

Original Research

Raising young children in multilingual Montreal: Chinese-Canadian parents' language choices and storybook reading style

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Abstract: Despite growing research on parent-child storybook reading in bilingual contexts, little is known about the reading styles that bi- or multilingual parents, particularly immigrant parents, employ with their children, and how these practices vary depending on the language of the book. This laboratory-based observational study examined how Chinese-Canadian parents living in a multilingual environment interact with their young child to support language learning during storybook reading. Thirty parent-preschooler dyads living in Montreal, Quebec where French is the dominant language and English is also widely spoken, participated. Parents were observed sharing a storybook with their child with a Chinese book and a French or an English book, depending on parental choice. The results showed that when reading either a French or an English book, parents used significantly more dialogic talk than when reading the Chinese book. Specifically, parents asked more literal questions to assess whether their child understood the vocabulary and text or to teach vocabulary. In both conditions, parents asked few inferential and distancing questions that place higher cognitive demands on children but are important to story comprehension and foster their engagement with reading. Results also revealed that parents and children preferred to interact in Chinese even when reading a French or an English book. The findings could guide interventions with immigrant families to optimize parental support of language learning in bilingual and multilingual contexts and promote positive experiences for both parents and their child.

Keywords: Early bilingualism, Immigrant families, Storybook reading, Parental reading style, Dialogic reading

Introduction

Parents' role in children's language and literacy development has received significant research attention, as evidenced by numerous studies on the home language/literacy environment (HLE) (e.g., Burgess et al., 2002; Klucznik et al., 2013; Sénechal, 2006). The HLE, including family socioeconomic status (SES), the physical environment (e.g., the number of books at home), language use in the home as reported by parents, language stimulation strategies implemented by parents, and parental perceptions

of language development, has been shown to predict young children's language development in monolingual contexts (Krijnen et al., 2020; Sénechal, 2006; Silinskas et al., 2020). There are also studies demonstrating similar effects for bilingual children (Chen & Ren, 2019; Dong & Chow, 2022; O'Brien et al., 2020; Scheele et al., 2010; Sénechal & LeFevre, 2014) who now make up 18% of all children aged 0-15 years in Canada (Schott et al., 2022) and over 20% of the school-aged population in some regions of the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Storybook reading is one context in which bilingual or

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multilingual parents who speak a heritage language (HL) might support their child's language development in that language or in the societal languages (SL) present in the family's repertoire. While research has examined the degree to which the frequency of storybook reading by HL speaking parents predicts young children's language skills (as reviewed in the next section), there is little research on how they engage in storybook reading. There is also limited information on whether the language of a book (i.e., the language in which the book is written) determines the quality or language of interactions between HL speaking parents and their children. Parents might use language-support strategies more frequently when reading an HL book versus a SL book due to their greater ease in their HL. They might also view reading as an opportunity to support HL maintenance, which has been associated with positive outcomes for children in various areas, including second language learning (Paradis et al., 2021), academic achievement (Jang & Brutt-Griffler, 2019), socio-emotional well-being (Kilpi-Jakonen & Kwon, 2023), and the formation of strong multicultural identities (Mu, 2015). HL maintenance has also been shown to benefit parent-child relationships and family well-being (De Houwer, 2015). Conversely, parents might use language support strategies as often or even more frequently to foster their child's SL development. As focus group interviews conducted by M. Lee et al. (2015) revealed, immigrant parents perceived knowledge of the SL as an asset and a protective factor preventing their child from being marginalized based on their linguistic and ethnic identity. The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Chinese parents living in a multilingual environment interact with their young child during storybook reading.

Literature review

Storybook reading by parents and children's language skills

Studies have examined parent-child book reading in contexts where children are raised with more than one language and have reported a relationship between such reading and children's language skills. The studies, however, vary in design; some examine (a) parent-child reading in the SL and its effects on children's SL skills, while others (b) focus uniquely on HL reading and HL effects or (c) contrast reading in the SL and HL (in combination or separately) on children's skills in one or both languages. For an example of the first approach, O'Brien et al. (2020) studied over 1300 families in Singapore who spoke a language other than English at home, where children are educated in English and certain "mother tongues" (p. 442), specifically Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. They found that parent-child reading in English (as reported by parents) was positively correlated with children's English vocabulary and reading skills. An earlier study conducted by L. Li and Tan (2016)

in the Singapore context revealed that parent reading in Mandarin predicted children's Chinese oral language skills

In a study focusing on Chinese-English dual language learners from low SES backgrounds in the U.S., Chen and Ren (2019) examined storybook reading in English, a combination of English and Chinese, and Chinese alone. English reading was associated with better expressive English in children, whereas reading in Chinese (either exclusively or alongside English) was linked to better receptive Chinese skills, but did not influence English skills. Thus, no cross-over effects were observed. In contrast, in a study conducted in Germany, Willard et al. (2021) found that while parent-child book reading in the SL (German) had no significant effects on children's SL vocabulary, reading in the HL led to SL gains when the language stimulation children received in their preschool setting was low, suggesting that reading in an HL can benefit children's SL learning, at least in some circumstances. Willard et al. proposed that the null effects for SL reading might be partly due to parents' proficiency in the SL. Hoff (2015) posits that when parents are not native or proficient speakers of a language (e.g., the SL), their language input may be less effective in facilitating their child's SL learning than the input of native SL speakers, such as teachers and peers. Nonetheless, parents whose more proficient language is an HL might choose to read to their child in the SL, because they deem it important for the reasons we proposed in the Introduction and/or because the language is within their repertoire. They may also engage in translanguaging rather than use the SL exclusively, a topic we address below.

Explanations of the storybook reading and child language relationship

The language in children's books might partly explain the relationship between storybook reading and children's language skills (Hoff, 2006; Logan et al., 2019; Montag et al., 2015). Logan and colleagues (2019) analyzed the number of words in the most circulated children's books and estimated that preschool children whose parents read picture books to them daily are exposed to 78,000 words a year. The language in storybooks is also lexically diverse. For example, Montag et al.'s study (2015) showed that 100 storybooks contained 1.72 times more unique words than child-directed conversations, and the ratio increased as the number of books in the sample grew. Thus, young children whose parents regularly read books with them receive larger and more diverse language input, which positively influences children's language development (Hoff, 2006; Montag et al., 2015).

Another important factor in the relationship between storybook reading and language development is parents' reading style (Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005). Some parents have been observed read storybooks to their child without requiring the child's response or participation; they ask only or primarily yes/no questions and direct the child's behaviour (e.g., directing them to turn pages), but show

little stimulation of their child's language (Brannon et al., 2013; Huebner & Meltzoff, 2005; Whitehurst et al., 1988). However, studies have shown that parental encouragement of children's participation in book-related discussions can be fostered and can, in turn, positively affect children's language. For example, Huebner and Meltzoff (2005) found that parents who received instruction on an interactive reading style displayed significantly more language support strategies after instruction (and barely any before instruction), and that children's utterances during the interactions also increased significantly in number and length compared to the initial observations.

In the present study, we conducted naturalistic observations of Chinese-Canadian parents to characterize their reading style when reading a book in the HL and an SL. We also noted whether translanguaging occurred during the reading or related interactions, with the intent of further analyzing the interaction of translanguaging and specific language support strategies in a future study.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging refers to the process through which bilingual individuals employ their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and communicate (García & Li, 2014; G. Lewis et al., 2012). It includes a wide range of practices, such as code-switching (shifting language across utterances), code-mixing (shifting within an utterance), translation (García, 2009; Sayer, 2013; Song, 2016), and the use of nonverbal resources, such as gestures, objects, and visual cues to facilitate communication (García & Li, 2014; W. Li, 2018). These practices serve various cognitive, social, and pedagogical functions for bilingual individuals, including deepening comprehension, supporting the development of a weaker language, strengthening home-school connections, fostering metacognition and metalinguistic awareness, and performing identities (García & Li, 2014; C. Lee & García, 2020; G. Lewis et al., 2012; Makalela, 2015; Yang et al., 2021).

Translanguaging has been examined in the context of parent-child reading. For example, a case study of a Chinese-American family's storybook reading practices showed how a mother used translanguaging to support the comprehension of her five-year-old son and 30-month-old daughter (Yang et al., 2021). In this study, the mother read English books but strategically used Mandarin to translate and explain, thereby scaffolding vocabulary development and conceptual understanding in both languages. The authors concluded that translanguaging also helped the children connect the story to their lived experiences, and engage more deeply with the text. In another case study, L. Li and Fleer (2015) observed a father who asked his daughter to read an English book in Chinese. When the child refused, the father demonstrated reading the English book in Chinese and engaged the child in conversation about the book in Chinese. While in this case the child

was reluctant to switch to Chinese, the study suggests that parents of bilingual children employ their languages purposefully when reading books to their children.

Present study

This laboratory-based study involved 30 families living in Montreal, each with at least one parent who had emigrated from China. Dyads of parents and children (ages 3-6 years) were observed during storybook reading while reading a Chinese book (HL condition) and while reading a French or an English book, according to the parents' preference (SL condition). The study aimed to address the following research questions (1) How do Chinese immigrant parents read to their child (i.e., what language support strategies do they use and how often do they use them) and (2) How does the language of the book influence the frequency and diversity of any observed strategies? A third question was (3) What languages do parents choose during book reading? Given that parents and children could use the HL or the SL, regardless of the text's language, we expected dyads to use their HL to some degree even when reading in the SL. In order to contextualize the findings, we also report data from a parent questionnaire on family demographics, language use at home, and family reading experiences.

Methods

Participants

Following ethics approval from Concordia university, we recruited Chinese-Canadian parents and their child aged 3-6 years old from Montreal, Quebec using convenience and snowball sampling. We posted recruitment flyers on social media and distributed the ad via a local Chinese immigrant service centre. We also asked the recruited participants to share information about the study with parents they thought would be interested in participating. Thirty families joined the study, with 28 mothers and 4 fathers attending the lab sessions during which storybook reading was observed. For most of the families ($n = 28$), the same parent read to the child in the HL and the SL. In two mixed-ethnic families, the mother read to the child in Chinese and the father (one from France and one from Israel) read to the child in French or English, respectively.

Measures and procedures

Parent questionnaire

Following consent, parents were asked to fill out a questionnaire we designed based on previous work with bilingual families (De Houwer, 1999, 2018; Luk & Surrain, 2019). The questionnaire included questions regarding demographics and aspects of the home language

environment (specifically, language use and book reading).

Observations of storybook reading

The observations took place in a research space at the host university. While the parents completed the questionnaire, the first author played with the child to establish rapport, using a standard set of toys selected for the study. Once the child was comfortable, the child and parent were led to a 'reading' area in the same room. The observations were video-recorded with a camera set up behind a two-way mirror in an adjacent room and audio-recorded with a microphone fixed to a wall in the reading area.

The parent and child were invited to read storybooks together under two conditions: a Chinese book (HL condition) and, according to parental choice, either a French or an English book (SL condition). We selected books based on the following criteria: written for young children, available in both the HL and SLs, following a simple storyline, and containing some humor (a feature we thought would appeal to the children). As we anticipated an intervention with the same parents (see Discussion section), we chose two highly similar books from a series to allow comparisons of parents' naturalistic style, reported in this study, with their style following the intervention (Mao & Pesco, *in press*). The books selected were Franklin and the Thunderstorm and Franklin's New Friend (English originals: respectively, Bourgeois & Clark, 2011a, 2011b; Chinese versions: 2023a, 2023b; French versions: 2000, 2002). For the reading sessions, book language order was counterbalanced (i.e., half of the parents read in the HL condition first and half read in the SL first). In the SL condition, 14 parents chose the French book and 16 chose the English book.

Prior to reading, parents were allowed to review the books but most declined to do so. Parents were not given instructions about how to read with their child or what language to use, as the study aimed to collect naturalistic data that might reflect parent-child interactions at home. Each reading session lasted 10-15 minutes separated by a 10-minute break, during which the dyad was offered drinks and snacks. When the dyad was engaged in reading, the researcher left the room to avoid parents and children feeling they were being supervised or distracting them, but observed the sessions from behind the two-way mirror where the video camera was placed.

Transcription and coding of storybook reading

The transcription process involved three steps: AI-generated automated transcription based on audio recordings (to which parents agreed on the consent form), review and revision of the transcript by a trained research assistant while listening to the audio recordings, and a final review and revision by the first author while viewing and listening to the video footage.

To capture parental language support strategies, we developed a coding scheme based on the literature on parent-child reading behaviors (Munzer et al., 2019; Strouse & Ganea, 2017) and dialogic reading (Whitehurst et al., 1988). The list of codes and examples of corresponding utterances are provided in the Appendix. As the list shows, utterances were coded as reading, content-related, attention-directing and procedural, or off-task. The content-related utterances were further coded into seven types: (1) asking the child to complete a phrase or sentence, (2) asking for literal information (i.e., information available in the text or pictures) or word meaning; (3) asking an inferential question (i.e., a question requiring the child infer a response based on the text and world knowledge), (4) asking a distancing question (i.e., a question inviting children to relate the text to their own ideas or experiences), (5) evaluating the child's response, (6) expanding the child's idea, and (7) repeating the child's speech. These subtypes are collectively referred to as "dialogic talk" in the results. Questions that required only a "yes" or "no" response were categorized as such. Utterances that did not fit into the either of these categories (e.g., parents asking clarifying questions) were classified as "other". The first author coded all data and a research assistant coded a randomly selected portion of the data (20%). Inter-rater reliability was good: Krippendorff's $\alpha = .85$ (Krippendorff, 2019). All disagreements were resolved through discussion between the first author and the research assistant.

In addition to coding the transcripts, the book language was also recorded as Chinese, French, or English (the latter depending on parental choice). The language of the parental utterances was also tallied (again, as Chinese, English, or French).

Results

Parent questionnaire

Demographics

As shown in Table 1, most of the participating families reported "middle income" (i.e., \$50,000-124,999, annually) and had high levels of education. The preponderance of middle SES families could reflect immigration policies in Canada that favor applicants with high levels of education, language ability, and work experience (Government of Canada, 2024). Except for one parent born in Canada, parents were first-generation immigrants in Canada, and four parents had arrived in Canada relatively recently (i.e., within the last three years). In addition, three families were of mixed ethnicity with mothers from China and fathers from either France or Israel. Most children were born in Canada.

Table 1. Demographic Information (N = 30)

	Mean	SD	N	%
Parent Characteristics				
Parent Age	37.73	4.76		
Education Mother ^a	4.37	.61		
Education Father ^a	4.27	.78		
Family Income				
Low income			2	6.7%
Middle income			23	76.7%
High income			5	16.7%
Child Characteristics				
Only Child			15	50.0%
Boy			16	53.0%
Child Age				
3 years old			7	23.3%
4 years old			15	50.0%
5 years old			4	13.3%
6 years old			4	13.3%
Child Born in Canada			26	86.7%

Note: a Education: 1 = Junior high school or below, 2 = Senior high school/ Vocational school, 3 = College diploma, 4 = Bachelor's degree, 5 = Master's degree or above.

Home language environment

The questionnaire results regarding home language environment are presented in **Table 2**. As the table shows, except for the three mixed-ethnicity families that applied a 'one-parent, one language policy', the families primarily used Chinese at home. Parents' and children's use of the Chinese language was significantly and strongly correlated: $r_s = .811$, $p < .001$. Additionally, Chinese was reported as

the dominant language for both parents and their child. According to paired t-tests, parents and children were, on average, more proficient in Chinese than in French or English (all $p < .001$). Dominance of Chinese was also reflected in the language practices parents reported on the questionnaire, namely, significantly more exposure to and greater frequency of reading Chinese books compared to the other two languages ($p < .01$).

Table 2. Language use and environment at home

	Chinese Mean (SD)	French Mean (SD)	English Mean (SD)
Parent language use ^a	79.92% (22.71%)	8.82% (14.00%)	8.93% (13.29%)
Child language use ^a	71.30% (22.40%)	15.30% (16.13%)	13.70% (17.32%)
Parent language proficiency ^b	8.08 (2.42)	4.23 (1.95)	5.60 (2.04)
Child language proficiency ^b	6.67 (2.31)	3.20 (2.01)	3.03 (2.28)
Numbers of books ^c	3.40 (1.13)	2.43 (1.30)	2.73 (1.25)
Frequency of reading ^d	3.53 (1.04)	2.73 (.91)	2.63 (.96)

Note: a. Daily language use: rating range = 0% – 100%; b. Language proficiency: rating range = 0 – 10; c. Number of books: 1 = Less than 10 books, 2 = 11-20 books, 3 = 21-50 books, 4 = 51-100 books, 5 = More than 100 books; d. Reading frequency: 1 = Never, 2 = Once a week, 3 = Several times a week, 4 = Once a day, 5 = Several times a day.

Parents' language support strategies

This section addresses Research Questions 1 and 2 about the language support strategies that parents used during

reading sessions. As shown in **Table 3**, when reading books in both conditions, almost half of parents' utterances were devoted to reading and explaining the texts. Dialogic talk and yes/no (book-related) questions together comprised

nearly a third of their utterances, on average. However, this proportion varied considerably from parent to parent, as shown by the SDs in **Table 3** and ranges for the proportions: 1.8%-39.15% in the HL condition and 7.78%- 44.83% in the SL condition.

A repeated measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), with book language order as the covariate (i.e., HL or SL first), showed that when reading the French or English book

(SL), parents used significantly more dialogic talk than they did when reading the Chinese (HL) book: $F = 17.78$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .39$). We also examined the diversity in types of dialogic talk. Parents used significantly more diverse types in the SL condition ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.25$) than the HL condition ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.14$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .33$).

Table 3. Parents reading style

	Chinese (HL) book			Fr/En (SL) book		
	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD	%
Reads Text	79.10	22.04	49.51%	90.17	44.91	46.67%
Dialogic Talk ^a	35.73	24.52	22.37%	48.77	34.89	25.24%
Yes/No Questions ^a	14.50	9.39	9.08%	15.63	16.76	8.09%
Other Content Talk ^a	12.50	9.74	7.82%	22.53	17.09	8.33%
Attention Directing	17.93	10.87	11.22%	16.10	11.19	11.66%

Note: a Together, these categories encompass parents' content-related utterances (see Method).

We further examined parents' dialogic talk by examining the mean proportions of the seven subtypes of dialogic talk (see Appendix for examples). As shown in **Figure 1**, parents displayed a similar pattern in the two 'book language' conditions with a large portion of their talk

devoted to literal questions and evaluations of their child's responses to questions or prompts (e.g., yes, you're right!) and only a small portion of their talk devoted to inferential or distancing questions.

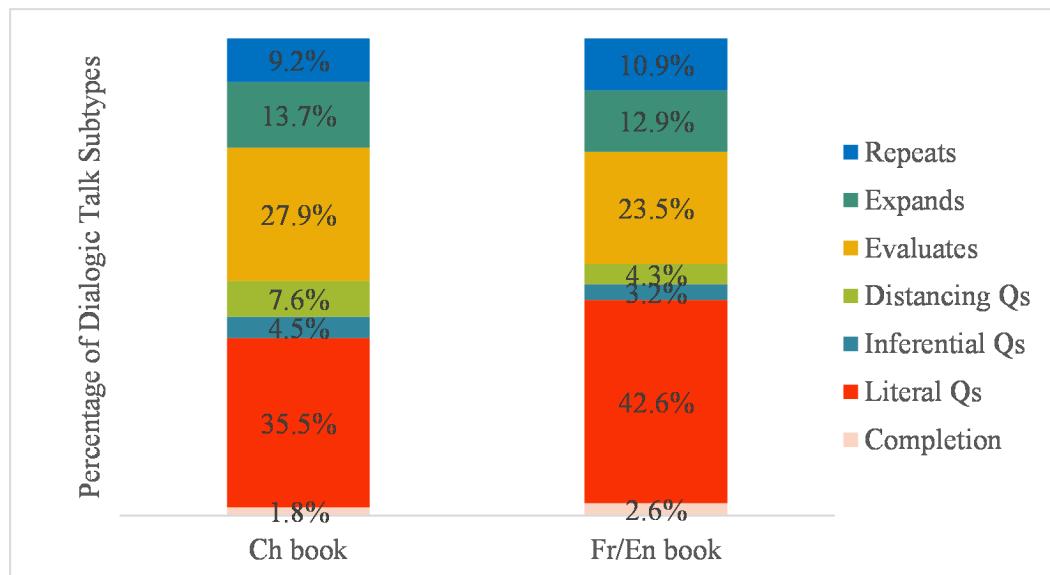


Figure 1. Subcategories of parental dialogic talk

Paired t-tests, reported in **Table 4**, further showed that the greatest difference between conditions was for literal questions, with the result nearing significance ($p = .008$)

once a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons was applied ($p = .007$). No other comparison was significant or neared significance.

Table 4. Dialogic talk subtypes: Comparison of HL vs SL conditions

	HL (M/SD)	SL (M/SD)	Mean difference (HL vs SL)	t	df	p
Completion	.63 (1.71)	1.1 (3.56)	-.47	-.85	29	.405
Literal Qs	12.57 (12)	21.37 (17.32)	-8.80	-2.87	29	.008
Inferential Qs	1.6 (3.57)	1.53 (2.84)	.067	.081	29	.936
Distancing Qs	2.7 (4.64)	2.17 (3.1)	.53	.66	29	.518
Evaluation	9.97 (7.79)	11.47 (8.48)	-1.50	-1.14	29	.264
Expansion	4.9 (3.65)	6.27 (6.56)	-1.37	-1.08	29	.289
Repeat	3.27 (3.99)	5.3 (6.84)	-2.03	-1.66	29	.108

Within the literal question category, parents often queried their child's vocabulary knowledge, as shown in the following excerpts from transcripts of parent-child reading sessions in the SL condition. Translations of parents' utterances are provided in parentheses.

Parent 16: *Blesses*, 大概知道是什么意思吗? ("Blesses", what does it mean?)

Parent 27: "He rubbed his eyes..." 哪叫rubbed his eyes (What does "rubbed his eyes" mean?)

Parent 28: 闪电(法语)叫什么? (What is lightning in French?)

Language choice and use

This section presents the results addressing Research Question 3, focusing on the language(s) parents chose for reading the storybook text and interacting with their child during the observation sessions. As shown on the left side of Figure 2, when the book was in Chinese, parents read the text to their child in Chinese. When the book was in French or English, parents varied in their strategies. Specifically, 14 parents read the text only in the book language, four parents translated the text immediately into Chinese (i.e.,

did not read in the book language), and 12 parents read the text in the book language then translated it into Chinese for their child, as shown in the excerpt of consecutive utterances by one parent below. The book text read by the parent is in quotes, followed by their translation of the text into Chinese. English glosses of the parents' words are provided in parentheses for the sake of readers.

Parent 27:

"He doesn't look very friendly, whispered Beaver."

他说, 他悄悄的跟他说, 他看着不是很友好 (He said, he whispered to him, he doesn't look very friendly).

"Mr. Owl told the class that moose had come from a different place far away."

老师跟他说, 他从一个很远很远的地方来 (The teacher told him, he had come from a place far far away.)

"Franklin, said Mr. Owl, I'd like you to be a buddy for Moose."

老师说, 我想让你成为他的好朋友 (The teacher said, I'd like you to be his good friend). The teacher said, I'd like you to be his good friend.

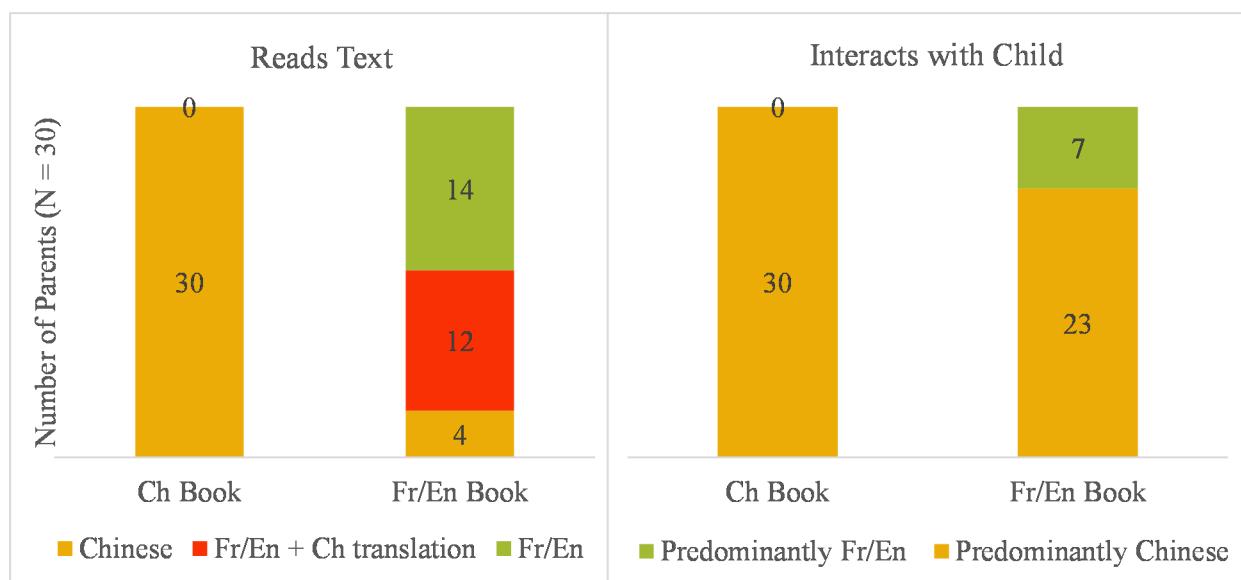


Figure 2. Parents' language use when reading and interacting with child

As shown on the right side of Figure 2, when parents interacted with their child, engaging in dialogic talk, 23 parents used Chinese predominantly and French or English to varying degrees and 7 used only the SL. Chi-square goodness-of-fit test comparing the parents using predominantly Chinese (n = 23) to parents using only the book language (n = 7) was significant $\chi^2 (1) = 8.53$, p = .003.

The examples below illustrate parents' use of HL and SL in the same interaction. The text read by the parent is in quotes, followed by translations or comments made by the parent in Chinese or French. The segments in parentheses are our translations of the Chinese or French to aid readers in following the examples.

Parent 12: "Franklin, Franklin worried..." 他害怕什么? (What was he afraid of?) "Franklin worried about the weather because he was afraid of storms." 他害怕天气, 怎么样...? 不太好吧? (He was afraid of the weather, how...? Not very good, right?)

Parent 26: Yeah, oh, it's scary. Look, the wind is so strong. It's even blown his umbrella sideways, right?

Discussion

This naturalistic observational study explored how Chinese-Canadian parents living in a multilingual environment interacted with their young child during storybook reading to support their language and participation in storytelling. We provided parents and their child with books in their HL (Chinese) and an SL (French or English, according to parental choice) and investigated how the language of the books (i.e., the language in which the book was written) related to parents' language support strategies, specifically their use of 'dialogic talk' and their language choices (i.e., their use of the HL vs. the SL for reading and interaction). In the sections below we consider the findings in light of information provided by parents on home language use and book reading practices (via the questionnaire) as well as the literature on dialogic talk and translanguaging.

Patterns of dialogic talk

Across parents, distancing and inferential questions were infrequent, regardless of book language. Towson et al.'s (2017) systematic review of dialogic reading intervention studies also found that distancing questions were less common than other types in those studies that provided details about question subtypes. Additionally, research shows that many educators do not ask inferential questions during storybook reading with preschoolers (Zhu & Pesco, 2025). Yet, distancing and inferential questions have been described as beneficial for children as they are cognitively-demanding and contribute to children's story comprehension, inferential thinking, and active

engagement with reading (Collins, 2016). Given that our study focused on immigrant children with varying levels of proficiency in their HL and SL, the parents might have thought that such questions were too cognitively challenging for their children. However, Collins (2016) demonstrated that even children with low L2 proficiency can benefit from high cognitive demand discussions during storybook reading. The subtypes of dialogic talk did not differ regardless of whether the book was written in the HL or SL, but the number and proportion of literal questions in the SL condition neared significance (SL > HL, p = .008) once a Bonferroni correction was applied.

Dialogic talk and language choice as a function of book language

When considering dialogic talk overall, parents engaged in it more frequently and used a wider variety of dialogic talk types when reading books in the SL condition. This may reflect the value they accorded to bi- or multilingualism (see Mao, 2025) and their interest in enhancing their children's comprehension and learning of the SL. They also tended to interact in the HL, even when the book was written in the SL. Indeed, nearly half (14) of the parents read the text in the SL, while the other half (16) immediately switched to the HL to translate the text for the child or read the text in the HL directly. Most parents preferred Chinese for book-related interactions beyond reading. When parents were presented with a book in their dominant (the HL in our case), the dyads tended to interact in that language, as also observed in Quirk et al. (2024), and the SL was never observed.

The predominance of the HL in both conditions aligns with the parent questionnaire data. As reported in the Findings, parents identified Chinese as the most proficient language for themselves, their child, and in most cases, another parent in the home. They also reported owning more books and reading more frequently in Mandarin, or, for one family, Cantonese, than in other languages. These results indicate that parents were interested in maintaining their HL, as has been reported previously for Chinese immigrant families (Curdt-Christiansen & Morgia, 2018; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Parents might have prioritized the HL even when reading an SL book to accommodate to their child's language proficiency and thus support story comprehension, as observed by Kremin et al. (2022), or might have felt better able to support their child's language by interacting in the HL given their own higher proficiency in that language compared to the SL (as reported in the questionnaire).

Indeed, studies of bilingual parents show that they use a child's dominant language (Kremin et al., 2022) as well as contact and pointing gestures (Zhou et al., 2024) to foster their child's comprehension of a non-dominant language. As W. Li (2018) suggests, multilingual interlocutors may draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire in interactions, for example, by using their HL to explain a concept or

vocabulary encountered in the SL, as observed in this study. These strategies can be considered translanguaging practices, defined by W. Li as "multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource[s] that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought" (p. 26).

While recent studies have shown that translanguaging is effective for enhancing a weaker language (K. Lewis et al., 2016), it might also be an effective strategy to help children maintain their HL. Parents' use of the HL in reading SL books observed in the present study was essentially a method of ensuring or increasing HL input that could strengthen the child's language. Furthermore, if and when bi- or multilingual children enter school in the SL and the SL becomes more prominent, parents could continue to translanguange, integrating the HL to discussions of SL material or building on SL knowledge to support continued growth of the HL.

Limitations and future directions

Our research has its limitations. A larger and more varied sample could be included in future studies to augment the generalizability of the findings. For example, future studies could include families from various SES backgrounds. SES is often regarded as an important factor in children's bilingual or multilingual development. Research shows that SES affects this development through parental language practices (Scheele et al., 2010). Parents from higher SES backgrounds tend to engage more in conversation with their children, focusing on eliciting responses rather than just giving instructions (Hoff, 2006). Therefore, the inclusion of families with varied SES backgrounds could deepen our understanding of reading practices in bilingual or multilingual homes.

The present study was limited in the analysis of children's responses to their parents' questions and initiations to their parents. A future direction could be an in-depth analysis of the existing data in terms of the content and function of children's utterances. Furthermore, we could nuance our analysis by examining children's expressive language within the interactions and its relationship to parental input. Research has shown that children play a dynamic role in shaping parent-child reading. Parents are constantly interpreting their child's verbal and nonverbal cues and adapting to the child's engagement levels (Preece & Levy, 2020).

Another limitation of the current analysis concerns the analysis of translanguaging. At this stage, we simply coded whether a parent exhibited any translanguaging behavior, for example, asking questions in Chinese while reading an English book, which constitutes a form of code-switching. We plan to adopt a more fine-grained approach in future analyses by coding the data for specific translanguaging strategies and examining how parents use translanguaging to engage their child in the various types of dialogic talk

observed in the present study.

Future studies could also involve observations of parents and children in more naturalistic settings and contexts. Parents in this study reported that they often read to their child before bedtime and allowed their child to choose the book; thus, observations at home could provide an interesting contrast with data collected in a lab, as was the case they were in the present study.

Finally, the results suggest parents in this and other studies might benefit from training on dialogic reading. As we observed, some parents rarely engaged their child in dialogic talk and many parents asked few inferential or distancing questions. In immigrant families, parents are not only often considered responsible for passing on their HL to their children (Cunningham, 2020; Weekly, 2020) but are also expected to provide SL input at home (Ahooja & Ballinger, 2022). Thus, implementing an approach to reading and interaction that could enhance language stimulation in the home environment is especially important. Subsequent to the study described in this article, the first author developed an intervention which involved dialogic reading workshops for the same set of parents, at-home practice of dialogic reading over several weeks, and an assessment of the impact of the intervention on the parents' reading style and children's responses. The results of this follow-up study are forthcoming (Mao & Pesco, in press).

Conclusion

This study investigated how Chinese-Canadian parents read and interacted with their child during storybook reading. Although parents did engage children in dialogue, they rarely initiated inferential or distancing discussions that require a higher level of cognitive demand than literal or close-ended questions and promote language development. The parents were observed reading a book in the HL and the SL; the study showed that both parents and children used their HL more frequently than the SL, regardless of the language of the book, a result that could have positive implications for HL maintenance. While parents used the HL more often, they used more language support strategies when reading SL books, particularly by asking literal questions to support story comprehension and vocabulary learning, showing that parents were sensitive to the language of the book. The findings can guide interventions with immigrant families to optimize parental support for language learning in bilingual and multilingual contexts and promote positive experiences for both parents and their child.

Authors' contributions

Wei Mao designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. Diane Pesco supervised the study and contributed to manuscript revision.

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Ethical statement

This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Concordia University. Informed consent has been obtained from all subjects participating in the study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix

The appendix is available at <https://file.luminescence.cn/ RPPE-420%20Appendix.pdf>.

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