

# The Construction of Biliterate Narratives and Identities Between Parents and Children

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## Abstract

This article highlights two bilingual families who participated in a larger study titled “Revaluing Readers and Families.” Drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives to highlight the experiences of a Greek and English speaking family and a Spanish and English speaking family, this article explores how these two bilingual families created narratives and identities about biliteracy based on their perceptions of their children’s bilingual reading abilities. Through a comparative analysis of multiple data sources that includes ethnographic observations, interview data, and miscue analysis data, this article investigates how the families co-constructed their children’s biliterate identities by acting and reacting to their children’s oral reading abilities in two languages. Instead of viewing biliteracy as an all-or-nothing enactment, the findings suggest that families generate narratives of biliteracy that allow them to define and defend their children’s biliterate identities and abilities. The implications of this research for educational settings are also discussed.

## Keywords

Literacy, bilingualism, education

## Introduction

Families are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse within the United States and globally. Bilingual families, which are defined as families in which at least one member of the family speaks, reads, and/or writes in two or more languages, must make educational and familial decisions to support (or not support) bilingualism in the home. While some families send their children to supplemental schools and after-school programs (Kanno, 2003), other families make conscious decisions to forgo bilingualism in favor of the dominant language of the society in which they live (Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004). Research suggests that parents make complex decisions and sacrifices for the sake of language, which is

connected to identity, power, and culture (Atkinson, 2011). For families, language is part personal history and part future.

In studying in how families support their children’s literacy learning, I became interested in the dynamics of bilingual families and how and why parents either challenge or support their children’s literacy learning in English and their native language in the home and in the school. Through my investigations, I found that issues of why parents support or challenge their children’s biliteracy learning in home and school

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were multifaceted, as language is viewed as a set of linguistically, socially, and culturally complex acts that cannot be teased apart (Block, 2003). Bilingual families do not necessarily see bilingualism and biliteracy as stable enactments; instead, they view bilingualism and biliteracy as varying in degrees of usage and proficiency with each language. Rather than claiming an all-or-nothing interpretation of bilingualism and biliteracy, parents and children create narratives that give layers of meaning to their families' bilingualism and biliteracy. Within these narratives, parents may invest in their children's bilingualism and biliteracy as they view it as a means of their children developing economic and cultural capital (Compton-Lily, 2007), or they may view it as a means of maintaining a cultural and linguistic identity (Kabuto, 2010). Conversely, parents may choose to privilege their children's English language learning experiences because they view it as a tool for assimilating into an English-dominant culture, which in turn hinders becoming bilingual and biliterate (Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004).

Based on data from two bilingual families who participated in a larger study titled "Revaluing Readers and Families," this article explores how bilingual reading abilities, or children's abilities to read texts in two languages, are socially and culturally constructed between parents and children. The term *revaluing* places an emphasis on valuing the strengths that readers bring to literacy learning and supporting families rather than remediating them (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005). Drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives to highlight the experiences of two bilingual families—one Greek and English speaking and the other Spanish and English speaking—this article explores the literacy interactions within these families to study the relationships between bilingual family units and literacy beliefs. Through a comparative analysis of the two families, this article investigates how the families constructed their children's

biliterate identities by acting and reacting to their children's reading abilities in two languages. The article also discusses the narratives of biliteracy that arose from the data, and how the parents defined and defended their children's biliterate identities within these narratives.

### **Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Reading, Identity, and Narratives**

In this article, biliteracy and reading in two languages are defined differently. *Biliteracy* is first and foremost viewed as a mixture of social and cultural practices that involve communication through reading and/or writing in two or more languages (Hornberger, 1990); it is defined as more than a discrete set of autonomous skills needed for reading and writing (Street & Street, 1991). *Reading* is defined as a transaction between reader and texts in the construction of meaning. Readers draw from their knowledge of grammar, the meaning of words and contexts, and letter-sound relationships and situate these aspects within their background knowledge to construct meaning from texts, such as books, signage, and labels. Reading in more than one language is part of and contributes to biliteracy but is not synonymous with it.

Taking a sociocultural perspective, this article examines the social and language contexts of reading practices to better understand how parents perceive their children's bilingual reading abilities and how their perceptions assist in the construction of biliterate identities. Gee (2002) wrote, "If someone wants to know about the development of literacy, he or she should not ask how literacy and language develop. Rather, he or she should ask how a specific set of sociocultural practices (or sets of them) embedded in specific ways with printed words develops" (p. 31). Gee (1996) noted that the analysis of sociocultural practices

considers the *whos* (i.e., the participants engaging in activities) and the *whats* (i.e., what the participants are doing).

In the following sections, I discuss the sociocultural processes and dynamics that define the narratives and identities of the participants (i.e., the *whos* engaging in the activities) in conjunction with reading in two languages (i.e., what the participants are doing).

### **Narratives and Identities**

Language acts as a mediational tool for the construction of our social reality. Weedon (1997) wrote, "Language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us. Neither social reality nor the *natural* world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses" (p. 22). In this sense, language is used to construct narratives as an interpretive framework for social behaviors. Language aligns us with particular social structures and institutions, or discursive fields, and challenges others (Weedon, 1997).

Defining oneself as a bilingual or biliterate person is not based on a set of established, fixed criteria. Instead, the meaning of being bilingual or raising bilingual children is socially produced within and through language to create a lived reality. Consequently, the use of language within bilingual families is highly complex and context situated. In addition, the languages that bilingual families have available to them serve as *social languages*, which are defined as "different styles of language that we use to enact and recognize different identities in different settings" (Gee, 1996, p. 12). Through social languages, bilingual families use their two languages to organize their families' social and cultural interactions within the family and with outside institutions and to talk about their experiences in the context of those interactions. For instance, a Spanish and English speaking

family may speak Spanish in the home or while attending church, but speak English when attending school functions.

The integration of multiple social languages creates narratives, which are larger constructs that create patterns of meaning. The concept of the formation of narratives through language builds on the Bakhtian notion that language is dialogic (Holquist, 1981). Dialogism proposes that language is made up of multiple voices and that the speaker attempts to synchronize the cacophony of voices they hear in their environment. Social languages act as the voices of discursive fields. When parents and their children read aloud across two languages and reflect on their readings, they use social languages to talk about their reading. Phrases such as "I read it wrong," "I have to get through all the words," and "Reading is not her thing" not only connect the speaker to the act of reading at the local level but also create narratives about the reader's abilities.

Narratives evolve out of a praxis during which individuals define and defend their identities (Rogers, 2004). It is defined through the idea of subjectivities, or our sense of ourselves and our ways of understanding ourselves in relation to the world (Weedon, 1994); and through our self-in-practice—how we act, dress, and employ language in the context of sociocultural activities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). The marriage of these two definitions produces an identity that is precarious and conflicting. Bilingual families may create narratives that support the use and development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in two languages or they may generate narratives where one language is favored over another or where speaking, rather than reading, in one language is valued over another. Through the creation of narratives, bilingual families align to, contradict, or resist alternative forms of identities, whether consciously or unconsciously.

### Reading in Two Languages

In this article, reading in two languages is viewed through the lens of socio-psycholinguistic theory, which contends that reading is the result of the active construction of knowledge as readers engage with the surface features of language to create a deeper meaning. The surface structure consists of the observable characteristics of written language, or the physical and measurable aspects (Smith, 1997). The deep structure, on the other hand, is the meaning that readers construct that cannot be directly measured or observed. Goodman (1996) asserted that readers use their sociocultural knowledge of and experiences with language when employing linguistic cuing systems (semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic) in combination with cognitive strategies (sampling, predicting, confirming, or disconfirming).

In the context of the above, miscues, which are defined as observed responses that differ from expected responses (e.g., reading *house* instead of *home* in the sentence “I went into his home.”) are seen as windows into how readers integrate linguistic cues and cognitive strategies when reading (Goodman, 1996). Oral reading miscues have a qualitative nature to them and are defined as either high or low quality. High-quality miscues do not change the meaning or grammatical structure of the sentence, whereas low-quality miscues disrupt both. For instance, the substitution of *house* for *home* in the previous example is a high-quality miscue, whereas the substitution of *green* for *home*, for example, would be a low-quality miscue. In this study, high-quality miscues are considered to represent the effective and efficient use of linguistic cues and cognitive strategies by readers. Parents, however, do not always have the same perception of miscues (Kabuto, 2009, 2012). Lacking theoretical

knowledge, parents often view miscues as a weakness, and when they talk about miscues—regardless of quality—through a deficit lens, they construct identities that position their children as readers who struggle.

To investigate how language mediates the construction of narratives and identities about biliteracy, bilingual parents and their children were asked to discuss the children’s high-quality reading miscues when reading texts in two languages. By discussing high-quality miscues, parents were presented with their children’s strengths as readers. Nevertheless, the parents constructed alternative interpretations of those miscues that sometimes cast a negative light on their children’s experiences in reading in two languages.

### Study Design

For the study “Revaluing Readers and Families,” each family participated in a minimum of 10 weekly sessions. During the 10-week period, all family members read a variety of written texts aloud and engaged in retrospective reflections of their miscues using Family Retrospective Miscue Analysis (Family RMA; Kabuto, 2009), a procedure whereby participating family members reflect on each other’s high-quality miscues. Family members were also interviewed and observed in the home and community settings. The two families presented in this article were the only bilingual families who participated in the study.

### Participants

Two bilingual students, Sophie and Thomas, and their families are the subjects of this article. Sophie is a fourth-grade student at a private, dual-language (Greek and English) school in an urban area, which she has attended since kindergarten. Sophie’s mother, Francis, is a

native Greek speaker who is also fluent in English, while her father, Steve, is monolingual English speaking. Sophie lives in an economically stable home environment with two financially secure parents. Francis holds a corporate job for a major bank and Steve works for a manufacturing company. In addition to attending a private, dual-language school, Sophie spends each summer in Greece with her grandmother. Sophie travels to Greece with her aunt and then travels back with her mother.

Thomas is a sixth-grade student in an urban, public, dual-language school, which he has attended since kindergarten. Thomas lives with his mother, Maria; his father; and his sister, Jenny (Maria's husband did not wish to participate in the study and visits to the home and community were made when he was absent). Maria is Spanish dominant in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Jenny, who was five years old at the time of the study and not in school, is Spanish dominant in listening and speaking. Thomas' family is of low socioeconomic status and lives in an area with a high crime rate and low-income housing. Maria immigrated to the United States 13 years ago and became a legal alien with the assistance of immigration lawyers.

When it was time for Thomas to attend school, Maria was adamant that Thomas continue his education in Spanish while learning English. Thomas' zoned school did not offer a dual-language program and was not rated highly in the school district. Maria said that she would "never allow" Thomas to attend the school. Maria searched out dual-language schools in the district and sent Thomas to another area to attend his current school, which is highly rated.

### **Collected Data**

A large corpus of longitudinal data was generated and analyzed as part of this study. All sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. Several data analysis procedures were used to analyze the data and will be described in further detail below.

In order to develop the larger social and cultural context of the home, the community, and how the parents and children interacted with print in the home, my research assistants and I collected ethnographic observations and reflective notes weekly. The ethnographic observations were critical for developing a sociocultural context for the narratives that the parents and children created. The reflective notes documented the researchers' positionality and reflexivity within the research design. Parent and child interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the study added additional information on the sociocultural context of the home, school, and community. The parent and child interviews were also critical for gathering data on the parents' perceptions of their children's bilingual reading abilities and how the children perceived their own abilities.

As part of the Family RMA procedure, Sophie and Thomas read aloud books in English and their other home language. High-quality miscues were selected from the oral readings for the parents and children to reflect upon and discuss. After the oral readings were completed, story retellings were elicited. Table 1 outlines the sequence of oral reading, retelling, and RMA data collection. The oral readings and retellings formed the miscue data, which was collected using standard miscue procedures (Goodman et al., 2005).

Table 1 *Outline of Bilingual Family RMA Sessions*

<b>Session #</b>	<b>Data Collected</b>
1	Reading interviews for the child and parents
2	Conduct miscue analysis with the child using English and other language text
3	Conduct English RMA session with the child
4	Conduct other language RMA with the child
5	Conduct miscue analysis with the child using English and other language text
6	Conduct other language RMA session with the child
7	Conduct English RMA with the child
8	Conduct miscue analysis with the child using English and other language text
9	Conduct English and other language RMA session with the child
10	Closing reading interview

Texts were selected based on the child's reading preference, ethnographic observations, or suggestions by me or my research assistants. At the beginning of the study, Sophie and Thomas were assessed using the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (QRI-4; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006). If Sophie and Thomas did not have an interest in reading the materials that were introduced through the ethnographic observations, we had a variety of reading materials based on the QRI-4 results prepared for the miscue analysis sessions.

The parents and children reflected on their high-quality miscues, which were preselected by the researchers, using Family RMA (Goodman & Marek, 1996; Kabuto, 2009). As per RMA procedures, the readers' high-quality miscues were played back to the reader. Afterwards, my research assistants, who were bilingual in each family's respective language, and I engaged the reader in the following semi-structured interview questions (Goodman & Marek, 1996):

1. Can you tell me what you did here?
2. Why do you think you made the miscue?
3. Does the miscue make sense?
4. Was the miscue corrected? Should it have been? Why?
5. Did the miscue affect your understanding of the text?

### **Comparative Data Analysis**

Collected data were analyzed using a three part process. The first part involved analyzing the oral readings and retellings by Sophie and Thomas. The second part involved using discourse analysis procedures, particularly the process of denoting and connoting, to analyze interview data, including the semi-structured RMA questions and conversational data, for each family. In the third part, a comparative analysis was conducted, which involved comparing the miscue analysis data and the discourse codes across the two families.

### **Analyzing Oral Readings and Retellings**

Miscue analysis procedures were used to analyze the oral readings. Once the miscues were noted on the typescript, they were analyzed through an informal miscue coding procedure (Goodman, 1996). First, the readers' final produced sentences with the miscues were coded for the following:

1. Syntactic acceptability: the sentence was given a *yes* if it was grammatically acceptable.
2. Semantic acceptability: the sentence was given a *yes* if it made sense.
3. Meaning change: the sentence was given a *no* if it did not change any significant aspect of the story or a *yes* if it changed a significant aspect of the story.

Next, the readers' word-for-word substitutions were coded for graphic similarity. Each substitution was charted beside the target word and marked as having either (a) high graphic similarity, (b) some graphic similarity, or (c) no graphic similarity. After the substitutions were coded, the frequencies and percentages for high, some, and no graphic similarity were calculated.

The retellings were transcribed and scored using an analytic rubric with the following criteria: characters, problem, resolution, events, and details. Each criterion was rated on a 4-point scale with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. Once each descriptor was rated, they were averaged to compute the overall retelling score. The miscue codings and retellings were scored by my research assistants and me to ensure agreement among the scores.

### ***Discourse Analysis***

I employed discourse analysis procedures to study how language defined the biliterate narratives and identities produced by the families of Sophie and Thomas and how the parents interpreted their children's bilingual reading miscues. Discourse analysis provides a venue for the analysis of language at the micro level, or the individual units of language, and at the macro level, or how language connects literacy learning to other aspects of family life, such as parenting or schooling experiences. In the present study, discourse analysis allowed us to navigate the complex issues that influenced literacy learning within the families.

Denoting and connoting processes were used to generate codes for concept formation during the discourse analysis procedure (LaRossa, 2012). These processes follow an inductive approach whereby the codes and concepts arise out of the data, as opposed to a set of predetermined codes being brought to the data. Denoting data entails breaking down and highlighting important text segments, or utterances, after all the oral data is transcribed. After identifying important text segments, the segments are linked together to form particular concept codes through the process of connoting.

Connoting allows researchers to think about the text segments in a thematic and abstract way.

The oral data were divided into two groups. The first group included the children's RMA interview data, and the second group included the reading interviews and the conversational data that arose during the sessions with both parents and children. The reason for this separation is the nature of the oral data. The RMA data stems from a semi-structured interview that examines reading from sociopsycholinguistic perspectives, or the micro aspects of language units. The RMA group text segments were coded based on *a priori* concepts (LaRossa, 2012) or by applying existing concepts from sociopsycholinguistic theory that describe how readers engage in psycholinguistic strategies through sampling, predicting, and confirming and the reading cuing systems (semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic). After the RMA text segments were coded, they were divided into two thematic code groups: psycholinguistic strategies and reading cuing systems. Table 2 presents the thematic code groups, the concept codes for each group, and an example for each concept code.

The second oral data group was made up of conversational data, for which a more diverse range of codes were identified compared to the RMA discourse data. In addition, the codes were of a slightly different nature, as this data did not relate solely to the reading process. Instead, the codes in this data group addressed the larger social, cultural, linguistic, and economic factors, or the macro aspects of language, that affected how the families interpreted, perceived, and made sense of their children's reading abilities. The codes for this data group were composed of *juxta vivo* concepts, or the characterization of concepts (LaRossa, 2012). Once the text segments were coded, they were grouped together under a general thematic code that linked the text segments together. Table 3 presents the thematic code groups, the concept codes for each group, and an example for each concept code.

Table 2 RMA Discourse Codes

<b>Thematic Codes</b>	<b>Concept Codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Sociopsycholinguistic Strategies	Predicting	"I thought it would say."
	Cross-Checking/Self-Monitoring	"I went back and saw that it was <i>plou</i> ."
Reading Cuing Systems	Engagement	"I was, like, reading it."
	Omissions	"I noticed that I skipped that part."
	Graphophonic	"Because the words look similar."
	Comprehending	"It really didn't sound like a word."
	Substitutions	"[I didn't see the 'lo'] so I said 'porque'"

Table 3 Conversational Discourse Codes

<b>Thematic Codes</b>	<b>Concept Codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Parenting	Accomplishments	"I feel happy because I accomplished what I always dreamed of for him."
	Parent-Child Interactions	"Ever since Michael was little, I would read with him."
	Teaching Reading	"Make him repeat the words and follow with his finger."
	School Participation	"I was the class mother. I would help every Monday."
	Making Sacrifices	"I am making that sacrifice for her because I know that it will be worth it."
	Preparing for the Future	"So that they have more opportunities when looking for a job."
	Parental Roles	"Is not really an activity that (Dad) participate in."
Judging the Child's Reading	Concerns	"I know that it's a little more difficult for him to read in Spanish."
	Reading Strategies	"She runs ahead and reads a word and she reads something else that's not there instead."
	Reading Frequency	"Because he rarely reads in Spanish anymore."
	School Performance	"And sometimes this happens also, for example, with math homework."
Relating to Child's Experiences	Reading Ability/Level	"I don't know to what level [so] I think she's okay."
	Comparing Two Languages	"It was great, you know, but um, Greek books is not [for her]."
	Emotional Experiences	"I feel very good because he is not going to suffer the way that I do."
Judging Personal Experiences	Comparing to Others	"I don't have a comparison of other kids of her age."
	Reading Behaviors	"Then again, this is something that all of us do."
Family	Language Ability	"It's very difficult for me to learn English."
	Reading Ability	"I learned that I make mistakes, but that I also self-correct."
Family	Sibling Interactions	"[Jenny] is always asking Thomas to read books to her."
	Extended Family Interactions	"She speaks with her grandma in Greece."

### Comparative Analysis

After the text segments were coded for the concept codes and grouped together under larger themes, the codes for the two families were compared. The frequency of each concept code was calculated for each family in order to identify larger themes that dominated each family's narratives and to compare the frequency of concepts in each family's narratives. The familial narratives were generated through data triangulation using the miscue data, children's RMA data, and oral conversational data and were placed in the context of the ethnographic data.

### Findings

Comparing the results of miscue analysis, RMA discourse analysis, and conversational data analysis revealed how the parents talked about and perceived their children's bilingual reading abilities. The parents' perceptions were

reflective and comprised the biliterate narratives and identities generated by each family.

### Findings from Miscue and RMA

#### Discourse Analysis

According to the QRI-4, Sophie read at a fifth-grade level (she was in fourth grade at the time of the study). Table 4 lists Sophie's English and Greek readings and their corresponding miscue statistics and retelling scores. Sophie read English fiction books that were at or above grade level and, based on the miscue statistics and retelling scores, possessed many effective reading strategies as she read for meaning. While Sophie read English texts that were above grade level, she read Greek texts that were below grade level. The miscue frequencies for the Greek texts suggest that Sophie was able to effectively read aloud and understand the stories; however, this effectiveness was dependent on reading books that were below her grade level, had strong picture support, and had predictable story structures.

Table 4 *Miscue Analysis and Retelling Data for Sophie*

<b>Books</b>	<b>Syntactic Acceptability</b>	<b>Semantic Acceptability</b>	<b>Meaning Change</b>	<b>Graphic Similarity</b>	<b>Retelling Score</b>
<b>English Books</b>					
<i>The Garden of Abdul Gasazi</i> (Van Allsburg, 1979)	Yes: 97%	Yes: 95%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 42% Some: 14% None: 42%	3.6
<i>The Invention of Hugo Cabret: Chapter 2</i> (Selznick, 2007)	Yes: 83 %	Yes: 83%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 62% Some: 7% None: 15%	3.0
<i>Yo, Vikings</i> (Schachner, 2002)	Yes: 96%	Yes: 92%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 40% Some: 30% None: 30%	4.0
<b>Greek Books</b>					
<i>The Mouse of the Countryside and the City Mouse</i> (Aesop, 1995)	Yes: 88%	Yes: 75%	No: 92% Yes: 8%	High: 7% Some: 33% None: 0%	3.5
<i>The Hare and His Friends</i> (Aesop, 1995)	Yes: 100%	Yes: 92%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 50% Some: 0% None: 0%	3.5
<i>The Best Squirrel in the Forest</i> (Korla, 1975)	Yes: 100%	Yes: 87%	No: 97% Yes: 3%	High: 80% Some: 20% None: 0%	4.0

According to the QRI-4, Thomas read at grade level (sixth grade). Table 5 lists Thomas' English and Spanish readings and their corresponding miscue statistics and retelling scores. The results show that Thomas was an effective grade-level reader in English and that he read Spanish texts at a fifth-grade level. The miscue statistics and retelling scores for Spanish and English texts suggest that Thomas was a proficient reader in both English and Spanish.

The discourse analysis for the RMA interview data revealed that in reflecting on their readings in each respective language, Sophie and Thomas talked about issues related to sociopsycholinguistic strategies and reading cuing systems. The frequencies of the various concept codes reflect the degree of evenness with which they talked about these strategies across their respective languages. Table 6 presents the frequency of content codes for the RMA interview data.

Table 5 *Miscue Analysis and Retelling Data for Thomas*

<b>Books</b>	<b>Syntactic Acceptability</b>	<b>Semantic Acceptability</b>	<b>Meaning Change</b>	<b>Graphic Similarity</b>	<b>Retelling Score</b>
<b>English Books</b>					
<i>Bored Tom</i> (Avi, 2008)	Yes: 96%	Yes: 93%	No: 99% Yes: 1%	High: 70% Some: 22% None: 8%	4.0
<i>Small Wonder</i> (Ghosh, 2012)	Yes: 95 %	Yes: 89%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 71% Some: 0% None: 4%	4.0
<i>Good as New</i> (Tapper, 2012)	Yes: 90%	Yes: 79%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 100% Some: 0% None: 0%	3.5
<b>Spanish Books</b>					
<i>Yo, Naomi Leon:</i> Chapter 1 (Ryan, 2005)	Yes: 96%	Yes: 96%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 67% Some: 17% None: 16%	2.25
<i>Yo, Naomi Leon:</i> Chapter 2 (Ryan, 2005)	Yes: 99%	Yes: 98%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 71% Some: 14% None: 15%	4.0
<i>Yo, Naomi Leon:</i> Chapter 3 (Ryan, 2005)	Yes: 99%	Yes: 99%	No: 100% Yes: 0%	High: 67% Some: 0% None: 33%	4.0

Table 6 *Frequencies of RMA Codes for Sophie and Thomas*

Strategies	Code	Sophie (N = 39)		Thomas (N = 38)	
		English	Greek	English	Spanish
Sociopsycholinguistic strategies	Prediction	0	1	5	5
	Cross-Checking	9	3	7	2
	Engagement	0	0	2	2
	<b>Subtotal (%)</b>	<b>9 (23)</b>	<b>4 (10)</b>	<b>14 (37)</b>	<b>9 (24)</b>
Reading cuing systems	Omissions	0	0	2	0
	Graphophonic	3	2	1	3
	Comprehending	10	2	3	4
	Substitutions	3	1	1	0
	Grammatical	3	2	0	1
	<b>Subtotal (%)</b>	<b>19 (49)</b>	<b>7 (20)</b>	<b>7 (18)</b>	<b>8 (21)</b>
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>28 (72)</b>	<b>11 (30)</b>	<b>21 (55)</b>	<b>17 (45)</b>

Of the 39 codes that emerged from Sophie's RMA interview data, 33% addressed sociopsycholinguistic strategies and 69% addressed reading cuing systems. Most of the codes addressed the English readings rather than the Greek readings (72% and 30%, respectively). In reflecting on her reading, Sophie addressed the following reading strategies: (1) employing graphophonic information to predict words, (2) monitoring for understanding, (3) substituting words, and (3) using grammatical knowledge to predict words. The distribution of codes by language suggests that Sophie was more comfortable talking about her English reading than about her Greek reading. For example, when talking about her English miscues, Sophie provided extensive explanations about the different strategies that she employed when reading. However, when asked about her Greek reading, she did not provide elaborate responses. Instead, she tended to give answers such as "yeah," "not really," and "it did." More follow-up questions were required to probe further into Sophie's thought processes in regard to her Greek miscues.

Thomas spent more time than Sophie discussing sociopsycholinguistic strategies when talking about his miscues (61% vs. 33%,

respectively). In addition, the distribution of codes by language was more balanced for Thomas' RMA interview data: 55% of codes addressed English reading and 45% addressed Spanish reading. When talking about reading cuing, Thomas referred to his English and Spanish reading with approximately the same frequency (18% vs. 21%, respectively), whereas Sophie referred to English reading much more frequently than her Greek reading (19% vs. 7%, respectively).

### Findings from Conversational Data Analysis

The parents talked about and responded to their children's bilingual reading abilities and situated their reflections within the context of experiences at school, at home, and in the community. Table 7 presents the frequencies of concept codes for each parent's conversational data. Sophie's parents, Francis and Steve, spent a significant amount of time making judgments about Sophie's reading abilities in English and Greek, and 73% of the codes identified in their data addressed this particular theme. For example, Francis and Steve frequently commented on Sophie's reading abilities and the reading strategies she used.

Table 7 Frequencies of Concept Codes in Parents' Conversational Data

Themes	Concept Codes	Maria (N = 43)	Francis & Steve (N = 59)
Parenting	Accomplishments	4	0
	Parent-Child Interactions	3	4
	Teaching Reading	6	3
	School participation	6	0
	Making Sacrifices	3	0
	Preparing for the Future	1	0
	Parental roles	0	2
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>23 (53)</b>	<b>9 (15)</b>
Judging the Child's Reading	Concerns	3	1
	Reading Strategies	0	13
	Reading Frequency	2	1
	School Performance	2	1
	Reading Ability/Level	2	14
	Comparing Two Languages	4	13
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>13 (30)</b>	<b>43 (73)</b>
Relating to Child's Experiences	Emotional Experiences	1	0
	Comparing to Others	0	1
	Reading Behaviors	0	2
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>1 (2)</b>	<b>3 (5)</b>
Judging Personal Experiences	Language Ability	4	3
	Reading Ability	1	0
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>5 (13)</b>	<b>3 (5)</b>
Family	Sibling Interactions	1	0
	Extended Family Interactions	0	1
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>1 (2)</b>	<b>1 (2)</b>

The parents' reflections on their children's reading in both languages are illustrated in the following examples. After reading and reflecting on the first miscue analysis session with *The Mouse of the Countryside and the City Mouse*, Francis said:

It was great you know, but, Greek books is not...I think I told you last time... we don't read as many Greek books as we do English books. Her reading in Greek is not, I mean whatever her level in English reading,

it's not [the same]. You know, which for me it makes sense, because even though we have a lot of Greek books at home, she always prefers [English], and when she was younger, she wanted me to read to her in English.

Francis' perceptions of Sophie as a bilingual reader were that Sophie's English speaking, reading, and writing abilities were not equal to her abilities in Greek. Francis also expressed concern over Sophie's overall academic performance in her fourth-grade year,

which Francis described as challenging. Francis stated that Sophie's grades dropped, and she brought home grades in the 60% to 80% range compared to A grades the previous year. Francis described this as "very strange for me."

In addition to making reading judgments, the code frequencies reveal that Francis linked reading and educational experiences to parenting. Francis felt that Sophie's drop in grades was the result of Francis trying to be less strict. Francis described how she moved from punishing her when she brought home less than optimal grades to telling her to "try her best." Francis also felt that her language use at home influenced Sophie's reading abilities. When reflecting on Sophie's high quality miscues when reading of *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, Francis said,

It was okay. I noticed that sometimes she runs ahead and reads a word...and she reads something else that's not there. Instead of, like, *the lights were on*, [she read] *the lights were open*. Sometimes it's like reading not what you see but reading what registers in your mind. Specifically about this [one miscue], I want to tell you sometimes and maybe it's my mistake. You know how it is in Greek... the expression *turn off the lights* [is said as] *close the lights*.

In the latter part of this dialogue, Francis blames one of Sophie's miscues on Francis' language use. When reading *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, Sophie read the phrase *turn off the lights* as *close the lights*. Because Francis is a native Greek speaker, she felt that her direct translation of the phrase had negative consequences for Sophie's reading abilities.

The major theme in Maria's conversational data was parenting. Of the 43 codes that emerged from analysis of Maria's conversational data, 53% related to the theme of parenting. Maria tended to view Thomas' reading abilities in two languages and his

biliteracy in a positive light, which was reflected in her view of herself as a parent. For example, when Maria reflected on Thomas' oral reading and retelling behaviors, she said, "I feel happy because I accomplished what I always dreamed of for him, to read in English and in Spanish. I feel very good because he is not going to suffer the way that I do. It's very difficult for me to learn English."

Maria also talked about the sacrifices that she made so that Thomas could develop his bilingualism and biliteracy. Because their zoned school had a low rating within its urban district, Maria sought out other schools in the district that Thomas might attend. She applied for Thomas to attend a dual-language school in the first year it opened, and she talked about how proud she was that he passed the entrance exam. Maria described how it took one hour each way using public transportation to take Thomas to school. After her daughter, Jenny, was born, she often brought Jenny along with her. Maria felt that she was willing to make these sacrifices, as she called them, for Thomas's education.

The dual-language school not only allowed Thomas to develop his biliteracy, but also allowed Maria to maximize her involvement as a Spanish-speaking parent. Maria felt that being a parent also meant being involved at the school. She said, "I was the class mother. I would help every Monday. When Thomas was little, I always went on trips with his class. I was always there. I always attended the shows and brought in food when asked." Maria acknowledged that if Thomas had attended an English-only school, she would not have been as willing or able to actively participate.

Compared to Francis and Steve, Maria made fewer statements related to judging her child's reading abilities (73% vs. 30% of coded responses, respectively). While Maria often expressed excitement about Thomas' ability to read in Spanish, she occasionally commented that his English and Spanish abilities were not equal and that he did not read as well in Spanish. Maria said, "[Thomas] makes more

mistakes in Spanish than in English” and “[He] has some difficulty when reading in Spanish because he rarely reads in Spanish anymore.” These comments are interesting since Maria’s limited English abilities would not allow her to fully critique Thomas’ reading abilities in English, and the findings from the miscue analysis suggest that Thomas’ English and Spanish reading abilities were almost equal.

Few of Maria’s conversations included attempts to relate to Thomas’ bilingual experiences (2% of coded responses) or family interactions within the context of bilingualism (2% of coded responses). More of Maria’s coded responses related to her own English reading and language abilities (13%). For example, she commented that it is difficult for her to learn English and that she does not understand much English.

### **Narratives of Biliteracy**

While the parents and their children listened to high-quality miscues that, from one theoretical perspective, demonstrate reading competencies and abilities, both parents and children created their own interpretations of the miscues that influenced how they perceived the children’s bilingual reading abilities. Both Sophie’s and Thomas’ parents interpreted their children’s miscues as signs of their differing abilities to read in each of their respective languages. At the same time, when discussing of their children’s high quality miscues, the parents used social languages to generate a matrix that created larger narratives within the families’ lives.

These narratives became tools with which to negotiate and support their biliterate identities. By comparing the ways that Francis, Steve, and Sophie used language to the ways that Maria and Thomas used language, the narratives that arose out of each family were revealed to reflect different perspectives on bilingualism and biliteracy. The varying natures of the narratives illustrate that bilingual and biliterate identities are multi-layered and socially constructed. These identities are extremely complex, and

both the parents and the children simultaneously created identities that were complementary and contradictory. The two types of narrative that were identified are: variant, which emphasizes one language over the other, and cohesive, which supports the integration of two languages.

### **Narratives of Variant Biliteracy**

The major theme within the narrative of Steve, Francis, and Sophie was that bilingualism and biliteracy serve different functions. While Steve and Francis supported Sophie’s bilingualism and biliteracy by placing her in a dual-language school, Francis felt that Sophie’s English reading proficiency was stronger, and she provided reasons for the discrepancy. Francis felt that it was acceptable for Sophie to have varying proficiencies as long as she was able to draw on Greek as a resource. Sophie did not show a particular interest in reading in Greek; she said, “I know how to read Greek, but I don’t want to read Greek books.” Francis was not concerned about Sophie’s lack of interest in Greek or her preference for English because she felt that Sophie could speak Greek and use it as a resource when necessary. Francis explained the importance of speaking Greek when she said, “I mean her flow when she speaks with her grandma in Greece, you know, she watches cartoons in Greek, even here that we have DVDs in Greek, that’s fine. You know. But the reading is not, you know... [not her thing].” Sophie supported this viewpoint when she explained that she does not speak Greek with Francis, only with her grandmother and her family who live in Greece.

Steve expressed extreme pride in Sophie’s bilingual speaking abilities. However, the same sentiment was not expressed when discussing and reflecting on Sophie’s reading. Francis, in particular, used language to construct a narrative of mismatched reading abilities. She frequently judged Sophie’s reading ability and compared her reading in English and Greek. From listening to and discussing Sophie’s Greek

and English readings, Francis perceived Sophie as better at reading English. When listening to Sophie's Greek readings, Francis' attention was drawn to how Sophie sounded when she read rather than what Sophie was able to understand. Within the narrative created by Francis, Steve, and Sophie, the parents defined Sophie as a more proficient English reader and established that her ability to speak Greek was more important than her ability to read in Greek.

### **Narratives of Cohesive Biliteracy**

Maria and Thomas constructed a type of narrative that demonstrated a more cohesive view of Thomas' bilingual reading abilities. Maria was satisfied with Thomas' bilingual reading abilities and Thomas articulated a sense of confidence in his bilingual reading. Thomas said that he enjoyed reading in both English and in Spanish and felt himself to be an equally good reader in both languages. Within this cohesive narrative, biliteracy was accomplished through balanced reading abilities in both languages. Maria said, "I feel happy because I accomplished what I always dreamed of for him: to read in English and in Spanish. I know that it's a little more difficult for him to read in Spanish, but I know that it is good for him to know both." When discussing Thomas' ability to read in Spanish, Maria commented that Spanish is more difficult for him and that he does not read as often in Spanish as in English. However, unlike Francis, Maria was able to overlook the differences in reading ability and see a more holistic picture of Thomas' bilingual reading abilities.

The cohesiveness of the narrative was reflected in the distribution of codes in the data. While Maria, like Francis, compared Thomas' reading abilities and levels in both languages, she considered his biliteracy as a reflection of her parenting and her family's ability to successfully prepare Thomas for future schooling and an economically stable future. Maria discussed this point in the following excerpt:

Ever since Thomas was little, I would read with him and make him repeat the words and follow with his finger. I would teach him the numbers and colors, little by little. I don't do the same with Jenny yet because she is too little. She already knows her ABC's and can also count up to 50. Jenny wowed the pre-k teachers because she did so well on the entrance test. They were amazed because she knew so much! That is why I don't mind getting up very early to take Jenny to that school. I am making that sacrifice for her because I know that it will be worth it. I want them to learn Spanish and, with time, also learn another language so that they have more opportunities when looking for a job.

For Maria, bilingualism and biliteracy were equally important, and she viewed them as a reflection of her ability to successfully parent and raise her children.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this comparative analysis of two bilingual families, several common themes were identified that inform our understanding of biliteracy learning. Parents and their children come with their own definitions of reading, bilingualism, and biliteracy, which are operationalized through the language they use to talk about bilingual reading abilities. The families in this study had different views of their investment in their children's bilingualism and biliteracy. Norton and McKinney (2011) suggest that investment "signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it." Why each family in this study supported their children's bilingualism and/or biliteracy was based on how they viewed language and literacy as investments that would provide their children with linguistic, social, cultural, and economic advantages within the

social spaces they participate. At the same time, parents, such as the two highlighted in this article, can place unequal emphasis on supporting their children's bilingualism and biliteracy. Francis and Steve invested differently in Sophie's bilingualism and biliteracy: they placed more value on Sophie's ability to speak Greek than to read it. Sophie, in turn, invested more in her speaking abilities. In contrast, Maria's cohesive narrative revealed a more equal investment in bilingualism and biliteracy. In Maria's family, the language investment was viewed as a future economic investment, whereas in Sophie's family, the language investment was a private, transnational investment that was connected to family members living in Greece.

Returning to Gee's notion of the *whos* and *whats* (Gee, 1996), examining local, situated reading behaviors within the family narratives illustrated the complexity of what it means to learn to read in more than one language. Bilingualism and biliteracy cannot be studied separately from the social context from which they originate. The narratives that arose from the families in this study demonstrate the co-construction of bilingual reading abilities and identities. The parents' views of their children's bilingual reading behaviors were connected to the children's sense of being a good reader in either language. In Thomas' case, he felt confident reading in both languages, whereas in Sophie's case, she felt more confident reading in English than in Greek. Importantly, this connection was not necessarily unidirectional from the parents to the children. The parents may have taken cues from the children and their teachers and reproduced those ideas in the language that they used. Nevertheless, the parents came into the social context with particular expectations of whether their children were considered "good readers" in each of their respective languages.

This study illustrates how identities are laminated and multidimensional and that competing aspects of identities can exist

simultaneously. This layering effect was illustrated through how the parents and their children used language to actively construct the narratives that defined and defended their children's bilingual reading abilities. Contradictions and affective factors played significant roles in the interpretation of the children's bilingual reading abilities. Being able to speak Greek with family members in Greece or viewing biliteracy as a matter of pride for the family provides motivation and generates dynamic relationships between individuals and language (in the formal sense of the word). Researchers are not necessarily able to control for these relationships, but they play a significant role in identity.

The implications of this research are important for educational institutions and policies. Educational institutions and policy makers should be cautious of creating generalized definitions of bilingual families and their needs. While both families in this study are defined as bilingual, each family created their own identity of themselves and showed agency in how they supported their children's bilingualism and biliteracy. Furthermore, this article illustrates the dynamic and interpretive nature of bilingual reading abilities. The close examination of language and how it defined and defended the abilities and identities of the two children illustrate that common, everyday language is far from neutral. Parents and educators can use language to position, support, or not support children's bilingual reading abilities. This point raises questions for future investigations regarding how or why bilingual families challenge schooling discourses or integrate them into their narratives of biliteracy in order to reproduce or challenge the children's positions as bilingual and biliterate learners.

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