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Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) for preschool children often focuses on the adaptation of parent-child interaction (PCI) style in order to develop and enhance the child's language-learning environment and encourage communication development. However, the majority of research documenting the effectiveness of this approach has focused on white middle class volunteers and the effectiveness of this approach for children from ethnic minority communities is questionable. There is a need to reframe the accepted definition of 'correct' PCI and to use this knowledge to adapt SLT recommendations so that they are more effective for all families and more consonant with diverse cultural contexts.

The current study undertook detailed conversation analysis (a data-driven, qualitative method of analysis) of three mother-child dyads of Nigerian origin and revealed a PCI style that traditional SLT would label as 'negative'. However, closer examination revealed that this was not inappropriate considering the context of activities and their perceived discourse role and that this was not always at the expense of 'positive' behaviours. It was also clear that the preference for this type of talk was reflective of deeply held cultural beliefs about the role of adults and children within the family. The cultural paradigm appears an important one when evaluating PCI and it is suggested that broad assessment and intervention practices are not sufficiently detailed to take into account the full complexity of this behaviour and tend to ignore the significance of context and underlying cultural attitude. The importance of adapting SLT practice to take this into account is highlighted and an example is given.

