

# Communication style differences in mother-preschooler dyads in Thailand and the United States

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## Abstract

We examined how mother-child communication is influenced by linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Twenty-one Thai monolingual mother-preschooler dyads and 21 American-English monolingual mother-preschooler dyads completed a language-elicitation (prompted reminiscing) task. Narrative samples revealed differences in conversation content and styles between the Thai and English groups. We conclude that linguistic and cultural norms influence mother-child interactions and that children acquire communicative styles specific to the language they are learning.

## Introduction

- Children acquire language through interactions with more competent social partners, usually their parents (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).
- Linguistic input that children receive from caregivers varies cross-linguistically and cross-culturally.
  - Monolingual mothers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have qualitatively unique styles of interaction (e.g., Minami & McCabe, 1995; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang, 2001).
  - Cross-cultural comparisons of Thai and Australian mother-child dyads have shown differences in conversation styles (Winskel, 2009).

## Research Questions

1. How do Thai and American-English monolingual mothers differ in the conversation *styles* used to support their child's narrative production?
  - e.g., do mothers differ in their use of praise or affirmations?
2. How do Thai and American-English monolingual mothers differ in the *content* of their conversations?
  - e.g., do mothers differ in their discussion of behavioral expectations or social norms?



Permission to use pictures was obtained

## Participants

	American-English monolingual mean (SE)	Thai monolingual mean (SE)	p-value
<b>Children</b>			
N* (girl:boy)	16 (5:11)	17 (9:8)	-
Age (months)	52.65 (0.83)	53.19 (0.97)	0.67
<b>Mothers</b>			
N*	16	17	-
Age (years)	36.75 (1.50)	37.66 (0.95)	0.61
Education (years)	17.80 (0.78)	18.55 (0.67)	0.47
<b>Fathers</b>			
N*	16	17	-
Age (years)	39.18 (1.45)	40.03 (1.12)	0.64
Education (years)	17.53 (0.66)	19.20 (1.33)	0.27

Inclusionary criteria based on the *Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire* (Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushanskaya, 2007):

1. Current exposure to L2 (if any)  $\leq 20\%$ ; AND
2. Proficiency in L2 (if any)  $\leq 5$  (0-10 scale).

\* In total, data have been collected from 21 English (10 girls, 11 boys) and 21 Thai (11 girls, 10 boys) monolingual dyads, but transcription and coding are still in progress.

## Procedure

Prompted reminiscing:

- All mothers were given a set of 11 word prompts as topics of conversation (Set 1 or Set 2). They were instructed to use the prompts to elicit narratives about past events experienced by the child.
- Mothers were instructed to go through each word and talk for as long as they would like about each topic.
- Interactions were video-recorded.

• Recordings were transcribed using Codes for the Analysis of Human Language (CHAT), available through the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES; MacWhinney, 2000).

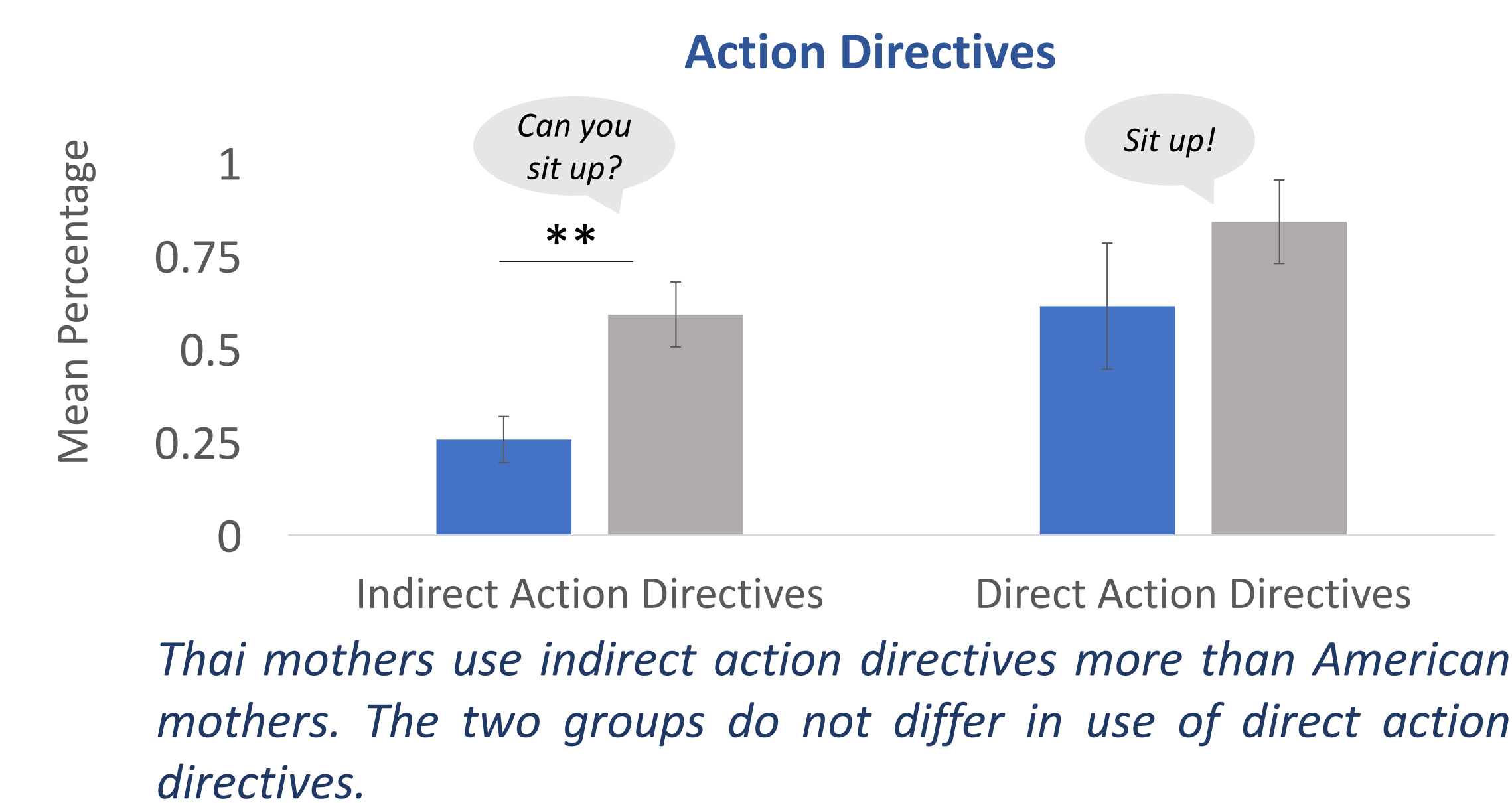
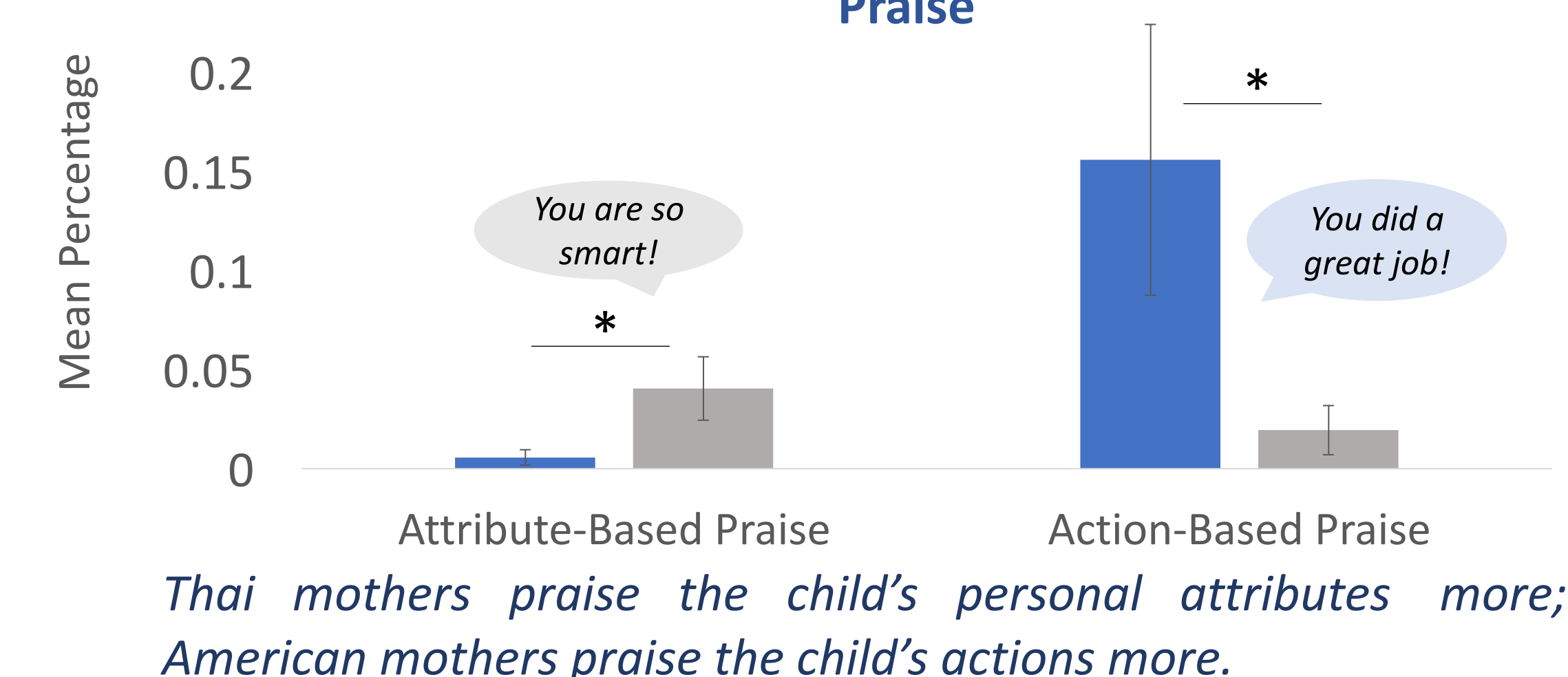
- For data analysis, mean percentage was calculated by dividing total frequency of each measure by total number of words, to account for differences in length of conversation.

## Methods

### Stimuli

	Set 1	Set 2
1	Blood (เลือด)	Doctor (หมอ)
2	Cat (แมว)	Dog (หมา)
3	Airplane (เครื่องบิน)	Car (รถ)
4	School (โรงเรียน)	Yard (สนาม)
5	Lunch (อาหารเที่ยง)	Dinner (อาหารเย็น)
6	Boat (เรือ)	Zoo (สวนสัตว์)
7	Laughing (การหัวเราะ)	Friend (เพื่อน)
8	Blanket (ผ้าห่ม)	Kitchen (ครัว)
9	Butterfly (ผีเสื้อ)	Spider (แมงมุม)
10	Holiday (วันหยุด)	Summer (ฤดูร้อน)
11	Birthday (วันเกิด)	Party (งานเลี้ยง)

## 1. Conversation Styles

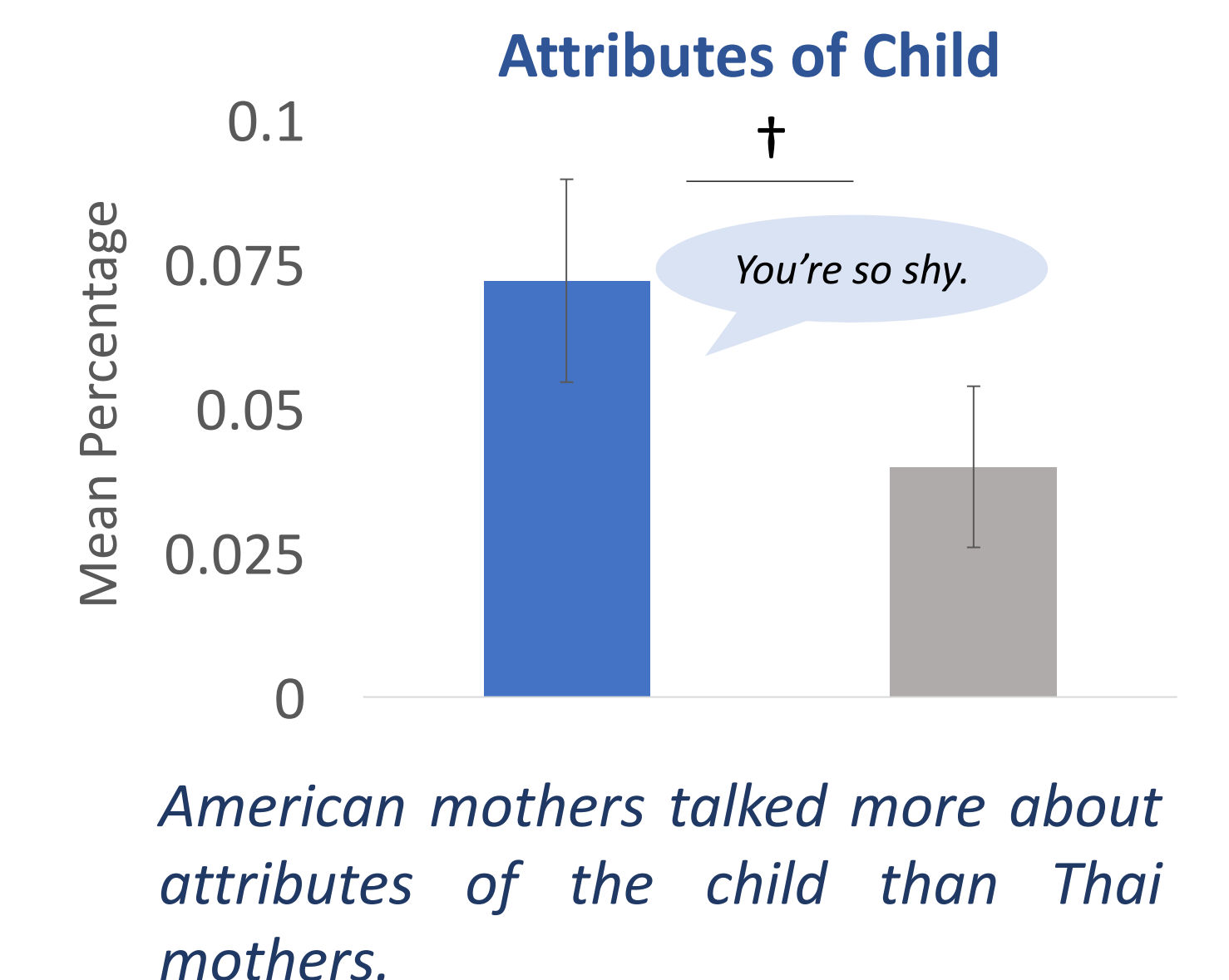
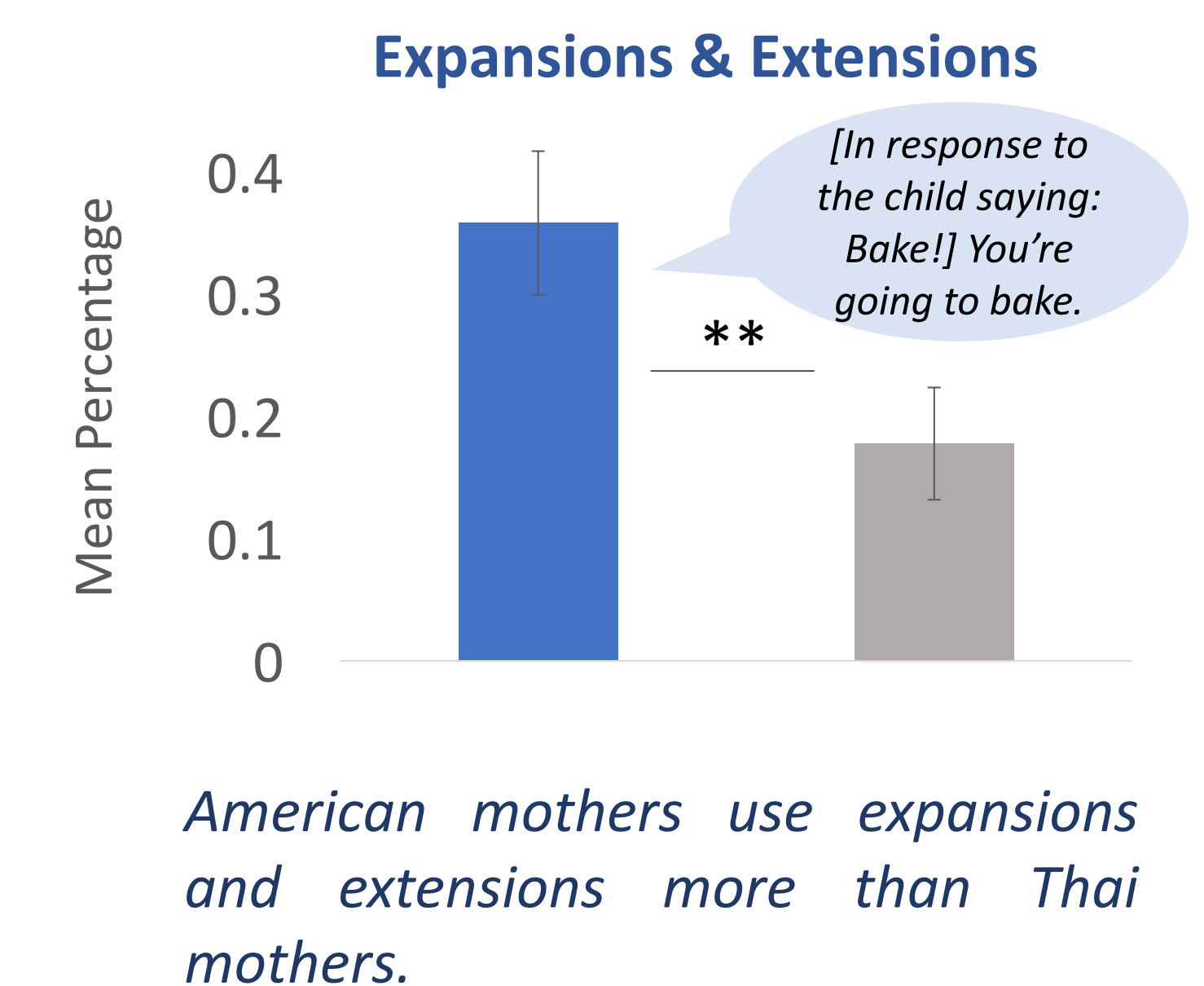
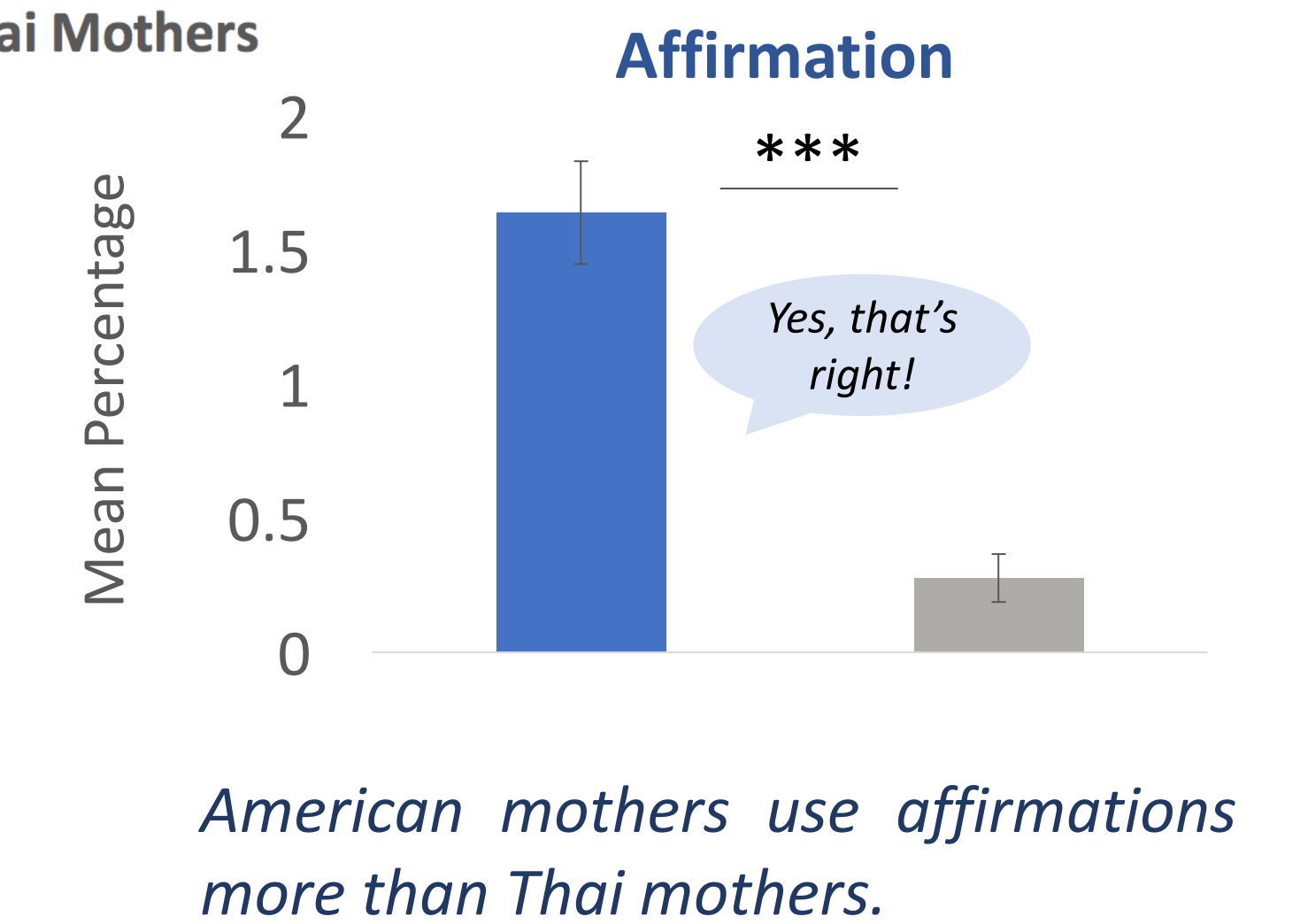


## 2. Content



\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , † $p < .1$

## Results



## Discussion

1. *Conversation styles* reflect cultural differences. Compared to American culture, Thai culture favors attribute-based praises and indirect imperatives, which encourages harmony within interpersonal relationships (Jia & Huang, 2008). American culture favors action-based praises, affirmations, and expansions/extensions, which promote self-competence and autonomy (Wang et al., 2008), as well as self-expression.
2. *Content* of conversation also illustrates socialization goals. The collectivist Thai society places greater importance on conformity to social norms, leading to greater discussion of behavioral expectations, while the individualistic American society emphasizes development of individuality and therefore highlights specific attributes about the child (Mullen & Yi, 1995).

## Conclusion

**American and Thai mother-child dyads exhibit distinct communication styles congruent with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.**