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From Interaction to Language Development: The Role of Grandparents in Fostering Communicative Competence in Preschool Children : The Folktale as a Model

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Abstract

This article examines how interaction between grandparents and children may support language development and communicative competence before school entry. It moves beyond the view of grandparents as caregivers alone. Instead, it focuses on the quality of interaction and the linguistic mediation they provide. The discussion draws on five complementary theoretical perspectives: interactional-cognitive, psychological-affective, family-ecological, functional-linguistic, and family-didactic. These perspectives are then applied to a common communicative activity shared by grandparents and grandchildren: the folktale. The analysis explores the linguistic and communicative opportunities offered by oral storytelling. It shows how grandparents can serve as active linguistic and cultural mediators in children's engagement with language and inherited cultural traditions.

Keywords: grandparents; preschool period; language acquisition; communicative competence; linguistic mediation; folktale.

Introduction

From psychological and interactional perspectives, language is a cognitive capacity and a complex semiotic system. It enables children to move beyond their biological existence and become social and cultural participants. Through language, children build relationships, express needs, understand their surroundings, and interact with others. Language acquisition therefore involves more than learning words or the rules of a particular language. It also involves using language in different social and communicative situations. This process reflects the interaction of biological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors.

As the cited author explains: “A child’s language acquisition cannot be separated from the linguistic and social environment in which the child grows up. The family and the wider social setting offer linguistic models and communicative situations. These help the child develop comprehension, expression, and language use. The nature of linguistic input and the patterns of interaction experienced by the child are therefore essential to language development”¹

The preschool period is particularly important in this process. During these years, children acquire much of their basic vocabulary and begin to demonstrate communicative abilities through comprehension and expression. They do not acquire language only by hearing words and sentence patterns. They learn by using language in meaningful contexts. Interaction with others gives them opportunities to listen, respond, initiate exchanges, and take turns speaking.

¹ Wahiba Mallal, “The Effect of the Linguistic Environment on Children’s Language Acquisition and Skill Development,” in Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference: Issues of Education and Teaching in the Arab World—Challenges and Solutions, Fa’ilun Center for Research in Anthropology, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Monastir, Mahdia, Tunisia, 2018, pp. 120–126.

The family is the child's first setting for regular, natural exposure to language. Children interact with family members from the earliest stages of life. The nature of these exchanges is an important factor in language acquisition.

Grandparents play an important role in extended families. This is particularly true in Arab societies, where they remain closely involved in raising grandchildren. Their regular presence in a child's life can create many opportunities for communication, conversation, play, and the sharing of experiences and expressions from the local environment. The author cites studies indicating that "children living in multigenerational families often show typical language and communication development, as grandparents offer a rich source of vocabulary and expressive forms."¹ From this perspective, the question concerns the effectiveness of grandparents as informal educational mediators. This question has gained importance as the structure of the modern family has changed. Nuclear households, parents' employment, and increased migration may reduce opportunities for natural language immersion. Digital screens have also become a routine alternative for some children. These screens offer largely one-way language input and can leave children as passive recipients.

Grandparents can provide care for many hours each day. Their role may extend beyond physical and emotional care. In the author's account, these everyday exchanges can form a natural and effective setting for informal teaching. Through spoken language, children may develop greater communicative maturity. Such exchanges can also narrow the linguistic gap between generations. They may help children balance inherited expressions with more recent forms of speech.

The folktale provides a clear example of these practices. When grandparents tell stories, a narrative can become an interactive exchange. Children hear language and may also take part in producing it. Storytelling then brings together linguistic learning, cultural memory, and communication across generations.

However, the linguistic influence of grandparents should not be assumed to be positive in every case. Kinship and frequent contact are not enough to establish a developmental benefit. Children's experiences vary with the quality of the relationship and their responses to grandparents' initiatives. Participation in shared activities also matters. Other factors include the language used by grandparents, its suitability for the child's developmental level, and the opportunities offered for children to express their views.

Family circumstances and social, economic, and cultural conditions also shape grandparent-child interaction. They may therefore influence language development. The central research question is not simply whether grandparents affect children's language. It is how their interaction becomes a linguistic and communicative resource, and under what conditions. This distinction links two key concepts: language development and communicative competence.

The significance of this study lies in the intersection of four dimensions of preschool development: language acquisition, social interaction, intergenerational communication, and school readiness. Children's language develops within social exchanges. Through these exchanges, they encounter the vocabulary, structures, and other resources of a language. Language development is therefore closely connected to the social relationships through which linguistic resources are acquired.

Recent literature increasingly considers grandparents as caregivers and sources of family support. This study extends that perspective by viewing them as active participants in linguistic interaction. The family environment offers children opportunities for play, conversation, and the sharing of knowledge and experience with grandparents. The central concern is how these exchanges can become settings for developing linguistic resources and communicative skills.

Accordingly, this study examines the potential contribution of grandparent-child interaction to language development and communicative competence. It considers the linguistic and communicative input generated by these exchanges and the mechanisms through which they operate. It then explores their possible relationship with children's developing language resources during the preschool period. The folktale serves as the principal communicative example. The study also seeks to outline a conceptual model linking language input, family interaction, and possible linguistic outcomes. This model may inform further research, particularly in extended families where grandparents participate in children's socialization.

The main research question is as follows:

How can interaction between grandparents and preschool children contribute to language development and the growth of communicative competence? Which interactional and linguistic mechanisms may account for this contribution?

Four related questions guide the analysis:

- How might the diversity, richness, and responsiveness of grandparents' linguistic input help children develop vocabulary, sentence structures, narrative forms, and other language resources?
- What forms of interaction can turn communication between grandparents and grandchildren into a setting for developing communicative competence?

¹ Keim, S. A., Mason, R. E., & Yisahak, S. F. (2025). Language and Communication Development and School Readiness of Children Raised by Grandparents or in Multi-generational Homes. *Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology*, 39(1), 56–67.

- To what extent can grandparents serve as linguistic and cultural mediators across generations, especially in multilingual families? What limits might family and social conditions place on this role?
- Can folktales told by grandparents provide interactive communicative situations that support language development before school entry?

Guiding Hypotheses

- The potential developmental contribution of grandparent-child interaction depends less on the frequency of contact or the number of words children hear than on the quality of reciprocal exchanges. Such exchanges allow children to participate actively and help construct meaning.
- Speech addressed to children by grandparents may differ from that of parents and other family members in its linguistic, pragmatic, and lexical features. These features may provide educational scaffolding for language development and communicative competence.
- The quality of children's linguistic input may depend on the oral activities they share with grandparents, including stories, folktales, and songs. Storytelling and conversations about lived experiences can do more than transmit words and sentence patterns. They can model language use and help children organize experience.
- Grandparents' presence does not necessarily lead to positive linguistic or communicative outcomes. Any benefit depends on the relationship, the family setting, the quality of linguistic input, and the activities shared with the child.

Key Concepts

The Preschool Period

The preschool period refers to the developmental years before children formally enter school. It usually extends from birth to about five or six years of age. During this period, major cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities begin to take shape.

These years are not an educational void. They offer a setting for informal learning through oral communication, play, and sensory-motor activities. Such experiences contribute to knowledge development and school readiness.

For this study, the important point is that children rely heavily on repeated interaction with adults, including grandparents, as they discover and acquire language. These relationships provide an important setting for examining how linguistic resources develop before formal education begins.

Language Development

In this study, language development refers to the growth of children's ability to understand, produce, and use language in interaction and communicative situations. It includes learning new words, forming sentences, constructing discourse, narrating, comprehending, and expressing ideas. It also involves "the child's gradual mastery of the means of linguistic expression, from sounds and babbling to words and structures, and eventually to mature expression."¹

The developmental value of language at this stage lies in children's ability to combine and use these resources. Play, narration, stories, and shared reading are therefore important contexts for language development and the organization of experience.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence refers to "the ability of a speaker and listener to draw on linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge in particular communicative situations. This knowledge allows them to understand and produce discourse suited to the context, the conditions of social interaction, and the intended purpose of the utterance."² It is therefore the ability to use linguistic resources effectively to achieve different social and communicative aims.

During the preschool years, this competence appears in basic behaviours. Children initiate speech, listen to others, take turns, stay on topic, and express opinions and feelings. The present study therefore looks beyond the vocabulary and structures children hear from grandparents. It focuses on whether repeated interaction helps them use language effectively in social situations and make practical use of what they have learned.

Narrative Competence

At this stage, narrative competence is mainly oral and implicit. It consists of "the unwritten linguistic and cognitive skills that allow a child to listen to a story and understand its structure. They also allow the child to recount its events orally in a temporal, causal, and logical sequence appropriate to the child's developmental level."³ This competence is

¹ See Hamid Abd al-Salam Zahran (2005), *Developmental Psychology: Childhood and Adolescence*, Alam al-Kutub, pp. 195–202.

² See Maurice Boileau, *Language Didactics through Communication: A Theoretical Framework and Pedagogical Applications*, 1998, trans. Ahmed al-Awza'i, 1st ed., Casablanca: Alam al-Tarbiya, p. 45.

³ Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, 2005, trans. Anwar Ibrahim, 1st ed., Cairo: National Center for Translation, p. 64.

not limited to folktales. It also involves organizing personal experiences and events in speech, reconstructing them through language, and describing them to another person.

Grandparents can help develop this competence through everyday family stories and folktales. Repeated exposure to these accounts provides children with models of narrative discourse and may support the development of narrative skills.

Linguistic Input

Linguistic input refers to the elements of language to which children are exposed. These include vocabulary, structures, discourse patterns, questions, and comments. It also includes the linguistic features that make this input accessible and useful to the child.¹

This study assumes that the quality of linguistic input is at least as important as its quantity. Speech produced through responsive interaction differs from speech that children merely hear without active participation. It is therefore more useful to examine grandparents' discourse and their ways of interacting with children than to count contacts or the linguistic forms children encounter.

These concepts show that the study does not treat a grandparent's role as a simple matter of presence or absence. Instead, it considers the opportunities created by repeated and regular interaction. Such opportunities may help children understand language and use it appropriately in meaningful situations.

Theoretical Framework: Toward a Multilevel Explanatory Model

The relationship between grandparent-child interaction and language development cannot be explained from a single perspective. Cognitive, social, emotional, family, linguistic, and cultural processes all play a part. Children acquire language in social settings. Yet the presence of adults, including grandparents, does not automatically produce linguistic progress. Interaction must offer children opportunities to participate and create meaning. For this reason, the study draws on several complementary theories. Together, they help explain how everyday exchanges may contribute to lasting linguistic competence. Five perspectives are considered in sequence. The first concerns how linguistic understanding emerges through interaction. The second addresses the emotional conditions that support it. The third places these exchanges within the wider family system. The fourth examines the character of linguistic input. The fifth applies didactic concepts while recognizing their limits in a family context.

1. The Interactional-Cognitive Foundation: Language as a Joint Construction of Meaning

The central idea here is that children do not acquire language simply by receiving separate linguistic units. They learn through meaningful participation in social situations. This perspective addresses a basic question: how is linguistic understanding constructed through interaction before language knowledge becomes more extensive and refined?

1.1. Reading Intentions and Joint Attention in Tomasello

Michael Tomasello's theory centres on "intention reading." Children do not learn words only through an automatic association between a sound and an object. They also use an essential social-cognitive ability: understanding what an adult intends when speaking.² According to Tomasello, this involves another mechanism, joint attention. This occurs when a child and an adult look at the same object with mutual awareness. The interaction forms a three-way relation among the child, the adult, and the object³

Tomasello's account differs from behavioural explanations based chiefly on repetition and sound-object association. It suggests that children can sometimes understand a new word after a single encounter by interpreting the communicative context. The source describes this as rapid learning from a single exposure⁴

This perspective helps explain the possible role of grandparents, particularly in activities involving joint attention. Such exchanges require the adult and child to devote attention to a shared focus. In some families, grandparents may have more uninterrupted time than working parents. Their interactions may therefore offer repeated opportunities for shared attention among the adult, child, and object.

2.1. Vygotsky: Social Interaction and the Zone of Proximal Development

Lev Vygotsky developed a sociocultural theory that departed from Piagetian views of cognitive development as an internal process that precedes learning. Vygotsky argued that many psychological functions, including language, conceptual thought, and voluntary memory, first occur between people through social interaction. They subsequently become part of the individual's mental organization. He called this the "general genetic law of development" in *Mind in Society*. According to this principle, every higher psychological function appears twice in the child's development:

¹ Bushra al-Balqasmi (2022), "Language Acquisition: Its Foundations and Stages," *Ibn Khaldun Journal for Studies and Research*, 2(13), p. 209.

² Tomasello, Michael (2003). *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 21–23.

³ Tomasello, 2003, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴ Muhammad Muhammad Amayrah (2015), *Language and Reading Difficulties*. Amman: Dar al-Fikr.

first between people, on an interpsychological level, and then within the child, on an intrapsychological level.¹ Several concepts from this theory are especially relevant to interaction between grandparents and children.

Mediation and Psychological Tools

Vygotsky distinguishes two broad types of tools through which people engage with their environment. Technical tools, such as axes and hammers, act on the external world. Psychological tools act on mental processes and help people regulate behaviour. Language, counting systems, and writing are examples of the latter.

For Vygotsky, language is a central psychological tool. It does more than allow communication with others. It helps people regulate attention, develop thought, and solve problems. Thinking and language are therefore closely related, and the development of thought is linked to linguistic development.

This view has important implications for the adult's role as a mediator. An exchange between an adult and a child does more than transmit vocabulary. It may provide a psychological tool that the child can later use to organize independent thinking.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level determined by a child's independent problem-solving and the potential developmental level determined through problem-solving with an adult or in cooperation with more capable peers.”² Effective learning, from this perspective, does not focus only on what the child has already mastered. It also considers the intermediate level that becomes accessible with support from others. The quality of that support matters.

The More Knowledgeable Other

Learning can take place informally with someone who has greater linguistic or cognitive competence than the child. The quality of this learning depends on how the other person responds and adapts assistance to the child's abilities.

Internalization

Internalization describes “the process by which operations first carried out on an external, interactive level become mental operations”³ Adults may repeatedly model complete linguistic forms in different communicative situations. Children do not necessarily master these forms immediately. They need successive opportunities to use new patterns before incorporating them into their own language.

Private Speech

Vygotsky also observed that children sometimes speak aloud to themselves while performing difficult tasks. He viewed this private speech as a transitional form between social speech directed toward others and silent inner speech. It shows how children begin to use language, first acquired socially, to guide their own thinking.

From this perspective, grandparents may contribute to language development in several ways:

- Grandparents may engage children in extended conversations throughout the day. These exchanges can offer regular opportunities to work within the child's zone of proximal development, sometimes beyond the time available in formal educational settings.
- Grandparents may respond to lexical or semantic errors by restating children's utterances in fuller sentences that remain close to the children's level. Such expansions can be more useful than brief corrections that children may not later incorporate into their independent speech.
- As a link between generations, grandparents may introduce traditional vocabulary, expressions, and narrative forms. This creates a form of symbolic mediation that involves both language and knowledge. In Vygotskian terms, it may enrich the psychological tools that children internalize.
- The repeated exchanges typical of some grandparent-child relationships may also support the gradual internalization of new linguistic structures. Forms first used in interaction can become part of the child's independent language.

In summary, this perspective regards language and knowledge as developing first through social interaction and later within the individual's thinking. Grandparents can act as more knowledgeable partners in this process. Their contribution need not stop at meeting children's immediate communicative needs. With suitable support in the zone of proximal development, they may help children use new words, structures, and more advanced forms of communication.

3.1. Bruner and Scaffolding in Social Interaction

Jerome Bruner's work on educational scaffolding provides a practical extension of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Whereas Vygotsky describes what children can achieve with support, scaffolding addresses how an adult provides that support during a task. Several features are relevant to the present study.

¹ Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 56–57.

² Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, op. cit.

³ Vygotsky, 1978, op. cit., p. 86.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is an architectural metaphor for temporary adult support. It enables a child to complete a task that would otherwise exceed the child's independent ability. The adult gradually removes this support as the child becomes more capable.

Gradual Withdrawal of Support

Support is not fixed. It decreases as the child's competence increases. This gradual adjustment distinguishes scaffolding from unsystematic assistance.

The Six Functions of Scaffolding

Six functions are associated with adult support: attracting the child's interest in the task, simplifying it into manageable steps, sustaining motivation, identifying the gap between the child's performance and the desired outcome, controlling frustration, and modelling a possible solution.

Interactional Attunement

The quality of scaffolding depends on how closely the adult's response follows the child's performance. It is not measured simply by the amount of help offered. Support increases when the child struggles and decreases when the child succeeds¹

In this framework, grandparents may contribute to language acquisition in the following ways:

- Daily interaction and repetition can create opportunities for grandparents to establish linguistic scaffolds and withdraw them as children progress.
- Grandparents may expand children's utterances through direct modelling. They can restate what a child says in a fuller form while keeping the language close to the child's original meaning and level.
- The author attributes to grandparents an intuitive sensitivity to language and extensive practical experience. These qualities may help them judge how much support a child needs and adapt their intervention to the child's response.
- As children's language develops, grandparents can reduce direct correction and use more open-ended questions. This adjustment encourages increasingly independent expression.

2. The Psychological-Affective Foundation: Emotional Security as a Condition for Interaction

The first perspective addressed the mechanisms of linguistic understanding. This second perspective asks a related question: what psychological conditions help children become receptive to linguistic learning and participate in it?

Emotional attachment is a cornerstone of development and education. A bond with a caregiver can provide a child with a sense of security. It can also support openness to knowledge, curiosity, exploration, and the acquisition of linguistic and social skills. As the cited source states, "the way an adult communicates emotionally with a child provides the framework in which the child's later linguistic and social skills take shape"²

Studies discussed in this account associate language learning with an emotionally supportive environment, often provided by adults such as grandparents. Language acquisition begins before a child says a first word. It begins in early emotional exchanges between the adult and the child, when they form a shared world of meaning. As the cited source states, "language is not merely words; it is a means of participating in culture. Such participation cannot occur without a close emotional bond that motivates communication"³ Two complementary theoretical perspectives help explain the role grandparents may play.

1.2. Bowlby's Attachment Theory and the Secure Base

John Bowlby developed attachment theory to describe the early emotional relationship between a child and a caregiver. According to this account, the child who experiences repeated, responsive interaction "develops an internal working model of attachment. This mental representation of the relationship is based on trust in the caregiver's availability and responsiveness."⁴ Bowlby also described the caregiver as a secure base that supports the child's later exploration of the surrounding world.

Within the family, grandparents can become important attachment figures during the preschool period, especially when they provide regular daily care. Their presence may allow children to explore new linguistic experiences with a familiar adult. Some grandparents also have relatively calm periods of time for interaction. Under favourable conditions, these exchanges may strengthen children's sense of security and confidence and encourage new communicative attempts.

¹ Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100.

² John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loyalty*, vol. I, trans. Abd al-Aziz al-Qusi et al. (Cairo: Supreme Council for Culture, National Translation Project, 1st ed., 1999), p. 355.

³ Jerome Bruner, *Child's Talk: Learning to Use Language*, translated and annotated by a group of researchers, National Center for Translation, p. 19 (paraphrased).

⁴ Bowlby, J. (1988). *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. London: Routledge, pp. 91–94.

2.2. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen proposed the affective filter hypothesis in his account of second-language acquisition. In this framework, high anxiety can interfere with the learner's ability to benefit from linguistic input. Even rich input may be less accessible when the affective filter is high¹

Krashen's account highlights the value of low anxiety and a sense of safety for language learning. These conditions may arise during supportive interactions with grandparents. A familiar adult who listens attentively can reinforce children's confidence and encourage them to express ideas. When children feel accepted, they may be more willing to speak, experiment with language, and make mistakes without fearing harsh correction.

3. The Family-Ecological Foundation: Grandparents Within the Developmental System

This perspective examines the setting in which linguistic exchanges between grandparents and grandchildren occur. Its central question is: where does this relationship fit within the wider network of relationships surrounding the child?

1.3. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains human development through continuing interaction between individuals and their environments. From this perspective, children's language development does not occur in isolation. It is shaped by their exchanges within several interconnected settings.

The following systems are particularly useful for understanding the possible contribution of grandparents to language development.

The Microsystem

The microsystem consists of the settings in which children take part directly in everyday life. These include the home, preschool, school, and interactions with grandparents.

This system is closest to the child's daily experience. Grandparents may be regular partners in communication within it. Through emotionally meaningful conversations and varied expressions, they can provide models that children observe and imitate. Such interaction may enrich children's vocabulary and language use.

The Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to connections between the child's immediate settings, such as relations between home and school or between family and community.

Grandparents may help link the language of the family with that of the wider community or school. They can also support children's movement between home varieties of speech and more formal or standard language varieties.

The Chronosystem

The chronosystem concerns the passage of time and the historical changes affecting families and society, such as migration. Grandparents may act as witnesses to these changes and as living sources of linguistic memory. They support communication between generations, transmit experiences, and preserve linguistic heritage and identity through proverbs, stories, and folktales. Such forms sometimes contain distinctive linguistic structures that may be threatened by the ready-made and simplified language associated with technology. In the words quoted in the source, "this ensures that preschool children gain linguistic structures with semantic depth and a contextual understanding of language extending beyond their own generation"²

From this perspective, linguistic and communicative behaviour develops through relations among these systems rather than through individual processes alone. Grandparents may contribute through daily language modelling, emotional and contextual support, and the transmission of linguistic heritage. These activities can also introduce children to narrative patterns and forms of reasoning.

4. The Functional-Linguistic Foundation: From Acquiring Language to Mastering Its Use

This perspective examines the language exchanged between grandparents and grandchildren. It considers its quantity, quality, and functions. The key question is: what forms of linguistic and communicative learning may arise from these exchanges?

1.4. Grandparents as Supporters of Language Functions

Halliday and Hart and Risley offer two complementary approaches to early language input. In Halliday's functional account, children gradually acquire language through the mastery of its functions. These include instrumental, regulatory, personal, interactional, heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions, before full mastery of abstract grammar.³ Hart and Risley, by contrast, focus on language quantity. They associate later differences in children's

¹ Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, p. 51.

² Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 37–43.

³ Al-Jilali Abu Ilyas Ben Farija, *Preschool Children's Language Between Acquisition and Communication: A Linguistic Approach*, 1st ed., Amman: Dar Osama for Publishing and Distribution, 2015, p. 82.

vocabulary with the number and variety of words encountered in the early years. Together, these approaches suggest two ways in which grandparents may contribute.

- The first is an increase in the total number of words children hear. This is possible because of the extended time they may spend with grandparents. According to the argument presented here, this greater exposure may widen the child's later lexical advantage relative to peers.
- Second, storytelling, riddles, repeated questions, and symbolic play may engage several functions of language. Imaginative and exploratory uses are particularly relevant. Such activities can support the early development of pragmatic competence.

2.4. Grandparents and Narrative Competence

Jerome Bruner distinguished two broad modes of thought through which people understand experience. The paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode organizes knowledge through classification, general rules, and abstract causal relations. The narrative mode organizes experience through events, intentions, characters, and outcomes unfolding over time. Bruner emphasized the importance of narrative in human understanding, especially in childhood. Narrative helps children make sense of everyday life and social and family relationships. It can therefore serve as an early way of organizing experience and giving meaning to events¹

What grandparents transmit is not limited to vocabulary. Their stories can also introduce the social conventions of language use. This relates to Hymes's concept of communicative competence. Children need more than grammatical knowledge. They also learn how to use speech in social situations, when to take a turn, how to respond, and how to adapt what they say to another person.

Grandparents may support narrative competence in several ways:

- Grandparents may tell the same story repeatedly and in different forms. This high-frequency narrative repetition exposes children to the underlying structures of the tale. It may strengthen narrative memory without relying on rote memorization.
- Grandparents can model different ways of telling a story. Gestures, changes of voice, and intonation add meaning to the spoken narrative and provide children with expressive models.
- Questions introduced during repeated storytelling can involve children in constructing the narrative. Over time, they may anticipate a conflict, a resolution, or another stage of the plot. They may then move from listening to retelling the story themselves. This shift from reception to independent production resembles the process of internalization described by Vygotsky.
- A family's shared collection of stories may also strengthen children's sense of belonging. Such stories connect them to their family, community, and cultural identity.

5. The Institutional-Didactic Foundation

The fifth perspective draws on concepts from didactics to understand the implicit learning that may occur through repeated communication between grandparents and grandchildren. It asks how concepts developed for school teaching can illuminate family language interaction without treating the two settings as identical.

1.5. Applying the Didactic Triangle

Jean Houssaye developed the widely used model of the pedagogical triangle. It describes teaching as "a three-way relationship among teacher, learner, and knowledge. This relationship is organized around three possible processes: teaching, training, and learning"² When grandparents are treated as informal didactic mediators, the three components have to be reconsidered in the family context.

- The pedagogical relationship (grandparent-child): This relationship is not governed by formal assessment. Its informal learning expectations are based more on conversational play and encouragement than on school requirements.
- The epistemological relationship (child-knowledge): Grandparents often share living, contextual knowledge rather than abstract textbook knowledge. This knowledge appears in family stories, folktales, songs, proverbs, and ordinary conversations.
- The psychological relationship (child-knowledge): The emotional bond with the person who communicates knowledge may increase children's willingness to engage with unfamiliar words and expressions. This may support their gradual internalization.

This application must be viewed critically. The didactic triangle was designed to describe organized schooling with defined aims and schedules. Applying it to the family setting therefore requires theoretical caution. The description of

¹ Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1–21.

² Jean Houssaye, *Le triangle pédagogique: Théorie et pratiques de l'éducation scolaire* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 21.

a grandparent as a pedagogical participant remains a metaphor. The author nevertheless argues that the support a child receives from a grandparent can, in many situations, be no less important than what a teacher provides at school.

2.5. Natural Didactic Transposition

Didactic transposition refers to “the process by which scholarly knowledge becomes knowledge suitable for teaching. This takes place through stages of reconstruction and simplification without removing its epistemological content.” Grandparents may also transform what they know. They do not present their cultural knowledge and heritage all at once or exactly as they received it. Instead, they adapt it for their grandchildren through two main processes.

- Selection and adaptation: Grandparents may break down the complex and symbolic forms of oral heritage. They can then reformulate them using vocabulary and expressions suited to the child's level of understanding.
- Making knowledge concrete: Grandparents may connect words with objects and actions in familiar settings. For example, they can name kitchen utensils or workshop tools while those objects are being used.

The expression didactic transposition is also used metaphorically here. In its strict sense, the concept refers to educational processes governed by the conditions and oversight of formal schooling.

Taken together, these five perspectives suggest that children's language development and communicative competence emerge through interaction at several levels. The interactional-cognitive perspective explains how communication, joint attention, and mediation can turn everyday exchanges into informal learning opportunities. The affective perspective highlights the role of emotional security in children's willingness to participate and explore language. The family-ecological perspective places these interactions within wider family and cultural relationships. The functional-linguistic perspective treats language as social action and examines the purposes it serves in communication. Finally, the didactic perspective draws attention to mediation, gradual support, and adaptation while maintaining the distinction between family interaction and formal teaching. Grandparents may therefore act as linguistic and cultural mediators. One useful context for examining this role is the folktale. The following analysis considers the Algerian story *Mqidech* and the Ogress and explores how its features can become opportunities for interaction and language use.

Applied Analysis: The Folktale as a Setting for Linguistic Interaction Between Grandparents and Children

The preceding discussion suggests that the contribution of grandparents to language development depends on more than their presence or the amount of speech children hear. What matters is the character of the interaction. This section applies that argument to the folktale, a communicative activity with both cultural and educational significance. The guiding question is: how can storytelling between grandparents and children become a setting in which children produce and use language?

3.2. Reasons for Selecting the Folktale as a Model of Grandparent-Grandchild Interaction

Folktales are readily incorporated into everyday family exchanges, particularly in Algerian households. Historically, many of these tales have been passed down orally by grandfathers and grandmothers. Their use in this study is therefore deliberate. Folktales belong to the type of intergenerational interaction whose linguistic and communicative dimensions the study seeks to understand.

One important feature of the folktale is that it presents language as an integrated source of meaning. It is not simply a ready-made narrative for children or a piece of cultural heritage. It can also provide an interactive setting for language use. While following characters and events, children hear expressions in meaningful contexts. They may ask questions, predict events, rephrase statements, and suggest different endings. They can thus contribute to the construction of meaning. In such exchanges, the story becomes a means of communication rather than a sequence of events recalled only for entertainment.

Folktales also bring several forms of learning into one activity. Children encounter new words together with examples of their use. They hear sentence patterns in context and follow dialogue between characters. These dialogues can illustrate basic communicative practices, such as taking turns, waiting for a response, and staying on topic. Linguistic and communicative learning therefore develop together within the same interactive setting.

The folktale also connects language with memory across generations. Grandparents transmit more than a plot. They introduce forms of expression, descriptions of social life, culturally meaningful vocabulary, and experience preserved through oral tradition.

Nevertheless, storytelling does not automatically develop language or communicative competence. Its educational value depends on how the exchange is conducted. If the grandparent dominates the conversation and the child only listens, the story functions mainly as a source of linguistic input. By contrast, questions, predictions, comments, and active participation can turn storytelling into an informal setting for using language.

The folktale was therefore selected for three related reasons:

- A linguistic reason: It offers vocabulary and sentence structures within meaningful contexts.
- An interactional and didactic reason: It invites children to participate in constructing meaning and discourse through different activities.
- A cultural and intergenerational reason: It provides a natural medium for transmitting language, memory, and expressive traditions between generations.

3.3. Selecting Mqidech as a Model for Analysis

On this basis, the study selects Mqidech and the Ogress, a well-known tale from Algerian oral tradition. The aim is to identify its linguistic and communicative potential. Rather than discussing folktales only in general terms, the analysis examines how language works within this narrative. It also considers how a grandparent can turn the telling of a story into an interactive exchange. Four related dimensions guide the discussion: lexical and syntactic resources, pragmatic and communicative functions, narrative structure, and affective-cultural meanings. Each dimension is linked to possible forms of mediation during storytelling. Particular attention is given to expressions that have educational value. These examples are discussed in relation to joint attention, linguistic scaffolding, and the functions of language.

3.4. Mqidech and the Ogress as an Interactive Context for Developing Language and Communicative Competence

Mqidech and the Ogress is an Algerian folktale built around a succession of events and situations involving its central character, Mqidech. His adventures drive the story forward. They also establish temporal and causal links between events. Dialogue among the characters adds an interactive dimension that can be used to support children's linguistic development.

The tale begins with a familiar opening formula: "Once upon a time, long ago." It then introduces the characters and develops through travel, getting lost, an encounter with the ogress, the discovery of danger, and the use of cleverness to escape. These elements offer several opportunities for linguistic learning.

The Nature of Linguistic and Communicative Input: Language in a Meaningful Context

A key didactic feature of Mqidech and the Ogress is that language is connected with actions and situations in the story. Children encounter expressions such as "Mqidech rode the horse," "he went hunting," and "the ogress is watching us."¹ These expressions introduce lexical fields related to movement, travel, journeys, the forest, and other contexts. The author considers these fields close to children's everyday experience. The tale thus provides a meaningful learning situation, consistent with language approaches that emphasize competence.

The forest provides a useful example of the role of setting. In the tale, places do more than contain events. They also create lexical and semantic connections. The characters move from the house to the forest and along the road. A grandparent can use these changes to ask: "Where was Mqidech?" "Where did he go?" and "Where did his brothers get lost?" Through these questions, children learn not only names of places but also relationships between place and action. Getting lost may be linked with the forest, climbing with the mountain, and walking or searching with the road. The tale can therefore support a network of related vocabulary.

This example connects with Tomasello's account of joint attention. When a word is tied to a shared scene or movement, children may find it easier to understand its referent and function. A grandparent might say, "Mqidech mounted the horse," while making a gesture that imitates riding. The gesture creates a shared focus. The horse becomes the object of attention and discussion. In this way, the word is experienced not simply as a sound but as an expression linked to a referent, a context, and an action.

From Linguistic Input to Function: What Does the Child Do with Language?

The folktale presents language not only as a formal structure but also as a tool for different functions. In Mqidech and the Ogress, language is used to report events, describe characters, ask questions, warn others, and express fear. Consider the phrases "That golden hen of yours kept me from sleeping" and "Those beans of yours ... I was almost asleep."² These utterances do more than convey information. Mqidech uses them to persuade the ogress of the reason he cannot sleep. He wants her to leave and deal with what he claims is causing his sleeplessness. This corresponds to Halliday's instrumental function, in which language is used to achieve an aim or meet a need. Halliday considered this one of the early functions of language in childhood.

Another clear example is Mqidech's well-known utterance: "Who is knocking? My hand is on the trigger."³ Although its form appears informative, it functions as a deterrent. Mqidech uses it to intimidate the ogress. This corresponds to Halliday's regulatory function: using language to control or direct the behaviour of another person.

Grandparents can draw on these exchanges to help children recognize different language functions. They might ask, "Why did Mqidech say that the ogress was preventing him from sleeping?" Such a question encourages children to see that an utterance has a purpose. Language conveys meaning, but it can also be used to bring about a particular response.

Joint Attention and the Construction of Meaning: From Hearing the Tale to Interpreting It

Joint attention during storytelling is not limited to a single character or event. The setting itself can become a shared focus. Mqidech moves through places such as mountains, forests, stables, and houses. Its characters include Mqidech, the ogress, and his brothers. A grandparent can guide the child's attention toward these characters and settings. One

¹ Yahya al-Habriri, "Mqidech and the Ogress," folktale published on the Aqlam Forum, 2009.

² Fawzia Ben Taher, "The Semiotics of the Folktale: Mqidech and the Ogress as a Model," master's thesis, University of Maghnia, p. 77, 2023.

³ Ibid., p. 81.

striking episode involves the ogress disguising herself as a girl by changing her appearance and voice. The grandparent might ask who the girl really is, why she changed her appearance, and whether Mqidech will recognize her. These questions move the child beyond recalling details toward interpreting the relation between appearance and reality. Joint attention then becomes a shared effort to understand meaning. The grandparent serves as a mediator between the child's reception of the story and the interpretation of its linguistic and social functions. This is consistent with the importance Tomasello assigns to joint attention in understanding language within a communicative context.

From Narration to Participation: Dialogue as a Means of Interaction

Folktales alternate between narration and dialogue. Their didactic value is not achieved by having children merely listen to the events. It increases when a one-way narrative becomes an interactive exchange in which children can ask questions, answer, predict, comment, and participate. One well-known passage has Mqidech say, "Who is knocking? My hand is on the trigger." The ogress replies, "I came to check on you"¹

This exchange illustrates address, response, and turn-taking. The grandparent can take the role of one character and ask the child to play the other. The child must listen, understand, wait for a turn, and respond in a way that fits the scene. Through such role play, the child moves from hearing expressions to producing them. Dialogue thus becomes a practical opportunity for language development.

Repetition Within the Tale and Its Role in Consolidating Linguistic Resources

Repetition is a common feature of folktales. Its value goes beyond repeating the same words or events. It exposes children to familiar linguistic patterns in related contexts while allowing meanings to change. Children can then connect a repeated structure with its use in different situations.

In Mqidech and the Ogress, the ogress repeatedly asks why Mqidech cannot sleep. The basic exchange remains similar, but his explanation changes. He first refers to the hen, then to beans, and later to other objects. Each answer forms part of his trick. The child can notice that a familiar sentence pattern may contain different information. Such patterns can later be adapted for everyday speech. Repetition becomes a functional element of the story rather than mechanical practice.

Grandparents can strengthen this process by asking similar questions during the telling, such as "Why couldn't Mqidech sleep?" Children may offer different explanations. The repeated question then becomes a framework for producing new utterances. From a functional perspective, a linguistic pattern becomes more meaningful when children use it to express different communicative intentions.

Reformulation and Linguistic Scaffolding

Reformulation and linguistic scaffolding are two ways to turn storytelling into an opportunity for producing organized discourse. The quality of interaction depends partly on how grandparents respond to the child's utterances. Asking questions and accepting brief answers may not be sufficient. The adult can also provide support that helps the child develop longer and more coherent expressions.

Scaffolding occurs when the grandparent does not simply supply a complete answer or stop at the child's first response. Instead, the adult offers gradual support. For example, the grandparent asks about the ogress, and the child answers, "The ogress went away." The grandparent replies, "Yes, the ogress went looking for Mqidech." The child then adds, "She went looking for Mqidech where he was hiding." Here, the adult builds on the child's speech rather than replacing it. If an utterance is incomplete, the adult may expand it. If it is adequate, further questions may help the child recall and organize events. Reformulation offers a fuller linguistic model. Scaffolding helps children produce comparable structures in new contexts.

Narrative Outcomes: From Individual Words to Organized Discourse

Like many folktales, Mqidech follows a relatively simple sequence. The brothers get lost, reach the ogress's dwelling, face danger, and are eventually helped by Mqidech's cleverness. Listening to the story gives children a sequence of events to organize mentally. Grandparents can turn this into an oral language activity. They can ask, "What happened first?" "What happened next?" and "How did the story end?" These questions invite children to do more than recall isolated details. They encourage them to arrange events into connected discourse and express the relationships between them.

Retelling offers another opportunity for independent language production. After hearing the folktale, children may be asked to recount it in their own words. They recall characters and events and attempt to connect them. Their version will not necessarily reproduce the original account. Instead, they reconstruct its meaning through their own language. In Bruner's terms, narrative becomes both a means of linguistic development and a way of organizing experience.

From Narration to Imagination and the Production of New Discourse

Once children become familiar with storytelling, grandparents can encourage them to go beyond retelling and invent a new version. For example, they might ask, "What would you do if you were Mqidech?" The child then draws on existing vocabulary and narrative experience to construct a new meaning. This illustrates the imaginative function of language

¹ Yahya al-Habriri, "Mqidech and the Ogress," op. cit.

described by Halliday. It also reflects a Vygotskian view of language as a resource for forming ideas about situations beyond the immediate here and now.

This reading of Mqidech and the Ogress suggests that grandparent-child interaction can offer valuable opportunities for language development and communicative competence before school entry. The strongest potential lies in moving beyond one-way narration toward children's active participation. A folktale's linguistic value does not depend on its content alone. It also depends on how grandparents use that content to invite questions, answers, dialogue, role play, and the reconstruction of events. The grandparent then acts not merely as a storyteller but also as a linguistic and cultural mediator. This interpretation highlights the importance of interaction quality, rather than linguistic input alone, in children's family and cultural experience.

Conclusion

This study concludes that language development and communicative competence during the preschool period are not determined solely by the amount of linguistic input or the presence of grandparents in family life. The quality of interaction is central. So are the forms of adult mediation and the functions language serves in everyday communication. The theoretical discussion therefore presents grandparents' contribution as a possibility rather than an inevitable effect. Its value depends on how the adult responds to the child, how suitable the language is, and how fully the child participates in constructing meaning.

The analytical application shows how a folktale can become a communicative activity with educational value. This occurs when storytelling involves questions, dialogue, joint attention, repetition, reformulation, linguistic scaffolding, prediction, retelling, and role play. Such practices provide more than vocabulary and sentence patterns. They allow children to use language for different purposes, take turns, remain on topic, express intentions, understand context, and produce coherent discourse. The key educational factor is therefore not the folktale itself but the way interaction is organized around it.

The study does not propose turning the grandparent-child relationship into formal instruction or assigning grandparents the role of schoolteachers. Instead, it draws attention to the natural linguistic and cultural mediation available within families. This mediation can complement formal education without replacing it. Grandparents can connect language with memory and experience. The folktale can provide a setting for language practice. Children, in turn, are participants in meaning-making rather than passive listeners. The educational value of intergenerational communication lies in its capacity to create repeated, meaningful exchanges rooted in children's experience and culture.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- Reconsider grandparents' place in children's linguistic environments. They should be recognized as potential communicative and cultural resources, not only as family caregivers.
- Give priority to the quality of interaction rather than the amount of input alone. Encourage dialogue, allow children time to respond, expand and reformulate their utterances, and use questions that promote thinking and expression.
- Encourage family storytelling during the preschool years. Move beyond one-way narration by inviting predictions, questions, comments, retelling, and role play.
- Use Algerian oral heritage as a linguistic and cultural resource for informal learning. Respect its dialectal and cultural features and preserve the contexts in which its forms of expression developed.
- Strengthen links between families and educational institutions. Teachers can draw on the stories and experiences children bring from home in oral expression, narration, description, and dialogue activities. The distinctive roles of family and school should remain clear.
- Conduct field studies that document patterns of interaction between grandparents and children. Such research could examine their relationships with vocabulary growth, narrative ability, communicative initiative, and the management of dialogue.

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