

# **Bakhtin's Dialogism in a Preschooler's Talk**

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## ABSTRACT

The case study describes the application of Bakhtin's theories of dialogism to the language learning of one child. The author traces the development of her son's language development from age 2 and 9 months through the age of 5 and 6 months. The findings focus on the ways in which the preschooler appropriated language from books, his parent's stories, and the media to use in his own play and storytelling. As his language skills developed, he relied less on memorizing texts he had heard and began to combine information from multiple sources. With age and increased exposure to a wide variety of materials, the preschooler became more aware of genre and adapted his talk to an audience for his own purposes. The findings demonstrate how a child was involved in using others' words and in transforming them to apply to new settings such as his play and his own stories. Further, the child's use of speech genres provides examples of the ways in which context played a role in shaping a child's language development.

While several researchers (e.g., Dyson, 1997, 2003; Lensmire, 2000; McCarthy, 1994) examining elementary students' literacy development have used Bakhtin's theory of dialogism quite effectively to conceptualize students' development of voice in writing, most early childhood researchers tend to use Piagetian or, more recently, Vygotskian perspectives to examine young children's language development. For example, a collection of articles edited by Power and Hubbard (1996) entitled *Language Development* provides historical studies by important theorists such as Piaget, Chomsky, and Vygotsky; includes a section on talk in schools with contributors such as Cazden, Dyson, and Wells; and contains an entire section entitled "Sociocultural and Personal Perspectives" that features Scollon and Scollon, Fine, and Tannen. Notably absent is any mention of the work of Bakhtin in theorizing young children's language development. Likewise, an important collection of research on young children's learning from sociocultural perspectives by Göncü (1999) has only one mention of Bakhtin in the entire volume. Yet, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism has much to contribute to the understanding of how young children acquire and use language as Wertsch (1991) has explicated in his work on Bakhtin.

This study originated with observations of my son and my interest in how Bakhtin's theories of dialogism might be applied to the learning of very young children. I draw from Bakhtin's theories to demonstrate how a preschooler used others' words in books, oral stories, and the media and applied them to new settings in his play and storytelling. Through his transformative dialogue, the preschooler learned to use particular genres in relation to particular audiences for specific purposes.

## THEORETICAL FRAME

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism suggested that an individual's speech is shaped in continuous interaction with others' utterances through the experience of assimilating others' words. He argued that "all our utterances are filled with others' words, varying degrees of 'our-own-ness'...which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate" (1986, p. 89). Producing unique utterances involves *ventriloquation*, a term that Wertsch (1991) defines as "the process whereby one voice speaks *through* another voice" (p. 59). In other words, humans combine a variety of voices they have encountered throughout their lifetimes to produce unique utterances.

Bakhtin differentiated between "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse" (1981, p. 342). The former "enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it" (p. 343). The latter, internally persuasive discourse, is "half ours and half-someone else's," (1981, p. 345). Bakhtin argued that there were two ways of assimilating discourse: "reciting by heart" which is an inflexible kind of

assimilation fused with authority that is transmitted and “retelling in one’s own words” (1981, p. 341) which is flexible, responsive, and transformative. Internally persuasive discourse results from the struggle of the two forms of assimilation and is an ongoing creative process that can be applied to new situations.

Bakhtin theorized that “we speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable *forms of construction of the whole*” (1986, p. 78). Speech genres develop in the same way as national languages, from interactions with others. As Todorov (1984) noted, “Genre is not the exclusive prerogative of literature; it is rooted in the everyday use of language” (p. 81). While Bakhtin suggested that there is no particular list of genres, there are generic forms such as greetings, table conversation, and intimate conversation among friends, as well as scholarly talk or forms of speaking appropriate for the military. Philips (cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 62) suggested songs, prayers, stories, and speeches are examples of genres because they are routinized and predictable with particular boundaries. Swales (1990) further defined genres as a “class of communicative events” (p. 45) with a “shared set of communicative purposes” (p. 46). Genres also have “family resemblances” (p. 49) as well as certain constraints that differentiate them from other genres.

Storytelling is one of the most frequently used genres introduced to young children. Children are exposed to stories read aloud; they learn to understand narrative frames from the media, and they tell their own stories at very young ages. McCabe (1996) suggested there were four important functions of stories and personal narratives for children: (a) making sense of experiences, (b) portraying roles played by various characters in stories, (c) making past events present and abstract events more vivid, and (d) forging relationships and facilitating language skills.

When examining the nature of children’s understanding of narrative, Applebee (1978) found that children developed a concept of story at a very young age. Studying preschoolers, first graders, and third graders, Hudson and Shapiro (1991) found increased sophistication with age in the use of the narrative genre. Older students created longer narratives, used more structural elements such as introductions and endings, and produced more cohesive stories than younger children. Topic and task also influenced students’ narratives. Children as young as first grade shifted their ways of telling stories depending on the demands of the task (Hicks, 1991). Preece (1987) found that young children were capable of producing a variety of narrative forms from personal anecdotes to retellings to original fantasies.

Sociocultural factors also affect children’s storytelling. Gee (1989) has argued that genre knowledge is linked to cultural values, while Heath (1983) found that opportunities for engaging in particular genres varied by social class and cultural group. McCabe (1996) found that families from different cultural

groups engaged in different types of storytelling events that took place in different contexts and served different purposes. For example, European-American families often exchange personal narratives at the dinner table; the narratives focus on action plots that are told in a particular sequence. In contrast, many African-American children's stories reflect the tradition of telling lengthy stories embellished with creative expression; the stories draw on literary devices such as metaphor with the intention of being performed. These differences are reflected in the forms and functions of stories told by members of diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Bakhtin's theories of dialogism including ventriloquation, internally persuasive discourse, and speech genre, together with previous research on narrative as an example of a speech genre, framed the study. In this case study, I focus on the following research questions: (a) How does a preschooler use information from books, his parents' oral stories, and the media in his own talk? (b) How does a preschooler develop internally persuasive discourse over time? and (c) How does a preschooler develop a sense of genre and audience over time?

## METHOD

The design of the study drew from case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Case studies are examinations of single individuals, groups, or societies whose chief purpose is description. Case studies are particularistic, focusing on individuals, situations, or events that provide in-depth documentations of events and perspectives. Case studies are inductive, relying on building conceptual categories from the data (Babbie, 1998; Yin, 1994). As Dyson (1995) pointed out, cases "offer a means for identifying and talking about the dimensions and dynamics of [classroom] living and learning" (p. 51).

Although case studies have been used to examine a variety of phenomenon in educational settings (e.g., McCarthy, 2002; Stake, 1995), case studies have been used to study children in their home contexts as well. Piaget (1969), for example, studied his own three children to develop his theories about how cognitive structures develop. Baghban (1984) studied her daughter's learning to read and write from birth to age 3. Bissex (1980) focused on her own child to understand the ways in which writing development, particularly invented spelling, occurs. More recently, Bauer (2001) examined her daughter's and son's development as bilingual/bicultural learners in German and English.

The intensive study of one individual in home linguistic and literacy contexts provides in-depth information that has the advantage of providing longitudinal data about young children's language and literacy development. The case study methodology was appropriate for this study because I collected data on one child over the course of several years.

## Participants and Roles

Mac is an only child of middle-class, European-American professors. The author and mother, Sarah, is an associate professor of literacy, specializing in children's writing and the socio-cultural context of literacy learning. Mark, the father, is also an associate professor of literacy who focuses on socio-cultural aspects of education. While our perspectives on literacy differ in terms of our sources (Mark using a range of critical theoretical frames, e.g., Bourdieu [1984], Foucault [in Rabinow, 1984], and Habermas [1984]; and Sarah drawing from Vygotsky [1978] and Bakhtin [1986]), we share a similar perspective on language development: that is, a social constructivist position, e.g., Vygotsky (1978), rather than a structuralist, e.g., Chomsky (1965), or developmental one, e.g., Piaget (1969). We both view the acquisition of oral language and literacy as reciprocal processes. For us this means that both are acquired through transaction with adults, peers, and media (e.g., computer, television, films, and books).

From birth we immersed Mac in the literacy activities of our lives and extended those activities to the reading of books, sharing of television and videotapes, and using computer materials that were age appropriate. Mac reflected our emphasis on oral language and literacy development. By 3 months, Mac was holding and chewing on cloth books, and by 6 months, we read aloud to him periodically throughout the day and as part of his bedtime routine. When he was a little over 2 years, we began to tell stories in the car to entertain him and to tell him stories at night in efforts to get him to fall asleep. We began with traditional stories such as *The Three Bears* which he asked us to tell him over and over again, until one day he began substituting ideas; for example, he wanted the bears to be eating tortellini (a favorite food of his) instead of porridge. We then began to invent stories and by age 3, he was telling us stories without prompts (see Appendix A for chronology of Mac's oral and literate development).

Both Mark and I acted as principal caretakers, but generally I was responsible for the bath and bedtime routines including the read-alouds, and we alternated with the ad-lib storytelling that occurred. A typical bedtime routine included the following: I managed the bath-dressing-tooth-brushing routines, then I read aloud to Mac for 20-30 minutes, then we turned off the lights. Mark would arrive for the storytelling portion of the evening and launch into one of his adventure tales. Mark, a gifted storyteller, often embellished his fantasy stories with details, metaphors, and colorful language that often built on cues supplied by Mac or from media we had viewed together. Stories often revolved around trips to faraway places and encountering animals or strange creatures, but they also included using names of Mac's friends and their parents.

My stories tended to be more mundane with more predictable storylines and occasionally, a moral to the story (e.g., an animal or child learns something). Mac often interrupted the storyteller when he did not like the direction of the story and offered alternatives, “No, I want an animal in the story.” Sometimes we asked Mac to tell us one of his stories in addition to or instead of one of us telling the story.

I played the role of participant-observer for this study, managing all data collection, including field notes and organizing audio and video equipment. I also did the tape transcriptions myself. Mark and I engaged in ongoing discussions about the data, and I shared my analyses with him.

### Data Sources

The major sources of data to examine my son’s learning were field notes, audiotapes, videotapes, and Mac’s work samples such as writing and drawing. To trace his oral language development, I relied primarily upon field notes and audiotapes of his talk during bath time, playtime, and bedtime. The field notes took the form of a baby book from birth to 2½ years old, in which I noted milestones in his physical, conceptual, and language development. I also noted the dates and examples of his first words, two-word sentences, and three- to five-word sentences. From ages 2½ to the present, I began using a notebook to record language development, vocabulary use, and stories he told on specific dates. In addition to making notes on a regular basis, I often jotted down notes at some critical moment when Mac seemed to be using new or interesting language.

When Mac was 2 years and 9 months, I began to use audiotapes to gain more specific, verbatim data about his storytelling and language use. I tape-recorded his talk during everyday routines—including bath time, getting dressed, playtime, our shared reading experiences, and storytelling events—and continued until he was 5½ years. I collected data during planned sessions several times monthly, taping whatever occurred for a specified period of time such as the length of the bath; these sessions were usually about 30 minutes in duration. Additionally, I often audiotaped Mac when he began to engage in spontaneous storytelling or interesting conversations.

To record his literacy development I videotaped at regular intervals our bedtime reading-aloud sessions from the time he was 15 months old. I recently reviewed and selected from these sessions to make a CD-ROM of his development; thus, the information in Appendix A reflects the analyzed literacy data. Additionally, as Mac began to draw and tell stories about the pictures as well as dictating stories to me, I collected work samples. Because this article focuses on oral language, the primary sources of data are audiotapes and field notes collected over a 3-year period (from ages 2½ to 5½) as I watched Mac appropriate

the dialogue from books and the media for use in his everyday activities and play.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis began with reading field notes and listening to the tapes. I selected a subset of audiotapes for transcription and further analysis based on two criteria: a) a recording from at least every 3 months of the 3-year period and b) any recording that seemed to indicate a change in the way Mac was using language. Although I am familiar with Strauss and Corbin's "grounded theory" (1990, p. 23), I did not work from the data towards theory. Instead, I began to apply Bakhtin's (1986) theories, particularly ventriloquation, to the data early on in my analysis. I also analyzed the data chronologically, looking for shifts and continuities in Mac's talk over time. There was an interplay among forming categories, selecting examples, and seeking disconfirming data. The three themes of ventriloquation, transforming voices, and the role of genre and audience were all derived from Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, but there are additional aspects of his theory that I did not attempt to apply. The development of these particular categories occurred over time because I engaged in some interpretations and analyses as I collected the data.

The study began with Mac's recitation of "How many many feet you meet," and I immediately identified the source as the Dr. Seuss book (1968) I had read to him recently. This began my search for tracing the sources that appeared to influence Mac's talk and applying Bakhtin's theory of ventriloquation to the data. Once I established the category, I began to look for potential sources for Mac's words and expressions. This analysis progressed toward identifying the narrative genre as one he was invoking.

As Mac got older, it became increasingly more difficult to identify the sources influencing his talk because he drew from them in more sophisticated ways. This led me to apply Bakhtin's theory of internally persuasive discourse. I went back and forth between the theory and the transcripts, noting examples of Mac appropriating texts verbatim. I then compared his version with that of the book or video. I looked at the examples from across the 3 years and realized that there was a developmental pattern away from memorization towards retelling the dialogue in Mac's own words.

The focus on genre developed from analyzing the key topics that Mac used in his discourse over time. These topics included a focus on animals (in particular dinosaurs), an emphasis on Mac and his family as characters, and his use of Pokémon. His almost obsessive emphasis on Pokémon easily lent itself to further analysis of genre. I also found that the data represented different types of speech events such as stories, explanations, games, and retellings. Upon closer examination, I found that the genre was very connected to his sense of

audience; that is, he used certain genres depending on his interlocutor. This finding became an analytic category: the role of genre and audience. Once I had formed the categories of ventriloquation, internally persuasive discourse, and the role of genre and audience, I selected examples from the larger data set that demonstrated particular patterns as well as shifts to include in the article.

In addition to using Bakhtin's theories to analyze the data, I employed a separate analysis to look at Mac's use of the genre of storytelling. I invoked European-American traditions of narratives because that is the discourse style to which he was most frequently exposed. Our own discourse styles as middle-class European-Americans, the story structures of books we read to him, and the conventions of the media most consistently reflected action-oriented plots with clear beginnings, middles, and endings. Therefore, I looked at features of character, setting, plot, and problem setting and resolution; I noted where Mac included characters' dialogue and storybook language such as "once upon a time" or "the end"; and I paid attention to issues of elaboration of details and coherence (Applebee, 1978; Hudson & Shapiro, 1991).

As participant-observer who is also a parent, issues of trustworthiness and credibility take on particular significance. Applying the criteria defined by Yin (1994) to determine the quality of a case study such as using multiple sources of data, spending a long time in the field, and asking key informants to correct misconceptions can be challenging when the key informant is a young child. Additionally, applying a particular theory (e.g., Bakhtin's) can also present challenges to finding disconfirming data; however, I used multiple sources of data, discussed interpretations with Mac's father, and considered alternate explanations. The two ways in which I sought to interrogate my own analyses were to consider other theoretical perspectives to explain the data and to find examples that did not fit the analysis. For example, a developmentalist (Piaget, 1969) perspective might have explained the data in terms of particular stages of language development. In fact, this perspective did inform my analysis to an extent. Since Bakhtin (1986) does not look at discourse in relation to children, nor does he explain how children might use language differently according to age, his theories do not help explain change in a child's language use.

A second method I used to establish credibility was to look for examples that did not fit the categories. There were some of those examples including Mac's utterances that had no identifiable source; however, there were enough examples to support my interpretations that I was not troubled by the fact that each language event did not fit neatly into one of my categories or into Bakhtin's theories.

## FINDINGS

The findings from the 3-year study of Mac's language development are described in the following sections; however, to place my analysis using



Bakhtin's theories in a larger context, I provide information about Mac's overall language and literacy development in Appendix A. This chart outlines changes over time and notes the examples that I include in the text to examine Bakhtin's dialogic theory in relation to my son's learning.

When applying Bakhtin's dialogic theory to Mac's speech, three facets were evident. First, Mac used others' words in a way that suggested ventriloquation. Second, as he grew older, it appeared that he engaged in a struggle between an authoritative voice and internally persuasive discourse. Third, Mac engaged in an interactive process of identifying and creating speech genres in relation to an audience.

### Ventriloquation

Bakhtin suggested that ventriloquation is "the process whereby one voice speaks through another voice or voice type in a social language" (in Wertsch, 1991, p. 59). This phenomenon was quite evident in Mac's conversations, play, and storytelling. When Mac was around 2½ years it was possible to trace some of the sources for his ventriloquation to the stories his parents told to him, the books we read, and the media to which he was exposed. Mac appropriated different levels of speech from these sources including words, expressions, sentence-level ideas, genres, and prosodic cues. Table 1 (next page) displays examples of Mac's ventriloquation from ages 2 years and 9 months to 5 years and 6 months.

#### Words, Expressions, Passages

Many of Mac's more traceable appropriations were at the word, phrase, or sentence level. For example, on one occasion he used the term "Oh Bother" to express annoyance, and this seemed to come directly from Disney's version of *Winnie the Pooh*—the books which we had read many times and the videos that he had seen.

The sentence that initiated this study occurred one night after his bath when I was attempting (rather unsuccessfully) to get him dressed in his pajamas; I began to tickle his feet when he said, "Oh how many many feet you meet." This sentence comes directly from Dr. Seuss's (1968) *The Foot Book*, a book we had read many times before, but not within the last week preceding the event. I then began to notice how many ideas he used in his play that reflected books we had recently read. Other examples from Mac's talk during the month of July 2000 included his saying, "He got caught in a net" as he was playing with his toys in the bathtub the day after we had read the fable *The Lion and Mouse* (Yolen, 1997). He also used the expression "He had a red hot chile" that came directly from a book we had read, *The Three Little Javelinas* (Lowell, 1992), a Southwestern adaptation of *The Three Little Pigs*. Mac also appropriated ideas derived from stories such as his use of "I will find my mother," said the baby sparrow. And he saw the cow. And he was not his

mother. He went in the big wide ocean,” not many days after reading *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 1960).

Dinosaurs were a major theme of the summer as we read many expository texts about dinosaurs; visited the Dinosaur National Monument in Vernal, Utah; and read fictional books about dinosaurs. Mac’s play often reflected his recent readings of books such as “He ate and ate and ate until he was all filled

Table 1. Mac’s Ventriloquation From Ages 2.9–5.6

Age	Type	Source	Example	Features
2 years, 9 months	•Words, expressions passages	• <i>Winnie the Pooh</i> •Dr. Seuss • <i>Are You My Mother?</i>	•“Oh Bother” •“How many feet you meet” •“I will find my mother”	•Direct quotes
2 years, 9 months	•Narrative genre	•Various books •Parents’ stories	•Elephant story	•Parental prompt •Characters, action
3 years, 2 months	•Narrative genre	•Various books •Parents’ stories	•Elephant and Giraffe story	•No prompts •Characters, setting, plot
4 years	•Narrative genre •Expressions	•Various books •Parents’ stories •TV commercials	•Mac Bear – Tiger story •Bob Dole	•Conventional openings, closings •Use of dialogue
4 years, 2 months	•Narrative genre	•Various books •CD-ROM	•Splatter Ink •Egypt Scarecrows	•Knowledge dump •Use of scientific discourse •Playing with structures
4 years, 3 months	•Narrative genre	•Various media sources	•Little Boy Who Wanted to Be a Fireman	•Dramatic tension •Audience influence
5 years, 6 months	•Narrative genre	•Various books • <i>Future Is Wild</i> TV series •Animal Planet TV	•African Plains	•First-person narrative •Function of stories •Scientific discourse

up,” an idea that reflected a recent reading of the book *Dinosaur Time* (Parish, 1974). We must have read *Danny and the Dinosaur* (Hoff, 1958; about a little boy who visits a museum and finds a dinosaur who comes alive to play with him for a day) 30 times in the car one weekend and Mac made use of this text in his subsequent play. For example, he said, “‘What lovely green grass’ they said. They are eating lovely green grass. All bugs together” during his bathtub play; this bore many similarities to the part of the text that says, “‘Oh what lovely green grass’ said the dinosaur.” Mac not only used the expression, but also used the idea of a direct quote; yet, he had turned the speaker into bugs, which were the toys he was playing with in the tub. On a different occasion, Mac placed other toys on the back of his toy dinosaur and said, “Let’s go to the museum.”

One of the more humorous examples of ventriloquation came right after he turned 4. He tapped me on the shoulder, put his face up to mine, and said, “Who’d you expect—Bob Dole?” in a perfect imitation of the commercial. Yet, he had transformed the television commercial to use for his own purposes—surprising his parents and making us laugh.

### Narrative Genre

While Mac’s appropriation of words, expressions, and sentences from books, the media, and his parents was fairly easy to attribute to particular oral and written texts, his uses of genres and prosodic features of conversation were more complex. Over the months that I began recording Mac’s talk, I saw the development of particular speech genres, especially that of the third-person narrative. Although few of the books that we read to Mac began with a traditional “once upon a time” story structure, almost all of our oral stories told to him began this way. He appropriated the traditional openings and closings of stories, beginning his own stories with “once upon a time” and ending with “and that’s the end of the story.” While we modeled the inclusion of characters and plots in our stories and initially scaffolded their use by prompting him with questions for his own storytelling, we did not explicitly point out these aspects of narrative to him. Mac’s appropriation of these forms was clear from his first recorded efforts when he was 2 years and 9 months. In his first recorded story (that he told to me upon my request as opposed to his natural talk in the bathtub), Mac stated that he wanted elephants in his story. I prompted with requests for action by asking him what happened in the story. His narrative contained several characters and actions such as the elephants spraying a king and then sheep and horses. Here is his first recorded story (see Appendix B for a transcription key):

Mac: I want elephants.

Mom: What is going to happen with the elephants?

Mac: They are going to snap the elephants away.  
Mom: What else?  
Mac: The king comes and they say, "What's going on here?"  
Mom: Good, what else happens?  
Mac: A white man comes and he knocks the king away. Snaps the king away.  
Mom: Does anything else happen?  
Mac: Yes, a big stomping elephant comes and it sprays water on the king. And then a really big elephant came and it sprayed water on the king too. And then anything else happens. And then. Says hello to the pig. He is a farmyard. And then what happens.  
Mom: What happens in the farmyard?  
Mac: What happens in the farmyard? What happens in the farmyard?  
Mom: You tell me.  
Mac: Now the three little wild elephants sprayed water.  
Mom: Who is in the farmyard that got sprayed?  
Mac: Sheep and horses.  
Mom: Did they like being sprayed?  
Mac: No they were too sad. They had to get the water off them.  
Mom: (pause)  
Mac: Then they (said) "quick, get it off." And then the farmyard in the pond and fish came and fish bit them and then the fish swam away. And then the fish swam away. And there was nobody else.

Once Mac stated that he wanted elephants in his story, I prompted with requests for action, such as "What else happens?" Without explicitly telling him that stories have a plot, I provided a scaffold for him to structure his story. While Mac's narrative contained many characters (whose relationships to each other aren't clear), action such as the elephants spraying the king and the sheep and horses, and emotions in response to my prompts, his narrative was not a coherent story. The prompts acted as guides, but he did not necessarily see them that way as he repeated my line of "What happens in the farmyard?" His repetition may have been to give himself time to think of the next event or to ask me for my ideas about what should happen next. Throughout this story there was a sense of coconstruction, although I am the authority who may have interfered with the story he wanted to tell.

A story from December 2000 when Mac was 3 years and 2 months demonstrates Mac's developing ability to tell his own story. He still wanted to include an elephant, but this story is decidedly different. He told this entire story to me without any prompting and included a beginning and an ending. There is little conflict in the story, but in spite of adding additional characters, Mac returns to the elephant and giraffe, integrating them back into the story.

(To Mom) I will tell you about the elephant and the giraffe. The elephant and the giraffe were hugging each other. The giraffe tried to put (inaudible) on the elephant's trunk and the elephant tried to put his trunk on the giraffe's ear. And they were snuggling and they would hug. That is what they did before they had to hug. The giraffe put his ear on the elephant's trunk. That is what they had to do—snuggle. Also they like to play with each other. Sometimes the giraffe comes to the elephant's house and sometimes the elephant comes to the giraffe's house. Both would see each other. Both would see the cool stuff in their houses. He lives in the grass where the people are and the cows and the horses are. And there was an old cat and an old dog who lives in the, who lives by the family. People would come over and see where the elephant was and they would pet the elephant because the elephant liked the people to come over and pet them. And they liked to pet the giraffe too and they would come over and pet the giraffe because he always let them pet him. And they would see the cows and the horses and the sheep and the pigs and the dog and cat. The dog would pet and the cat would chase him out. The cat would play with the mouse. The cat would play with the mouse and chase him out, the cat liked to chase him out and the mouse liked to chase the cat. Sometimes the dog would come over. But, but, but, but they liked. But the mouse went first and then the mouse went first and then went the cat and then went the dog. They liked to go around in circles. Sometimes the other animals would come with the mouse, the cat and the dog. Sometimes the giraffe and the elephant would come with the dog, the cat, the mouse, and all the other animals liked to come. They all liked to play with each other and even the people liked to play with the animals. They all played together. And that is the end of the story.

What becomes clear from the story is that Mac internalized the narrative genre and used it to tell his own stories. He demonstrated an understanding of the need to introduce characters, some sense of setting (living in the grass), and a focus on plot. He used a variety of verb tenses to tell his story (e.g., present, past, future perfect) and added details to elaborate the plot.

Mac showed the most interest in storytelling and the narrative genre between the ages of 4 and 5. He began to formally introduce his characters (even though he did not always include those he mentioned initially in the developing plot) and told a story that contained a problem or plot line. The following example comes from October 2001, when he had just turned 4 years old:

Mac: I am going to make up a story with a bear, a tiger, and a blue whale.

Mac: Once upon a time there was a little boy named Mac. He had a lot of animals. Each day he played all his favorite animals. Sometimes he would battle little animals but he really liked the big animals that he saw at the zoo. But when he saw a zoo animal, he opened the door of the cage, he went inside the cage, ran inside the cage and stopped scooped (inaudible) the animal in his mouth and swallowed the animal. (He starts making noises of swallowing and crying.)

Mom: Then what happened?

Mac: A bear came out of his cage and (ate?) all the animals and (took?) the little boy away. All the small animals climbed onto the bear and all the other big animals climbed onto the bear. Soon a hippo came running and opened his mouth and got all the animals and the bear inside his mouth. He felt something in his mouth move. He felt something in his tummy move. He didn't know what was going on inside him. He looked in and there he saw all the animals inside him. He saw the bear and he saw some other animals and he said, "That was good, that was what was going on." And soon he fell down to the ground because everywhere he went all the animals inside him were moving. That is the end of the story.

Mac used conventional openings and closings to signal the narrative structure. He demonstrated his interest in animals and he shifted the focus from the little boy to the animals. First, the bear made his entry, but then the hippo replaced the bear as the animal that has a strange experience—feeling animals inside him. There is more coherence to the story than previous narratives, and he used dialogue. While he introduced the story with himself as the main character and referred to himself in third person, the story was more about the animals than about himself.

Between the ages of 4 and 5, Mac tried out a variety of narrative structures and topics, not all of which were coherent. Sometimes, he appeared to do a knowledge dump, just placing everything that was in his mind in a story, regardless of whether it made sense. Here is an example:

Mac: Once upon a time there was a beautiful castle. In that castle there was a mean cat and dog. And there were magnets and there were bones. Put splatter ink on them.

Mom: What happened with the splatter ink?

Mac: Splatter ink went on them, and, but the man got some more splatter ink and threw it on him. They took all the splatter ink off. Then they told the man that they did not like splatter ink

on their bodies and then all the men went away. All the men that used to see them. The men that used to see them were Joseph, (inaudible) wrapping paper and (inaudible). These were the men that used to meet all those (inaudible). The end.

Mac had the core of a plot with the problem of splatter ink, but he did not develop it. He also spoke less clearly than usual, as seen in the number of inaudible expressions. In the next story, from the same time period of 4 years and 2 months old, Mac was learning a great deal of new information from expository texts and showing an interest in science. The story below illustrates his appropriation from a number of sources—a CD-ROM we had about exploring Egypt, books that distinguished between dinosaurs who were meat eaters and those who were plant eaters, and his developing interest in ideas such as evolution. Here is a story he told:

Mac: Once up a time there was some Egypt scarecrows that walked like a giant elephant. And the scarecrow were (inaudible). All the Egypts were scared of the scarecrows because they thought the scarecrows were meat eaters, but no, they were plant eaters. And they used to bring the bird, the animals would come, and they would never climb on the snowman. The snowman peacock, build after it was all gone then it came to life and it was so scary that it was even bigger than the whole world. It was too heavy to carry. Every time the Egypt tried to carry it, then the other was too heavy. (inaudible) was made of ivory, made of fire, then the snake evolved into (inaudible). My story is done.

Mom: What were Egypts? (pause) Were they animals? Plants?

Mac: They were made of silver back, it is a silver coating. You can't really see it but it is real. It comes to every house like the Egypts do.

Mom: In your story there were Egypts, snowmen and the elephant?

Mac: No.

Mom: No elephants. (In reading over the transcript I noted that he had used "walked like a giant elephant" to indicate the way the "Egypts" walked rather than as characters in the story. However, in my initial role as audience I was a bit confused.)

Mac: Silverback. It was a man-eating (inaudible) that is strong enough to carry the man that holds up the earth.

Mac's Egypt story was more a display of appropriating scientific discourse than a coherent narrative. However, later on that month he experimented with a different kind of structure. In January 2002, Mac began to tell me a story that I jotted down:

The little boy wanted to be a fireman, but there were no fires. The little boy wanted to be a teacher, but no kids came to school. The little boy wanted to be a paleontologist, but there were no bones.

I switched on the tape recorder and asked him to repeat his story. This is what he told me:

Once upon a time there was a little boy who wanted to be a fireman. When he grew up he was a fireman but a lot of people wouldn't call him. He never wanted to be a fireman again. Nobody ever didn't call the fire department. He decided to be something else. He wanted to be a teacher. Nobody ever came to school. (In a louder, more exaggerated voice) "Anybody, come. I'm the teacher at school. Come." But nobody answered because he was all alone. They were in their home, but nobody would come. Then something really bad happened. Very sad. Very mean to do. That little boy got killed. That is the end.

In the first version, Mac showed some knowledge of narrative structure through his repetition of a pattern—the boy selected an occupation, but was thwarted in some way. In Mac's second version, he added dramatic tension, prepared the listener for a sad ending, and, indeed, ended with the main character getting killed. It is clear that Mac's audience influenced the two versions. I made the event more formal by asking him to repeat it for the tape recorder and he seemed to interpret this as an invitation to add more drama and, perhaps, a stock ending—someone getting killed.

A major change occurred in his storytelling around age 5½. He became much more aware of the functions of stories, saying, "I can tell this one over and over again because I remember it." Instead of telling stories that were idiosyncratic—invented on the spot—he began to see that he could tell the same story again. He also suggested he had a repertoire of stories when he said, "This is one of my stories of one of my trips." (He then asked me to give an introduction to the story and the date, as was my habit to announce on the tape.)

On the way to the African Plains of of the Future I had to walk across a very hot place, which was very difficult to live in. While I was walking along I saw, I saw a huge basilisk, I almost missed it because it was flat (I interrupt to clarify if he said basilisk.) basilisk and then he dumped stuff into his little (inaudible) and ran through a swarm of flies and the flies got trapped in his frill. And, and I discovered that, I knew that he had waxy stuff on his frill, on his frill, and he got the flies off his frill. So I shot, I shot my uh sample gun and it hit his frill and it fell off and I went and got it and put it in my sample collection and closed the box, and then put it in my back pack and zipped my back pack up. Then I reached the African Plains. I was looking for three



creatures (clears his throat) um little monkeys, a rattleback, and big birds. And at first I was looking for the rattleback and I saw a group of little monkeys running and I didn't know why they were running but then I saw they were running because they were being chased by a pack of big birds. And then, and then the boss of all the big birds uh uh uh stopped the chase and went over to a nest and I saw that there was a big rattleback trying to eat her eggs. And then I just watched and stuff and then, and then, (pause) and then I went back home. That was my story.

Like many of Mac's stories, this one featured animals he had seen from television shows such as *The Future is Wild* (a special on the Discovery Channel that featured zoologists predicting what animals might be likely to adapt to future conditions), his viewing of Jeff Corwin's adventures on Animal Planet, and the DVDs entitled *Walking with Dinosaurs* (Haines, 1999) and *Walking with Prehistoric Beasts* (Haines, 2001). He combined some of the scenes he had viewed in which Jeff Corwin acted as a scientist to take samples from different animals with his knowledge of existing animals (like the basilisk) and animals of the future such as the rattleback, which he explained later was "a spiny reptile of the future. It has spines on his back. He rattles his spine when a future bird comes along." What is markedly different is his insertion of himself into the story and use of the first-person narrative. Here he placed himself in the role of a scientist taking samples, but provided several plots such as the monkeys being chased. Mac used scientific language interspersed in his first-person narrative. His shift to the first person may also have reflected the types of stories his dad was telling at night. These stories tended to feature members of the family in daring occupations (like oceanographers as opposed to college professors) and Mac's friends, but his dad always used third person, namely Mac, as the protagonist.

The changes in Mac's narratives over the course of almost 3 years reflect several changes. He appropriated the narrative structure around 3 years old, but then refined it to include conventional openings and closings, plot development, and intentional use of dialogue. Although there was more coherence in his stories told at 5½ than at 3 years old, his stories also suggest that the development of the narrative genre was not necessarily straightforward. Instead, it included experimentation with scientific discourse, use of vocabulary that he had heard but did not necessarily know the meaning of, and playfulness with different types of narrative structures. He became aware that stories not only have a structure and sequence, but that the narratives themselves can have some stability. While he seemed to be clearly influenced by the narratives he heard from us, from books, and from the media, Mac was struggling with creating his own internally persuasive discourse.

## Transforming Voices: Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Discourse

In Mac's use of voices he had encountered from the media, books, and us, we can see the ways in which he struggled to create his own "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Table 2 displays his development from reciting verbatim from books and videos to his retelling of stories in which he drew from several sources and added his own details and inflections.

Table 2. Transforming Voices: Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Discourse

Age	Source	Example	Features
3 years, 7 months	Book	<i>Commotion in the Ocean</i>	Recites verbatim
3 years, 8 months	Book	<i>Greedy Python</i>	Recites verbatim
3 years, 9 months	Book	<i>Are You My Mother?</i>	Recites verbatim
3 years, 9 months	Video	<i>Eyewitness Reptile</i> video	Substitutes information Includes information from other sources
4 years, 3 months	Stories at school	Retellings of stories	Intertextuality
4 years, 9 months	Navajo tape Bible Pokémon	Beginning of the Earth story	Combines sources Uses distinctive features of each
5 years	Book	<i>The Little Old Lady Who Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything</i>	Retelling Changed voice Added details Intertextuality

### Reciting Verbatim

When he was 3½ years old Mac began to recite texts he had heard verbatim. For example, after we read *The Greedy Python* by Buckley and Carle (1985), Mac recited the entire book. Later he recited *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 1960) from memory, a task that was facilitated by the repetition of phrases in the book. A favorite of his was the following from the book *Commotion in the*

*Ocean* (Andreae, 1998). Mac's version was almost verbatim from the book:

There is no other beast on the planet as big as the giant blue whale  
He measures a 100 feet long from his head to the tip of his tail.  
We are just a bunch of barnacles and all we do is cling  
We know it is not that glamorous but it's our favorite thing.

During this same summer, Mac became fascinated with animals, and in particular the *Eyewitness Series* on dinosaurs, reptiles, and amphibians. Many of the books are accompanied by videos that are narrated by Martin Sheen. Mac began to recite whole passages from the videos, taking on the voice of Martin Sheen. The books and videos became almost religious texts to him and reflected a clear example of Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse. Here is an excerpt from Martin Sheen's version:

There are lizards that are larger than a human and others smaller than a beetle. There are six and a half thousand different types of reptiles each sculpted by the fine act of adaptation to fit its environment perfectly. Like the (molluck ?) or thorny devil. A threatening vicious monster? Only on the outside. It's a member of the largest reptile family—the lizard. Those spines do more than just deter predators, they collect dew to drink. (*Eyewitness Reptile* video, 1994)

Here is Mac's rendition:

There are lizards and reptiles larger than a human or others smaller than a beetle. There are six and a half different kinds of reptiles each (stutters) perfectly like the molluck or thorny devil. Is this a threatening monster? Only on the outside. It is a member of the largest reptile family, lizards, who lives in the deserts. But those spines are more than just a (inaudible) predator.

Although Mac appropriated many of the exact words and the tenor of Sheen's voice in his version, he also changed some of the words to make his own sense of it. For example, he skipped the part about adaptation, but added information he knew from other sources (i.e., that many lizards live in deserts). Mac's version of the section on crocodilians also reflects the appropriation of exact dialogue at the same time as he added his own interpretation from watching the video. Below is Martin Sheen on crocodilians:

The reptiles closest to sea dragons of myth are the crocodilians embracing alligators, caimans, and, of course, crocodiles. With their huge jaws and watery eyes, they are as old as the dinosaurs and perfectly adapted to the life in the rivers. Their tails are their motor, their feet are rudders, their skin is an iron hull and when they move, they strike like fire (inaudible). A fully-grown crocodile can be submerged for well over an

hour waiting for prey. When they make a kill they can't chew so they saw off the carcass. Vicious? Deadly? Certainly! But these jaws can gently cradle a baby. (*Eyewitness Reptile* video, 1994).

Here is Mac's version:

Um, Alligators, caimans, and of course, crocodiles. Their huge smiling jaws, watery eyes, they are a result of the dinosaurs who quickly adapted, adapted to life in the rivers. (stutters) The tails are the motors, the feet are the rudders, their skin is an iron hull but when they move they strike like lightening. A fully-grown crocodile can lie submerged while it is waiting for its prey (noise). But they can't chew so they have to (whistle?) and tear the meat off and cutten (sic) it. (stutters) But these killer jaws can also fondly cradle a baby...

While Mac did not recite the part about sawing the meat off the carcass, he invented his own version where he described what occurred when the reptile ate its prey. He also substituted *fondly* for *gently*, indicating that he understood the meaning of the words. While Mac substituted some words and showed his understanding of the text by including information from other sources, his talk was filled with the authority of the text from the reptile video.

During the summer when he was 4 years and 9 months old, he told a story about the beginning of the earth. During that week he had encountered at least three sources that he used in his story. We had been listening to stories told by Navajos that often began, "Once long ago when the earth was just beginning." The stories were marked by the very distinctive voice of a Navajo woman. In our efforts to provide him with some religious background, we had read to him a series of Bible stories, mostly from the Old Testament. Mac had been watching many Pokémon movies that take place in other worlds such as Pokémon gyms or the Orange Island. Mac told a story that reflected linguistic markers of each of these sources: he told the story in a voice that sounded like the Navajo woman and included animal characters, the content reflected stories from Genesis, and the narratives also followed a plot line not unlike Pokémon movies.

Just before Halloween, when he had turned 5, Mac asked if I wanted to hear a scary story. When I said yes, he began to tell a story in great detail about a little old lady being chased by several objects. Here is his story:

There was a little old lady who went out to the forest to get some nuts and berries. That girl (inaudible) in the forest, when she was going back she saw these two shoes and they went "clomp, clomp" only twice. And then the old lady said, "Get out of my way" and the shoes got out of her way. Then she walked a little bit faster, but behind her she could hear "clomp, clomp." Then she saw these pants, that these

green pants, and they went “wobble, wobble” and then that little old lady said, “Get out of my way.” And the green pants got out of her way and the little old lady walked a (changed his voice to a higher pitch) little bit faster. And then she (inaudible) “clomp, clomp, wobble, wobble” and then she saw these pants, the shirt, and it went “shake, shake.” And she went “Get out of my way. I’m not scared of you, you shirt.” (clears his throat) And the shirt got out of her way. Then she walked a little bit faster, but behind her she heard “clomp, clomp, wobble, wobble, shake, shake.” Then two gloves (inaudible) went “clap, clap,” then the musician’s hat went “nod, nod.” She said, “get out of my way, you two gloves, the musician’s hat, [she] said, “I’m not scared of you.” But behind her she could hear, “Clomp, clomp, wobble, wobble, shake, shake, clap, clap, nod, nod.” Then there was a pumpkin head stuck up in a tree. It was going “boo, boo.” She said, “Get out of my way, you pumpkin head. I’m not scared of you.” He got out of her way. Now she walked a little bit faster. By now she was walking at a very fast speed and then she got to her cottage and got inside and slammed the door. It was so quiet in her cottage that she didn’t even know. Then the door went “knock, knock” and she answered the door and guess who was there? The two boots going “clomp, clomp,” the pants going “wobble, wobble,” the shirt going “shake, shake” the gloves going “clap, clap” and the musician’s hat going “nod, nod” and the scary pumpkin head going “boo, boo.” And the next morning they made a scarecrow out of him. She put the boots at the bottom, and the pants on top of the boots, the pants on top of the boots, the shirt on top of the pants, and and the gloves got on the sleeves of the shirt, and the pumpkin head on the shirt, and the musician’s hat on the pumpkin head. And then it walked and scared all of the crows. And they built a scarecrow and the scarecrow walked around scaring all the crows away. And they lived happily ever after.

Since there was such coherence to the story and he told it with such fluency and dramatization, I asked if he had heard the story somewhere. In fact, his teacher at preschool had read a story entitled *The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything* (Williams, 1986). Mac’s retelling, after hearing the story only once, was very close to the actual text. The order of the appearance of the shoes, pants, shirt, glove, hat, and pumpkin head were accurate, as were the noises such as “clomp, clomp” that accompanied each object. He did insert his own interpretation that the pants were green and the pumpkin head was in the tree; these aspects of the story were not told in the text, but the pictures showed green pants and the head in a tree. He deviated from the text in some places; he said, “She slammed the door,” while the text reads, “She ran as fast as she could and didn’t stop to catch her breath until she was safe inside her

cottage with the door locked” (p. 11). He also changed the shoes to boots at the end, and he added a subject *she* (most likely meaning the old lady), then *they* for putting the scarecrow together. In the text, the clothed scarecrow simply appears the next day with no subject specified for assembling it.

Mac’s retelling of videos and stories reflects the Bakhtinian idea of a “heterogeneity of voices” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 93) that were not verbatim accounts. The story retelling is quite different from his more verbatim memorization of the segments from the *Eyewitness Reptile* video. First, his retelling of the story was after one exposure, as opposed to his having viewed the video many times. Second, he retold the plot in his own words rather than simply appropriating the exact words and inserting a few minor changes as he did in the transcription from the video segment. He changed his voice to indicate dramatic points from the story (probably his teacher did too), but it sounded more like his voice than the teacher’s. Third, much more interpretation is indicated in the story retelling: he added details from the pictures, inserted his own subject, and summarized rather than simply ventriloquating (Bakhtin in Wertsch, 1991).

### Intertextuality

Mac’s retelling also demonstrated intertextuality (Todorov, 1984) between two texts. His teacher had read *What Was I Scared Of?* (Seuss, 1997), a story about green pants to the class. He was able to compare the two stories as being scary and both having green pants. Yet, he was also able to identify the elements that were different. He said, “It [the little old lady story] was like the green pants story only there wasn’t the gloves, the pumpkin head, the musician’s hat, the shirt, or the shoes.” His comparison demonstrates an awareness of an ability to identify similarities and differences between texts.

The examples cited demonstrate the various ways in which Mac struggled to make the authoritative voices he encountered more internally persuasive (Bakhtin, 1981). There seemed to be a gradual movement away from memorization toward retelling in his own words over time. He began to rely less on the actual text he had heard and seen, and he began to show more interpretation, adding his own details. While Mac continued to extract texts from a variety of sources, the verbatim quality had been replaced by a more creative and open quality. Over time, he tended to perform less for us and integrate the texts into his play. For example, he no longer repeated sections of CDs or the *Eyewitness* video verbatim; however, he did use information from his books and videos in his play and told us facts in brief form. There appeared to be insights (Stahl & Murray, 1998) that Mac developed as he gained control over what he told; he actively used various elements for his own purposes. He also seemed to develop an ability to identify his sources as he was able to compare texts. At the same time, Mac was developing an awareness of genre.

### The Role of Genre and Audience

Mac's awareness of audience and genre began to appear around the age of 4 and became more sophisticated by the age of 5 as demonstrated in Table 3. His development of genre seemed to coincide with the distinctions that he made among his reading materials. For example, he called *The Big Bug Search* (Young, 1998)—expository text in which the reader is provided with short amounts of information and directed to find all the bugs in the picture—a “learning book.” He distinguished it from a “silly story” such as *Don't Eat the Teacher* (Ward, 1998) about a shark eating everything at school. He also said *The Big Bug Search* was not a fairy tale. He became interested in Dr. Seuss books and requested them frequently just before he turned 5. Mac said, “We all know Dr. Seuss is really funny. He writes a lot of funny letters in *On Beyond Zebra*” (1955). He added that Dr. Seuss used many funny pictures and words and makes up a lot of rhymes. He suggested that Dr. Seuss “writes the rhymes to help us know more rhymes and to make it more sillier.” At around 5 years old he revised his understanding of genre to include the following: learning books (books that have numbers, letters, and pictures to identify), story books, and “history books like *Eyewitness*.”

Table 3. Mac's Developing Awareness of the Role of Genre and Audience

Age	Genre	Features
3 years, 6 months	Expository text	Memorizes 150 Pokémon characters
3 years, 9 months	Expository text	Develops own Pokémon scripts: “Do you have a Beadrill?”
3 years, 11 months	Expository text Videos	Develops pop quiz: “Meowth has strong powers. True or false?”
4 years	Books	Distinguishes between learning books and storybooks Develops rituals and rules for different genres: games, storytelling, explanations
4 years	Expository text Videos	Retelling Pokémon plots Provides facts: “Most Pokémon have exoskeletons.”
5 years, 1 month	Expository text Videos	Invents own story based on Pokémon Invents Pokémon play with several actors and roles

## Genre

Mac's awareness of genre became evident in the rules he set for types of events and audience. For example, thinking games—in which we gave clues and he tried to guess the animal—were only for bed and not for the car. He had a distinct style for the following genres: storytelling, which consisted of either stories told to or by him at bedtime with the lights off; retelling of stories, which generally occurred in the car after he had heard stories that were read at school; expository/explanations, in which he recounted his understanding of some natural phenomenon or said, “did you know that dinosaurs...”; dictated stories, in which he told a story and we handwrote or typed his exact words; and told stories that described the picture he had drawn. Within each of these genres, Mac and his parents interacted in certain ways that became routinized and proceduralized (Philips in Wertsch, 1991).

One example of Mac's understanding and deliberate use of genre is in relation to Pokémon. Mac became enthralled with Pokémon when he was 3 years and 6 months old, and we ordered the *Official Pokémon Handbook #2* from Scholastic (2000), which listed all 150 Pokémon (at that time; now there are more) by type in rows with the picture and the word below. He asked me to repeat the names and point to them every day, morning and night, for 9 days. (No diacritical marks were available to help the reader so I used my own knowledge of phonics to pronounce the irregular names. Mac used my pronunciations until he watched the shows that had different ones, and then he corrected my pronunciations, e.g., caterpie [mine: caterpi, the movie: caterpee].) We always did this in a particular order, and at the end of 2 weeks Mac could identify each one.

Mac soon began comparing and categorizing the figures and began to assign the other children in his class and the adults around him Pokémon names. From the little information that was provided in the book, he began to make up stories and end them with such phrases as “the adventures of the Pokémon will never end.” While he was not able to decode the words, he developed a way to discriminate among the features of the characters. (Many of the characters have names that are similar to animals, i.e., *butterfree* looks like a butterfly.) He developed his own ritual (“Do you have Beedrill?” “Do you have Marill?”) that appeared to facilitate his learning of the names in a game-like manner.

Mac's obsession with Pokémon, with some periods of weeks in which he did not attend to it, remained to age 5 and 2 months. (After Christmas there was a complete dismissal of Pokémon, and he became obsessed with dinosaurs and all prehistoric creatures.) He watched most of the movies, collected the cards and figures, and read more books, mostly consisting of catalogues that listed facts about Pokémon. Some of the books also contained quizzes and true-



false questions. He occasionally visited the Web site “to learn more about the new Pokémon” with assistance from his parents.

Mac used the Pokémon characters in a variety of ways. While doing so, he showed a command of genre and situated himself in differential power positions with the people with whom he was interacting. The question-answer genre developed in September 2001 before he turned 4 and appeared to be connected to quizzes included in two of his books. He asked me, “Meowth has strong powers—true or false.” These developed into pop quizzes often posed on the drive home from preschool:

Mac: Mom, Does Bulbasaur have leaves on its back?

Mom: Yes.

Mac: Wrong. It has a bulb on its back!

Mac: Does an Ivysaur have a flower?

Mom: Yes.

Mac: Got it. You get an Ivysaur. But don't look (in the book) for the answers. Just know it in your mind.

In the setting of the pop quiz, Mac positioned himself as the authority figure by evaluating my responses to his questions. This was in contrast to our initial interactions in which I was the authority figure because I deciphered the text and told him the names. A variation on this activity was for him to tell a Pokémon story and then ask me to tell it back to him—he was checking my listening comprehension. If I left out information he thought was important (which I often did), he provided it.

Another setting in which Mac was the expert and I the less informed was in his retelling of the plots of Pokémon movies. The plots of each are quite predictable: the characters of Misty, Brock, and Ash find themselves lost in a forest, debating which way to go. They invariably fall into a trap, and one of their Pokémon is stolen. The opponents appear and a Pokémon battle ensues. The good guys (Misty, Brock, and Ash) choose their Pokémon and related attack (such as vine whip) and defeat the bad guys (Team Rocket or their foils) in a battle for badges. Other predictable features include the songs that introduce the movies; the narrator who begins and ends each adventure; and a robot voice that identifies the Pokémon, describes its evolution, and its attacks. However, because I rarely agreed to watch an entire series of movies with him, Mac begged me to watch and added, “You can learn a lot more about their attacks if you watch with me.” He attributed his knowledge base to having watched the movies. In this way, he positioned himself, with the help of the shows, as the authority.

Mac's attention to the movies resulted in an infusion of Pokémon lines in his own play such as, “Those creeps took everything.” He also had taken on the

Pokémon characters, some of the settings, and basic plot lines to use in his own storytelling. One story of his demonstrates that he expected attention from his audience and a familiarity with the characters. Here is an example at age 5 of his storytelling that was prompted by my request for a story:

Mac: One time Muk got up early and Muk went on a walk and then he came to the pond where the Water Pokémon swim and Starmie and Staryu (stutters) woke up and came out of the water. Then Squirtle did and Squirtle came out of the water and then they went out on an adventure. Then they went out on an adventure. On the way they saw Ditto and um Ditto transformed into Alakazam. Then they went on a walk and they kept walking until they came to a rock. They climbed over it and they decided to have a race. The one that got started first was Muk. He went and started running before the others did. Then Starmie started running, then Squirtle started running, and then Alakazam and Ditto started running. You know who won?

Mom: No.

Mac: Alakazam and Ditto. Even though they were the last ones. They won because they were fast. And then they decided on a prize that Alakazam and Ditto would get because they won and the prize was another Pokémon. And the other Pokémon was Marawak. And then Ditto (inaudible) and then they went back home and had a big lunch and then they played and then they played spaghetti (a game he had made up). The story is over.

Mac switched roles in this narrative to involve me in the story, perhaps to test my knowledge and to explain some of the features of the story. He involved me by asking if I knew who won and then proceeded to explain to me why particular Pokémon were successful; however, he returned to the narrative format once he had clarified certain aspects of the story.

Other speech genres emerged in his play. Each bears a “family resemblance” (Swales, 1990, p. 49) to the others, while having slightly different purposes and audiences. When Mac played alone, he took on the role of several of the characters and their various attacks, usually in some type of order. For example, he looked at a large poster of Pokémon hanging in his room and went through them systematically, or sometimes he would “just think of them in my mind” without a prompt. His moves parallel the movies in which the characters essentially did battle with one another to earn badges. His play consisted of little dialogue, much noise making that sounded like battle cries, and a great deal of action, e.g. kicking legs into the air and jumping off furniture. The purpose appeared to be entertainment and the audience was a distant other since most of this play did not involve other people.

In contrast, when he wished to engage another child in his game, he assigned him or her a role and they battled with one another. Or, occasionally, he and the other child played more collaboratively. He explained that when he played with his friend Gracie they were DoDuo, a two-headed Pokémon, and since they were two heads tied together they had to work as one. Even though Mac was the self-proclaimed expert on Pokémon in his class, there appeared to be more equality in his play with classmates than with me.

Mac's interactions with me with regard to Pokémon most resembled the genre of a formal play. He assumed the role of the narrator and invited me to select a Pokémon I wanted to be. He chose his attacks and invited me to choose mine. (I was usually unable to come up with an appropriate attack [such as vine whip] and mistakenly selected types [such as grass or poison] instead.) Our playing together involved more dialogue than his solitary play as he directed me to do certain things while allowing me to choose within the rules, e.g., my Pokémon and attacks. One of our games involved a dramatic genre. Mac simultaneously played three roles in the game—a character in the play, narrator to explain what was going on in the play, and stage director to explain to me what I should do and to answer my questions. I, too, assumed different roles as I tried to understand the game.

Mac: (as director) We are supposed to walk around like this and pretend that we are walking along a road.

Mac: (as actor) Which way?

Mac: (as director) We both go "That way." And we both point to a different way.

Mac: (as actor) Let's go my way because my map tells me to go that way.

(Pause and walk around the room)

Mac: (as actor) There is a Bulbasaur.

Mom: (as actor) What do we do?

Mac: (as actor) Then there is another Bulbasaur.

Mom: (as actor) Do they know each other?

Mac: (as actor) Look, there is another one.

Mom: (as actor) Are they friendly?

Mac: (as actor) Yeah. There is another one. Wow!

Mom: What should we do, Ash?

Mac: (as director/actor) I just want to be myself.

Mom: (as actor) What should we do, Mac?

Mac: (as actor) They all want to hug each other.

(Mac makes fighting noises)

Mac: (as actor) Bulbasaur and (inaudible) are hugging each other.

Mom: (as actor) Now what?

- Mac: (as actor) Hmmmm. This is a Pokémon Paradise.
- Mom: (trying to understand more about the game) What makes it a Pokémon Paradise?
- Mac: (as actor) I see an Ivysaur.
- Mom: (again trying to understand more about the game) Why would we see it in Paradise?
- Mac: (as director, exasperated) Didn't I just tell you it was a Pokémon Paradise?
- Mom: (trying to understand more about the game): So we see lots of different Pokémon?
- Mac: (as director) I think the Pokémon might get lonely so that is why it is a Pokémon Paradise.
- Mac: (as actor) OK there is a Squirtle in the water.
- Mom: (as actor) I see.
- Mac: (as actor) There is a Wartortle in the water.
- Mom: (as actor) Yeah.
- Mac: (as actor) Look, there is a Blastoise and the Blastoise is swimming off to the other side of Pokémon Paradise. I think it is swimming back. (pause) Look over there—there is Metapod.

Mac had multiple roles in the game that required him to provide different types of information for different audiences. Once he realized that I had some questions about how to play my role and about the function of Paradise, he did two things in response: he stepped out of his role to explain why it was Pokémon Paradise and then began to include more detail in his own dialogue to indicate the action of the drama. The multiple roles are indicative of the heteroglossia (Wertsch, 1991) of voices that Mac was using to play the game.

Despite his growing awareness of audience and purpose of the communicative acts in which he engaged, Mac did not maintain a pureness of genre that I have implied by the analysis above. Instead, he often combined genres and switched types of discourse accordingly. He also combined his knowledge of living things with his interest in Pokémon. For example, he said to me quite matter-of-factly, "Most Pokémon have exoskeletons." This is not one of the many facts that are included in Web sites or books listing Pokémon and their characteristics. Here, Mac had clearly extrapolated the knowledge he had about certain living creatures to apply to his characters.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from the study demonstrate the ways that Bakhtin's theories can be applied to one child's language development and point to the possibilities for further application to other children. First, Bakhtin's theory of ventriloquation was useful in exploring the ways in which Mac drew from books, the stories we

told, and the media to use in his play and in his own stories. His talk often reflected voices that were "filled with others' words" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89). Mac appropriated language from books to use in his own play, but he also internalized the genre of narrative to tell his own stories. Further research on other young children can suggest the ways in which other children use the media in similar or different ways from Mac.

The examples from Mac's narratives demonstrate that for him, gaining control over the ability to tell coherent stories that contain the main elements of characters, setting, and plot was not a straightforward process. These data support the conclusions of Hudson and Shapiro (1991) that children develop more sophisticated narratives with age, but Mac's data also show that these features do not simply unfold or develop in a continuous path. Instead, other children, like Mac, may take detours, gaining control over some features of the process like developing plot, while other features are less developed. Additionally, as McCabe (1996) points out, culture may be a strong influence on the features that are more developed than others.

As Mac became older it was more and more difficult to trace the sources of his ideas. When he was 2 and 3 years old, we could frequently identify the sources of his language in books and the media, especially since we tended to be more in control of what we read to him and what he watched. By age 5 and 6 months he had been exposed to many more books, stories, and television shows than we could possibly track. As the complexity of his language increased, it was also difficult to identify which elements came from which sources. This understanding is compatible with Bakhtin's indications that in a heteroglossic world "where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide" (1981, p. 428), we are exposed to more and more voices that intermingle and are difficult to identify.

As Mac developed his language skills, he began to use more internally persuasive discourse. Around the age of 3 and 6 months, he tended to memorize segments of videos and books verbatim, although even in those segments we can see that he understood the ideas and inserted some of his own words. By age 5, Mac relied much less on memorization of text and more on interpretation and adding elements from several sources. While his rendition of reptiles (*Eyewitness Reptiles* video, 1994) when he was 3 showed a marked resemblance to the voice of Martin Sheen, his retelling of *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* (Williams, 1986) at age 5 showed a marked difference. This finding is not meant to imply, however, that children's language development moves from authoritative discourse to internally persuasive (Bakhtin, 1981) in neat, linear ways. In fact, Bakhtin used many examples of adults using "hybrid constructions" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 59) and theorized that we are all constantly in the process of drawing on others' words.

While the case study of one individual can not be generalized to a larger population of children, the finding that Mac memorized less as he grew older

suggests there may be a developmental process in which children move from relying on memorized texts to having more control over the utterances they select from the vast array of possibilities they encounter. This finding could be extended by examining several children's language development over time, specifically focusing on memorization and retelling of stories.

The findings from the study also indicate that Mac became more aware of genre and was able to use it for his own purposes. Genre and audience appeared to be closely connected for him. As he began to see genre as consisting of particular routines and rules (Swales, 1990), he also used them in relation to his audience. For example, Mac used different genres with me, such as the guessing-game format, than he did with his peers. He began to give me directions about turning on the tape recorder when he believed he had a story that deserved to be told. These aspects of genre development support the findings of Hicks (1991), who saw that the demands of the task have an effect on children's stories, and Preece's (1987) findings that young children are capable of producing a variety of narrative forms. Mac's purposes seemed to parallel McCabe's (1996) findings that stories serve a variety of functions including making sense of experiences, portraying roles, making abstract events more vivid, and developing relationships with others.

Mac's appropriation of language from books, stories, and the media demonstrate that he was involved at a very early age in using others' words and also in transforming them to apply to new settings such as his play. Further, his use of speech genres provided more examples of the ways in which context (e.g., audience and tools; Wertsch, 1991) plays a role in shaping children's development of literacy. Continuing to study other children as their language is developing in a variety of settings can provide us with more opportunities to observe Bakhtin's theories in practice.

Limitations to applying Bakhtin's theories are evident in the data as well. While his theories provide explanations about the appropriation and application of materials from multiple sources, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism does not account for the developmental nature of the changes in Mac. Perhaps combining developmental theories (e.g., Piaget, 1969) with those of Bakhtin might begin to account for the changes that occurred in Mac's appropriation from the social world to his own learning and development. Just as any one theory is limited in its application to young children's learning, so the study of one child is limited. A larger study of more young children tracing their narrative development through the preschool years from two perspectives might provide additional clues about how children appropriate language from their social worlds to use in their own learning and development.

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## APPENDIX A

Age	Oral Language	Literacy Development	Bakhtinian Analysis
0–12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•First words “mama” (9 mo)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Chews on cloth books (3 mo)</li> <li>•Is read to (6 mo)</li> </ul>	
13–18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Words include “ball,” “hello”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Turns pages</li> <li>•Imitates inflections</li> <li>•Chimes in “I do”</li> </ul>	
18–23 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Expanded one-word vocabulary</li> <li>•2-word combinations e.g., “Dad walk” “bring book” “read book”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Identifies Os and 9s in newspaper</li> </ul>	
2–2½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•3–5-word phrases, e.g., “Mac’s mom open present” “Mac’s mom pick book read” “Be careful go downstairs. Don’t fall.” Tells teddy bear a story, “Once upon a time there was a baby.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Identifies all upper-case letters</li> <li>•Turns pages from front to back</li> <li>•Imitates sound of reading</li> <li>•Says “the end” at conclusion of story</li> </ul>	
2½–3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Uses books and media in play, e.g., “I will find my mother,” said the baby sparrow.”</li> <li>•First recorded story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<i>Little Red Hen</i> story points to pictures and says, “Not I said the pig”</li> <li>•Describes drawn pictures to dictate stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Ventriloquation, e.g., “Oh how many many feet you meet”</li> <li>•Narrative genre, e.g., Elephant story (with prompts)</li> </ul>
3–3½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Expanded vocabulary, e.g., “I’m just devastated.”</li> <li>•Repeats media phrases, e.g., “The adventures of Pokémon will never end.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Joins in as I read <i>Tall Tall Grass</i></li> <li>•Uses pictures and memory to “read” <i>Red Hat, Green Hat</i></li> <li>•Asks questions about text</li> <li>•Memorizes 150 Pokémon characters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative genre, e.g., Elephant and Giraffe story (without prompts)</li> </ul>
3½–4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recites sections verbatim from books, videos</li> <li>•Scripts for audience repeated patterns, e.g., “Do you have a Beedrill?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Retells stories</li> <li>•Imitates sentence reading by pausing</li> <li>•Initial letter-sound relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Transforming voices—<i>Commotion in the Ocean</i></li> <li>•Genre: Pop quiz, e.g. Pokémon, “Meowth has strong powers. True or false?” “Does Ivysaur have a flower?”</li> </ul>

Age	Oral Language	Literacy Development	Bakhtinian Analysis
4–4½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Use of metaphor, e.g., "I look like a skeleton dancing at the moon."</li> <li>•Narrates scenes from Pokémon, e.g., "Those creeps took everything."</li> <li>•Oral poem, "I love the snow more than the wind. I love the snow more than the sun."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Combines text and media to "read" stories</li> <li>•Writes name, several letters</li> <li>•Dictates stories</li> <li>•Initiates stories, "Let's write a story, then make pictures, then make it into a TV show."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative Genre</li> <li>-Uses conventional openings and closings, e.g., Mac-Bear-Tiger story</li> <li>-Experiments with plot structures, e.g., Splatter Ink Egypt stories</li> <li>-Adds dramatic tension, audience influence, e.g., Little Boy Who Wanted to Be a Fireman story</li> <li>•Audience/Genre awareness</li> </ul>
4½–5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increased vocabulary, "The wheels are propelling me forward."</li> <li>•Increased use of metaphor, e.g., "When we go to sleep at the same time our dreams can meet."</li> <li>•Increased insights articulated, "Sometimes fiction is stranger than the real thing."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Some sight words in context</li> <li>•Some sound-letter recognition, "I have to deal with that c at the end of my name." (Many people call him Max.)</li> <li>•Increased enjoyment and understanding of reading "I like reading because you learn a lot of things and words tell you more than pictures."</li> <li>•Categorizes books into learning and story books</li> <li>•Identifies author's style, e.g., "We all know Dr. Seuss is really funny...He makes up a lot of rhymes. I think why he writes rhymes is to help us know more rhymes."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Transforms voices by drawing from several sources, e.g., Beginning of the Earth story</li> </ul>
5–5½ years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Makes up rhyming story, e.g., "Once there was a dog in the fog. Then the dog did not like to be in the fog."</li> <li>•Increased use of metaphor, e.g., "I would like to laugh to fill up the earth." "The electricity got tired of using the same light bulb."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increased letter-sound correspondence</li> <li>•Interest in silent letters, e.g., "Is the e a fake one?" "Does c in ice cream make a s sound?"</li> <li>•Story retellings refined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Narrative: Awareness of purpose, e.g., Africa Plains story</li> <li>•Transforming Voices/ Intertextuality: Retelling of <i>The Little Old Lady</i></li> <li>•Genre experimentation e.g., Pokémon story-telling</li> <li>•Audience: assuming various roles, e.g., Pokémon play</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### Transcription Key

(Inaudible)	words were not discernible on the tape
(words in parentheses)	omitted words, contextual information, pauses
(parentheses with ?)	inaudible, but I provide an educated guess based on audio and contextual information