

## **Supporting Young Children’s Bilingual or Multilingual Development Through Storybook Reading: Insights from Chinese Immigrant Families**

a doctoral dissertation project by Wei Mao at Concordia University,  
under the guidance of Dr. Diane Pesco

This research focuses on Chinese immigrant families living in Quebec (Canada) where French and English are the two official languages and widely spoken. The goal is to empower parents to foster their children’s bi/multilingual development in ways that are meaningful and enjoyable to them and to their child, and can be integrated into daily life. This research is expected to enhance parents and children’s positive experiences in bi/multilingual teaching and learning, and thus contribute to harmonious bi/multilingualism (De Houwer, 2015, 2020).

The research involves two studies. Study 1, a naturalistic observational study of 30 families, aims to deepen our understanding of how Chinese immigrant parents living in Quebec interact with their young child (ages 3 to 6 years) during storybook reading. The main questions are: What language interaction strategies and reading styles do Chinese parents use when engaging in storybook reading with a book in Mandarin vs. one of the societal languages (English or French)? How do the children respond (e.g., engagement level, language used, content of response)?

Following consent, parents will be asked to fill out a questionnaire based on previous work (De Houwer, 1999, 2018; Luk & Surrain, 2019; Strouse & Ganea, 2017), that covers language use at home, parental views on bilingualism, and family reading experiences. Next, the parent will be invited to share a storybook with their child in two conditions: with a Mandarin book and with a French or English book (dyads to choose which of these two languages). The session will be video-recorded and transcribed and coded deductively, using a system derived from previous studies (i.e., Munzer et al., 2019; Strouse & Ganea, 2017).

In Study 2, the same parents will be introduced to dialogic reading as a means of supporting their child’s bi/multilingual language development. Four research questions will be addressed: (1) What are immigrant Chinese parents’ experiences with and views on dialogic reading? (2) How do parents’ interactional and reading styles following dialogic reading instruction and introduction to a digital reading pen compare to those observed in Study 1? (3) How do children respond to their parent’s style? (4) What are the factors that motivate or impede parents’ use of dialogic reading at home?

Study 2 will begin with a parent workshop, addressing dialogic reading techniques and introducing parents to the digital reading pen, a device that can be used to activate “read-alouds” or other audio components embedded in print books (see [demonstration](#)). Following the workshop, parents will be provided with books in Mandarin, French and English and a digital reading pen to use the techniques at home over two months and will log their activity. Following this, parent-child dyads will be observed following the same procedures in Study 1 but with one new component: parents will be invited to use the digital reading pen with a book they choose to see if the parents are more likely to use the pen when reading and speaking in their second/additional language. Finally, parents will return for a focus group discussion, during which they will be invited to share their experiences with and perspectives on using dialogic reading at home. The data from the focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Together, these two studies will contribute to our understanding of children’s language experiences within Chinese immigrant families, and provide unique data on Chinese parents’ views on storybook reading to support harmonious multilingualism within their family.