INFANT STORY-HOUR IN A PUBLIC LIBRARY: QUESTIONS[1]

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Goffman uses the term "fortuitousness" to mean a significant event which is seen as incidentally produced when natural forces operate on socially guided doings: that is, events are generated by some effort to control the natural world (Goffman 1974: 33). The event under discussion here is not incidentally produced; rather, it is very carefully planned and orchestrated for a particular purpose. However, my entry into the event was a fortuitous occasion. As a librarian I have been concerned for many years with the reading patterns of teenagers, but when I happened upon a story hour for infants, I felt that it was particularly noteworthy and deserved further study. This paper, the result of that study, examines twelve sessions from three series of story-hours for children under two years of age. The sessions are considered part of the socialization process used by a segment of mainstream suburban society to *enculturate* children with the notion that literacy is highly valued. During each thirty-minute session the librarian uses songs, stories from books, rhythmic exercises, and formulaic exchanges to lead fifteen to twenty-five parent/child pairs from the everyday world into the story world and back again.

The examination of transcripts of tape recordings of these sessions reveals that the primary speech repertoire used by the librarian is the question[2]. Within the context of this story hour I

shall look at the ways this question format is used and the pattern of interaction among the various groups within the question paradigm. I have not used the usual "question and answer" adjacency pair, because the child-participants are not yet two years of age and do not respond verbally. This study includes the examination of the use of questioning patterns in: a) books and songs; b) during the opening and closing rituals; and c) at the high point of each session, when the librarian brings in the books.

All encounters took place in the Children's Department of the Foxton Library (pseudonyms are used throughout), a very busy, overcrowded, heavily used public library. Situated in a sprawling township thirty minutes from a large Eastern city, the library serves a populace which is ethnically, culturally and economically mixed. Its location next to the post office on a street that intersects a large shopping center ensures that there will be ample foot traffic. The major emphasis in this library is on service to children, with services to and in the interest of pre-schoolers assigned highest priority. The Children's Librarian has expressed the belief that, since this age group has no other library (such as the school library) to serve them, it is important to the library, and eventually to society in general, to condition them early in their lives toward becoming library users and supporters.

The Children's Department is on the ground floor and is reached by stairs from the adult section or by a separate entrance from the outside. It contains not only numerous books, but also two sliding boards (a type of playground equipment which may be checked out), a computer, toys-to-go, records, tapes, magazines, mobiles, and pictures.

The diversity of the collection reflects the philosophy that there are many contributors to literacy in our culture.

The library has an active program of story-hours usually held three times a week. In addition, there are special programs for groups from nursery schools or public schools held by request at holiday times or by special request. The story-hour under observation has been run twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, for six sessions each time. This year a four-session winter cycle was added in response to parents' requests. Admission to all story hours is by pre-registration. Although twenty-five parent/child pairs[3] are accepted, there are usually only fifteen in attendance, not always the same ones. The adult half of the pair or dyad is most often the mother. All who attend are white. Evidence of clothing, cars and speech indicates that they are middle-class, one-job families. At least half of the mothers attend with a first child. Although several mothers are in their mid-thirties, most are in their twenties. All appear to be very serious about parenting.

The librarian conducting the infant story-hour, Ann O'Brien, is a sunny, outgoing person who seems to love children and is skilled at working with them. On weekends she accepts occasional bookings as a clown for children's parties, although she rarely dresses in costume at the library. She is a polished performer and conducts the story hour with great aplomb.

When I arrived for the first story hour, tape recorder, camera and notebook instead of a diaper bag in hand, I was set apart from the mothers in attendance. Furthermore, as I attended without a baby, I was not a member of that particular in-group. As librarians, however,

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Ann and I share the philosophy that the public library is a strong social force and that services to children are very important. A 1981 publication of the American Library Association (Young) addresses this issue by speaking of the responsibility to the library for understanding and responding to societal needs and goes on to say that community means everyone, including children. After stating a belief that, with respect to young children, stories, songs and games shared with a group develop social skills, the publication goes on to suggest that opportunities for development should be available to all. According to the article material is not enough; such a program demands a knowledgeable staff, a receptive environment, and imaginative programming supported by adequate, up-to-date materials. In stating its goals, the library must decide whether its emphasis is to be placed on entertainment or education, and gear its programs accordingly. One of the goals of the program under discussion here is the educating of the parents to the wealth of material that is available for use with young children. One might say that the Foxton Library's Children's Department has as its goal education through entertainment. My question, "What is it that is going on here?" leads me to look carefully at this "...event or deed described within some primary framework" (Goffman 1974: 25). The primary framework in this case is one mode of communicating with very young children—through questions directed to them.

As mothers and babies arrive they gather in the main room of the Children's Department. (For ease of description, I will refer throughout to the adult half of the dyad as "mother", although I did, in fact, see at various times two grandmothers, two grandfathers, two

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fathers and a baby-sitter). Sitting on a large oval rug or on chairs, they engage in various rituals of greeting or otherwise negotiate entrance into the group. "The baby" is a common conversation opener. Babies crawl around exploring, some use the slide and a few cry. Until Ann is ready to start the program, the double doors to the children's fiction room are kept closed. At the proper moment, Ann opens them and invites everyone in. She is, in effect, giving the signal to move from the everyday to the story world. Harste (1979: 20)says that comprehension is affected by setting, and that it is important for the child to know that "this is a story". With the opening of this room for a special purpose, Ann is telling the children by her framing gesture that now is the time to enter the world of make-believe. The children are invited to participate in "real" behavior in a "pretend" universe (Kelly-Byrne, class lecture, 1984).

The transcript to follow is representative of all sessions. Upon examination one sees that the story hour can be divided into four segments: a) greeting rituals; b) activity (songs, stories, finger plays, etc.); ç) book time; and d) leave-taking rituals.

Foxton Library Story Hour 3/6/86 9:50 a.m

General greeting activity.

This is the third session in a special four-session winter cycle. Mother/child dyads are re-negotiating interaction based on prior acquaintance at story-hour sessions and in the community. I see Marge and her son, Bill; Carol and Laurie have brought the new baby, Karen; and several others whose names I am not sure of are in attendance. The story hour begins officially at 10:30. The time before that is spent watching the babies and mothers and talking to Anne. My emphasis this time is on observing the pattern of questions and answers used within the context of the story hour.

M=mother   B=baby   A=librarian in charge

Greeting

M: Where do you want to sit today?

A: Hi-iiii!

(general conversational babble, too garbled to transcribe)

M: What's the matter?

A: Good morning! Good morning everyone! How are you? It's good to see you! Do you know who has been so happy because you're coming today? Wooley! Wooley gets so excited! He couldn't wait 'til you came to the library---and here he is---wait 'til you see how smiley he is---he's so happy---here he comes---come over here, Adam, O.K.? This is Wooley's special place back there---oh-oooh! Hi-ii!

(A. has attached Wooley, a monkey puppet with long arms and legs that go around her body, and is crawling around the circle greeting the children and having Wooley give kisses to everybody. Most of the babies walk up or crawl to A. for kisses.)

A: Thank-you! (conversation garbled) O.K., now Wooley's going to go back here (moves behind puppet theatre) and---(sounds from record player while A. hunts for correct band)---is everybody ready?

Activity

(song) "What Do We Do When Baby Wakes Up?". Laurie sits and stares at action while mother nurses the new baby (four week old); Baby ? bounces on mother's outstretched legs; Mother ? holds her own and another baby while she sways and claps; Marge claps Bill's hands; Martin swings, claps, participates more than in November; Baby ? (nine months old) sits on M.'s lap while M. claps.

Lots of kisses at words "....We give him a kiss mmmmmwah!"

Everybody claps and yells "Yaaaay!" at close of song.

A: Shall we read a book?

M: (in chorus) yeeeees.

A: Shall we read a book?! Remember we read I Touch? Now we're going to read I See. Is everybody ready? Here it is---right up here. (sitting on chair to left of puppet theater, holds book out to her left, swings from left to right with each page so everybody can see)

> I see my bear---good morning!
> I see my spoon---I eat!.....

(general chorus of oooooh and aaaaah)

A: Who remembers Wooley's cousins, the five little monkeys? Here they ar-re. Is everybody ready?
(Five little monkeys are attached by velcro to a wooley mitt which fits on the puppeteer's hand. Monkeys are removed one at a time on the word "one".)

> Five little monkeys jumping on the bed!
> One fell off and bumped his head!....

Group: Yaaaaaay!

B: All gone!

A: That's right---they're all gone---and---who remembers "This little piggy went to market"?
Group: Ooooooh! Aaaaaaah---Little piggy!...
A: O.K. This little piggy went to market...
M: (tickling babies) Wee, wee, weeeee weee
A: Shall we do that again?
M: Yes.
A: This little piggy...home! Good!
A: Now---what's in this book?
   (lots of B. noise)
A: This is what---a banana! Banana---this is Wooley's very favorite--banana---and this is a little toy duck---little toy duck! And these are baby's shoes---see baby's shoes?---This is a pretty flower---and this is a comb---oh! and this is a little puppy dog! And these are mittens! And---right? Let's see---does anybody know what this is? This is---a bunny rabbit---a bunny rabbit. And another bunny rabbit---and another one! (unintelligible because of much B. noise---something about counting)
A: and M: One---two---three---four---five bunny rabbits!
(Places bunny figures on flannel board, points as group counts.)
A: Now we have a tree---one---two---three---four---five trees! And now---are you ready?---ooooooh! a ball! One---two---three---four---five balls! O.K.! And now---I think---We should do "Bouncing, Bouncing"!---Run to your Mommy! Ready? (Babies crawl, run, or walk to beckoning mothers as A. finds band on record and starts music. Several mothers ask "Do you want to do 'Bouncing, Bouncing'?" Words are sung to "It's a Small World After All".)

   Bouncing, bouncing on my knee. (repeat three times)...
   I'll swing you high, I'll swing you low,...
   And I won't let go!

(Laurie's mother manages to hold the new baby on her lap and swing Laurie at the same time. This is an occasion for lots of hugs and cuddles between M. and B.)
A: O.K.! Does anybody remember "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See"? ---Shall we do this?---Is everybody ready? (Places figures modeled after book on flannel board):

   Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?
   I see a red fox looking at me....
                              (A: I have a surprise!)
A: Very good! O.K.---now---we all remember Winston---don't we? Winston is going to sing a song---well---before Winston sings a song, let's see if we can do this---(noises of false starts on record until right band is found)

   Hello feet, go stamp, stamp, stamp,
   Hello body, just turn around.....

A: Very good! And now I think Winston is ready to sing his song. (Moves behind puppet theatre and raises hand with Winston Dog puppet to accompaniment of "Willoughby, Wallaby".)

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(as Winston) Hi, everybody! Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I just love it when you come to the library!---I'm going to sing a song now---

(Babies sit on mothers' laps, stand and bounce, "dance", or clap. Brad has really improved in behavior; he dances and bounces with great rhythm in the center of the circle, enjoying the music and the attention, to the delight of many of the other babies. Lots of running behind theater, maybe looking for Winston)

W:---Well, boys and girls, I'm going to come out now and say hello to everybody, and then---Mrs. O'Brien is going to get some books---
B: aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!
W: ---and everybody can get a book to read---o.k.?
(lots of indecipherable chatter, M. and B.)
A: holds Winston on lap, many B. crowd around.
M: (to Brad) Gonna go get your blanket?

Book Time

Winston (with A.'s help) puts about 30 board books on the floor. (B. crowd around, take books, wander around, go to M., sit on lap or stand.)
M: (variously) Get a book for Mommy---wanna read a book---bring it here--(too much noise to decipher individuals)
(Book Time is characterized by babies sitting on mothers' laps, looking at books. There is also a high level of general chatter as mothers read to babies or converse with each other. After a while A. plays a soft song on the record player--a "calm-down" activity and a signal that the session is over.)

          Baby's going bye-bye, put on Baby's shoes,
          ...wave bye-bye.

A. Will you come back next week?

Leave-Taking

The session is formally over after Wooley gives "goodbye" kisses in the same way as he gave "hello" kisses. Most children do not want to leave until they have had a kiss from Wooley--the signal that story time has ended. With reference to closings, Hymes speaks about a "...conventional formula that marks the end of the text" (in storytelling) and also of "...conventional formulae that mark the end of the narrative event; performative words that bespeak the efficacy of the act of myth performance..." (Hymes 1981: 323). In this case, rather than performative words we observe the use of a fictional

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character---an object rather than a verbal formula or a physical gesture. Hymes says further that "...the finish has to do with the outcome of the story for those who participate in its performance--that the performance is over..." and calls this act "post-transformational". The act of Wooley's reappearing and giving kisses returns the participants to the everyday world. Some mothers leave in a hurry, others linger to chat with each other or with Ann. Many check out materials and/or return to the play area for a few more turns on the sliding board or the rocking horse.

A complete transcript of an entire session has been included at this point in order to give an overview of the event. Throughout the paper sections will be used from this and other transcripts to illustrate various points. The convention used for marking vocal inflection is as follows:

$<$ voice rises at end of word, open sound

$>$ voice is lowered in pitch, closed sound

⌒ drawn-out pronunciation

_____ emphasis

Most children in this study speak few, if any words. As they are not yet two years old, they are, in some cases, just beginning to form a vocabulary. Although a child as young as one month was brought to the story hour on two occasions, the youngest child brought regularly was two months old, and that was before I began to observe the sessions. During the time that I was present, the youngest child was six months old at the beginning of the series. This is not to say that the children do not communicate: they use many vocal sounds with

varying inflection, physical gestures, and eye contact in order to relay their messages to mothers, older children and the librarian. Since no real "answer" is expected, most conversation is "aimed" at babies, and rather than being a verbal interaction, is a hybrid of communication modes. Heath identifies questions as the most frequent type of talk addressed by mothers to pre-schoolers; results of this study reveal that others closely involved in pre-school care and education also seem to prefer questions. She lists three types of questions from a study of a family's speech patterns with their a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter: Q-I, where the questioner already has the information requested; A-I, where only the child (answerer) has the information; U-I, unanswerable, where neither has the information (example: adults' monologues). On the occasions in Heath's study when U-I questions were posed adults didn't usually wait for an answer, nor did they seem to expect one (Heath 1983: 250-251).

Applying Heath's model of questions to the several transcripts in my file, I find that most of the questions asked in this context do not truly fit Heath's categories.

From 11/1/84:
        A: Shall we try something?--O.K.--shall we try
        something that your older brothers and sisters try?
        Shall we try "Open shut them"? Shall we? Shall we?
        O.K. Ready?

This strip could have been pulled from almost any page. The questions belong, if anywhere, in the Q-I category. However, Heath (1983: 252) does comment on the belief that "...questions should be used for ...'teaching' children...what they should learn"; further, that "...many of the questions did not serve interrogative functions. Many were, in fact, directives or imperatives, statements of fact, or

exclamatory remarks. Many served as reminders..." about behavior. My own analysis of the event under study shows that in most cases no answer is expected. Questions are used as markers:

1) to suggest what is happening;
2) to inform mothers as to expected behavior (theirs, child's);
3) to show child or mother attention is being paid to them;
4) to bridge the gap from one activity to the next;
5) to recall a previous activity;
6) to express pleasure in child's/mother's presence;
7) to encourage children to participate.

In the following excerpt from the "greeting" portion of 11/1/84, questions are used to suggest what is happening (Heath's question as directive), to inform as to expected behavior (Heath's question as reminder), and to encourage the children to participate (Heath's question as imperative). It also illustrates Heath's finding that questions are used as statements to carry messages not to the baby, but to others (Heath 1983: 129). Statements are used to bridge the gap between moving behind the curtain and re-appearing with Wooley. The exclamation, "Thank-you" suggests the response to kisses. (I have the following abbreviations after questions in the next two excerpts from my transcript to designate their type according to Heath's analysis: I=imperative, E=exclamatory, F=fact, D=directive.)

Wooley the Monkey is awakened from his nap grouchy because he has to get up. As A. crawls around on her knees holding Wooley, she says:
A: I think he's happier now---oh, now he is happy---mmmm! Would you like a kiss, Jane? (I) Thank you! (Jane cries, ??laughs) Would you like a kiss, Michael? (I) ---Elizabeth?
M: Julie.
A: Julie. Would you like a kiss, Julie?(I)
M: He's lookin' at the girls! (laughter)
M: See the monkey?---See the monkey?(D)
M: (several) ooooooh! aaaaaah! (laughter)
A: Does he give good kisses?(I).

Frequent use of questions to show the child or mother that attention is being paid (Heath's question as fact) and to express pleasure in the pair's presence (Heath's question as exclamation) is shown by the portion below from 11/29/84. It also shows the question as directive (Heath) to bridge the gap from one activity to the next. Hymes (personal communication) suggests the term "polite guidance" for repeated use of the question form in this type of situation.

> A: Good morning everyone! Are you all ready?---Well,
> I'm going to get Wooley---Did you get your kiss,
> Jessica? mmmmmwah! Do you want another kiss, David?---
> Oh, you are? Michael, my goodness, you're all grown
> up! (moves behind puppet theatre to put Wooley to bed,
> talking all the while)
> O.K.---Shall we put our hands like this so we can do
> "Open, Shut them"?

With this gesture and this question Ann moves the story hour from the "Greeting" portion to the "Activity", which is the longest part. When I charted the four sections of the story hour and the seven types of questions I identified, I found that Ann uses questions as directives more than any other type. Next in frequency are questions to inform about behavior, to carry messages to people other than the baby. Ann makes frequent use of questions as directives to bridge the gap from one activity to the next. The aim seems to be to keep conversation going while a record is put on, book located, or flannel-board figures readied. She uses almost as many questions to recall previous activity as to bridge activities. (See Table 1 below). The portion of the transcript from 11/8/84 which follows shows the use of questions as bridges and to recall previous activity during the Activity segment. The use of questions and statements as interacting

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bridges and as instruments of recall is especially illustrated by the sequence with Baby Bear, including the statement to Michael.

11/8/84
(song, "Clap, clap, clap our hands" has just ended)
A: That was wonderful!---Shall we read a book?
Remember we read Good Morning Baby Bear? This book
is called Baby Bear's Bedtime. Is everybody ready?
O.K.   ---"Baby bear has had a busy day...Goodnight,
Baby Bear".---We'll have another one, Michael, in a
little while, but first, does anyone remember "This
little piggy went to market"?---Does everybody remember
that?...Let's do that again, shall we?...O.K.! Do
you remember "Hickory, dickory dock"? We did that one
                last week---I think---you remember?

TABLE 1

Number of questions recorded during 4 segments
of 12 story hours and categorized by function.

FUNCTIONS BY LETTER CODE

SEGMENTS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Greeting	5	5	23	1		9	12	2
Activity	68	55	12	29	27		12	20
Book Time	1	2	2					1
Leaving	2	2	3	1	1		1	

A.   To suggest what is happening, what response should be.
B.   To inform as to expected behavior!
C.   To show that attention is being paid.
D.   To bridge gap between activities.
E.   To recall previous activity.
F.   To express pleasure.
G.   To encourage.
H.   Tag questions

The greeting and activity portions of the story-hour usually occupy about twenty minutes. Then, each week, Ann would announce in a voice filled with promise and suspense some variation of "Shall I get the books?" or, "Do you know what's next? I'm going to bring out a biiiiig box!" She would bring out a box labeled "Baby's First Books" and place it in the center of the circle. Babies would crawl, walk or run to, over and into the box, pick up one or more books and take them back to their mothers. Within a very short time (fifty-five seconds to two minutes, by actual clocking) all mothers had a baby on a lap or beside them, reading or looking at books. Ann did not use many questions during book time beyond those which initiated the strip. In a switch from her "story lady" role to her librarian role she used statements to encourage mothers to check out material: "You can check out books---as many as you want---at the desk". She usually moved around the room chatting to babies and mothers, sometimes sitting while a baby (or several) brought her books which she read to them or looked at with them. Book time is terminated by the gesture of bringing Wooley out and moving the group into the leave-taking ritual.

From 11/8/84
A: One more record and then Wooley's gonna come
out and you can check any of these books out.
(few false starts until the right band of record
is located)
("Brand New Alphabet Song")
O.K.---Let's get Wooley to come out.---Does anybody
want a kiss goodbye?---Will you come back next week?

With this brief passage children are told what is happening, mothers are informed as to what is expected of them, all are shown that the

librarian notices each of them and is pleased to see them each week, and a previous activity is recalled.

One type of question used frequently and not heretofore discussed is the tag question. Gunther Kress (1979: 50) identifies this type of question as being concerned with the "...mechanics of interpersonal relations, establishing rapport, seeking confirmation, eliciting support and so on". He was not referring to speech with infants, although his analysis seems applicable to speech directed at children. In her study of speech addressed to infants, Heath (1983: 252) found that "...tag questions hooked to the end of statements, underscored the statements rather than called for a response from the child...these questions-in-form served other functions. Children were usually expected to give no verbal response but to alter their behavior or attend to the question as a reminder for them to think about or consider a previous event, or their background knowledge and experience related to the occasion". Similarly, Elizabeth Dines (1980: 22) found that "...tags serve a very definite function...to cue the listener to interpret the preceding element as an illustrative example of some more general case". Note particularly the number of times Ann says, "Shall we?", or "O.K.?" in the transcript provided in this paper. Holmes (1986) identifies tag questions as a "syntactic device which serves to hedge the strength of the speech act in which it occurs". Her findings show that women "clearly use more facilitative tags than men do...", and that this is consistent with several studies which show that "women tend to adopt a supportive or facilitative role in conversation". Holmes was addressing the use of "You know", but her findings may be applied to the use of tags as a facilitative device in the context of

the story-hour. The librarian in this study makes frequent use of tag questions, mostly in the activity portion of the story hour. She uses them to call attention to the fact that something is about to begin, as seen in this transcript from 11/7/85.

> A: Did everybody get a kiss? Tracy, would you
> like a kiss?---O.K.? Everybody ready to
> clap hands? (moves behind puppet theatre) Ready?
> "What do we do when Baby wakes up?" (song)
> That was wonderful! Shall we read a book? Shall
> we?---(general fussing noises) I See.---Is everybody
> ready? Ready?

Although the babies use few words to respond to the various types of questions used in this event, there is a pattern of interaction between the librarian and the babies. They learn quickly to run to Wooley and to put up their faces for kisses. Many adopt a stance of rapt attention when Ann sits on the chair from which she reads books. The question-as-announcement, "Shall I get the books?" is a signal to watch her closely and move to the pile of books, pick one up, and return to mother's lap.

Mothers use questions, as Heath (1983:248) states, to "...coach the child to attend to a rule-governed event and to share in her way of responding to that event". Some examples are: "Do you wanna do bouncy?"; "Wanna read a book?"; "Want to kiss Wooley goodbye?" "Are you going to get kisses?". They have a tendency to speak in a higher register when addressing the children than when addressing each other or Ann. Ann also spoke in a higher register when asking questions within the body of the story hour, presumably of the babies, than when asking questions directly of the mothers in conversation before and after. Snow (1977) and Newport (1977) have both commented on this pattern in mothers' speech to children. Heath (1983:248) says that

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adults systematically modify their language, "...They speak more slowly, with a high pitch, and they often vary the pitch". Gumperz (1970: 220) sees this kind of shifting, special intonation, in-group terminologies and topical selection as relying basically on "...metaphor and heavily dependent on shared background knowledge".

When I attended the session on 3/13/86, I paid particular attention to the vocal register used by the adults. In this portion of the transcript the three adult speakers changed to higher voices and slower speech when addressing the infants; whether or not it was the mother's own infant made no difference.

(h) higher register   (n) normal register
M.M.: Want a kiss, Matthew? (h)
M.M.: Who am I, Andrew? (h)
M.A.: Is it O.K. for him to call you Donna, or do you prefer Mrs. Warren? (n)
M.M. Whatever you prefer--it doesn't matter to me. (n)
See the monkey? (h)
A: Oh, thank-you (laughs). Oh. O.K. Everytime somebody says "Ann" I turn around. (n) O.K.---Wooley's going to go back here and take his nap---while we get ready for "Clap, clap, clap our hands"---O.K.? (h)

The activity part of the story-hour begins with this song. It follows a question-and-answer format and gives mothers and infants a chance to interact and to respond to the music. Mothers characteristically hold their child on their laps, or the child sits on the floor in front of and close to the mother. For very young children, the mothers move the various body parts at the proper places in the song and make appropriate gestures. The children who are around one year or older move themselves and do gestures on their own. This song is one example of what Heath (1983:248) terms a formulaic exchange wherein "the negotiation of jointly shared intention in communication

between mother and child appears again and again". The song asks a question, repeated twice, answers the question and adds the refrain.

What do we do when Baby wakes up?...
Clap, clap, clap our hands....

What do we do at dressing time? (rept.)
We put on our clothes...
What do we do at breakfast time? (rept.)...

The last line is an occasion for big hugs and kisses between mothers and babies, and, along with the rhythm and the interaction, may explain why it is a great favorite. Although many songs were used in this story hour, this is the only one which follows a question-and-answer format.

Eighteen different books were used at various times in the story hour. Of these, nine followed a question-and-answer pattern. The following excerpt is from one of the infants' favorites, Where's Spot?, used on 9/26/85.

A: O.K.---shall we read---a---boooooook? (in a very dramatic stage whisper). Don't you think that would be woooon-der-ful? Leeeeeeee-eeeet's read--- shall we read Where's Spot? Oh-kaaaa-ay.
There's Spot! He's under the rug.
Do you think he's under the rug?---
is he under the rug?
No-ooo----it's a ---turtle! under the rug.

The book continues to find a succession of animals in the same way, using the peek-a-boo model, which babies love and which is very familiar to them. In addition to the search for some being or object, several books follow the formula typified by the book I Can--Can you?,

where a child performs some act and another child follows. Here is a brief excerpt from the book:

> Rebecca can catch her toes. Can you catch your toes?
> Jason can wriggle his fingers. Can you wriggle
>   your fingers?
> Rebecca can stick out her tongue. Can you stick
>   out your tongue?
> Jason can stand on his head. Can you stand on your
>   head?

The children pay close attention to this book and sometimes imitate the actions as Ann reads.

Of the flannel board activities, six were Mother Goose rhymes. The seventh, "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see?" was modeled after the book of the same name. Various animals are added to the board one at a time and Brown Bear "sees" each in reverse succession, much like "Old MacDonald had a Farm".

It was noted earlier that the librarian did not use as many questions at book time as during other parts of the story hour. She occasionally said something like "Do you know what?" and some variant of "I'm going to bring in a biiiiiig box!", suited action to words and brought in the book box (or the pile of books, after the babies ate the box). Rather than using questions during this time, Ann uses statements of fact, direction, encouragement, or information. Hymes (1972 [1971]) in writing about speech acts as being essential to discourse, says that a community of speakers holds joint knowledge of both message form and the context in which the message occurs; that is, Ann and the mothers know what is meant by the statements, and the babies will learn. This idea of shared knowledge in a speech community is illustrated in the

following passage from 10/18/84:

> A: Everybody come get a book and take it back to
> Mommy.--Cards for the books are at the desk.---
> You can check them out--(to child) You can take
> the books home with you.---Take them out to the
> desk.--Check them out.

The preceding lines are from session one. After the participants become familiar with the routine, Ann is able to move around the room chatting with mothers about books and reading, fulfilling her goal, as she expressed it, of "educating the parents to what's out there for babies". On occasion she is able to add, "We have some new books this week---they're brand new---you can get a book and take it back to Mommy". A few children stand and stare, but most get books, some independently and some with mothers' urging or encouragement. Helen liked to take the box apart before choosing a book; Jane delivered books to everybody before settling on her mother's lap; and Donald, at seven months, preferred to eat his book.

Underlying all of these activities is the belief on the part of the community, the library, the parents and the education system that it is important, indeed vital, to get children to be readers. Society expects children to become readers. According to a recent publication, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1984: 29), one of the greatest needs toward this end is for the child to have experience with oral and print language. The publication states further that "reading is part of children's general language development and is not isolated from listening, speaking and writing...reading instruction builds on oral language" (p. 30). Extending literacy is seen as a link to cultural heritage, as each era has fables, tales, fiction, poetry, non-fiction that embodies the core of the culture (Becoming a Nation of Readers

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1984: 61). This program is not intended to help "build a super-baby"; it is intended to bring children and literacy events together as an early step toward their enculturation.

Mothers under study use statements rather than questions in conversations with each other; for example, "Two Janes--that's nice" and "This is a real challenge for him--he likes getting them out" (the books out of the box --about Donald). This switching of style by the mothers to fit the addressee (whether adult or child) depends on:

- a) what the speaker hopes to accomplish in the speech act, the ends in view;
  b) what the speaker thinks the addressee is capable of understanding; ￫
  c) the status of the addressee due to age and social position in relation to the mother. (Hymes 1972 [1971]: 102-104).

Many songs have a pattern of direction/response. "Allouette" (the children's version), "Put your little foot", and "Baby's hokey pokey" are three songs which contain directions for the children and mothers to follow. "Bouncy, bouncy", in addition to teaching the infants to follow directives, carries a strong message of love and security in the lines "I'll hold you tight, I won't let go". Mothers swing babies "high" and "low" at appropriate times and cuddle and hold tight on the words "I won't let go".

As mentioned earlier, all participants are white, mainstream, and moderately affluent. Although approximately ten percent of the population in this community is black and there is a generous representation of East Asians, East Indians and Hispanics, no one from any of these groups has attended the story-hour. At different times, three Israeli mothers brought infants. I have noticed that the library has patrons of all ethnic and racial groups. Mrs. O'Brien and I

'discussed the matter, but came to no real conclusion. The story-hour is advertised by flyers at both the adult and the children's circulation desks and in the local newspaper, so the event is no "white secret". We conjectured that perhaps many of these minority group mothers are working outside the home and the children are in daycare centers, and/or there may be no available transportation. It is possible that if the library would actively seek out and personally invite minority group mothers, they would attend.

In interpreting this event, it may be helpful to look at the sentence form as one level of communication and the speech act itself, or what the sentence is doing, as another. In a theory of levels postulated in "On Communicative Competence", Hymes (1972 [1971]: 278)) says that what "...is the same on one level of representation has in fact two different statuses for which a further level must be posited; that what is different at one level may have in fact some status at the further level". He sees the speech act as a controlling factor for the form; thus, it can take the form of a question, a statement, a command, or a request. For example, the same words, "Shall we read a book?" can be interpreted variously as any of the preceding, depending on context.

Snow (1977:76) uses the term "motherese" for the kind of talking that mothers and other care-givers use when addressing infants. She says that it is well-established that "...it is simple and redundant, that it contains many questions, many imperatives...and that it is pitched higher and has an exaggerated intonation pattern". "Motherese" might be referred to as a style. Hymes (1972[1971]: 106) raises the question of the effect of style on the speaker when he says that in "most cases style is understood as the arousal and

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accomplishment of expectations. *Ann's use of questions is a style.* Questions are generally interpreted in our society as being a more polite form than imperatives; by saying "Come over here, Adam--OK?", she is telling Adam to get out of the puppet theater, but in an acceptably polite manner. Similarly, she arouses expectations when she asks "Shall we read a book?"; this register is softer than "We'll (or I'll) read a book". The implication of both question and statement is "I'll read--you listen", so the expectations are accomplished. Snow (1977:41) goes on further to cite Juliet Phillips (1970) on "...the most striking characteristic of mothers' speech---its here-and-nowness, its everydayness". Mothers' speech is effectively limited to discussions of what the child can see and hear, what s/he has just experienced or is just about to experience, what s/he might possibly want to know about the current situation...". I think this captures the essence of the conversation within the context of the infant story-hour. The foregoing examples have shown the simplicity, the redundancy, and the immediacy of speech by the adults to the infants in this study. It is regrettable that words on paper cannot show the rapt attention on little faces.

+This paper was prepared for Prof. Hymes' course entitled "The
Ethnography of Speaking".

2The "question" is defined in this study as any utterance which would
require a question mark in written discourse. As will be seen, these
"questions" may have other purposes than that of simple information
gathering.

3From my own experience as a librarian twenty-five pairs is too large a
number for the space provided for children's story-hour in the library;
it results in much noise and confusion. This personal observation was
confirmed by the librarian. On the other hand, ten to twelve pairs is
actually too small a number for story-hour because this causes the
mothers who must perform most of the actions in the songs and finger
plays to become self-conscious--they cannot get lost in the crowd.

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