

The Relationship between Parents' Language Practices and Their Bilingual Children's Vocabulary Development

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Received April 18, 2019; accepted May 15, 2019

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parents' practices and their bilingual child's vocabulary scores. Twenty-three parents and their bilingual children were recruited from a local Flea Market, in Central California, and were also recruited through social media. A Pearson correlation was conducted to find a relationship between the scores on the PPVT and TVIP, and their relation to telling stories, reading in English, and speaking in English. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between telling stories and PPVT, but not the TVIP. Another significant positive correlation was found between reading in English and the scores on TVIP, but not the PPVT. A final Pearson correlation was conducted, and found a significant positive correlation between speaking in English and the scores on PPVT, but not with the TVIP. These findings are discussed in the context of bilingual learning and parents' home practices.

Keywords: Bilingualism, parent practices, PPVT, TVIP

Introduction

From the day they are born, children begin to learn language based on their early environments. For some children, this means exposure to one language whereas other children learn two or more at once. Children are greatly influenced by their parents' native tongue. As a result, the child begins to acquire vocabulary through language experiences in home. Undoubtedly, supporting their child's bilingualism as monolingual or bilingual parent is an important factor in a child's proficiency in one or both language(s).

Bilingualism

A plethora of research has shown that children learn a second language faster when they are younger. There are differences in the way monolingual and bilingual children acquire and understand their language(s). Bialystok, Luk, and Yang (2010) found that bilingual children know less words compared to monolinguals. Furthermore, differences between monolingual and bilingual 2nd graders and 5th graders showed that 5th graders monolinguals performed better in a metalinguistic analysis (Hermanto, Moreno, &

Bialystok, 2012). Other research by Bialystok and Viswanathan (2009) demonstrated differences in bilingual children's inhibitory control, showing that bilinguals have to hold back a language when speaking to a monolingual.

For sequential language learners, these processes may differ. Umbel and Oller (1994) demonstrated that children need to be proficient in their first language to be successful in learning a second language. Research has found that children are more successful in learning a second language if the child has developed an understanding of their first language (Clifford, Rhodes, & Paxton, 2014).

These studies show some of the ways that language development differs among children. Of course, parents also place a role in their children's language learning.

Parents' Language Practices

Parents place different emphases on their child's language development. Satomi (2011) found that a child will speak more of a given language depending on the language spoken by the parent. It is common for parents to want their child to learn their native language. Lee,

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Shetgiri, Barina, Tillitski, and Flores (2015) found that parents prefer their bilingual children to practice their English at school because the parents feel like teaching the native language should be done at home. Parents may have the best intentions in wanting their children to be bilingual, but sometimes do not understand some of the language difficulties bilingual children may have (King & Fogle, 2006). For example, monolingual Spanish-speaking parents knew when their child was struggling in both languages. As a result, parents attempted to help their children any way they could by creating strategies such as asking the child to translate an English book verbally to Spanish to help their child practice their Spanish (Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006).

However, knowing how to help one's child can be difficult, especially for immigrant parents who face challenges adapting to a new environment. Bilingual children's parents from a foreign country were less involved in their child's education (Turney & Kao, 2009). This was due to barriers that parents faced as minority immigrants (e.g., lack of child care, inconvenient meeting times, not speaking English, etc.). Other research supports the idea that the parent's ability to integrate themselves in a culture outside of their own helps their children excel in a school setting (Eunjung, 2002). Some schools support the development of both languages, which helps to remove the pressure of teaching both languages in the home. Still, the home environment plays an important role in language learning.

Mishina-Mori (2011) demonstrated that parents respond in a different language when considering the situation. Parents use their own language experiences of language to teach their children (Sawyer, Manz, & Martin, 2017). In fact, parents that knew both languages would use the language that they struggled with growing up as a way to support their child's learning of either language(s). Furthermore, bilingual parents play a role in what language their child will speak in the home (Hu, Torr & Whiteman, 2014). For example, parents tend to emphasize English at home, because they believe learning another language can hinder their child's success in English (Hu et al., 2014).

On the contrary, some parents want to teach their children their native language to be closer to the culture the child was born into. Farruggio (2010) found that parents place a special importance on making sure their child can speak their native language. Conversely, Dorner (2010) found that some parents placed their child in a two-way immersion program, because they found both languages to be valuable for their children in the future. Gerena (2011) demonstrated a difference in why parents want their children to learn another

language. For example, parents that spoke Spanish said that they wanted their child to learn Spanish so they can preserve their language and culture (Gerena, 2011). This is contrary to English-speaking parents that said the child would benefit from knowing another language for job opportunities and global connectedness (Gerena, 2011). Stritikus and Garcia (2005) compared Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents and the results showed that over 80% of the Hispanic parents wanted their children to be taught in a Spanish in the classroom. Alternatively, some parents preferred their children to be in dual programs because they liked how it valued their native language (Ramos, 2007).

Based on previous research, it is clear that parents approach language learning in the home differently, which plays a large role in children's outcomes. The current study explored similar aspects such as comparing parents' language practices and their child's vocabulary knowledge.

Present Study

The current study was conducted to understand children's vocabulary knowledge in both languages (e.g., English and Spanish), and how it relates to parents' language practices in the home. This research will specifically be adding to the literature by answering the following hypotheses: 1) amount of time telling stories will be correlated with higher English and Spanish vocabulary scores; 2) the amount of reading in English will be correlated with higher English and Spanish vocabulary scores; and 3) the amount of time speaking in English will be correlated with higher English and Spanish vocabulary scores.

Method

Participants

A sample of 23 participants was recruited at The Crows Landing Flea Market and through social media (e.g., Facebook & Instagram). The children age ranged from 2-5 years old ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.81$). There was an even split between parents were born in USA = 43.5% ($n = 10$) and Mexico = 43.5% ($n = 10$), with an addition few born in El Salvador = 8.7% ($n = 2$). Regarding language(s) spoken in the home, 34.8% reported speaking only Spanish while 56.5% reported speaking both languages.

Measures

English Vocabulary. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) consists of 19-sets and has 12 questions per set to assess an individual's vocabulary knowledge in the English language. The assessment begins at 2.5 years of age, and it goes on to 19 years of

age, and into adulthood. Scoring in the PPVT is done by using the basal and ceiling set rule. The basal set rule is one or zero errors in a set. The ceiling set rule is eight or more errors in a set. Once the child has eight errors in a set the assessment ends.

Spanish Vocabulary. Test de Vocabulario en Imagenes Peabody (TVIP) consists of 125 pictures to assess an individual's vocabulary knowledge in the Spanish language. The set begins at 2.5 years old, and it continues to 14 years and on. Basal and ceiling rules are used to measure the child's score. The basal is measured by using the highest eight consecutive correct responses. The ceiling is measured by using the eight consecutive responses that contain six errors. After the child reaches six consecutive errors within the eight consecutive the assessment ends.

Parent's Language Practices. The Parent Child Activities and Language and Culture Orientation (1998) questionnaire measures how much interaction the child and parent have during every day activities. For example, one of the questions that was asked was "Telling stories to the child." The scale for the question was 6= not at all and a 1= more than once a day.

Procedure

After the parent/guardian consented to participating in the study, the child was administered the PPVT and TVIP. While the child was taking the PPVT and the TVIP, the parent/guardian completed the Parent's Language Practices questionnaire. They had the right to end the study whenever the parent or child wanted. After the parent completed the questionnaire, and child the was tested in both the PPVT and the TVIP, the parent was debriefed. The parent was given a raffle ticket for the possibility of being randomly selected, and getting a goody basket. As an incentive the child was given a tub of Play-Doh.

Results

A Pearson correlation was conducted between PPVT ($M = 98.61$, $SD = 14.57$) and TVIP ($M = 89.26$, $SD = 16.13$) with telling stories ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.12$). A significant positive correlation was found between telling stories and the scores on the PPVT, $r = 0.55$, $p = 0.01$. In comparison to the TVIP, there was no significant positive correlation found between telling stories and the scores on the TVIP, $r = -0.13$, $p = 0.57$.

A second Pearson correlation was conducted between PPVT ($M = 98.61$, $SD = 14.57$) and TVIP ($M = 89.26$, $SD = 16.13$) with reading in English ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.38$). There was no significant positive correlation was found between reading in English and the scores on the PPVT, $r = 0.20$, $p = 0.39$. A significant

positive correlation was found between reading in English and scores on the TVIP, $r = 0.39$, $p = 0.09$.

A final Pearson correlation was conducted between PPVT ($M = 98.61$, $SD = 14.57$) and TVIP ($M = 89.26$, $SD = 16.13$) with speaking in English ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.11$). There was no significant positive correlation found between speaking in English and the scores on the PPVT, $r = 0.06$, $p = 0.81$. A significant positive correlation was found between speaking in English and the scores on the PPVT, $r = -0.42$, $p = 0.06$.

Discussion

This study looked at the relationship between parents' language practices, and bilingual children's vocabulary scores on the PPVT and the TVIP. The results partially supported the hypotheses. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between telling stories and PPVT, but not the TVIP. This might be due to most stories being told in English, thereby supporting English vocabulary development.

An additional significant positive correlation was found between reading in English and the TVIP, but not the PPVT. This finding was unexpected given the two languages involved. Perhaps the child is applying their vocabulary knowledge in English to Spanish.

A final Pearson correlation was conducted and found that a significant positive correlation between speaking in English and the PPVT, but not with the TVIP. This finding supports past research that shows speaking is related to vocabulary development (Hoff, 2006).

Limitations

Limitations in the study included missing parent data, the data collection environment, and sample size. First, there were no demographic questions for the parents. This did not allow the researchers to analyze the relationship between children's vocabulary scores and parent's age, income, and education level. Another limitation was the environment where the children were recruited. Some of the participants were recruited and tested at the local flea market whereas children recruited through social media were in their home. These children may have been able to focus more in comparison to the children that were in the louder flea market environment. In addition to the noise level distractions, some parents hovered over their child during the PPVT/TVIP administration. Lastly, the small sample size was not a good representation of bilingual children, nor did it allow for appropriate group comparisons.

Future Research

Future research could focus on comparing first-and second-generation parents, parent perceptions, and comparing monolingual and bilingual children to the parents' perceptions. By comparing first and second-generation parents, research can better understand how language practices differ in the home. A parent perceptions questionnaire can help with comprehending how parents practice language and value or prioritize language. Lastly, it would be interesting to compare bilingual and monolinguals, and how they differ in terms of their parents' practices and perceptions.

Acknowledgements

I thank the California State University, Stanislaus and the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program for support throughout this research. To Dr. Ellen Bell, and Dr. Andrew Dorsey who each provided critical insights and guidance at various stages of the study. I would like to send a special thank you to my McNair Mentor, Dr. Grace Paradis. Without her mentorship, constant encouragement, support and inspiration, this research would not have been possible.

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