

Linguistic output during preschooler-adult shared book readings with culturally familiar and less familiar English speaking adult readers: A pilot investigation

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(RUNNING HEAD: Shared book reading: Familiar and less-familiar adult)

4 Abstract

This pilot investigation compared the linguistic output of typically developing bilingual preschoolers during shared book readings with a culturally familiar adult (who spoke in English as a second language) and US English-speaking adult reader (i.e., culturally less-familiar adult). Two books, matched for sentence length and content, were shared with the children; book presentations were randomized and counter-balanced. Scripted questions were included during reading interactions. The language output during the shared book readings was transcribed and analyzed for linguistic features including mean length of utterance, number of questions, and type-token ratio. Data analyses demonstrated that there were some differences in children's responses when they were read different books. Implications for cross-cultural research are discussed.

Key words: Shared-book reading; Preschoolers; Linguistic output; Culture and language; Early literacy

19 Background

Economic globalization changes the educational experiences of children (Garcia, 2009). Increasingly, highly trained professionals are expected to travel to different countries around the world to consult and work. Often these jobs can last months or even years and the employee's family may travel and live in a new country during the employment period. As one example of this growing issue, the census data of the United States of America (1970) recorded 51,000 foreign born from India in the United States. By 2006, the number of Indian immigrants had grown nearly 30-fold to 1.5 million (Migratory Policy Institute, 2008). As a second example,

1 Graddol (2006) argues that nearly 3% of the world's population is *transnational*, which is
2 described as the ability of an individual to go back and forth to the country of origin aided by
3 technology and improved transportation. English, which is most often treated as an international
4 language is used widely in Asia (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). Consequently, many children in India
5 are bilingual in their home dialect and English.

6 A child of a transnational employee in the USA is likely to receive some of his or her
7 education in a US school setting. Even if the child has ²³ learned English as a second language in
8 India, ²³ the child must adapt to US pronunciation and syntax/vocabulary variations when he/she is
9 interacting with US speakers. Alternately, children learning English as second language in Indian
10 school setting would also require adapting to the pronunciation, syntax/vocabulary variations of
11 teachers of English who are learners of English as foreign language (non-native speakers of
12 English) and also would have relocated from different states of India. Given this paradox in the
13 context of Indian educational set-up which also prevails in the USA, it is important for the
14 children's family and school educators to work together to help the children adapt as quickly as
15 possible to the academic expectations and English-language as it will occur in the school setting.
16 This study investigates the way in which young preschool children adapt to the questions during
17 a book reading when interacting with an adult that is more culturally familiar (i.e., one who looks
18 and speaks in a way that is characteristic of an individual from the local community [a citizen of
19 India who speaks English as second language]) and an adult who is less culturally familiar (i.e.,
20 an English speaker who is a citizen of the US). The goal ²² of this study is to more clearly
21 understand how ²² young bilingual children adapt to culturally familiar and less-familiar speakers
22 and to hypothesize on the implications of this variation. In the following sections the authors
23 review the following information: (1) the range of behaviors that must be considered when

1 considering the communication challenges of a child who is bilingual and (2) the importance of
2 book reading as an important educational experience for young children.

3 Bilingualism in the 21st century is more than just knowing two languages (Garcia, 2009).
4 Bilingualism also includes understanding the social and pragmatic functions of both languages.
5 Different languages have different communicative styles and different norms of interaction
6 (Wierzbicka, 2003). Importantly, bilingual children are surprisingly skilled at adapting their
7 language with different language partners (De Houwer, 2009). Bilingual children as young as
8 two years old show language accommodation when speaking directly with strangers, using more
9 of the stranger's language during a free-play session than they would normally do (Genesee,
10 Boivin, & Nicoladis, 1996). However, a range of factors can affect bilingual children's language
11 choices (Kasuya, 2002). In this study we examine how children's use of English (a second
12 language) varies in response to two English speakers, varying in the degree of cultural
13 familiarity, during an adult-child book reading interaction.

14 Adult-child shared storybook reading is a very important aspect of early childhood; this
15 interaction is a context fostering early literacy skills (Adams, 1990; Bus, van IJzendoorn, &
16 Pellegrini, 1995; Dunning, Mason, & Stewart, 1994; Lonigan, 1994). Through storybook
17 reading, children develop vocabulary (Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995), phonemic
18 awareness (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003), and print knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2002;
19 Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009) as well as develop an interest and motivation to
20 read (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). These literacy skills are robust predictors of later reading
21 ability (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson, &
22 Foorman, 2004; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Because of the
23 importance of shared storybook reading, a number of literacy interventions have been developed

1 (e.g., dialogic reading, print referencing; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999; Fielding-Barnsley &
2 Purdie, 2003; Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2000).

3 The National Research Council (2000) recommend that educators and parents focus on
4 shared book reading throughout children's preschool and early school years. In the current
5 study, we consider variations in children's responses when reading with an adult who is more
6 culturally familiar versus a culturally less-familiar reader. Child's participation during an adult-
7 child book reading is a particularly relevant context to examine children's ability to code switch
8 and adapt to different adult readers.

9 This study answers the question: Do children demonstrate different linguistic abilities
10 when communicating in English when they are interacting with a culturally familiar versus a
11 culturally less-familiar adult? It was hypothesized that child linguistic variables would vary in
12 response to the two readers.

13 **Method**

14 In order to examine the above hypothesis, a quasi-experimental design was employed for
15 a cross-sectional study on preschool children studying in Mysore city, Karnataka, India.

16 **Participants**

17 The 10 children in this study ranged in age from 53 to 63 months, with a mean age of
18 56.8 months ($SD = 3.19$ months). The children were selected from middle socio economic status
19 families (Venkatesan, 2009) located in Mysore city, Karnataka, Southern India. All the children
20 were from families speaking Kannada as native language and learnt English as second language
21 in the school setting. Children were enrolled in a Montessori preschool center. Children's
22 eligibility for participation in the study was ensured through individual assessment on the

14
1 Computerized Linguistic Protocol for Screening (CLiPS) (Anitha & Prema, 2008) for adequacy
2 in language development. A doctoral student (the third author), supervised and trained by the
3 first author, evaluated the children prior to the book reading sessions. The scores on Clips for all
4 the children were found to be within the norms set for the screening tool.

5 **Procedures**

3
6 The two books used in the current analysis were *Camey is sad* (Book A; author: Pooja
7 Srinivas) and *Elephant and the goat* (Book B; author: Archana Suthar). Both the books are
8 highly illustrated and judged as being equally appealing to preschool children. The two books
9 are equivalent in number of pages (Book A = 16, Book B = 16), number of sentences in the text
10 {Book A = 98 (Statements=81; Exclamations=10; Questions=7); Book B = 91 (Statements=87;
11 Exclamations=0; Questions=4)ⁱ and Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) (Book A = 8.48; Book B
12 = 8.21)}.

13 The order of the adult-child readings (Culturally Familiar [CF] versus Less-Familiar [LF]
14 reader) and book selection (Book A versus Book B) was randomized and counterbalanced.
15 Specific questions were predetermined. Questions represented a variety of concrete (e.g., “What
16 fell down?”) and abstract forms (e.g., “How does Camey feel?”)ⁱⁱ. The readers were to (a) read
17 the text, (b) ask the scripted questions, (c) and respond to the children with a paraphrase of the
18 children’s utterances (e.g., Child: “Look at that rat!” Reader: “Oh a rat!”), or provide minimal
19 encouragers to talk (e.g., “hmm,” “yes,” “I see.”).

1 A trained transcriber
20 Book interactions took place in a quiet location at the preschool center. A trained transcriber
21 developed verbatim transcripts of all child and adult utterances during the two videotaped book
22 reading sessions for each dyad. Only the spontaneous talk produced around each book reading

1 was transcribed; the adults' reading of the book text was not included in the transcript. Running
2 speech was parsed at the utterance level using the conventions described by Miller and Chapman
3 (1996). The transcripts were then entered orthographically into the Systematic Analysis of
4 Language Transcripts (SALT, version 7.0) program. Inter-observer reliability of transcription
5 was established by having a second trained observer randomly selected and transcribed two
6 transcripts (10% of the total sample). The second observer completed a second set of utterance-
7 by-utterance transcripts. The third author compared the first and second version of the selected
8 transcripts and calculated an agreement percentage by dividing the total number of agreements
9 by the number of disagreements and agreements and multiplying this figure by 100. Agreement
10 percentages for individual transcripts ranged from 97% to 98%, with an overall reliability of
11 97.5%. Five child and adult linguistic measures were computed using SALT language analysis
12 software. Measures included the number of utterances, number of questions, percent of
13 questions, MLU (in morphemes), and type-token ratio (Type-token ratio documents vocabulary
14 diversity).

15 **Results**

16 Results interpret the linguistic output for five variables when the children were
17 interacting with the Culturally Familiar (CF) and Less-Familiar (LF) reader during two matched
18 book readings. The linguistic output of children was compared in relation the two independent
19 variables; reader (CF versus LF) and book (Book A versus Book B). The dependent variables
20 included number of utterances, number of questions, percent questions, MLU in morphemes, and
21 TTR. See Table 1 for details.

22 Table 1: Mean & SD for CF and LF readers

23

		Culturally familiar	Culturally less
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Sl. No	Dependent variables	(CF)		familiar (LF)	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Number of utterances	17.9	7.6	16.6	5.5
2	Number of Questions	1.4	1.7	2.1	2.2
3	Percent of questions	7%	8%	21%	29%
4	Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)	3.3	1.5	3.6	1.1
5	Type Token Ratio (TTR)	0.58	0.15	0.60	0.24

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2 A Univariate ANOVA was computed to consider main effects and interactions. Table 2

3 indicates the F - values and p -values for the main effects and interaction effects.

4 Table 2: F - values and p -values for the main effects and interaction effects

5

Sl. No	Dependent variables	Independent variables					
		Reader		Book		Reader x Book	
		F	p	F	p	F	p
1	Number of utterances	0.186	0.67	0.027	0.87	1.67	0.21
2	Number of Questions	0.56	0.47	0.10	0.75	0.10	0.75
3	Percent of questions	0.2	0.17	1.0	0.33	0.97	0.34
4	Mean Length of Utterance (MLU)	0.23	0.64	0.39	0.54	5.03	0.04
5	Type Token Ratio (TTR)	0.06	0.81	5.03	0.04	6.4	0.02

6

7 The results indicated that the children produced the same number of utterances with the

8 CF reader as compared to the LF reader, $F(1) = 0.186$, $p = 0.67$ (LF reader, $M = 16.6$, $SD = 5.5$;

9 CF reader, $M = 17.9$, $SD = 7.6$). There was no significant difference in child total utterances

10 between books, $F(1) = 0.027$, $p = 0.87$, and no significant reader X book interaction, $F(1) =$

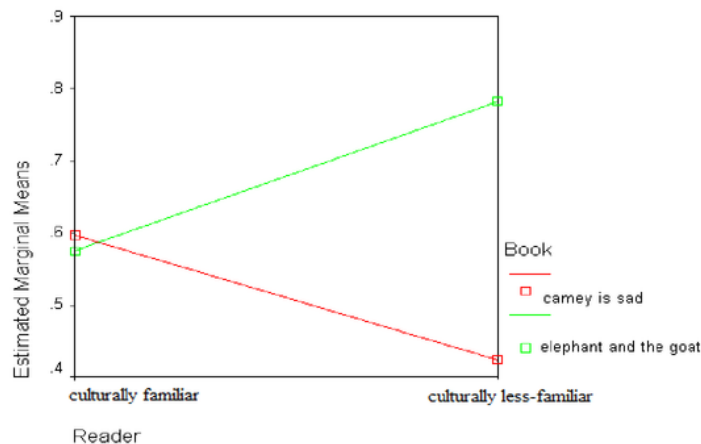
1 1.67, $p = 0.21$.

2 ¹³ There was also no significant difference in children's question formulation between the
3 two readers, $F(1) = 0.56, p = 0.47$; (LF reader, $M = 2.1, SD = 2.2$; CF reader, $M = 1.4, SD = 1.7$)
4 or the two books, $F(1) = 0.10, p = 0.75$, and there was not a reader X book interaction, $F(1) = 0$
5 ³ .10, $p = 0.75$. There was no significant difference in children's percent of questions produced
6 between the two readers, $F(1) = 0.2, p = 0.17$ (LF reader, $M = 21\%, SD = 29\%$; CF reader, $M =$
7 $7\%, SD = 8\%$) or between books, $F(1) = 1.0, p = 0.33$. There was not a reader X book
8 interaction, $F(1) = 0.97, p = 0.34$.

9 ¹² In general, there was not a significant main effect for children's MLU between readers, F
10 $(1) = 0.23, p = 0.64$ (LF reader, $M = 3.6, SD = 1.1$; CF reader, $M = 3.3, SD = 1.5$) or books, $F(1)$
11 $= 0.39, p = 0.54$. There was, however, a reader X book interaction effect, $F = 5.03, p = 0.04$.

12 Figure 1 shows the reader X book interaction.

13 Figure 1
14 Estimated marginal means of TTR for CF and LF Readers



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3 When considering the TTR, there was not a significant difference between readers $F(1)$
4 $=0.06, p = 0.81$ (LF reader, $M = 0.60, SD = 0.24$; CF reader, $M = 0.58, SD = 0.15$). However,
5 there was a significant main effect for books $F(1) = 5.03, p = 0.04$ (Book A, $M = 0.51, SD =$
6 0.18 ; Book B, $M = 0.68, SD = 0.19$). There was also a significant reader X book interaction, $F =$
7 $6.4, p = 0.02$. Figure 2 shows TTR X reader X book interaction.

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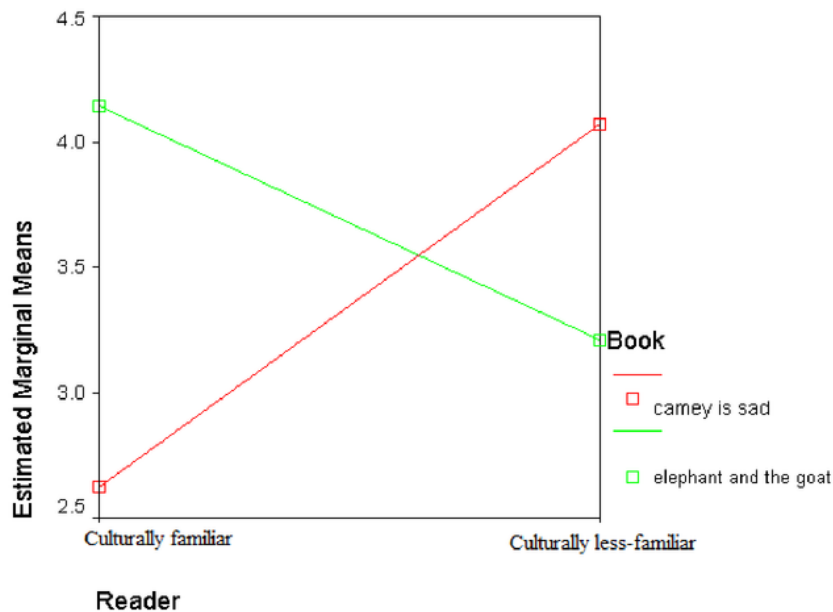
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18 Figure 2

19 Estimated marginal means of MLU in morpheme for CF and LF Readers



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3 **Discussion**

4 We hypothesized that children would respond differently to a culturally familiar versus a
 5 less familiar reader. Surprisingly, in some respects this hypothesis did not hold true.
 6 Specifically, the bilingual children in the present study, when interacting with a culturally
 7 familiar versus less familiar adult, did not show significant differences either in the number of
 8 utterances, question formulation, or percent of total number of questions. These data suggest that
 9 the overall “willingness” of the children to participate across the familiar and less familiar adult
 10 were similar and that ¹⁷ even very young bilingual children are able to adapt to different language
 11 partners in many situations (De Houwer, 2009). This in an encouraging finding in that young
 12 children are likely to be interested in interacting with a variety of “helpful” adults, regardless of

1 the adults' cultural familiarity. This finding bodes well for the academic outcomes of young
2 transnational children.

3 However, in other analyses, the data supported the original hypotheses that there would
4 be variations in children's level of linguistic performance. Our analyses demonstrated that the
5 complexity of children's linguistic performance did vary in relation to the book and reader.
6 First, there was a significant difference in TTR across books. This finding may be interpreted to
7 suggest that although the books were selected to be equivalent, on the basis of number of pages,
8 sentences and MLU, they may have not been equal in their "transparency" to young children and
9 thus not provided equal opportunities for children to demonstrate their English vocabulary. We
10 suggest that educators should use a variety of books during interaction with young bilingual
11 children when assessing their vocabulary ability. Books that may be viewed by the adult as
12 equivalent may present subtle contextual differences that will implicate ¹⁶ the child's ability to
13 demonstrate his or her vocabulary skill.

14 There were further variations in children's vocabulary output in this study. When
15 children were interacting with the culturally less familiar reader, their "vocabulary richness" (as
16 measured by TTR) was not consistent across the two book readings. In contrast, the children's
17 vocabulary richness stayed consistent during interaction with the culturally familiar reader. Since
18 these books exemplified Indian cultural themes (e.g., parable-like stories with personified
19 dialogue between animals) the culturally familiar reader may have provided subtle scaffolding
20 that allowed the children to perform equally across the book readings; the US reader may have
21 not been able to provide this support as the story themes were less familiar to a US reader.

22 Finally, differences in linguistic complexity were demonstrated with regard to the second
23 interaction focusing on children's mean length of utterance. Children produced longer utterances

1 with Book B as compared to Book A when reading with the CF reader. In contrast, children had
2 longer utterances with Book A with the culturally less familiar reader.

3 These findings support the notion that bilingual children are likely to respond to
4 differences in social or pragmatic expectations in a more- versus less-familiar interaction.
5 Wierzbicka (2003) stated that different languages have different communicative styles and
6 different norms of interaction. Also, the differences may again relate to US reader's less
7 familiarity with the cultural themes of the two books. The findings of the study are important
8 when considering the effects of a transnational education. If children move between academic
9 settings (between settings that are more- or less-culturally familiar) differences in linguistic
10 performance may occur. Educators should be aware of these potential variations and should be
11 sensitive to supporting children in their changing academic environments.

12 There are several limitations to this study. There was a limited pool of participants and
13 only two books were used. However, despite the limitations, this study provides a first step in
14 understanding and designing research to explore the linguistic challenges of children who are
15 educated in a bilingual cultural setting and are likely to be exposed to less-culturally familiar
16 adults in their educational experience.

17 ***End Notes:***

- 18 i. The measures were derived by manual counting as well as by using information derived from the
19 software for calculation of Gunning Fog index (1952).
20 ii. Questions were framed to evaluate labelling/naming skills; recall/analysis skills; critical
21 evaluation skills and other skills elicited through open ended comments by readers with a
22 pause for the participant to remark.

23

APPENDIX

24 ***Questions***

25 ***Book A:***

26 1) Oh my! Look at the big snake!! (Low abstraction level)

- 1 2) What is Camey doing? (Low abstraction level)
- 2 3) Why did eagle swoop down? (Low abstraction level)
- 3 4) How did slithers get away? (High abstraction level)
- 4 5) How does Camey feel? (High abstraction level)
- 5 6) Where is slithers the snake? (Low abstraction level)
- 6 7) How does slithers the snake feel? (High abstraction level)
- 7 8) Oh! Look at the rat! (Low abstraction level)
- 8 9) Why is slithers the snake going after the rat? (High abstraction level)
- 9 10) What do you think about the story? (High abstraction level)

10

11 **Book B:**

- 12 1) Oh my! Look at all the sticks! (Low abstraction level)
- 13 2) What fell down? (Low abstraction level)
- 14 3) Why is gopu worried? (High abstraction level)
- 15 4) What happened to the goat's leg? (Low abstraction level)
- 16 5) Oh! Look at the elephant! (Low abstraction level)
- 17 6) Why did kitu start to cry? (High abstraction level)
- 18 7) What is Kitu eating? (Low abstraction level)
- 19 8) How did Montu help Kitu? (High abstraction level)
- 20 9) How did the people act when they saw the Elephant? (High abstraction level)
- 21 10) How did Kitu's mother feel? (High abstraction level)
- 22 11) What did you think about the story? (High abstraction level)

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