

The impact of older siblings on vocabulary learning in bilingual children

Taylor and Fong Kan (2018) International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

This study examined the effects older siblings' use of L1 (Cantonese) and L2 (English) in the home had on Cantonese preschool children who were learning English as their L2.

Study of two groups:

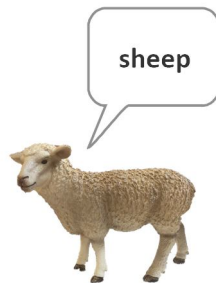
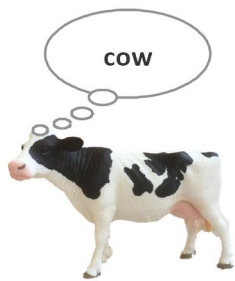
Group 1 - Mostly L1

Siblings who spoke mostly Cantonese at home

Group 2 - Equal L1/L2

Siblings who spoke Cantonese and English at home

Both groups of preschool children were tested using a vocabulary measure and fast-mapping tasks.



Fast mapping is the initial stage of learning words when a child quickly associates or maps a word (phonemes) to a referent (thing or concept).

Results:

Mostly L1 Group

Mostly L1 outperformed Equal L1/L2 group in the fast mapping task in Cantonese

Mostly L1 Group

Mostly L1 outperformed Equal L1/L2 group when measured using a comprehension probe

Equal L1/L2 group

In the Equal L1/L2 group, use of L1/L2 in the home didn't have an impact on the fast mapping skills of children using either L1 or L2 in the tests.

Implications for schools:

Using L1 at home is not detrimental to children's fast mapping skills in English. Therefore encouraging siblings to use their home languages with younger children will help their bilingual language development.

It could be important to ask parents/ guardians about siblings use of language at home when assessing young children's speech and language at school as sibling interaction can affect language learning.

