Research article

'What? Olaf is the taxi driver?' Co-construction of spontaneous fantasy narratives in preschoolers' pretend play interactions

Younhee Kim

University of Macau, Macau SAR, China
yhkim@um.edu.mo

Yvonne Tse Crepaldi

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
ytse@ntu.edu.sg

While children's remarkable ability to co-construct spontaneous fantasy narratives in pretend play interaction has been noted, sequential organization embedded in the collaborative construction of narratives have received little research attention. Drawing on an ethnomethodological and conversation analysis perspective, the current study examines the sequential organization of pretend play narratives co-constructed in children's play interaction. Close sequential analysis based on 30 hours of audio and video recordings reveals an array of resources and interactional practices used to construct and maintain the spontaneous narratives. Sequential analysis allows to observe sense-making procedures embedded in the way participating children respond to and develop the storyline. The paper concludes with a reflection on how real-world knowledge informs and regulates the co-constructional process of fantasy narratives.

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Introduction

Despite the wide scholarship and vast amount of literature on the play, the importance of spontaneous play for children's social, cognitive, and linguistic development has been widely acknowledged (Pellegrini, 2009). While children's play interaction has gained much research attention and the benefit of play for children's development has been well documented (e.g. Lynch, Pike & Beckett, 2017), much of the research undertaken within this field has been understood through a developmental lens, which has paid little attention to understanding how children's play is produced and organized as social interaction (Danby & Baker, 1998, 2000; Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998). Recently, a growing body of research has examined children's play interaction as social practice using an EMCA (ethnomethodology and conversation analysis) approach. By using video and audio recordings of naturally occurring interactions and examining methods and practices children use in producing their social interactions, these studies shed light on our understanding of how children's play interaction is socially organized (Bateman & Butler, 2014; Butler, 2008; Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell, 2010; Theobald, Bateman, Busch, Laraghy & Danby, 2017). Examining children's play interaction from an EMCA perspective makes possible new understandings that children are interactionally competent from their very early years (Danby, 2002) and highlight the complex dynamics of social interactions during play experiences for young children.

From among various types of children's play including locomotor play, pretend play, and ludic play, social pretend play has been recognized as one of the most complex kinds of play in childhood (Garvey, 1990). In addition to its link to the later development of literacy (Snow, 2006), the significance of social pretend play is found in its recognition as a primary locus where children's peer culture is produced and maintained (Corsaro, 1993). For example, in describing children's online game activity, Danby, Davidson, Theobald, Houen and Thorpe (2017) show how pretend play intersect with children's play and use of technology.

When children are engaged in social pretend play, they construct a temporary fantasy reality through their talk and act, which may involve the imaginary transformation of immediate objects into something else

(e.g. pebbles become teacups). Central to research into young children's social pretend play is the question of how children manage to collectively create coherent dramatic situations (i.e. how they achieve and maintain a shared understanding of what is going on in their play interaction and what they draw on in generating spontaneous fictional narratives). This process of constructing a pretend narrative is often achieved in a collaborative manner, constituting mutually adaptive behaviour. At times, though, the process might encounter disagreement or challenge from the other participant, which in turn, may engender interactional negotiation among participants.

This study describes how spontaneous pretend play narratives are co-constructed and maintained in preschool children's play interactions by applying a conversation analytic approach (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). This approach allows researchers to observe and identify the array of interactive skills employed by children in improvisational fantasy play.

Social pretend play

Pretend play, also referred to as symbolic play, make-believe play, and sociodramatic play, is a play mode where children are engaged in behaviour in 'as if' mode (Fein, 1981). By definition, pretend play requires 'double knowledge' (McCune-Nicolich, 1981) in that play needs knowledge of both the real world and the pretend world. Children have to signal to one another 'what it is that they are doing now, displaying for others what constitutes the common scene in front of them' (Goodwin, 1993, p. 160). Communicating to their play partners that they are engaged in play, thus signalling that their actions need to be interpreted as such, requires meta-communication (Bateson, 1972). Furthermore, (an) underlying theme(s) for the pretence drama needs to be spontaneously negotiated and mutual orientation. This nature of the play – establishing and maintaining pretence contexts – makes the language used in social pretend play quite different from speech produced in other contexts, and thus worthy of examination (Giffin, 1984).

Pretend play is recognized as a primary site where children's peer culture is produced and maintained (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998). In co-constructing a fantasy narrative or sociodramatic role play, children often draw on fairy tales, popular culture, or their own experiences. For example, Sparrman's (2002) work on play interaction at a Swedish after-school centre shows how the girls' fantasy play draws on their knowledge of the pop group the Spice Girls. As Corsaro (1985) observes, however, children incorporate and

imitate, and also appropriate and reinvent elements from adult culture in creating peer culture. Goldman (1998) examines pretend play among Huli children in Papua New Guinea from an anthropological perspective, and illustrates how they invoke real life experiences and reinvent them in their play. For this reason, pretend play is examined as a reconfiguration of children's experience of the world (ibid.).

Children's participation in pretend play contributes to the production and extension of peer culture, as children take up and reinvent elements from wider adult culture, as shown by Corsaro's work in an Italian preschool and Evaldsson's work in a Swedish afterschool program (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998). Sawyer (1997) focuses on the performative and improvisational nature of pretend play interaction and draws a comparison of children's pretend play with adults' improvisational theatre performance. Along similar lines, Kyratzis (2014) examines pretend play interactions in English-Spanish bilingual preschool girls' interactions focusing on the types of resources used in signalling and aligning to play themes. Among ethnomethodologically informed studies that examine children's pretend play interaction, Butler's (2008) work, set in the playground of a New Zealand primary school, describes the methods and practices through which a group of children produce the local order of the group *fairy club*. Drawing on membership categorization analysis (Hester & Eglin, 1997), Butler (2008) and Cobb-Moore et al. (2010) describe how children invoke pretence to formulate places and use it as a resource for managing peer interaction.

Construction of narrative in pretend play

A close connection between pretend play and narrative has been noted in previous literature since a central element of pretend play is the enactment of narrative scenarios that are generated on the spot by the participating children (Nicolopoulou, 2007). For this reason, narrative production and pretend play was thought to help lay the foundations for later discursive narrative skills. Narrative and pretend play are recognized as distinct but interconnected parts of children's symbolic activity (Kavanaugh & Engel, 1998). Most studies examining narrative construction in pretend play, however, have drawn on interpretive and developmental perspectives (Nicolopoulou, 2007). While advocating for interpretive and sociocultural perspectives, these studies have assumed prescriptive ideas about narrative structure (Labov & Waletzsky, 1974). Furthermore, these studies

have not investigated the turn-by-turn sequential organization of story construction nor its collaborative nature (cf. special issue of *Research on Children and Social Interaction* 3.1–2, edited by Burdelski & Evaldsson, 2019). Similarly, while the remarkable facility with which children generate spontaneous fantasy narrative has been recognized (Corsaro, 1985; Sawyer, 1997), little attention has been paid to the sequential dynamics embedded in co-construction of the fantasy narrative. The defining features of spontaneity and being subject to negotiation characterize the process of generating fantasy narratives in children's play interaction. We now provide a brief review on each feature.

Many play activities, social pretend play in particular, require spontaneity (Aronsson, 2011), and 'being able to capitalize on fleeting opportunities by utilizing complex contextual and pragmatic knowledge' (Howard, 2009, p. 340), such as improvisation skills. In their attempt to theorize verbal improvisation for the study of language socialization, Duranti and Black (2011) note that verbal improvisations are more often found in child-child interaction than in parent–child interaction, especially in those interactions that involve creativity (Keenan 1974). In pointing out that children are more likely to indulge in verbal improvisation when left to their own devices, Duranti and Black (2011) note that adults and older siblings often assume the right to evaluate the children's improvisations through approval or disapproval. In improvisation, repetition and variation are identified as basic elements of improvisation.

The co-construction of fantasy narrative is achieved in a collaborative manner and involves interactional negotiation. A child's utterance provides a context for the next utterance and entails possible future directions. The next utterance needs to be designed in a way that is related to and expands the theme provided in the previous one. There is no script or set of roles, however, that specifies what each child is to do next. Each unfolding moment of the emerging play narrative is contingent and impromptu (Sawyer, 1997). While there is no script in directing each child's next move, there seems to be underlying themes oriented to by the children as they construct a fantasy narrative (Auwärter, 1986). Even at a very young age, children show orientation to topic as one resource for maintaining the unity of a discourse (Keenan & Schieffelin, 1976). In responding to a previous child's utterance, the current child's move might be to expand it in a way that activates specific social knowledge (e.g. in the morning, everyone has to go to school; Auwärter, 1986). Aspects of the contexts

set up in the previous turns are oriented to as relevant and valid by the children. The way in which children build upon each other's utterances reveals their reasoning and sense-making procedures.

The current study examines how children co-construct fantasy narratives in pretend play interaction with the primary focus on investigating the sequential practices and resources employed by the children. In examining an array of resources and methods employed by the children in co-constructing fantasy narrative, we focus on the way that participants design their moves to further the storyline as well as the way in which they achieve a shared understanding of the narrative through interactional negotiation. We conclude the paper with a brief comment on how real-world knowledge both informs and regulates the co-constructional process of spontaneous fantasy narrative.

Data and method

The database for the current study comes from a larger study (Kim & Carlin, under review) that examined bilingual children's interaction and language development. The bilingual children were aged 3.6–5.0 years during the data collection and attended preschools in Singapore. The entire database includes three sets of corpus data:

1   audio recording of a parent and child (one family: Harry and Dad, six hours in total);
2   video-recording of peer interaction between two Korean–English bilingual preschool-aged children (Yvonne and Noah) (total 24 hours); and
3   video recording of parent–child interaction (four families, 33 hours).

The current study draws on the first two corpora.

The data were collected at two-week intervals over 10–18 months, depending on the participants' availability. All parents gave informed consent for the recordings to take place for research purposes. There were no guidelines that informed data collection other than the recording of naturally occurring routine interactions. For the video-recording of the two preschoolers' peer interactions, the camera was placed in a corner of the room, with no adults present. The two child participants were neighbourhood playmates. The audio-recordings were undertaken by the father. Data were transcribed according to the conventions of conversation analysis

(Jefferson, 2004). In addition to the symbols included in Jefferson (2004), we used the '#' sign to indicate a rasping or creaky voice. Multimodality was examined, when possible, after relevant sequences were identified.

In the two recording sessions presented below, Yvonne and Noah were playing with a Playmobil 'Country Farm Barn with Silo' and a few figurines from a Lego set. The Lego figurines represented fairy tale figures such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* and Olaf in the Disney animation *Frozen*. Extracts 1–3 are from the peer interaction corpus (Yvonne and Noah) and Extracts 4–6 from the parent–child interaction corpus (Harry and Dad).

Analysis

Drawing upon the shared knowledge of the fantasy character

Observations from the data show that characters from the media and popular culture often serve as the base material for fantasy play interaction. Prior to Extract 1, Yvonne and Noah (sitting mostly out of camera sight) were working on a 'school bus' scene, where finding a driver and a bus auntie was a salient task. The school bus scene quickly turned into a taxi and taxi driver scene. The extract begins as Yvonne hands an Olaf figurine to Noah suggesting that Olaf be Noah's taxi driver (line 1).

Extract 1: Olaf is the taxi driver

```
01      Y:      Here's yours.
02              (1.2)
03      N:      (a) ↑driver?
04              (3.6)
05      Y:      Olaf is this driver.
06              (0.5)
07      Y:      ↑WHAt! <Olaf is the taxi dri:ve:r.>↑
08              (0.5)
09      Y:       >Oh my< go::sh.
10              (0.3)
11      Y:      that (.) i:s [°so°
12      N:                   [he'll melt so: (0.8) the [ta:xi (will[:)
13      Y:                                             [NO:::.(.)  [NO:::,
14              the taxi [  has       sno]::w,
15      N:               [↑(HE)DONNEED,↑]
```

Noah questions the assignment of Olaf as a driver (line 3). While confirming that Olaf is indeed assigned as a taxi driver (line 5), Yvonne provides a series of a dramatic responses ('WHAT!' delivered with prosodic amplification and an interjection 'oh my gosh') to the suggestion she herself made. While Yvonne's speech from lines 7–11 sounds like it is directed to

herself, it serves to mobilize engagement from Noah (line 12). Noah's next turn presents an advancement in the storyline: the driver will melt and the taxi will (be flooded). This move is effective as it advances the plot of the play drama while drawing on the shared knowledge of the Disney character, Olaf, who is a snowman.

Yvonne resists assertively with two strong 'No's and comes up with a device that will serve to forestall Noah's scenario, 'the taxi has snow'. Note that Yvonne's resistance does not dispute the shared understanding that being a snowman, Olaf will melt under certain conditions. Yvonne provides additional detail that prevents Noah's proposed storyline from progressing, while defending hers. Despite the disagreements about how the story will unfold, they do not invalidate or challenge the essential characteristics of the Disney character, which serves to inform the co-construction of fantasy narrative.

Repetition and variation: Embellishing the storyline

We present another example that illustrates how fantasy characters inform the generation of a storyline. In Excerpt 2, Noah's proposal that Sebastian[1] is sick is further developed by Yvonne's response that he cannot play the music. Excerpt 2 also showcases how repetition and variation provides a basic structure for improvisation. The structural feature of a storyline (i.e. the causal link that was capitalized on in the first part of the story) is repeated with another character in the second part. In the beginning of Extract 2, Noah and Yvonne had finished their snack and returned to their play.

Extract 2: Sebastian is sick

```
953    N:     [#no::w#
              [(Noah lens sideway towards the toy farm, see Fig.1)
954           (1.1)
955    N:     °#Sebastian# is sick°.
956           (0.4)
957    N:     today Sebastian is sick.
958           (2.0)
959    Y:     yah.
960           (0.9)
961    Y:     he cannot play music.
962           (0.3)
963    Y:     why Flounder is facing to the fa:rm,
964           (1.6)
965    N:     because he's si:ck.
966           (0.7)
967    Y:     yea:h.
968           (.)
969    Y:     Flou:nder is also si:ck.
((Skipped 12 lines in which they discuss where Flounder is.))
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981    N:      hih hih I know here! ((pointing to the top))
982    Y:      he's sick.
983            (1.0)
984    Y:      he's sick. he is also sick.
985            (0.4)
986    N:      so he is watching the farm over there?
987    Y:      yeah. because he's sick.
988            Sebastian also washing the far- watching the farm.
989            <becau::se he's also sick>.
```

When Noah returns to the play site and learns towards the toy farm house (Figure 1), he proposes a new theme by claiming '#no::w# (1.1) °Sebastian is sick.°' (lines 953–955). He repeats it a little louder and adds the time stamp 'to<u>day</u>' (line 957). This highlighted repetition mobilizes engagement from Yvonne, who aligns herself by responding, first with an agreement token 'yah' (line 959) and afterwards by expanding the storyline, 'he cannot play music' (line 961). Yvonne's presentation of a consequence in the next line reflects what Pellegrini (2009) observes as a key component of narrative competence, which is an understanding that characters' acts are temporally and causally motivated. By presenting a state of affairs that can be reasonably expected from Noah's proposed theme, Yvonne's utterance aligns with the proposal, and also reveals an orientation to the reasoning of causal development: Sebastian cannot play music because he is sick. Next, Yvonne asks 'why Flounder is facing to the fa:rm' (line 963), which turns out to be an ingenious move as it elicits a response, 'because he's sick' (line 965). The linguistic construction 'because he's sick' recycles
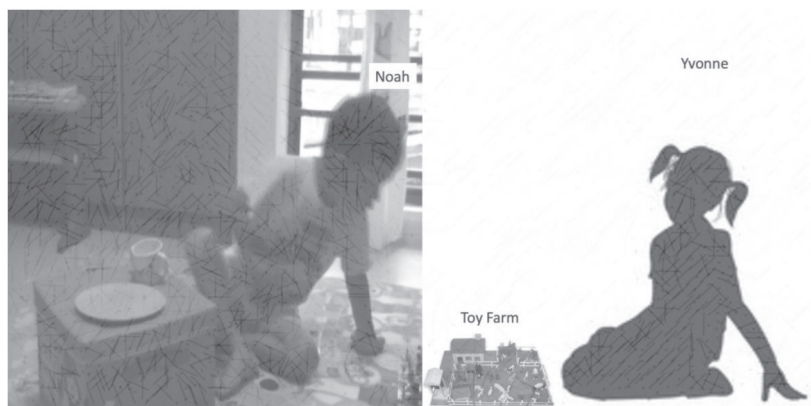

Figure 1   *Noah resumes the play by saying 'now' and leans towards the toy farm (line 953). Yvonne is sitting out of view.*

and aligns with Noah's own initial formulation about Sebastian being sick (line 955), achieving format-tying (Goodwin, 1990). Yvonne concurs with 'yeah' (line 967) and a modified repetition 'Flounder is also sick' (line 969), which forms the matching structure to the current storyline.

After some lines in which they discuss where Flounder is, Yvonne repeats the theme that the characters are sick (lines 982–984), three times. The repetition mobilizes Noah's response, 'So, he is watching the farm over there?' (line 986). Note that Noah's turn progresses the story by harking back to Yvonne's earlier question 'Why Flounder is facing to the farm?' though now the turn is slightly modified ('facing to' to 'watching') and designed in a way that requires the playmate's confirmation (rising intonation). This showcases how repetition-based-variation is used as a basic resource (Duranti & Black, 2011) for children to expand a storyline. This useful strategy can further the storyline while achieving alignment with preceding sequences. Yvonne confirms this and then refers back to the first character, Sebastian, 'Sebastian also washing the far- watching the farm because he's also sick'. By formulating Sebastian's action[2] in reference to the action just mentioned for another character, Flounder (watching the farm), the narrative achieves cohesion along the storyline and thematic consistency.

Extract 2 showed how the two preschool-aged children develop and maintain the contingently produced local theme that 'somebody is sick' within the overarching theme of 'going to school' by responding to the cues presented in each other's utterances. One child initiated play by announcing a theme ('Sebastian is sick'). The story progressed by the other child's response ('he cannot play music') based on their knowledge of the character and reasoning of causal development. The story was embellished and expanded by bringing in another character and drawing upon the structure of repetition-based-variation. Repetition was not applied in a mechanical manner, but rather provided the basis for variation and thus creativity as the children creatively incorporated the contingent play setting of a toy farm and the figurines' bodily orientation (facing the farm), to their ongoing construction of the story.

Narrative sustained from parallel to mutual play

In our data set, we observed that the collaborative co-construction of pretend play narrative could occur when the children were initially engaged in parallel independent play that gradually merged into the co-construction

of a narrative. In the beginning of Extract 3, Noah and Yvonne are sitting next to each other and playing somewhat independently – Noah with a toy air balloon and Yvonne with *The Little Mermaid* Lego figurines (Figure 2).

Figure 2 *Independent play (lines 1–5).*

Figure 3 *Yvonne glances at Noah's actions after Noah mentions 'Africa' in line 6.*

Figure 4   *Independent play (before line 180).*

Figure 5   *Placing down the balloon and vocalize 'dundun↑du:n'*
(line 189).

Extract 3: Actually it's Korea

```
01   Y:      ah ↑people wanna g[o.                              --------- |
02   N:                        [chu:,                                     |
03   Y:      ((impersonating))↑hello I'm a little mermaid I wanna go  >Fig.2
04           to Africa                                                    |
05           (1.4)                                          --------- |
06   N:      this is (.) Africa,Fig.3 (1.3) (ma:lls)
((skipped 174 lines, where the children play on their own. N stands up to fly his
toy balloon around the room, and then remains standing on the far right side of Y,
see Fig. 4))
180    N:     landing for take off.(.) landing for take °°off°° (.) choo::
181           (1.4)
182    N:     (on) afrri↑ca: (0.6) (what they's went to swen wan wan), (0.7)
183           (thank you,) (0.4) (and/then) ↑go:, (0.4) (↑go) pa pa. po:n.
184           (2.4)
185    N:     ch:u:
186           (1.0)
187    Y:     this is Singapore. it's really hot.
188           (1.3) ((N moves back to Y's side))
189    N:     ts:: (0.9)ts::::hh  (1.0)  [dundun↑du:nFig.5,
                                         [((N sits down))
190    N:     (1.2) ↑du::n chu::: (1.0) ((sniffs))=
191    Y:     =this is Singapore. the balloon came to Singapore.
192           (0.6)
193    Y:     ac↑tually,(°°its Kor- (.) Korea°°).
194           (0.8)
195    Y:     (°°Korea also can yah it's okay°°)
196           (1.1)
197    Y:     annyeon::g
              'Hello'
198           (1.5)
199    Y:     ae::ng
200           (1.9)
201    N:     [geu'om yeogi] ↑TA:!
              'Then hop on here'
202           (1.1)
203    Y:     alas↑seo:,((looks up at the balloon))
              'Okay'
```

At the beginning of Extract 3, Noah is imitating the flying sound of the balloon ('chu:' in line 2), and Yvonne is impersonating the Little Mermaid, who announces her desire to go to Africa (line 3). Here, 'Africa', the regional reference mentioned in Yvonne's talk, is recycled in Noah's next turn as his balloon's destination (line 6), which triggers Yvonne's glance (Figure 3). Although each child is creating their own story, their talk is made accessible for the other participant.

Both continue to play independently for the next 1 minute and 20 seconds (transcript not included), during which Noah stands up to fly the balloon around the room and then stays standing on the far right of Yvonne (Figure 4). During this, Noah's talk sounds like a pilot, as in lines 180-186, he announces 'Africa' again as a landing place (line 182). Yvonne, who remains sitting and playing with the Little Mermaid, suddenly makes an announcement, 'This is Singapore. It's really hot' (line 187). While Noah does not respond verbally, he moves back towards Yvonne and sits down next to her while landing the balloon and making the dramatic onomatopoeic

'dundun↑du:n' (Figure 5) in line 189. Shortly after, Yvonne repeats her announcement with a more explicit reference to Noah's balloon ('the balloon came to Singapore', line 191). In her next turn, however, she displays a change of mind ('actually'; Wootton, 2010), self-repairs the destination to Korea (line 193), and quietly reaffirms her decision (line 195). She then code-switches by making a greeting in Korean 'annyeo::ng' ('hello') (line 197), followed by a flying airplane sound (line 199). This greeting elicits Noah's verbal response in Korean, 'geu'om yeogi↑TA:' ('then hop on here') that serves to accept Yvonne's invitation bid (Cromdal, 2001) for joint play. From this point on, the pretend play narrative unfolds in a more closely interconnected manner and the two continue to have a few more exchanges in Korean about where to go before Yvonne returns to her mermaid play accompanied by code-switching to English. The code-switching employed here serves as a dramaturgic summoning (Cromdal & Aronsson, 2000), marking the child's utterance worthy of the recipient's attention and thus achieving a shift in the play frame from parallel play to joint construction of the play narrative.

In Extract 3, we described how the two children coordinated their parallel and joint play narrative construction by deploying different practices. The practices included: displaying an orientation to each other's presence as a play partner while playing independently, by maintaining a reference to each other's play theme ('This is Africa'); the acts of physically moving closer to their peer (Figure 6) and code-switching. Code-switching worked as an effective practice for making invitation bids for joint play where the initially separate play themes of the 'air balloon' and '*The Little Mermaid*' were merged together.

Discrepancy in background knowledge

The process of the co-construction of fantasy narrative inevitably reveals moments of intersubjectivity between the participants put at risk. In the next extract from a parent–child interaction, the child's (Harry) proposed storyline encounters a problem as indicated by the father's (Dad) repair initiation.

Extract 4: Train and dinosaur

```
01    H:    ye:sso:- (.) youhmleh- .H h 'nd the ↑choo:: choo: train
02          (0.3) coming to bang the di(.h)nos(h)aur, the ↑di>no<s:
03          (go awing) to .h <fire the trai::n>.
04          (0.5)
05    D:    wha↓dj↑you mean fire the trai::n.=
06    H:    =t- trn- if with the (.) dinosaur's mou:th voo:: like dat,
07    D:    lik- oh like a dragon?
08    H:    y:ea:h.
09    D:    okay:, so go on then, (.) fire the trai::n,
```

Prior to Extract 4, it has been agreed that the object that Harry was holding is a dinosaur. At the start of the excerpt, Harry proposes a basic storyline for the fantasy play: a train will come to 'bang the dinosaur' and the dinosaur fires at the train (lines 1–3). However, the last part of the storyline gives rise to the father's repair initiation 'what do you mean fire the train' (line 5). After a short pause, Harry demonstrates what he means by enacting a dinosaur that breathes out fire using gesture and an onomatopoeia of a firing sound 'voo::' (line 6). The use of the change of state token (Heritage, 1984) 'oh', points to the father's shift in understanding, and he checks what Harry means by asking, 'oh like a dragon?' (line 7). With Harry's confirmation (line 8), the problem is resolved and the play scenario carries on (line 9).

While we cannot confirm the reason for the father's attempt for clarification, we suspect it could be due to the fact that dinosaurs are not typically associated with fire-breathing. However, with the child's enactment of the scene and the father's display of understanding and acceptance, they reached an agreement. Extract 4 showed that the storyline of fantasy narrative is subject to negotiation in interaction. Even though the child and the parent might have had different background knowledge regarding fire-breathing creatures, they managed to agree on the features of the characters through clarification and negotiation.

Negotiation on the setting and props

Part of the fantasy narrative construction involves the transformation of immediate objects into what fits the story of the fantasy world being constructed. Rather than being specified beforehand, however, this matter of representation arises during the course of play and is negotiated spontaneously as the play unfolds. Extract 5 occurs two minutes after Extract 4. The father (Dad) and the child (Harry), still engaged in the dinosaur and train play, are now discussing how to put out the fire on the train.

Extract 5: Hose pipe

```
103    D:    Ok, so er:: I need to put the water on it
104    H:    Yea:h
105    D:    okay can ↑you find me some water.
106          (0.6)
107    H:    up u:h, (0.6) ↑u::h
108          (2.1)
109    D:    [its- like a hose pipe
110    H:    [i- i-
111          (0.7)
112    H:    u:h uh (0.4) >do ↑you know how to switch this off?
113    D:    yeah I do.
114    H:    how?
115          (0.6)
116    D:    what the pen?
117    H:    yeah
118          (1.0)
119    D:    uh just press the top and pretendi it's got a button.
120          (0.9)
121    D:    it's like a hose pipe. so you can shoot water onto
122          the train no:w,
123    H:    uh I can't,
124          (0.4)
125    H:    °°I can't,°° (.) do you knew how- is ↑this (0.7)
126    D:    yes this. you can use this pen. this's got a button.
127          (1.1)
128    D:    th[e:re you know? on [off,
129    H:      [°(kan)°          [°(k)°
130          (1.0) ((pen clicks))
130    H:    yea:h.
131    D:    yea:h.
132    H:    ↑SO- so you need to blo:w some wa:ber on
133          (0.6)
134    D:    okay do I press this button first,
135    H:    yea:h.
136    D:    ˋka:y,
137          (1.1) ((pen clicks))
138    D:    wh[::::::::::
139    H:      [v::::::::n.
```

After accepting Harry's proposal that Dad has to put water on the train (line 103), Dad asks Harry to find some water (line 105). This leads to some difficulties for Harry as indicated by the pauses (lines 106, 108, 111) and repetition of non-lexical perturbations (lines 107, 110). Although we cannot be entirely certain due to the lack of video, it sounds like Dad has offered a pen to Harry likening it to a hose pipe (line 109). In the subsequent talk (lines 112–120), the two negotiate details of how to use the pen as a hose pipe. Harry displays difficulty in using the pen however, and asks Dad to demonstrate (line 112–114). Dad instructs Harry to pretend that it has a button so he can shoot water onto the train (line 119–122). With Harry displaying difficulty with the pen (line 123, 125), Dad suggests another pen which has a button (line 126) and points where Harry can switch it on and off ('the:re you know? on off' in line 128). This seems to have

worked. There is a clicking sound (line 130) and both agree on the use of the prop (lines 130–131). Harry resumes the play (with the conjunction 'SO- so') while passing the task of putting out the fire to Dad (line 132). Dad complies with this and further aligns himself by checking with Harry one more time on how to use the prop ('do I press this button first?', line 134). After obtaining Harry's affirmative response, the two enact the scene of blowing water through the pen using onomatopoeia (lines 138–139).

The transformation of immediate objects into what fits their purpose in the imaginary scenario is an important part of pretend play (Danby, 2005). Objects are used as important resources in pretend play, and can contribute to generating cultural play scripts (Kultti & Samuelsson, 2017). Participants' assessment of the objects (i.e. whether they are usable within the pretend play framework) often forms a large proportion of the play interaction (Danby et al., 2017). In Excerpt 5, Dad's suggestion to the child that he find some water generated the need for a new prop – a hose pipe. The initial pen (i.e. the pen without a button) appeared not to be a suitable prop for Harry. Having noted this, Dad then suggested a pen with a button, instead.

Extract 5 showed that agreement on what objects will serve as props is an outcome of the negotiation between the play participants as they responded to this contingently generated need. Negotiation on what prop to use and in what way, generated extensive talk. Some of them is talk *about* play, and some talk *in* play. This provided an opportunity for the parent and the child to transition between out-of-play and in-play frames (Bateson, 1972; Kim, 2018).

Common sense reasoning in pretend play scenario

As the co-construction of pretend play narrative is a mutually adaptive behaviour, occasionally one party might challenge the reasoning behind the development of a proposed narrative. One grounds on which to challenge the reasoning is real-world knowledge. While it is an alternative reality that is constructed in pretend play interaction, real-world knowledge becomes an authoritative source on which, one participant can challenge the narrative proposed by the other (Auwärter, 1986). Extract 6 is a continuation of Extract 5 where Dad and son (Harry) have been playing the dragon and train scenario. The conversation revolves around whether the father can get rid of the dragon, who keeps putting fire back onto the train.

Extract 6: How can he fly with no wings?

```
141    D:    what's the dragon doin'.
142    H:    (heek-) when you- when you blow, (.) the wa::ter
143          ri:ght, .h the dragon is t- trying to make the .h
144          th- th- the train back into fi:re:.
145    D:    so while I'm trying to put the trai:n out,
146    H:    yea:h,
147    D:    the f- the dragon is adding more fire.
148    H:    yeah becau[se the] dragon wants to break you'
149          trai::n.=
150    D:              [ HHH  ]
151    D:    =the dragon wants to break the trai::n.
152    H:    He is- h[e's of-
153    D:            [well then, (.) I think I need to get rid
154          of the dragon first ↑don't I?
155          (0.3)
156    H:    if ↑get(f) rid(f), he will- he will come back to
157          your (.) hou:se he wou- he will say (0.3) ((deep
158          low voice)) M::: I want to blo:w the trai::n ba:ck.
159          (0.7)
160    D:    okay well I think- I think the dragon needs to go
161          away, so I'll throw the dragon into co:rner .hh (.)
162          and then we can put the fire out, so go away dragon,
163          (.) there, >(its- thrf)< thrown him away,
164          (0.3)
165    H:    {then the dragon} <fly: ba:ck>. (({}sounds remote))
166    D:    okay so how do I get rid of him. what do I do::.
167    H:    uh. (0.3) I don't ↑know becau' if you trow him,
168          he will fly back he:re.
169    D:    so maybe I can cut off his wings.
170    H:    cut off his (bit-) wi' one wi::ng he-[(0.6)]=
171    D:                                         [hh.h ]
172    H:    =(uh the) uh the back of the  dra[gon, ]
173    D:                                     [yeah,]
174    H:    he can f:ly: .h with one wing.
175          (0.3)
176    D:    he can fly:: with one wing,=
177    H:    =.h yeh the back have two wings. so he can fly::.
178    D:    so I'll cut off bo:th of his wings,
179          (.)
180    H:    u:hm both of his wings .h uh uhm uh(k)m uh ali-
181          later, (.) when he fly::,
182          (1.3)
183    D:    =(H[HH)]=
184    H:       [ al]↑so when when (.) he no wing he can fly:.
185          (0.5)
186    D:    [↑HOW can he fly with no wings.
187    H:    [(  )
188    H:    like tis °zi:::° like that.
189          (0.5)
190    D:    °(bt-) (0.3) n: that means nothi:ng, that doesn't
191          prove anything Harry:.
192    H:    it- it does ↑b'cos he has like (the other lik-)(.)
193          [(legs)
194    D:    [I think, no=no. what you need to say is the- .hh
195          when he's got no wi:ng[s,=
196    H:                          [yea:(n)h,
197    D:    =he can still run.
```

((The argument continues. In the end, Dad suggests they should
just give up and let the turn brun.))

In Extract 5, Dad pretends to put out the fire with a hose pipe, making a 'wh:::' sound (line 138) while the child was making a 'v:::' sound (line 139). This prompts Dad to ask Harry what the dragon is doing (line 141). Harry explains that the dragon is putting more fire onto the train (lines 142–144). Dad formulates his understanding (Sorjonen, 2018) for Harry to clarify (lines 145, 147), which Harry does but he also specifies the outcome by concluding 'the dragon wants to break your train' (lines 148–149). This prompts Dad to suggest that he needs to get rid of the dragon (lines 153–154). From this point on, the narrative construction becomes a battle between a plan to get rid of the dragon (as suggested by Dad) and an invincible dragon (as suggested by Harry). Dad comes up with multiple solutions to kill the dragon, first by throwing it into a corner (line 161) with Harry constantly claiming that the dragon will come back (lines 156–158, 165). Dad then asks how to get rid of it (line 166) and proposes to cut off his wings (line 169), but Harry asserts that the dragon can still fly with one wing (line 174). Dad proposes to cut off both wings (line 178) but Harry claims the dragon can still fly without wings (line 184).

Previously, adopting a commentator's voice, Dad asked Harry how to get rid of the dragon (line 166) although Harry denied any possibility of that happening. Finally, Dad makes a more explicit challenge to Harry's storyline as he poses the question 'how can he fly with no wings?' (line 186). Harry responds to this by enacting a scene, visually not accessible but inferred from his words 'like this' and an onomatopoeia of a bee-like buzzing sound 'zi:::' (line 188). Finally, Dad comes out of the pretend play framework, addresses Harry in a real life framework when he says 'that means nothing. That doesn't prove anything, Harry' (lines 190–191). At this point, they are completely out of the pretend play framework and Dad's voice adopts a pedagogical tone as he challenges and disputes Harry's reasoning. Harry still resists by claiming that the dragon can still fly because he has legs (lines 192–193). Dad's next utterance serves as an instruction at a meta-communication level, 'I think no no what you need to say is, when he's got no wings, he can still run' (lines 194–195, 197).

The narrative reality constructed in pretend play is an alternative one. It does not have to match real-life knowledge (e.g. dinosaurs can breathe fire and a snowman can be a taxi driver). However, the reasoning that underlies the narrative construction became the focus of discussion. It was up to the participants' negotiation and agreement to determine that

something is accepted as a legitimate plot and based on valid knowledge in a pretend play interaction. One participant can invoke real-world knowledge either to support or contradict the way the narrative develops. While a dinosaur can be a fire-breathing animal, it is unreasonable in this case for a participant to argue that dragons can fly without wings. There seems to be an orientation to the normative progress of the events. Even though it is a fantasy play narrative, the reasoning that underlies the unfolding of the pretence narrative can be subject to evaluation. At any one point, if one party decides the characters or events are unreasonable, they may challenge the narrative by leveraging real-world knowledge. Thus, the knowledge that is regarded as valid is the result of the participants' negotiation.

We are uncertain whether we can observe a similar pattern of behaviour (disputing the storyline proposed by the other child by bringing up real-world knowledge) in children's peer interactions. Dad's contribution in Extract 6 can be considered a distinctively pedagogical action when he says 'what you need to say is the- .hh when he's got no wi:ngs, he can still run', in addition to contesting the child's argument, 'that means nothing, that doesn't mean anything, Harry' (lines 187, 188).

Discussion

This study has described the resources with which spontaneous episodes of children's pretend play narrative are constructed by examining the sequential unfolding of pretence narratives. We showed that children draw on shared knowledge about fantasy characters as well as the reasoning of causal development in generating the next moves to further the storyline (Extracts 1 and 2). Repetition and variation provided a basic resource to expand and embellish the storyline (Extract 2). A pretend play narrative can begin with parallel independent play and merge into a co-construction of joint pretend play as the children move between independent play and mutual engagement (Extract 3). In re-engaging the play partner and thus resuming the mutual play drama, code-switching was used as an important resource between the two bilingual children (Korean and English).

The data showed how code-switching serves as a dramaturgic summoning (Aronsson, 2011; Cromdal & Aronsson, 2000), marking the current utterance newsworthy and thus drawing the playmate's attention more effectively, finally achieving a shift from parallel play to mutual engagement. While code-switching achieved the shift to mutual engagement, the children

displayed their orientation to each other's play through various practices that included making a reference to the other's play theme ('This is *Africa*', '*The balloon* came to Singapore'). This mutual orientation to the play theme seems to have played a significant role in merging the two play scenarios which were developing in parallel.

Assigning roles and props has been identified as an important part of pretend play interaction in the literature (Aronsson, 2011; Danby, 2005). While the need for props arises contingently as the story progresses, objects/props themselves can generate more details in the storyline (Kultti & Samuelsson, 2017). Transforming real life objects into something else requires interactional work between play participants. This can include verbal articulation in the form of an announcement (Sidnell, 2011), such as 'This is a school bus' as well as implicit agreement. The choice and meaning of props are subject to interactional negotiation (Extract 4). While play participants can announce the assignment of props, they can also express their assessment of the object regarding whether it is suitable in the current narrative activity (Extract 5). While they were negotiating the choice and meaning of the props, it generated talk *about* play (i.e. meta-communication), hence allowing transition across real life and pretend play frames: communicating *in* and *about* play (Bateson, 1972).

Likewise, co-constructing a story narrative is a collaborative achievement, which consists of a series of spontaneously generated responses (Duranti & Black, 2011), and subject to negotiation at any point in the unfolding interaction. In pretend play, children move in and out of imagination. The dialectic nature of imagination (Kultti & Samuelsson, 2017) is well captured in the tension observed in how real-life knowledge informs as well as regulates the imaginary storyline (Extracts 4 and 6). In Extract 4, the fact that fire-breathing is a feature typically associated with a dragon, and not with a dinosaur, might have triggered the father's request for clarification. More importantly, however, while the constructed fantasy narrative is an alternative reality and thus, does not have to match real-world knowledge, the interactants need to agree on what makes a plausible storyline. Joint production of a fictional reality involves constant negotiation among the participants. Real-world knowledge provides a powerful source, both in generating the storyline and contesting the suggested one (Extract 6). The question of how real-world knowledge and reasoning procedures may intersect with spontaneous fantasy narrative construction in children's pretend play deserves further research. We hypothesize that children's peer

interactions will be different when compared to parent–child interactions in regard to this point. But, more evidence is required to support this conjecture.

Conclusion

In social pretend play, pretence is integrated into social interaction. Having a fantasy in an individual's mind is one thing, but putting it into a public domain by sharing it with others or co-enacting it, is a fundamentally different matter (Schütz, 1962). The latter constitutes a significant step in child's development: bringing out their private domain and putting it onto a public domain of social interaction. This process is closely mediated by structures of social interaction, and hence, constantly subject to interactional negotiation. In this paper, we treat pretence 'as a publicly available system and as a form of social interaction' (Sidnell, 2011, p. 131). In so doing, we examined methods and practices with which preschool-aged children constructed pretence narrative in social interactions. The identified resources and practices, including drawing on the shared knowledge of fantasy characters, reasoning of causal development, displaying orientation to the other's play theme, and code-switching, attest to the resourcefulness of the children. The function and use of code-switching in bilingual children's peer interaction deserves further scrutiny. Lastly, we reflected on the dialectic nature of constructing fantasy narrative. While the fantasy narrative is an alternative reality, participants orient to real life knowledge, both as a regulating force for the storyline and as a source for informing it. Future research could examine whether the degree in which real life experience informs as well as regulates the fantasy narrative scenario might differ between parent–child interaction and children's peer interaction.

When we first identified the focus of our analysis for the current study, how children co-construct fantasy narrative in interaction, and reviewed the literature on preschoolers' pretend play and storytelling, we noted that the majority of studies drew on arranged pretend play data rather than spontaneously occurring pretend play, which would have been necessary to enable comparison across variables such as age, play partner influence, script knowledge, etc. The focus on the co-construction of fantasy narratives in pretend play interactions is a small but growing body of EMCA-informed studies of children's interactions. The current study contributes to this

niche by examining spontaneous social pretend play involving preschool age children from an EMCA perspective.

About the authors

Younhee Kim is currently assistant professor at the University of Macau. Her research interests include second language acquisition/learning, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, interaction with and among children, and teacher education. Her most recent interest lies in looking at how affect/emotion is constructed in parent–child interaction and how accountability and emotion are enacted and intertwined in parent–child interaction. She has published various book chapters and articles in journals such as *Applied Linguistics*, *East Asian Pragmatics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, and *Journal of Teacher Education*.

Yvonne Tse Crepaldi is a research fellow in the Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies at Nanyang Technological University. Her research interests include parent–child interaction, doctor–patient interaction and multilingualism.

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Notes

1 A character in the Disney animation *The Little Mermaid*: a red Jamaican crab, who leads the sea creatures' music performance.
2 Note that, initially, what Yvonne proffered for Sebastian was 'he cannot play music' (line 961).

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