Ventriloquism as early literacy practice: Making meaning in pretend play

Title

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Abstract
This article discusses how children in New Zealand make meaning in their spontaneous pretend play from kindergarten (four years old) through to their first year of primary school (five years old). The findings discussed here are taken from a wider project investigating children's storytelling where 12 child participants were video recorded during their everyday storytelling experiences over a three-year period. This article reveals how children's engagement in pretend play often involves playing out an impromptu storyline where ventriloquism is used to talk objects into life through paralinguistic features such as gesture, gaze and voice prosody. These findings suggest that through the act of ventriloquism in pretend play children learn to engage in complex meaning making activities in playful ways, orally formulating characters and building coherent and systematic storylines that can be identified as early literacy practices.

Keywords:
pretend play; storytelling; early literacy practices; New Zealand; object personification and voice projection; ventriloquism

Abstract

This article discusses how children in New Zealand make meaning in their spontaneous pretend play from kindergarten (four years old) through to their first year of primary school (five years old). The findings discussed here are taken from a wider project investigating children's storytelling where 12 child participants were video recorded during their everyday storytelling experiences over a three-year period. This article reveals how children's engagement in pretend play often involves playing out an impromptu storyline where ventriloquism is used to talk objects into life through paralinguistic features such as gesture, gaze and voice prosody. These findings suggest that through the act of ventriloquism in pretend play children learn to engage in complex meaning making activities in playful ways, orally formulating characters and building coherent and systematic storylines that can be identified as early literacy practices.

Introduction

Ventriloquism

The art of ventriloquism became famous in American culture by the ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, his dummy, where Edgar made Charlie 'speak' in what has been theorised as a 'communicative constitution of reality' (Cooren, 2012, p. 4), giving the dummy agency to participate in the interaction. Ventriloquism can be identified where 'the shifting conditions of vocalic space are illustrated with particular clarity and intensity in the curious, ancient, and long-lived practice of making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source: the practice of

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ventriloquism' (Connor, 2000, p. 13–14). In traditional performances of ventriloquism, the dummy is presented as a character through its gifted vocal performance where the ventriloquist and his dummy are portrayed as characters in a story being told to the watching audience. In each performance the dummy is not real, it is a doll — something akin to a child's toy, and it is the act of the ventriloquist that provides the contextual understanding that (for the time being) the doll is real with its own personality.

For the ventriloquist's act to be effective it requires a collaborative understanding between the ventriloquist and the audience around the temporal reality of the dummy. Ventriloquism can therefore be seen as a collaborative project where shared meanings between the participants (ventriloquist and audience) co-produce the context (Goodwin & Duranti, 1997). This playful act of illusion around bringing objects to life is often seen in children's play where the co-production of shared meanings and rules around the reality of props in pretend play are negotiated (Butler, 2008).

Pretend play

Many studies have used a psychological approach to the investigation of pretend play and focused on its relationship to child development (for example, Bruner, Jolly & Sylva, 1976; Fleer, 2013; Kitson, 2010; Moyles, 1989; 2014; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1976). Piaget's study of pretend play suggests that it is an activity where children learn to assimilate life experiences through acting them out in playful ways (Göncü & Gaskins, 2011). The work of Piaget around children's pretence led to the understanding of how children produce symbol systems, such as language, in their play, and how telling a story (sometimes referred to as lying in his book 'Play,

Dreams and Imitation') represented symbolic thought as a 'distortion of reality …[and] characteristic of the dawn of reasoning' (Piaget, 1951, p. 233). This work by Piaget has been influential in many areas of pretend play including how it supports language and cognitive development, and how pretence comprehension, or understanding the concept of pretence, can also be observed in children's pretend play with others (Kavanaugh, 2014, p. 272). Through understanding the mental states of others, children develop a Theory of Mind, an ability to see things from another's point of view, which is important for all social interactions and developed through engaging in pretend play (Lillard & Kavanaugh, 2014).

Vygotsky's work on symbolic play suggests that it offers opportunities for early language acquisition and word meaning, where children 'come to recognize, as they use one object to represent the meaning of another object, that they can also use arbitrary symbols like words to represent the meaning of objects' (Göncü & Gaskins, 2011, p. 50). The developmental aspect of play, and more specifically games with rules was explored by Vygotsky where he researched how these rules were related to props in role play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Further links have been made between children's pretend play and meaning making where children who engaged frequently in this type of play were found to use rich literate and complex language, affording opportunities for practising and mastering oral syntactic competencies needed for literacy (Galda & Pellegrini, 2008; Vadeler, 1997).

Researchers interested in the social practices embedded within pretend play have used conversation analysis to reveal how children use membership categories to uphold the social order of the playground (Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006); children's displays of knowledge around object transformation (Sidnell, 2011); and how asymmetry in the social order is played out as one member emerges as group leader (Kyratzis, 2007). When engaging in pretend play with other children there is often inclusion and exclusion of peers through the negotiation of roles and rules (Bateman, 2015; Butler, 2008; Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Corsaro, 1994, Garvey, 1974, 1977, 1982, 1984, 1990) and 'stage management' (Harris, 2000, p. 30) where the scene is set prior to the actors performing a story. Play roles are taken on and adapted, and language is used to negotiate social order through the player's co-production of the game (Bateman, 2015; Butler, 2008; Kyratzis, 2007). Language, gesture, gaze and the use of objects are all important paralinguistic resources for children to communicate shared meaning within their pretend play with others, making this type of play particularly complex.

Object personification and voice projection in role-play

When children engage in pretend play they often use one object to represent another, where children can either agree on the transformation of the object as a co-equal *stipulation*, or one child informs their peers of what the object is transformed into through an *assertion* (Sidnell, 2011). Research indicates that children can give identities to objects when engaging in pretend play in *object personification* and anthropomorphism (for example, Gjersoe, Hall & Hood, 2015) where the attribution of human type qualities is given to inanimate objects where 'objects (for example, toys, blankets or any other everyday object) [are] constantly treated by the child as

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alive' (Giménez-Dasí, Pons & Bender, 2016, p. 190). Personified objects are identified as being different from imaginary companions, as the former involves the transformation of a physical object and the latter relates to an invisible other that only the child can 'see' (Giménez-Dasí et al., 2016, Trionfi & Reese, 2009).

Children's use of voice to talk for their character has been termed 'projection' (for example, Vaz Japiassu, 2008) where the child projects their voice onto a material object or 'vehicle' (Harris, 2000, p. 30). Voice projection in play has been observed where 'the objects played with, rather than the person playing, take on life and do the acting, though there may be vigorous use of voice' (Slade, 1971, pp. 3–4 cited in Vaz Japiassu, 2008), although it is suggested that there is little use of gesture to help convey the intended meaning of the projection to other play partners and observers. The act of voice projection in pretend play is referred to in this article as *ventriloquism*, due to the word definition being

> the production of the voice in such a way that the sound seems to come from a source other than the vocal organs of the speaker. 2 : the expression of one's views and attitudes through another; especially : such expression by a writer through a fictional character or literary persona.
> (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

It is argued here that the term ventriloquism refers to the act children engage in when they make objects take on a specific character in their pretend play, where gesture, voice projection and object personification is used collectively. Ventriloquism is an act that uses voice, gesture and paralinguistic resources as children orally formulate characters and provide contextual understanding and meaning making with play

partners. These verbal and non-verbal characteristics used in the act of ventriloquism can be linked to early literacy practices where characters are formulated as an impromptu story unfolds..

Meaning making and voice quality

Gumperz (1992) discusses how prosody, paralinguistic signs, code choice and choice of lexical forms all work to convey contextualisation, understanding and meaning with others. These paralinguistic resources include the use of gaze, gesture, voice tone and pitch and pointing used to maximise intersubjectivity between people. People use these resources to represent prior or non-present speakers as being a particular type of character through adapting a certain type of voice when quoting that person, demonstrating the speaker's stance towards what the animated person said (Goffman, 1974, 1981).

Reported speech has been found between children and adults in Japan to socialise children into 'socioculturally appropriate speech and in the process position the quoted speaker as a particular kind of social actor (e.g., polite, gendered, epistemic authority, one who speaks indirectly)' (Burdelski, 2015, p. 591). The use of a particular voice to portray a person in a certain light is also found in storytelling (Stivers, 2008) and in disputes between children where vocal pitch, volume and gesture were all used in the reporting of another child's speech to identify him 'as a coward' (Goodwin, 1990, p. 245). Children have also been found to use voice change to mock a prior child's talk 'in Antonero culture by repeating *Buenos Dias* with a feminized falsetto voice, recasting the identity of prior speaker and turning speaker's own words against him' (Goodwin & Kyratzis 2007, p. 285). Voice quality was used by preschool children in their pretend play to create meaning where 'the ways in

which characters were voiced provided opportunities for differentiation' (Kyratzis, 2007, p. 345), affording contextual understanding of the enacted characters.

Laver (1991, p. 184) discusses voice quality in detail from a linguistic perspective where he suggests that paying attention to voice settings offers a rich insight into 'signalling affective information through tone of voice'. Laver provides detailed descriptions of various voice qualities along with an auditory recording of what these voices sound like, offering excellent insight for phonetic theory and for researchers of other disciplines interested in learning more about voice quality. The study of voice tone in effective communication has more recently been studied through the synthesis of auditory repeated listening and acoustic machine-generated recordings to offer a comprehensive understanding of the sequences of talk in social interaction (Walker, 2013). Voice quality is essential in conveying a specific type of character, offering important contextual understanding for the story recipient and/or story partner.

Storytelling, narrative and literacy in pretend play

Reese, Sparks and Suggate (2012, p. 134) suggest that 'narratives are a rich source for observing semantic skills, because they draw upon a child's lexical knowledge' and also demonstrate broader communicative and syntactic skills therefore providing 'a natural setting for observing multiple levels of linguistic, cognitive and social-cognitive development'. Children's storytelling can differ in structure from non-linear to the Western linear format where diverse ways of telling stories in various cultures are equally significant (Ochs & Capps, 2002). The collaborative ways in which children co-produce stories with others is also recognised (Bateman & Carr, 2016; Theobald & Reynolds, 2015; Ochs & Capps, 2002) indicating that the social process of storytelling should be taken into account when investigating children's storying.

Stories are *recipient designed* to include news so that the story will be interesting and worth listening to for the story recipient (Sacks, 1995).

Method

The research project

The data presented and analysed here are taken from a three-year Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funded project in New Zealand exploring children's story telling from their last year in kindergarten through to their first 18 months in school (Bateman, Gunn, Carr & Reese, 2014). Ethical consent was received from the researcher's academic institution, then the participating kindergartens and the children's parents before finally gaining assent from the children. Kindergarten teachers who were particularly interested in exploring children's storytelling and had good working relationships with local schools were chosen to participate in the research. Six children who had similar birth dates were then selected from each of the two kindergartens so that all children progressed to school between January and June 2015. An equal as possible gender distribution was also a selection criteria with four girls and two boys participating.

This article focuses on the data involving the six children from Auckland, New Zealand. All of the educational institutions that the six children attended were within a low decile area with a population of European, Māori, Tongan and Samoan families.

Data collection and analysis

The project focused on children's everyday story telling activities to see the opportunities that were available to children throughout their early years, and so an inductive approach to the data gathering was implemented to allow the data to inform

the analysis rather than being restricted by predefined hypothesis (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Each child wore a wireless microphone and was video recorded for one hour during everyday activities; the video data was then processed through iMovie and stored on a password-protected computer. Notes were made on the day of each data collection, beginning the process of analysis. Specific parts of the video that showed children engaging in storytelling were then edited from the wider video collection by the researchers. The video edits were watched repeatedly by the researchers, and conversation analysis (CA) was used to analyse the sequential verbal and non-verbal actions that co-produced storytelling.

CA uses transcription conventions to detail features of talk and gesture (see appendix for a list of conventions used in this article) to represent interactions in as much detail as possible. Through studying the systematic ways that interactions unfold, the analyst reveals what is meaningful to the participants through their orientation to some conversational features and gestures and not others (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). This way management of everyday shared understandings are evident in orderly ways.

Results and Discussion

Excerpt 1

Matai: first kindergarten data

This first excerpt shows Matai when he is four years old, playing in the sandpit of an early childhood centre with his Spiderman figure. He sometimes talks to another boy, Sam, as they act out their superhero story, and he does this through using the voice of his Spiderman figure.

```
05 Matai:   hey >kung=fu=panda::< I'm okay (0.4) I'm in the
```

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06          sand↓ ((turns his head to talk to another child to

07          his left whilst burying his spiderman figure in the

08          sand))

09          (5.8)

10 Sam:     o↑kay↓ (.) (    ) all dirty: ((approaches Matai
while

11          he talks holding his kung fu panda toy in his hand,

12          making a flying motion with it through the air.

13          Walks away again when he finishes talking))

14 Matai:   .hhh

15 Sam:     he:::y (    ) this is (    ) dirty::↓

16 Matai:   yeah I ↑a::m ↓dir:ty::↓ (.) you ↑get me out of the

17          sa:::nd ↓I'm ↑stu:nk

18          ((Sam walks away from Matai back towards building))

19          (1.8)

20 Matai:   .hhh hhhh ↑hey (0.8) kung-fu-panda::↑ >hey< ↓you

21          ↑get me out of the s:::and ↓but I'm ↑still really↓

22          stu:::ck (0.8) where dis (0.9) .hhh ↑whe:::re go::::

23          (0.4)>oh< ((begins to make engine noises and

24          covers spiderman with sand)) br:::::::  .hhh

25          br::::.hhh  br::::  .hhh  br::::  .hhh br::::  .hhh

26          br::  .hh br:: br::  .hh  br:: br::  .hh

27          ((A couple of minutes later Matai is still

28          outside, but in a different part of the sandpit.

29          Matai and Sam are playing together under the water

30          tap with their plastic toy figures.))

31 Sam:     >lets=go=in=the< ↑wa:↓te:r (0.4) spidy:↑

32 Matai:   the water I have to wash my ↑ha:::nds (0.7) <with
```

```
33          the ↑mu::d> hm [my hands mud]

34 Sam:                     [I have mud] on my hands

35 Matai:  I got mud on my hand ↑too:::

36 Sam:    yeah me ↑too: (1.0) ↓all over the hand

37         (0.8)((both boys wash their hands under the tap))

38 Matai:  °let's go in the water°

39 Sam:    let's go in the ↑wa:↓te:r spidy:↑

40 Matai:  .hhh .hhhh  I'm co:::ld
```

This first observation opens with Matai playing with a plastic Spiderman figure, burying it in the large outdoor sandpit area, whilst shouting out to a boy, Sam, nearby. When he does this, Matai uses a voice that is different to his usual voice, talking through his Spiderman figure to the figure that the boy is holding, a plastic Kung-fu Panda toy, opening the interaction through the act of ventriloquism. The voice that Matai uses is similar to 'nasality' as described by Laver (1991), making it quite distinct from his own, as he tells about being in the sand using the indexical term 'I'm' (line 05). The use of indexical terms such as I, we and us makes it difficult to determine who is being referred to, where one way of deciphering who the indexical term refers to can be gained through paying attention to the category bound activity tied to the indexical term (Bateman, 2014). Here we see that 'I'm' is tied to the category bound activity 'in the sand', indicating that the person who 'I' is, is the person who is 'in the sand' — Spiderman, in this case as Matai, has buried him in the sandpit. These actions together indicate that it is not Matai speaking here but his character Spiderman.

Matai also speaks directly to his peer's toy, marked by using an address term (Wootton, 1981) 'Kung-fu Panda' (line 05) suggesting that he is speaking directly to the character, not the child holding it. No verbal communication occurs for over five seconds as Matai continues to bury Spiderman, but then Sam responds by moving closer to Matai and Spiderman. Sam also chooses to interact through his figure, as he flies Kung-fu Panda through the air within close proximity of Matai and Spiderman. Here Sam also uses a character voice to reciprocate the character's interaction (lines 10–13). These actions, Spiderman's initiation of the interaction with Kung-fu Panda and Kung-fu Panda's physical response, position the children in a participation framework (Goffman, 1974, 1981) set up for progressing a storyline involving the two superhero characters.

Matai sets the scene for the ensuing story as he introduces a problem to overcome — his character being stuck in the sand and needing help — this Trouble being the main event in this story (Bruner, 2002). However, Sam walks away from Matai and there is a brief pause before Spiderman calls out to Kung-fu Panda again, reiterating the Trouble and exacerbating it by stating that he is now 'really stuck' (lines 21–22), and through the paralinguistic features of voice prosody where tone, pitch and the length of the words are now exaggerated (lines 20–22). Matai then uses a different vocal choice to project the noise of machinery, adding another component to the developing storyline. Although we cannot be sure what type of machinery he is enacting, it is embodied through further paralinguistic features in his use of gesture as he covers Spiderman almost completely in sand. This works to further progress the storyline as Spiderman becomes buried deeper and deeper in the sand. Of particular interest here is the way in which the pretend play participants use ventriloquism to act out an

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impromptu storyline with no additional narrative needed to provide contextual understanding by either member.

A couple of minutes later in the play episode, Sam and Matai are still in the sandpit area but are now positioned together under the water tap. This time Sam marks the start of this section of the play episode through his Kung-fu Panda figure as he suggests the collaborative action to go in the water (line 31), using a higher pitched voice than his usual one and adding the address term 'Spidy' in final position, which requires 'Spidy' to examine the words prior to the address term and respond accordingly (Baker & Freebody, 1986; Wootton, 1981). As before, this action of ventriloquism enables Sam to do at least three things: 1) have autonomy over the development of the storyline involving the two characters, 2) communicate to Matai that his character is of a particular persona, and 3) continue the storyline, and therefore the interaction with Matai, within the participation framework.

There is a brief suspension from the pretend play (lines 32–37) initiated by Matai as he moves out of the vocal tone he has been using to interact with Sam, and returns to using his usual voice when speaking about washing the mud off his hands (lines 32–33). Sam reciprocates the shift away from pretend play, as he too abandons the ongoing storyline of the action figures being in the water to deal with a more pressing issue of getting his hands clean. To do this Sam also changes his voice back to his normal tone (lines 34 & 36), demonstrating how this prosodic action works to secure contextual understanding for his play partner with regard to being in or out of the ongoing pretence. This insertion sequence in pretend play has been observed in prior research when an important issue has to be dealt with that is deemed more important than the ongoing pretence, which is usually a relational issue of emotional or physical

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wellbeing (Bateman, 2015).

The pretend play story is then returned to by Matai, as he adopts the 'nasal' voice quality he has been using in the prior turns involving his ventriloquism of Spiderman to orient back to Kung-fu Panda's suggestion to go in the water (line 31), albeit quietly. Matai's ventriloquism of Spiderman involves him using the collective proterm 'let's' to mark a collaborative action for the characters along with the category bound activity of 'go in the water' (line 38), indicating as before that the people who are speaking are those who are going in the water together. Sam aligns with this suggestion by repeating Matai's utterance, placing emphasis on the word water and using the final position address term 'Spidy' again, making it clear that he is directly speaking to Spiderman, not Matai.

Excerpt 2

Isla and the iPad – second kindergarten observation

The following observation, like the first, was recorded during the first year of the project when the participating children were attending kindergarten, although this recording was made later in the year. Here, Isla is seated at a table and has an iPad mounted on a stand in front of her. The screen shows pictures of four characters standing in front of a house scene. Isla can manipulate these characters, as she uses her forefinger to tap, move, and resize them.

```
004 Isla:   ((uses a pinching motion on the screen, making each
005         figure shrink to a smaller size)) (0.9) .hhh (1.0)
006         .hhh ↑[I'm <↓s:ma::ll>]
007              [((reduces a character to a small size))]
```

15

008   (0.7)

009   ↑[I'm <↓s:ma::ll>]

010   [((*reduces a character to a small size*))]

011   (0.7)

012   ↑[I'm ↓s:ma:ll .hhh .hhh]

013   [((*reduces a character to a small size*))]

014   ↑[I'm sma:↓ll]

015   [((*reduces a character to a small size*))]

016   ↑I'm ↑small ↓kids

017   (5.2) ((*changes iPad background picture and*

018   *continues manipulating the figures*))

019   ↑I'm <u>sma::</u>ll kids [I'm a <u>zo:m</u>bie (1.5)

020   [((*drags a zombie character into*

021   *the house then a roast chicken character*))

022   [↓<u>loo:</u>k (°>chicken<°) ((*normal voice*))

030   [((*pinches the chicken with her fingers, and it*

031   *becomes very small*))

032   (16.2) ((*moves characters around*))

040   ↑um ki:ds (.hhh) (0.6) ah::: she's a <<u>zom</u>:bi↓e:::>

041   [(.HH) hi::de ↓hi:de ↓hi:de ((*high-pitched*

042   *character voice resumes*)) (0.7) ((*moves figures*

043   *around the house in a running motion*))

044   [I'm <u>ju:</u>st a zo:mbie ba:↑<u>ker::</u>

045   [((*moves the characters slowly*))

048   (2.5)

049   (.hh) [↓>get out get out< get a:::ll out of you::

050   out ((*normal voice*))

```
051        [((paws at the screen with both hands, moving all
052        characters out of the iPad frame as she speaks))
```

In this observation Isla is sitting alone at a table with an iPad, making the voices of the characters she is playing with to make a storyline. Throughout this episode Isla is telling the story through the ventriloquism of the iPad characters, using a high-pitched falsetto voice quality (Laver, 1991). As with the prior excerpt, Isla does not use any additional narration of the storyline here, just the character voices to develop the storyline.

Isla begins her impromptu story in the same way as Matai in excerpt 1, not by narration but through the use of ventriloquism, projecting her voice onto her chosen characters. However, rather than including a peer in the storyline, Isla has complete autonomy over her story as she plays all of the characters herself. Isla's first lines (6–16) involve her using a small, high-pitched voice to animate her characters as she resizes each one to make them smaller, giving the characters a specific type of 'small and squeaky' identity. As with the prior excerpts, Isla's use of the indexical term 'I' in her utterances 'I'm small' indicate that it is not Isla speaking here, but the 'small' characters.

Isla then complicates the storyline as she introduces Trouble into the plot with a zombie character (line 19). Although her voice is still the high-pitched tone when introducing the zombie character, her accent changes to mimic a slight American twang. This subtle prosodic shift marks the new zombie character as having a separate identity to the present characters and differentiation between which characters are

talking (Kyratzis, 2007). She then brings in a roast chicken character (line 22) and manipulates and rearranges all characters in silence for some time before returning to the zombie storyline, marking a non-linear telling observed in non-Western storytelling practices where the story does not follow a systematic order and is irregular in its production of events (Ochs & Capps, 2002). The zombie story is now progressed as Isla makes the characters cry, run away and hide from the zombie character, all actions being vocalised so that the ventriloquism is fully embodied. The zombie storyline is then resolved with the zombie character, downgrading her 'zombieness', declares that she is 'just a zombie baker' (line 44), again using a slight American accent, this time with a much lower tone. Isla then marks the end of the story (for now) by returning to her normal voice and commanding the characters to 'get out' as she swipes at them to remove them from the iPad scene.

In these two kindergarten examples, and in others that we have, we observed that the children are often engaged in acting out stories through pretend play where they vary their pitch and tone in their playing out of characters, both alone and with others. Both examples here show how the children are using ventriloquism to enact characters through the use of an object (superhero figures and iPad characters), indicating that these objects afford opportunities for children to tell stories. The usefulness of including such open-ended resources for early literacy practices are demonstrated here, where children can be observed orally formulating characters, an activity that is necessary in later writing exercises (Baker & Freebody, 1986). The autonomy over character persona and the direction of the storyline without adult directives is afforded here. Through the affordance of time, space and open-ended objects, the children add their own paralinguistic resources to create complex story structures, following their

own interests and practising storylines that include Trouble (Bruner, 2002) and resolution. These pretend play episodes afford children the opportunity to try on new roles, orally formulate characters and create impromptu storylines, engaging in meaning making and problem solving through language in spontaneous play (Vygotsky, 1976).

Excerpt 3

Matai and Sienna puppet story – first primary school observation

Matai and Sienna are positioned behind a puppet theatre in their primary school classroom. The whole class has just been read a story about monsters from a large book by their class teacher. There are various stations around the classroom where the children can now replicate the story (with their own embellishment) through various means (for example, playdough, blocks, blank paper etc). Matai and Sienna select a puppet theatre; Sienna chooses a crocodile puppet and Matai has a bird.

```
01 Sienna:  _no::w ↓do it (2.2) >your turn< (0.8) >now

02         you=no:w< yo:::u (.hh) go °for shower° (0.6)

03         ((imitates shower noise)) sh::[:::

04 Matai:                             [go for shower e:ither

05         >here< ER::::::=ah ((sings)) de boo ↑bah:: de boh

06         ↑do be:: bo bi de=bo bi de[e:: dee dee dee dee]

07 Sienna:                        [SH:::::] (0.7)

08         °it's camera (>looking=at<) us° ((singing))

09         dee:: ah:::: ah:::: .hhh .hhh hu:rry (0.3) I'm

10         r:eady (.h)  I'm ready (0.3) I::'m RE::ady

11 Matai:  I'm go:ing I'm still in the shower=I'm still sti:nk
```

```
12          (0.7) my shower stinky (1.0) (.h) ((singing)) ah:::

13          dee [dee dah

14 Sienna:    [$what can ↑this: ↓monster do$ ((lifts puppet

15          up to 'audience' and waggles it))

16          (2.2)

17          $I can [fl::y$ ((holds it in the air))

18 Matai:        [>°oh oh ay ay< ((pulls curtain over to the

19          side with his bird puppet))

20 Sienna: whe::°sh° ((moves the puppet through the air and

21          then lands it behind the theatre))

22 Matai:  right your o::n ((looking down at his puppet))

23 Sienna: now it's your: turn no:::w ((looks at Matai))

24 Matai:  no wait I need to go shower ((looking at puppet))

25          (0.8)

26 Matai:  [(             )]

27 Sienna: [$what↑E::ver$] (0.7) .hhh >whate::ver< ((looks at

28          'audience'))

29 Matai:  oh wa ca di ca do:: ((holds his turtle puppet up to

30          centre stage and uses a character voice, singing.

31          He moves the puppet as he talks)) *ah hello:: (0.5)

32          I can go jump un:der:: >in the< (jiggling)

33          jelly=argh*:: ((looks at the puppet and makes

34          splatting noise and motion))smplf:: er:: ((makes

35          puppet fall to the floor. Then looks at

36          'audience')) your turn ((looks at Sienna's puppet))
```

Sienna begins this sequence of pretend play by prompting Matai to start with the storyline, emphasising the word 'now', attending to the immediacy of the act and

leaving turn allocation spaces where Matai could talk (lines 1–3). By offering the floor to Matai and leaving spaces for him to talk, Sienna is setting up a participation framework for a possible story to be acted out as a collaborative and interactive one between the two players (Goffman, 1974, 1981). However, Matai does not take up the offer to talk at this point, and so Sienna begins the storyline herself, announcing 'go for a shower' and then making shower noises. The following lines (3–13) show the puppet characters taking showers, marked by the characters singing.

Sienna then announces in a loud voice similar to Laver's (1991) description of *creaky falsetto* 'I'm ready' (lines 9–10), indicating that her puppet is now ready for their performance following its shower preparations. Matai's response indicates that Sienna's puppet's readiness is seen as a prompt for his puppet to start the performance, as he announces that he is not ready as he declares that he 'stink' (line 11), using a voice similar to *raised larynx voice* (Laver, 1991). The ventriloquism by Matai and Sienna work to alert the play partners that the words being spoken are not that of the child, but those of the puppet, and this works to secure the pretend play context for the players with no need for additional narration of plot or storyline. Contextual understanding is provided through the children's voice quality where meaning making around who is talking can be easily understood by the play partners, as is demonstrated as the storyline progresses.

The classroom exercise is then returned to, as Sienna repeats some words from the book that the teacher just read to the class, 'what can this little monster do' (line 15), with her normal voice, smiling. She follows this by adding her own part to the story, as requested by the teacher, with ventriloquism, as she uses a falsetto voice 'I can fly'

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(line 17) and moves the puppet through the air in a flying motion. The paralinguistic resources that Sienna employs here differentiate the general storyline from a character talking, with her use of voice quality and gesture. Sienna provides further contextual understanding for her play partner with the words that she uses here, again with the use of an indexical 'I' tied to a category bound activity 'can fly', making it clear that the speaker is the one who is engaged in the act of flying and marking the utterance as coming from the puppet, not Sienna.

The final lines show Matai overlapping Sienna slightly with noises, which Sienna does not attend to and continues synthesising her puppet's actions of flying through the air with flying 'whoosh' noises (line 20). Matai then uses his usual voice to tell his puppet 'you're on' (line 22) whilst gazing at him to show that his utterance is aimed directly at that figure (Goodwin, 1981). Sienna aligns with this as she also suggests that it is Matai's puppet's turn, also directing her gaze at the puppet, making him the independent recipient of Sienna and Matai's talk. Matai then returns to his *raised larynx voice* for his puppet, replying that he still needs a shower (line 24). Sienna then responds with her puppet, marked with a croaky, harsh type of voice quality (Laver, 1991) with the utterance 'whatever'. Through ventriloquism Matai is able to delay performing the story without any blame being allocated to him, as it is his puppet who is suspending stage presence by taking a shower, not Matai.

The children tell their impromptu collaborative story here in an orderly way where turn-taking can be observed and each character plays a particular persona through ventriloquism. The children use linguistic and paralinguistic resources to perform an impromptu story told through characters, juxtaposed with telling the story as intended

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by the class teacher. A year after Matai's performance of an impromptu Spiderman and Kung-fu Panda collaborative story with a peer detailed in excerpt 1, Matai continues to demonstrate his skills of negotiating a pretend play interaction with a peer through the act of ventriloquism. It is possible that the opportunities that he had to engage in pretend play experiences at kindergarten places Matai in a good position to be able to perform in such a competent way in these subsequent primary school exercises, enabling him to provide impromptu comedic embellishments to his storyline.

Excerpt 4

Sienna & Ataahua second primary – iPad characters

Sienna and Ataahua have positioned themselves in a corner of the classroom behind a freestanding set of bookshelves, out of sight of the other members of the classroom. Sienna has the iPad on her lap; it has a storytelling app on it. They start choosing characters and settings for their story:

```
18 Sienna: once upon a ti:me ((moves the baker character

19         around the screen then moves her hand away))

20 Ataa:   there wa::s↓ .hhh °ashew-° ((touches and moves the

21         fire-fighter character))

22 Sienna: there was two: hunters↓ who love↑d hunting around↓

23         (0.6) they ↑were friends and they **loved** to hun↓t

24         (1.0)

25 Ataa:   and then this this this fire-engine .hhh come and

26         >took< the machi::ne and the fire-engine man em

27         ↓sprayed the liddle girl↓
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28        (1.1)

29 Ataa:   [shhh:: shhh:: shhh::] ((moves character))

30 Sienna: [↑oh (0.8) for•  your•  in•for•mation] ((staccato))

31 Ataa:   shhh::

32 Sienna: I am not fire (.) so you don't need to do that↑

33        (1.2)

34 Ataa:   shhh:: kshhh:: ksh=and (°pretend you're dead°)

35        (1.2) ((moves the baker character to lie down))

36 Sienna: urgh

37 Ataa:   and then (0.6) we had (0.7) a spray=a spray your-

38        kshhhh: kshhhh::

39 Sienna: °sto::p now Ataa° and then they lived happily

40        ever after
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This transcription is taken from the final data collection of the children when they had been in primary school for their first year. Sienna starts the story narration with her usual vocal tone and with the typical opening 'once upon a time' (line 18), marking the start of the story in a linear way (Ochs & Chapps, 2002). The collaborative telling of the story is then marked through the subsequent lines (20–27) as Ataahua continues the story, beginning where Sienna left off, to make a seamless transition in the narration with 'there was', and throughout the subsequent lines as the storytellers 'set-up' the story background, all achieved in their usual voices.

However, when Ataahua takes her turn (line 25), rather than follow the storyline set up by Sienna involving hunters who are friends and love to hunt, she narrates her fire-fighter character as a 'fire-engine'; the fire extinguisher he is holding is also brought

into the storyline, referred to as a 'machine'. When Ataahua does orient to symbolic representation of the character icons (Sienna's character from his actual baker appearance to a girl in line 27) she does so by dropping her voice to make it very deep, similar to Laver's (1991) *lower larynx voice*. Ataahua narrates a predicated action for her fire-fighter character here, as he is given the task of spraying Sienna's character (line 29). This low vocal position is held while Ataahua then performs the act of spraying, moving her character around on top of Sienna's and making 'shhhh' noises.

In response to this storyline, Sienna shifts from her usual voice to a higher pitched falsetto tone, producing her utterance in a broken staccato way (line 30). Prior research refers to staccato voice use 'to describe separated and distinct words and syllables within talk' (Harris, 2006, p. 108) and found that it was used in conflict interactions to mark out particular words by putting stress on them, mirroring the finding here where Sienna's character confronts Ataahua's character for spraying her. Here Sienna's use of staccato utterance in conjunction with a high-pitched voice quality when performing the act of ventriloquism provides contextual understanding (Gumperz, 1992) that it is the character speaking and not Sienna herself. Ataahua replies with a continuation of the storyline as she makes another 'spray' noise (line 31), and Sienna continues with her dispute. Further meaning-making is evident in Sienna's next utterance (line 32) where she directly addresses Ataahua's character 'you', still in the same character voice indicating that it is the two characters that are having the dispute, not Ataahua and Sienna.

Ataahua then shifts from her embodied spraying back to her usual voice, albeit a quiet one, providing differentiation of who is speaking (Kyratzis, 2007), marking her

leaving the character and becoming herself again to narrate a storyline plot to Sienna: 'pretend you were dead'. Sienna responds by offering a demonstration of understanding, as she makes her character fall down and vocalises the action 'urgh'. The story is then brought to a close, again with a typical linear marker: 'they lived happily ever after'.

This sequence involves voices being incorporated to play out the story through the characters. The linear and sequential process involved in telling a story present within this interaction mirrors the way in which children are required to read and write stories when in school (Ochs & Capps, 2001) and can be linked to the emergence of early literacy through playful and enjoyable means.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how young children use ventriloquism to co-produce impromptu storytelling in kindergarten and their first year at primary school in Auckland, New Zealand. The importance of opportunities for children's oral formulation of characters in these pretend play episodes is identified here, as this activity can be linked to later written literacy practice where children will be required to imagine and formulate characters in their written stories. Emerging literacy skills can also be seen in these pretend play ventriloquism episodes as the children represent one object (for example, a plastic toy) for another (a living being with its own persona), requiring meaning-making through paralinguistic resources, which can be linked to emerging literacy through symbolic representation (Vygotsky, 1976).

When Isla had the opportunity to engage in pretend play with the iPad characters (excerpt 2), she demonstrated her competence at orally formulating characters in a

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storytelling, not through narrative but through the act of ventriloquism. For the children who had the opportunity to engage in pretend play through collaborative ventriloquism, the change in voice prosody accompanied by paralinguistic resources (for example, gaze in the direction of the speaking object in excerpt 3) worked to provide contextualisation and understanding (Gumperz, 1992) for the present players, enabling a smooth flow of storyline with little need for repair. Even though the children were working in collaboration with each other, each child changed their own voice to animate individual and separate characters where 'the voice is not merely the sign of this animation, it is the very means by which animation is accomplished' (Connor, 2000, p. 10).

The changes in voice prosody here demonstrate that storylines can be developed through pretend play in spontaneous ways where there is a mutual agreement that the children are acting, contextualised as the children perform new characters through ventriloquism. A key factor in collaborative ventriloquism is the need for the story partners to believe that the object being talked through is indeed a character with its own voice, identity and autonomy, and has a particular persona through the use of a particular voice quality. The ways in which the children can co-construct a story only through ventriloquism, with or without the use of an overarching narrative, is a skill which requires fast-paced thinking in order to be responsive to their play partner's actions in a relevant and timely manner that does not slow down the pace of the story, whilst also adding an impromptu contribution that could take the storyline in any new direction. These findings suggest that, given the opportunity to engage in pretend play, children learn to engage in complex meaning-making activities in playful ways, building coherent and systematic storylines that can be seen as early literacy practices.

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Appendix

The conversation analysis symbols used to transcribe the data are adapted from Jefferson's conventions described in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

[	the beginning of an overlap
]	the end of an overlap
=	the equal sign at the end of one utterance and the beginning of the next utterance marks the latching of speech between the speakers. When used in between words it marks the latching of the words spoken in an utterance with no break.
(0.4)	the time of a pause in seconds
(.)	a period in parentheses indicates a micropause less than 0.1 second long.

::	lengthening of the prior sound. More or less colons are used to represent the longer or shorter lengthening.
↑	a rising intonation in speech
↓	a falling intonation in speech
-	abrupt break from speech
<u>Underscore</u>	marks an emphasis placed on the underscored sound
Bold	underscored words in bold indicate heavy emphasis or shouting
°degree sign° tone	either side of a word indicates that it is spoken in a quiet, soft
(brackets)	utterance could not be deciphered
((*brackets*))	double brackets with words in italics indicate unspoken actions
$dollar$	Dollar signs indicate the talk was in a smile voice
creaky	Asterisks indicate the talk was in creaky voice
~wavy line~	Wavy lines indicate a wobbly voice (as in crying)
>arrows<	utterance spoken quickly
<arrows>	utterance lengthened