personal experiences (“Did they ask permission from their mom?”, “Can I have a drum like this, too?”).
5. Recalling information. Children point out details in the story and give information (“Do you know what a drill is? It makes r r r ... as it drills holes in the ground.”).
6. Prediction. Children predict the development of the plot (“First he will put the door”).
7. Clarifying. Children describe pictures and explain attitudes (“Yes, but their tails were singed”).
8. Questions for clarification. Children ask for explanations about incidents and attitudes (“Why is he sitting down?”).
9. Parallel reading. The category involves only children’s EI and “reading/narrating” words or phrases in the story, while parents are reading/narrating (Mother: “Little frightened wolves” Child: “let me come in”).
10. Letters and writing. Children name letters, recognize numbers, or ask their mothers to name letters and read words to them.

### Data analysis

The statistical analysis of EI was performed with SPSS for Windows.

### RESULTS

Means and standard deviations for EI of mothers and children are depicted in Tables 1 and 2.

ANOVA analysis showed differences between mothers’ and children’s interactions during the three repeated readings and narration of the story.

With regard to the mothers’ EI there were differences in relation to the following categories:

- a. During the first reading there were differences in: names ( $F_{1,20}=8.23$ ,  $P=0.01$ ), feedback ( $F_{1,20}=5.86$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), organizing ( $F_{1,20}=14.97$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), elaboration ( $F_{1,20}=4.42$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), relating to real life ( $F_{1,20}=10.96$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), recalling ( $F_{1,20}=4.70$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), clarifying ( $F_{1,20}=7.91$ ,  $P=0.01$ ), letters ( $F_{1,20}=7.09$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), and the total number of insertions ( $F_{1,20}=13.55$ ,  $P<0.01$ ). Mothers with tertiary education made more inser-

tions than mothers with secondary education on: names ( $t=-2.86$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), feedback ( $t=-2.42$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), organizing ( $t=-3.87$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), relating to real life ( $t=-3.31$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), clarifying ( $t=-2.81$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), letters ( $t=-2.66$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and total number of insertions ( $t=-3.68$ ,  $P<0.01$ ).

- b. During the second reading in: feedback ( $F_{1,20}=4.36$ ,  $P=0.05$ ), elaboration ( $F_{1,20}=5.49$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), relating to real life ( $F_{1,20}=9.35$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) and the total number of insertions ( $F_{1,20}=5.51$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Mothers with tertiary education made more insertions than mothers with secondary Education on: feedback ( $t=-2.08$ ,  $P=0.05$ ), elaboration ( $t=-2.34$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), relating to real life ( $t=-3.05$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) and total number of insertions ( $t=-2.34$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).
- c. During the third reading in: relating to real life ( $F_{1,20}=5.25$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) in which mothers with tertiary education made more insertions than those with secondary education ( $t=-2.29$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).

Repeated measures ANOVA per EI category for mothers with a tertiary education showed a progressive reduction in:

- a. *Low-abstraction categories*. Names ( $F=7.16$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), mothers made significantly more insertions in the first reading than in the third reading and narration.

Organizing ( $F=6.53$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), mothers made significantly more insertions in the first reading than in the second and third readings and the narration.

Clarifying ( $F=5.63$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), mothers made significantly more insertions in first and second readings than in the third reading and narration.

- b. *High-abstraction category*. Relating to real life ( $F=6.49$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), mothers made significantly more insertions in the first and second readings than in the narration (Table 3) and the total number of insertions ( $F=7.43$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), mothers made significantly more insertions in the first and second readings than in the third reading and the narration.

Repeated measures ANOVA per EI category for mothers with secondary education showed during the second reading a significant augmentation in low-abstraction categories: attention ( $F=4.05$ ,  $P=0.01$ ), clarifying ( $F=4.41$ ,  $P=0.01$ ) and the total number of insertions ( $F=2.95$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), and then a progressive reduction. Specifically, mothers made significantly more insertions on clarifying during the second reading than the first reading and the narration; on attention during the second and third

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviation of mothers' extratextual interactions during the three readings and narration in term of mothers' education

Mothers' extratextual interactions	1st Reading		2nd Reading		3rd Reading		Narration	
	Secondary Education M±Sd	Tertiary Education M±Sd	Secondary Education M±Sd	Tertiary Education M±Sd	Secondary Education M±Sd	Tertiary Education M±Sd	Secondary Education M±Sd	Tertiary Education M±Sd
Attention	1.0 (1.4)	3.8 (5.4)	2.0 (2.1)	3.7 (7.9)	0.9 (1.0)	2.0 (4.2)	0.0 (0.3)	0.0 (0.0)
Names	1.3 (2.2)	7.0 (6.1)	2.7 (3.4)	3.9 (3.5)	2.0 (3.0)	3.6 (4.1)	0.7 (1.0)	0.4 (1.2)
Questions/names	0.0 (0.3)	1.6 (3.0)	0.6 (1.0)	1.8 (2.9)	0.4 (1.2)	1.0 (2.0)	0.6 (1.2)	0.1 (0.4)
Feedback	1.3 (1.5)	6.0 (6.3)	3.0 (2.9)	7.2 (5.9)	2.8 (3.4)	6.4 (6.2)	2.2 (1.7)	4.6 (4.3)
Repetition	0.0 (0.3)	1.0 (1.8)	0.2 (0.4)	0.9 (1.0)	0.8 (1.4)	0.7 (0.9)	0.5 (1.5)	1.0 (2.0)
Elaboration	0.1 (0.4)	1.0 (1.3)	0.1 (0.4)	1.0 (1.2)	0.1 (0.4)	0.8 (1.2)	0.2 (0.6)	0.4 (0.6)
Organizing	0.0 (0.0)	4.0 (3.5)	0.4 (0.8)	1.9 (2.5)	0.2 (0.4)	1.0 (1.7)	0.5 (1.2)	1.3 (1.6)
Prediction	0.0 (0.0)	0.9 (1.5)	0.1 (0.6)	0.9 (1.7)	0.1 (0.4)	1.4 (3.6)	0.8 (1.8)	1.1 (3.2)
Relating	1.0 (2.7)	9.1 (7.6)	1.6 (2.3)	6.0 (4.2)	0.8 (0.9)	5.6 (6.9)	0.4 (0.6)	1.0 (1.1)
Recalling	0.0 (0.0)	0.8 (1.2)	0.7 (1.1)	1.2 (2.1)	0.9 (1.7)	0.2 (0.9)	0.5 (1.2)	1.4 (1.8)
Clarifying	1.6 (1.9)	14.4 (14.9)	4.4 (4.1)	13.0 (15.2)	3.0 (3.3)	7.1 (8.9)	1.0 (0.8)	1.7 (2.1)
Questions/clarification	0.0 (0.3)	1.4 (2.2)	0.2 (0.6)	0.7 (1.7)	0.3 (0.9)	0.6 (1.0)	0.1 (0.4)	0.6 (1.0)
Letters/writing	0.0 (0.0)	2.0 (2.4)	0.1 (0.6)	0.7 (0.9)	0.0 (0.0)	0.5 (1.2)	0.0 (0.3)	0.0 (0.3)
Total	6.9 (7.4)	54.6 (42.3)	16.8 (14.8)	43.3 (34.4)	12.8 (9.3)	31.5 (31.0)	9.5 (6.5)	14.4 (13.9)

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**Table 2.** Means and standard deviation of children's extratextual interactions during the three readings and narration in term of mothers' education

Children's extratextual interactions	1st Reading		2nd Reading		3rd Reading		Narration	
	Secondary education M±Sd	Tertiary education M±Sd	Secondary education M±Sd	Tertiary education M±Sd	Secondary education M±Sd	Tertiary education M±Sd	Secondary education M±Sd	Tertiary education M±Sd
Names	0.7 (1.2)	3.2 (4.2)	1.2 (1.7)	3.7 (4.6)	0.9 (1.3)	3.5 (3.1)	1.3 (1.6)	1.0 (1.8)
Questions/names	0.9 (2.0)	2.0 (1.6)	1.8 (2.9)	2.5 (2.5)	1.0 (2.3)	0.8 (1.2)	1.0 (1.8)	0.2 (0.6)
Repetition	0.5 (1.5)	2.1 (3.3)	1.8 (1.6)	3.7 (5.4)	0.8 (1.0)	3.0 (4.9)	1.0 (1.0)	1.3 (4.5)
Relating	1.4 (2.4)	5.5 (6.2)	1.1 (1.2)	4.9 (4.0)	1.1 (1.1)	4.6 (4.9)	1.5 (1.6)	1.6 (2.3)
Recalling	0.4 (1.5)	0.3 (0.9)	1.5 (2.2)	1.5 (2.6)	0.9 (1.3)	2.0 (4.1)	1.8 (2.7)	5.1 (3.4)
Prediction	0.0 (0.3)	1.6 (2.3)	0.0 (0.3)	0.4 (0.6)	0.1 (0.4)	0.4 (0.8)	0.0 (0.0)	0.1 (0.4)
Clarifying	0.3 (0.6)	3.4 (3.5)	1.3 (1.6)	4.7 (4.9)	1.0 (1.7)	4.3 (4.8)	1.2 (1.8)	1.2 (2.1)
Questions/clarification	1.0 (2.0)	6.1 (6.5)	1.8 (2.3)	6.4 (6.4)	1.3 (2.3)	4.7 (5.0)	0.8 (1.2)	1.0 (1.3)
Joint reading	0.0 (0.0)	0.5 (1.5)	0.8 (1.8)	2.1 (3.5)	0.7 (1.2)	3.8 (7.4)	2.7 (5.4)	5.9 (9.6)
Letters/writing	0.0 (0.0)	0.7 (1.5)	0.0 (0.3)	0.7 (1.0)	0.2 (0.9)	0.2 (0.6)	0.0 (0.3)	0.2 (0.6)
Total	5.6 (6.0)	25.9 (19.9)	11.6 (8.1)	31.0 (25.2)	8.5 (5.3)	27.3 (24.1)	18.1 (23.9)	18.7 (17.0)

**Table 3.** Means of extratextual interactions in the three readings and the narration for mothers' with a tertiary education

Readings	Attention	Names	Questions/names	Feedback	Repetition	Elaboration	Organizing	Prediction	Relating	Recalling	Clarifying	Questions/clarification	Letters	Total
1st Reading	3.8 a*	7.0 a	1.6 a	6.0 a	1.0 a	1.0 a	4.0 a	0.9 a	9.1 a	0.8 a	14.4 a	1.4 a	2.0 a	54.6 a
2nd Reading	3.7 a	3.9 a	1.8 a	7.2 a	0.9 a	1.0 a	1.9 b	0.9 a	6.0 a	1.2 a	13.0 a	0.7 a	0.7 a	43.3 a
3rd Reading	2.0 a	3.6 ab	1.0 a	6.4 a	0.7 a	0.8 a	1.0 b	1.4 a	5.6 ab	0.2 a	7.1 b	0.6 a	0.5 a	31.5 b
Narration	0.0 a	0.4 b	0.1 a	4.6 a	1.0 a	0.4 a	1.3 b	1.1 a	1.0 b	1.4 a	1.7 b	0.6 a	0.0 a	14.4 b

\*Means in the same column followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P≤0.05)

readings than the narration (Table 4); and on the total number of insertions during the second reading than the first reading.

With regard to children's EI there were differences relating to the following categories:

- a. During the first reading differences in: clarifying ( $F_{1,20}=8.25$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), asking for clarification ( $F_{1,20}=6.08$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), prediction ( $F_{1,20}=4.57$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) total number of insertions ( $F_{1,20}=10.41$ ,  $P<0.01$ ). Children whose mothers had tertiary education made more insertions than those whose mothers had secondary education on: clarifying ( $t=-2.87$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), asking for clarification ( $t=-2.46$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), total number of insertions ( $t=-3.22$ ,  $P<0.01$ ).
- b. During the second reading in: clarifying ( $F_{1,20}=4.63$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), asking for clarification ( $F_{1,20}=5.02$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) relating to real life ( $F_{1,20}=8.55$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and the total number of insertions ( $F_{1,20}=5.85$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Children whose mothers had a tertiary education made more insertions than those whose mothers had a secondary education on: asking for clarification ( $t=-2.24$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), relating to real life ( $t=-2.92$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and total number of insertions ( $t=-2.41$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).
- c. During the third reading in: names ( $F_{1,20}=6.61$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), clarifying ( $F_{1,20}=4.47$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), relating to real life ( $F_{1,20}=5.16$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and the total number of insertions ( $F_{1,20}=6.37$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Children whose mothers had a tertiary education made more insertions than those whose mothers had a secondary education on: relating to real life ( $t=-2.27$ ,  $P<0.05$ ) and total number of insertions ( $t=-2.52$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).
- d. During the narration there were differences in the high-level abstraction category: recalling information ( $F_{1,20}=6.50$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), in which children whose mothers had tertiary education made more insertions than those whose mothers had a secondary education ( $t=-2.55$ ,  $P<0.05$ ).

Repeated measures ANOVA per EI category for children with mothers of tertiary education showed a progressive reduction in the low-abstraction categories: names ( $F=4.96$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), asking about names ( $F=5.12$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), clarifying ( $F=3.97$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), asking for clarification ( $F=3.85$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), and in the high-level abstraction category: relating to real life ( $F=3.44$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Specifically, children made significantly more insertions during the three readings on: names, clarifying and asking for clarification than the narration, and during first and second readings on: asking for names and relating to real life than the narration. In the nar-

ration children made significantly more insertions than in the three readings concerning the high-abstraction category: recalling ( $F=9.56$ ,  $P<0.001$ ) (Table 5).

Repeated measures ANOVA per EI category for the children with mothers of secondary education did not show differences during readings or narration.

In all three readings and the narration, the highest means of EI were found for mothers with tertiary education in low-level abstraction categories: clarifying, feedback, and in the high-level abstraction category: relating to real life, while for mothers with secondary education it was found in low-level abstraction categories: clarifying, feedback and names (Table 1). For both groups of children the higher means of EI were found in low-level abstraction categories: asking for clarification and clarifying, and in the high-level abstraction category: relating to real life (Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

In the last decades, a vast body of research has indicated that the family environment has tremendous impact on a child's language and literacy development. In this context, the child acquires his/her first experiences that will increase future linguistic and academic abilities (Purcell-Gates 1996), is exposed to writing materials and experiments with them, observes others reading and writing, while becoming involved in these activities with the help of family members (DeBaryshe et al 2000).

The family's demographic characteristics, such as socio-economic status, educational background, literary habits, and involvement in cultural/literary activities have a positive effect on the preschoolers' language and literacy development (Weigel et al 2006, Burgess et al 2002). More specifically, children benefit from both parents being involved in certain activities, such as buying children's books, reading them together, storytelling, and learning nursery rhymes. These activities help preschoolers develop pre-reading abilities: interest in books and reading, as well as beginning to discern characteristics of the written language. On the other hand, the children's ability to use and comprehend spoken language does not seem to be directly affected by the above activities, it does however, appear to be positively related to parents' literacy and educational level (Weigel et al 2006).

Furthermore, the parents' educational background affects both the quantity and quality of the oral lan-

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**Table 4. Means of extratextual interactions in the three readings and the narration for mothers' with a secondary education**

Readings	Attention	Names	Questions/ names	Feedback	Repetition	Elaboration	Organizing	Prediction	Relating	Recalling	Clarifying	Questions/ clarification	Letters	Total
1st Reading	1.0 a	1.3 a	0.0 a	1.3 a	0.0 a	0.1 a	0.0 a	0.0 a	1.0 a	0.0 a	1.6 b	0.0 a	0.0 a	6.9 b
2nd Reading	2.0 a	2.7 a	0.6 a	3.0 a	0.2 a	0.1 a	0.4 a	0.1 a	1.6 a	0.7 a	4.4 a	0.2 a	0.1 a	16.8 a
3rd Reading	0.9 b	2.0 a	0.4 a	2.8 a	0.8 a	0.1 a	0.2 a	0.1 a	0.8 a	0.9 a	3.0 a	0.3 a	0.0 a	12.8 a
Narration	0.0 bc	0.7 a	0.6 a	2.2 a	0.5 a	0.2 a	0.5 a	0.8 a	0.4 a	0.5 a	1.0 b	0.1 a	0.0 a	9.5 a

(P≤0.05)

**Table 5. Means of extratextual interactions in the three readings and the narration for children's whose mothers had a tertiary education**

Readings	Names	Questions/ names	Repetition	Relating	Recalling	Prediction	Clarifying	Questions/ clarification	Joint	Letters	Total
1st Reading	3.2 a	2.0 a	2.1 a	5.5 a	0.3 b	1.6 a	3.4 a	6.1 a	0.5 a	0.7 a	25.9 a
2nd Reading	3.7 a	2.5 a	3.7 a	4.9 a	1.5 b	0.4 a	4.7 a	6.4 a	2.1 a	0.7 a	31.0 a
3rd Reading	3.5 a	0.8 b	3.0 a	4.6 ab	2.0 b	0.4 a	4.3 a	4.7 a	3.8 a	0.2 a	27.3 a
Narration	1.0 b	0.2 b	1.3 a	1.6 b	5.1 a	0.1 a	1.2 b	1.0 b	5.9 a	0.2 a	18.7 a

P≤0.05



guage interaction between them and their children during literacy activities. For instance, during reading, parents with tertiary education talked to their children and used abstract speech more often than those with a lower education (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis, Kyridis & Hatzisavvides 2006b, Natsiopoulou, Souliotis & Kyridis 2006a, Torr 2004). In the present study this discrepancy between the two groups of mothers existed in all three readings.

Parent-child reading has been described as an evolving process in which parents often adjust their behaviour to meet their children's developmental level and facilitate their participation. Studies showed that during the first readings, middle-class parents' EI focused on main characters and objects depicted in the illustrations. However, as the preschoolers became more familiar with the book, parents tended to direct attention more to a high abstraction level to maintain the interest in the text rather than the pictures (Crowe 2000, Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton & McGrath 1997).

The present study showed that during the first two readings, Greek mothers focused mainly on illustrations. Mothers with a tertiary education did so at both a low- and high-level AEIs, while mothers with a secondary education only made low-level abstraction insertions. This was most probably because they believed that drawing attention to the pictures facilitated their children in gaining a clearer or easier understanding of the story. However, mothers progressively limited both low- and high-level AEIs.

In addition, this study demonstrated that mothers from lower educational backgrounds made the least number of EI during the first reading. This agrees with Torr's finding which stated that mothers who left school at an early age, read quietly to their children, interacting occasionally with them. Furthermore, Torr suggested that reading picture books is not seen as an important literacy practice by those mothers without tertiary education (Torr 2004). Concerning Greek mothers, this congruent finding is not only related to education level, but most probably affected by their overall exposure to books and reading. It has been found in other studies that Greeks with tertiary education read more often for themselves (National Center of Book 1999), as well as to their children (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis, Kyridis & Hatzisavvides 2006).

It is likely that mothers with a lower education who participated in this study focused more on the text in the initial reading and, as a result, avoided verbal ex-

changes with their kids, while in the second reading, having become more familiar with the story, they were able to concentrate on trying to involve the preschooler in the reading process. Thus, they made more EIs, mainly of low-level abstraction, than in the first reading. Mothers with a tertiary education, due to greater familiarity with the written language, shifted their attention to their child from the start and attempted to make the preschooler participate in the reading process using both low and high abstraction levels of EI as was found in other related research with parents of middle- to upper middle social backgrounds (Hammett, Van Kleeck, Huberty 2003).

The present study demonstrated that the majority of EI of both groups of mothers and children related to the story content with only occasional references to printing elements (e.g. typeface, page-numbers, layout). This supports the findings of other researchers (Hammett, Van Kleeck, Huberty 2003, Stadler & McEvoy 2003) who speculated that storybooks promote discussion on what takes place in the text. This perhaps explains why even mothers with tertiary education made only a few insertions on the written language, relating more to functional elements of the book itself, while the children instigated questions on language elements, as indicated in the following extract from the data:

*Mother:* "Does this remind you of some other story, Despina?"

*Child:* "No... but it reminds me of something on TV ... (by the man) who wrote the book you read to me."

*Mother:* "Who? Eugenios Trivizas whom we saw on TV?"

*Child:* "Yes, Eugenios ..."

*Mother:* "He is the author of the book. He wrote the book."

*Child:* "I will become a writer, too."

The mothers' verbal exchanges in categories organizing the reading and attention, were only superficially related to the story.

*Mother* (observing the picture, says to the child): "Look at the way he is looking at him. Can you see how he is looking?"

The EI of the other categories were directly related to the story since the aim was plot comprehension. In order to achieve this, the mothers commented on:

a. Items of the story that provoked the child's interest.

...their fluffy tails scorched.

Child: "What does 'scorched' mean?"

Mother: "To 'scorch' means to burn it."

b. Items that mothers felt might be difficult for the child to understand.

...The pig dialed the video entrance phone

*Mother:* "Do you know what a video entrance phone is? It is a telephone connected to a television so we can see the face of the person ringing the doorbell. Do you understand?"

Often mothers, in order to make the child fully understand the story,

a. Relate it to the child's personal experiences:

...built themselves a house of bricks

*Mother:* "Look. They built it exactly like grandpa does."

b. They add extra information:

*Mother* (looking at the picture): "Look, it will be full of concrete. Can you see?"

*Child:* "Will they also paint the benches?"

*Mother:* "Benches? This isn't a bench. This is scaffolding. It's used by builders to step on and build, but you're right, it looks like a bench."

In all three readings, the majority of insertions for all mothers consisted of low-level AEIs. Nevertheless, mothers with a tertiary education made more high-level abstract insertions regarding the category relating to real life. These verbal exchanges resulted in their children also making more insertions in this category than the other children.

As far as the children are concerned, the EI with their mothers in all three readings focused largely on the illustrations. However, children whose mothers had a lower education made fewer high-level AEI and insertions overall, most probably because the mothers' reading style was less stimulating and less responsive. This is in accordance with other research findings, which support that these children made only occasional EI, while being read to. This appeared to be more prominent in reluctant mother-child pairs during the reading interaction (Bus, Belsky, van Ijzenboorn, Crnic 1997). In contrast, the children whose mothers had tertiary education constantly interrupted their mothers at various points in the reading and thus further discussion was instigated (Torr 2004).

The findings of the present study correspond with our previous research (Natsiopoulou, Souliotis, Kyridis 2006a) which showed that during shared reading Greek parents with tertiary education used more extratextual utterances than parents with a lower education and the majority of these utterances were of low-level of abstraction. This outcome may in some ways relate to Hart & Risley's (2003) findings that during routine parent-child interactions parents of low socio-economic status talked less than parents of high socio-economic status. In addition, the results suggest that as the written text becomes more familiar, the verbal exchanges between parent and child also become more limited. This can be considered as an indication that parent's EIs during shared reading aim to facilitate children's understanding of the story more than gaining greater entertainment from the reading.

In Western societies, repeated readings of the same illustrated storybook are common in many families. Our findings suggest that this practice is a process in which parents appear to adapt their reading style: during the first readings it is highly interactive involving a high number of EIs with their children, which progressively decreases with subsequent readings. As both the parents and the children become more familiar with the story they are more content to simply read the story and derive pleasure from it. Thus, repeatedly reading the same storybook to preschoolers should lead to aesthetic reading of the literary text and to enhancing children's enthusiasm for stories and literature. In parallel, children acquire pre-reading abilities, as they internalize information about the plot and develop a greater understanding of the story and text (Crow 2000). With regard to children's language development, the benefits of repeated readings of the same storybook was difficult to determine, given that mothers' insertions progressively decreased and the majority of EIs were of low-level abstraction.

Further psychological and pedagogical research in this area will undoubtedly provide new perspectives and techniques to enhance both the enjoyment and educational value of the reading process, as well as enrich the parent-preschooler EIs, especially in families with less exposure to books and literary activities.

### Limitations to the study

Due to the limited sample size, study findings are not indicative of the reading behaviour of all Greek mothers during repeated readings of the same storybook. In

addition, the chosen storybook applied repetitive patterns both in plot and vocabulary, as well as substantial amounts of rhyming language. This could have contributed to parents and children quickly becoming familiar with the story and/or could have affected the quantity and quality of mother-child interactions. It would be interesting to conduct further research using a storybook written in another style or even a non-fiction picture book with a larger and more representative sample of Greek families.

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