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It is Not All Greek to Me: The Interconnectedness of a First Grader’s Greek and English Reading Strategies

Abstract
The current study examined the literacy skills that a bilingual first grader uses when reading and discussing texts in Greek and English. I worked with a first grader, Lauren, and her mother. The study consisted of interviewing the participants, assessing Lauren's literacy skills, and observing Lauren and her mother read together. The findings of this study were that Lauren uses the same literacy strategies when reading books in Greek and English (this finding is concurrent with other studies) Lauren's reading skills in Greek are less advanced than her reading skills in English and that the student prefers reading in English, but likes to discuss texts in Greek. This study has implications for school librarians as well as for foreign language instruction.

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It is Not All Greek to Me: The Interconnectedness of a First Grader’s Greek and English Reading Strategies

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Abstract

The current study examined the literacy skills that a bilingual first grader uses when reading and discussing texts in Greek and English. I worked with a first grader, Lauren, and her mother. The study consisted of interviewing the participants, assessing Lauren’s literacy skills, and observing Lauren and her mother read together. The findings of this study were that Lauren uses the same literacy strategies when reading books in Greek and English (this finding is concurrent with other studies) Lauren’s reading skills in Greek are less advanced than her reading skills in English and that the student prefers reading in English, but likes to discuss texts in Greek. This study has implications for school librarians as well as for foreign language instruction.
My sister and I grew up in a world of two different languages: Greek and English. Even though Greek was our first language, I required language support throughout primary school in order to learn English, whereas my sister did not require it. Nevertheless, we were both immersed in Greek and English. At a young age, my sister and I believed that we could separate these languages into two different spheres; Greek was used only at home, while English was used only at school. However, by reflecting upon our experiences, I recognized that Greek and English met at a crossroads; they were not two separate entities. My personal experience with bilingualism has led me to question the types of literacy strategies that primary school bilingual students use.

There are students, like my sister and I, who proceed through primary school with a knowledge base in two languages, and due to this, it is important for researchers to study the literacy strategies of bilingual students. By studying this topic, educators analyze how two languages interconnect when students discuss stories and read texts in both languages. A thorough and analytical study of this topic helps educators to recognize which literacy strategies bilingual students use when discussing texts in both languages. The current case study has implications for secondary foreign language instruction, since foreign language educators can help their students acquire literacy skills that will help them in learning a second language.

The sociocultural theory entails that individuals learn through communication with others, and by doing so, they attain skills that allow them to live in diverse social and cultural environments (Larson & Marsh, 2005). In accordance with the sociocultural theory, Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Gee (2001) describe literacy as being a social practice. Thus, according to
Barton and Hamilton (1998), Gee (2001), and Larson and Marsh (2005), the sociocultural theory, as well as literacy, entails communication that transcends wide varying cultures and social groups. Bilingualism, in particular, encompasses diversity in societies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Larson & Marsh, 2005) because individuals who speak two languages transpire between two environments in which different languages are spoken. Due to this linguistic movement, bilingual students have formulated bonds between their languages (Haritos, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Sneddon 2008). Hartios (2003) found that bilingual (Greek and English) students are able to translate information from one language to another. In congruence with Haritos (2003), Reyes (2006) determined that students can form links between their first and second languages. In another study, the researcher found that bilingual students make use of the same literacy strategies in both languages (Sneddon, 2008).

The purpose of the current study was to explore which, if any, literacy strategies does a bilingual (Greek and English) first grader, Lauren, use when reading and discussing texts in Greek and English. The data collected in this study consisted of interviewing Lauren and her mother, Heather, assessing Lauren while she read, retold, and answered questions regarding a Greek and English text, and observing Lauren and Heather as they read texts in English and in Greek. After I collected and analyzed the data, I found that Lauren uses the same literacy strategies when reading texts in Greek and English. However, she reads English texts better than Greek texts. Even though Lauren prefers reading books in English, she likes to discuss them in Greek.

**Theoretical Framework**

The topic of examining which, if any, literacy strategies bilingual students utilize when discussing and reading texts in both languages, employs a basic understanding of the importance
of literacy, the definition of literacy, the sociocultural theory of literacy, and the acquisition of literacy. First, it is necessary to establish the definition of literacy prior to discussing the methods and findings of this study, since the study examines which literacy strategies the first grader bilingual student employs. One definition of literacy that will inform my study is derived from Barton and Hamilton (1998), and will then be correlated with the definition of literacy that Gee (2001) provides. Barton and Hamilton (1998) define literacy as the following:

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (p.10).

Barton and Hamilton explain that literacy is a social practice because it involves interaction. Through social interaction, one acquires certain skills, such as learning how to talk, how to behave in conversations, and acquiring knowledge about cultural processes. The literacy definition of Barton and Hamilton correlates to bilingual students because these students engage in conversations in both languages; therefore, they communicate with others and through communication, bilingual students obtain new information. The interrelation between the definition of literacy and its connectedness to bilingual students is imperative for this study because although these students communicate in both languages, it will be analyzed which literacy skills the bilingual first grader uses when discussing and reading texts in English and Greek.
Gee (2001), like Barton and Hamilton (1998), describes literacy in a social manner through discussing the different types of discourses. Gee (2001) writes that “[l]iteracy is control of secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourse)” (p.23). Gee defines secondary discourse as the language used in a formal setting, whereas primary discourse is the language used in a familial setting. Therefore, bilingual students in the United States tend to use English in schools (Gee’s description of secondary discourse) and their other language, at home (Gee’s description of primary discourse); nevertheless, this study will illustrate how the two languages interconnect when the bilingual first grader discusses and reads texts in both languages, and to what extent her secondary discourse (English) and primary discourse (Greek) correlate.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Gee (2001) define literacy by explaining it as a social practice. Both of these definitions of literacy are derived from the sociocultural theory. Larson and Marsh (2005) write that the “[s]ociocultural-historical learning theory defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems” (p.100). Based upon the sociocultural theory, individuals acquire knowledge through social interaction by exploring the different cultural and social facets of a society (Larson & Marsh). The sociocultural theory, as described by Larson and Marsh, relates to the current study of bilingual students since these students live in environments in which they need to communicate in two different languages; however, the link between the two languages in terms of literacy strategies, which will be explored in this study.

Literacy equips an individual to survive and become a fully functional member of a society, as illustrated through Barton and Hamilton (1998), Gee (2001), and Larson and Marsh (2005). However, in order for individuals to be able to participate in literacy activities, such as
communication, reading, and writing, literacy needs to be acquired. There are three principles that make up the foundation of literacy acquisition. They are the following: the functional principles, relational principles, and the linguistic principles (Goodman, 2001).

The functional principles are representative of the knowledge that students have regarding the reasoning for why language is written (Goodman, 2001). Goodman writes, “[t]he functional principles are the understanding that children have about the reasons and purposes for written language” (p. 320). The functional principle is essential in this study because bilingual students have access to texts in both of their languages; therefore, the functional principle plays a role in examining how and to what extent, bilingual students make links between both languages (Goodman).

The second principles, the relational principles, demonstrate the awareness that children have concerning the links that exist between oral language, written language, and the significance of words (Goodman, 2001). Therefore, when children see a word, they comprehend that the word holds meaning; they realize that the word represents an object or an idea (Goodman). Since bilingual students come into contact with words in their respective languages, the relational principles provide an essential foundation in analyzing bilingual students’ associations in their languages (Goodman).

The third principles are the linguistic principles (Goodman, 2001). Goodman defines these principles by writing that “[t]he linguistic principles are the understandings children have about how written language is organized and displayed so that communication can occur, considering the orthographic, graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic systems of language” (p.320). Bilingual students read texts in both languages, and through this study,
insight may be provided on whether or not the bilingual first grader can have a similar
discussion, at a comparable level of difficulty, when having conversations about texts in English
and texts in Greek.

The topic of exploring the literacy strategies that bilingual students employ is also a
significant diversity focal point; research has been done in the lack of diversity embrace of
English Language Learners (Harris, Rapp, Martinez, & Plucker, 2007; Mueller, Singer, &
Carranza, 2006). Harris et al. (2007) explain that educational institutions are not practicing social
justice because they are not respecting ELL students and the parents of these students by not
providing them access to gifted education opportunities. Mueller, Singer, and Carranza (2006)
also found that ELL students with special needs are not provided with adequate support since
they are not given instruction in their first language. Both sets of authors, Harris, Rapp, Martinez,
and Plucker, along with Mueller, Singer, and Carranza, reflect that parents of ELL students are
not voicing their thoughts or are making decisions about their children’s education. Although
Harris et al. (2007), as well as Mueller, Singer, and Carranza (2006), focus on the education that
ELL students receive, and this current study focuses on the literacy strategies that bilingual
students employ; there may be a link between these two matters.

From a diversity standpoint, emphasis needs to be given to what students with a
knowledge base in two languages can accomplish. Hence, by studying the literacy strategies that
a bilingual first grader uses when discussing and reading texts in English and Greek, allows
educators to embrace both languages, not only the main language that is taught in American
schools; the information that will be derived from this study will help prevent acculturation,
which is the process of focusing on the main language that is used in the majority of the
institutions in a society. Harris et al. (2007) and Mueller, Singer, and Carranza (2006) illustrate
that a great amount of focus is placed on the mainstream language, which is English, and that consequently, the skills and needs that students have in their first language are not appreciated. It is significant for educational institutions to value students’ knowledge of more than one language (Harris et al., 2007; Mueller, Singer & Carranza, 2006).

As stated earlier in the theoretical framework, Harris et al. (2007), along with Mueller, Singer, and Carranza (2006), advocate that parents of English Language Learners need to be part of their child’s educational team by providing their insights about how their child learns; as these authors (Harris et al., 2007; Mueller, Singer, & Carranza, 2006) illustrate, parental feedback provides an avenue of embracing language diversity in educational institutions since parents have the opportunity to share their views regarding the language education and strategies that can be used in schools for their children.

**Research Question**

My experience of being caught in a dimension of two different languages – Greek and English has allowed me to ponder upon literacy strategies that bilingual students use. Therefore, provided that literacy is a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Larson & Marsh, 2005) and that diversity of different languages need to be embraced in educational institutions (Harris, Rapp, Martinez & Plucker 2007; Mueller, Singer & Carranza, 2006), this action research project asks, which, if any, bilingual literacy skills does a first grader use when discussing and reading texts in Greek and English.
Literature Review

Introduction

This section of the study contains a review of the research that has been executed in bilingualism. The purpose of the literature review is to examine the most recent findings in the field of bilingualism and literacy so that the foundations for the current study can be established. The literature review contains five sections that are significant in bilingualism. These sections are the following: learning two languages at once, the first language is helping the second one, bilingual students turning monolingual, the importance of maintaining the native language in schools but the obstacles of using it, and the benefits of knowing two languages.

Learning Two Languages at Once

There has been ample research regarding the link between learning two languages at the same time (Haritos, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Reyes & Aazuala, 2008; Sneddon, 2008). Haritos studied the extent in which bilingual students (Greek and English speaking individuals) remembered information that was presented to them in Greek and English. Even though Haritos focused on memory in bilingual individuals, her findings are unique because they provide insight into the relationship between two languages, especially the correlation between the two languages that the current case study analyzes – Greek and English. Haritos worked with thirty two Greek and English speaking second and fourth graders and read two passages, in both languages, to the students. She questioned the students regarding the passages, and found that the students were able to successfully remember the information that was presented to them in both passages; therefore, they were able to retain the information that was read in Greek and English (Haritos). Based upon the results of this study, Haritos determined that “these findings, in totality, lend support to the idea that bilinguals have a common semantic store of knowledge that
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The researcher also found that while the students were comprehending the passages, they were translating the information between the two languages; they used their translations to answer the comprehension questions (Haritos). Haritos’ study illustrates that there is a link between Greek and English, since students were able to successfully use their knowledge of each language to understand, remember, and answer the questions that were asked. Therefore, Haritos demonstrates that by studying memory in bilinguals, it is evident that there is an association between the two languages and that students can synthesize and learn information at the same time in both languages. The connection that Haritos found between two languages is also evident in Reyes (2006), who studied “...the ways in which young emergent bilingual children begin to develop literacy in two languages, Spanish and English” (p. 267), as well as in Reyes and Azuara (2008).

The links that are built between two languages are created in early childhood (Reyes, 2006; Reyes & Azuara, 2008). These links are evident in Reyes who studied the manner in which bilingual (Spanish and English) preschoolers used their two languages throughout their day. By working with the three preschoolers, Reyes found that the students knew that they could speak in two languages, make relations between both languages, and consequentially, build their skills in Spanish and English. Hence, Reyes’ observations, like Haritos (2003), illustrates that there are associations between the two languages that students speak. Both researchers (Reyes, 2006; Haritos, 2003) determine that students are aware of their use of two languages and can use both languages to create meaning. The findings of these researchers (Reyes, 2006; Haritos, 2003) also relate to the works of Reyes and Azuara (2008) and Sneddon (2008).

Reyes and Azuara (2008), while studying the skills that twelve bilingual (Spanish and English) preschoolers used, found that students are able to form associations between the two
languages and use their knowledge in both languages in order to expand their literacy skills, such as spelling. Furthermore, the researchers (Reyes & Azuara) found that preschoolers are capable of acknowledging the two languages (Spanish and English), speaking both languages, and writing in both Spanish and English. Thus, bilingualism aids students in acquiring greater literacy skills, and it shows that two languages can flourish at the same time (Reyes & Azuara). Hence, bilingual students are able to use their skills in both languages in order to increase their understanding of the world around them, communicate with others, and further progress their literacy skills (Haritos, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Reyes & Azuara, 2008). Sneddon (2008) takes the information regarding the interconnectedness between two languages further by studying the ways in which reading books in two languages can help students expand their literacy skills in both of the languages. In the study, the researcher worked with six students in order to study what the impact of reading books in two languages can have on students’ literacy skills (Sneddon). The researcher found that there is a significant interconnectedness between two languages, such as students using their knowledge of decoding in one language in order to decode words in the second language, applying their writing skills when writing texts in both languages, and using similar reading comprehension strategies when reading texts in both languages (Sneddon). However, Sneddon’s study does not only reflect that students are able to use their literacy skills that they have in one language in order to make meaning of the texts in the second language, but that students are also able to write their own books in two languages and expand their vocabulary repertoire. Bilingual students have a great depth of knowledge in both languages that permits them to have further understandings about how both languages function, the skills that can be used in both languages, and the knowledge that can be passed and
expanded through the use of two languages (Haritos, 2003; Reyes, 2006; Reyes & Azuara, 2008; Sneddon, 2008).

The First Language is helping the Second One

Haritos (2003), Reyes (2006), Reyes and Azuara (2008), and Sneddon (2008) illustrate that bilingualism can help students expand their skills in both languages. Pritchard and O’Hara (2008), Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono, and Otheguy (2009), Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, and Pollard-Durodola (2007), and Gort (2006) explore how a student’s L₁ (first language) can help the student make literacy gains in his/her L₂ (second language). Even though bilingual students possess greater literacy skills in their first language, than in their second one (Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008), students use their literacy skills in both languages to make sense of the texts that they read (Pritchard & O’Hara). The study that Pritchard and O’Hara executed reflects that bilingual students are able to use the literacy strategies that they possess in their first language in order to make sense of texts that are written in their second language. Hence, students are able to apply the reading skills that students have in their native language when reading texts in their second language (Prichard & O’Hara). A similar conclusion was found in the study that Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono, and Otheguy (2009) implemented. In their study, Gabriele et al., by studying syntactic data, exemplify that a student’s first language can provide insight for learning a second language; therefore, both Pritchard and O’Hara (2008), as well as Gabriele et al. (2009), show that the skills that a student possesses in his native language can help him acquire knowledge in his second language.

The findings of Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, and Pollard-Durodola (2007) are similar to Prichard and O’Hara (2008) as well as Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono, and Otheguy (2009) because the researchers found that “…the present study suggest[s] a relationship between L₁
(Spanish) abilities and L₂ (English) acquisition; that is L₁ (Spanish) competence mediates the acquisition of L₂ (English)” (Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, & Pollard-Durodola, 2007, p. 255).

Hence, bilingual students are able to successfully draw upon their literacy knowledge in their first language when working on literacy activities that involve their use of their second language (Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008; Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono & Otheguy, 2009; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson, and Pollard-Durodola, 2007). As noted earlier in this literature review, it has been established that bilingual students who are learning both languages at the same time use their writing knowledge in order to produce written texts in both languages (Reyes & Azuara, 2008); however, Gort (2004) illustrates that bilingual students, who know their native language well, are able to use their knowledge of writing conventions in their first language in order to apply it to their writing in their second language. Consequently, when a student acquires the foundations of writing in one language, these foundations are transferable to the second language, which shows that another link exists across languages (Gort).

The first language that bilingual students have acquired aids them in developing skills in their second language, because students apply their knowledge from the first language to the second language (Prichard & O’Hara, 2008; Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono & Otheguy, 2009; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodola, 2007; Gort, 2004). The ties that bilingual students create between their native language and second language are significant because students use the skills that they have acquired in their first language in order to construct and expand their knowledge base in their second language (Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008; Gabriele et al., 2009; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodola, 2007; Gort, 2004). Therefore, students’ first language provides them with support in learning their second language which illustrates that skills attained in the first languages serve as a pedestal for learning the second language.
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(Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008; Gabriele et al., 2009; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodola, 2007; Gort, 2004). The finding that the first language helps the second language is significant in literacy since a student’s first language gives him a base in which to access literacy skills, such as communication, reading, and writing strategies, when learning the second language (Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008; Gabriele et al., 2009; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodola, 2007; Gort, 2004).

Bilingual Students Turning Monolingual

A misunderstanding that is found in bilingualism is the notion that a student who sustains his first language will not be able to use his second language as well (Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010; Tran, 2010). However, this is not the case because it has been found that the maintenance of the first language does not adversely impact the second one (Proctor et al. 2010; Tran, 2010). However, the opposite may occur (Proctor et al., 2010; Dahl, Rice, Steffensen & Amundsen, 2010) because a unique aspect of bilingualism that has been studied is the possibility of students losing one of their first languages as they come into less contact with one of the languages in the school setting (Proctor et al., 2010; Dahl et al., 2010), and when this transpires, students lose the benefits of bilingualism (Dyc, 2002; Haritos, 2003; Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006; Robertson, 2006; Reyes & Azula, 2008; Sneddon, 2008; Kenner, Al-Azamil, Gregory & Ruby, 2008; Martinez, 2010; Priven, 2010; Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya & Bialystok, 2010; Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010).

Firstly, the misconception that bilingual students will do poorly in further expanding their second language if they continue to use their first language, has been disproved in studies (Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010; Tran, 2010). Proctor et al. (2010) and Tran (2010) facilitated studies by working with Spanish and English speakers and found that when students
maintain their first language, they do not lose their second language. Proctor et al. (2010) explains “…that Spanish language instruction does not impede literacy development in English” (p. 90), and Tran (2010) reached the same conclusion that the “…use of Spanish with others both at home and in school has no statistically significant effect on English proficiency, but exerts a strong effect on proficiency” (p. 278). Therefore, Proctor et al. (2010) and Tran (2010) reflect that students should not be prohibited to continue to study their first language since it will not lessen their articulateness in using their second language. However, in the study, Proctor et al. (2010) found that when students are not given the opportunities to use their first language, they do not retain their native language. Although it may be difficult to grasp the possibility of how quickly it could be possible for an individual to lose one of his languages, it is a realistic outcome that may occur when a person does not come into contact with that language (Proctor et al., 2010; Dahl, Rice, Steffensen & Amundsen, 2010). An example of an occurrence of an individual losing one of his languages is that of Per, a four year old Norwegian preschooler, who stopped using English after returning to Norway from the United States (Dahl et al., 2010). The lack of hearing and using the English language caused Per to stop communicating in it (Dahl et al.). The case of Per shows that when students are not in contact with a language, they are at risk of losing their language (Dahl et al.). Therefore, the findings provided by Dahl et al. and Proctor et al. (2010), are significant because the researchers show what the impacts of not using a language can lead to.

**A Disconnect in Practice: The Significance of Maintaining the Native Languages in Schools but the Obstacles of Implementing the Language**

As the previous section of this literature review exemplifies, bilingual students can lose one of their languages when it is not being used (Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010; Dahl,
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Rice, Steffensen & Amundsen, 2010). Since this is a concern in the field of bilingualism (Proctor et al., 2010; Dahl et al., 2010), there are strategies that educational institutions can use so that bilingual students do not lose their first language (Priven, 2010; Cummins, Chow & Schecter, 2006); however, there are obstacles that are found in educational institutions that lead children to not have the opportunities to use their first language (Manyak, 2006; Li, 2006; Robertson, 2006; Palmer, 2009; Martinez, 2010; Reyes, 2004; Hernandez, 2001; Hancock, 2006). Therefore, although it is significant for students to have access to their first language in school (Maynak, 2006; Li, 2006; Robertson, 2006; Palmer, 2009; Martinez, 2010; Reyes, 2004; Hernandez, 2001; Hancock, 2006), it is difficult for educational institutions to provide students with opportunities to do so (Maynak, 2006; Robertson, 2006; Palmer, 2009).

The inclusion of a student’s first language in the realm of academics allows students to not only maintain their native language, but to also learn more information and become open-minded (Priven, 2010). Priven completed a study in which he interviewed bilingual gifted students and their teachers in order to analyze the value of using first language materials in school. The researcher recommends that through the use of these materials, students maintain their first language (Priven) and it gives students opportunities to “…comment on the different kinds of knowledge that were accessible through different languages, thus developing their critical thinking skills” (Priven, p. 320). Therefore, Priven, in his study, suggests that bilingual students should be able to incorporate information in their studies that is provided in their first language in order to further learn and study topics, as well as to keep their first language alive. Similarly, Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006) believe that bilingual students should have the opportunity to read books in their first language in the academic setting. Like Sneddon (2008), Cummins, Chow and Schecter (2006) found that there are benefits to using books that are written
in the students’ respective language because the “…books would permit students to access prior knowledge through their L₁, thereby providing a framework for transfer of this knowledge to English” (Cummins, Chow & Schecter, p. 300) and it exemplifies “…that we [school] value their language, their prior experiences, their knowledge, and their culture as important resources for the curriculum and the community” (p. 300). Hence, the continual contact of the first language in schools is important in allowing students to maintain their native language (Priven, 2010), using higher level thinking skills by comparing and contrasting information, learning how information is presented in two different languages (Priven), making connections between the first and second languages (Priven, 2010; Cummins, Chow & Schecter, 2006), and embracing diversity in educational institutions (Cummins, Chow & Schecter, 2006).

Although there are many benefits to including materials that are written in the students’ first language in school (Priven, 2010; Cummins, Chow & Schecter 2006), there are difficulties with the implementation of first language materials due to policies (Maynak, 2006), practices that do not embrace diversity (Palmer, 2009), and biases (Robertson, 2006; Hernandez, 2001). One policy that has hindered the use of bilingualism in educational institutions was Proposition 227 in California which “…mandates English immersion education…” (Maynak, 2006, p. 245). The proposition caused teachers to not be able to use Spanish in order to teach students skills, and it also prevented students from being proud of their linguistic cultures (Maynak). Although Maynak completed a study in an environment in which instruction was not permitted to be executed in Spanish, Palmer (2009) facilitated her study in a classroom in which the majority of the class (70%) was taught in Spanish and the remainder was taught in English. Although this classroom embraced both languages, the teachers did not allow students to code-switch and created a system in which if a student did so, he received a negative consequence in front of his
peers. This study reflects that even if instruction is carried out in a student’s native language, it can still negatively impact students if they are not allowed to code-switch and be able to fully articulate themselves (Palmer).

The topic of code switching is a major one in the field of bilingualism because, as illustrated by Palmer (2009), there are teachers who believe that code switching is not accurate and students need to be conditioned to cease it. Hence, this is an obstacle because it does not allow students to celebrate their first language in the school setting (Palmer). However, there is evidence that has been voiced by Palmer, as well as Reyes (2004) and Martinez (2010) that supports the necessity of code-switching. Palmer (2009) shows that code-switching needs to be allowed in classrooms, and Reyes (2004), along with Martinez (2010) concur with Palmer (2009), but go a step further by discussing the importance of code-switching. Reyes (2004) did a study in which she recorded the code switching that occurred among forty students discussing science and found that students code-switch in order to “…use the language with which they both [speaker and listener] feel most comfortable and have greater competence” (p. 93). Code-switching enables students to express themselves in a manner that meets their needs and allows them to better converse with others (Reyes). Code switching is significant because it provides individuals with the chance to work with both languages in a style that is successful for them (Reyes). Martinez (2010), like Reyes (2004), found that code switching is important because not only does it allow students to communicate well (Reyes), but “…students used Spanglish to: (1) clarify and/or reiterate utterances; (2) quote and report speech; (3) joke and/or tease; (4) index solidarity and intimacy; (5) shift voices for different audiences; and (6) communicate subtle nuances of meaning” (Martinez, 2010, p. 131). Therefore, Martinez (2010) like Reyes (2004), demonstrate the significance of code switching because both researchers argue that code-
switching permits students to explore their two languages in a way that helps them to better articulate their views, participate in deliberations with others, and understand who they are as speakers and listeners. Other researchers are also concurrent with Reyes (2004), Palmer (2009), and Martinez (2010) in discussing the naturalness of code-switching and its advantages to students (Gort, 2006; Li, 2006; Reyes, 2006; Kenner, Al-Azami, Gregory & Ruby, 2006; Reyes & Azuara, 2008; Rice, Steffensen & Amundsen, 2010).

Another obstacle of using the students’ first language in classrooms is the negative perspectives that educators have regarding their bilingual students in their classes (Robertson, 2006; Hernandez, 2001). In the study, Robertson (2006) found that students can make connections between the different languages that they are learning, and this is concurrent with other studies (Haritos, 2003; Gort, 2006; Reyes, 2006; Cardenas-Hagan, Carlson & Pollard-Durodola, 2007; Pritchard & O’Hara, 2008; Reyes & Azuara, 2008; Sneddon, 2008; Gabriele, Troseth, Martohardjono & Otheguy, 2009); however, Robertson (2006) also discusses negative views that the students’ teachers have regarding their students’ bilingualism. The researcher found that educators believed “…that the bilingual readers do not understand their reading material, neither the lexicon nor the illustrations…” (Robertson, p. 52) and Hernandez (2001) found a similar finding in which “…second-language students’ poor spelling and punctuation can lead teachers to miss the fact that some of these children have good ideas and organizational skills, and that they also have a variety of sentence type characteristics of mature writers” (Hernandez, p.309). Thus, educators have a negative perspective on the skills set that bilingual students possess and this causes teachers to create biases against the inclusion of the students’ native language in the classroom (Robertson, 2006; Hernandez, 2001).
The Benefits of Knowing Two Languages

Research illustrates the significance of bilingualism (Dyc, 2002; Haritos, 2003; Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006; Robertson, 2006; Reyes & Azuala, 2008; Sneddon, 2008; Kenner, Al-Azamil, Gregory & Ruby, 2008; Martinez, 2010; Priven, 2010; Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya & Bialystok, 2010; Proctor, August, Carlo & Barr, 2010), and stresses the importance of maintaining, as well as promoting, bilingualism.

One advantage of bilingualism is the benefits that students have in executive functioning (Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya & Bialystok, 2010). The researchers assessed and interviewed the parents of 63 two year olds and found that bilingual students had greater executive functioning skills. The finding is significant because it supports the benefits of bilingualism particularly since the major role that “…executive processes [have] in cognitive life…” (Poulin-Dubois, p. 576). Executive functioning is the knowledge base that individuals have in order to cope with the tasks in everyday life, such as making decisions and understanding information (Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel, 2008). Hence, the finding presented by Poulin-Dubois (2010) emphasizes the benefits of bilingualism because it advocates that through the acquisition of a second language, students are able to have skills that enable them to function daily.

Another benefit of bilingualism is that students are able to think critically about their linguistic capacities and to draw connections between their two languages (Kenner, Al-Azamil, Gregory & Ruby, 2008). Kenner et al. exemplifies this advantage of bilingualism in a study in which sixth graders in the United Kingdom analyzed two poems – one poem was written in English and the other was written in Bengali (the Bengali poem was also translated into English). The findings of Kenner et al. show that by reading the poem in two languages, students became accustomed to a different language and they learned about “…complex metaphorical content…”
The researchers further discuss the advantage of reading the poem in the classroom because “[b]y working bilingually to negotiate meaning, the group had reached a collective agreement about the use of metaphor in the poem. For each child, this represented a step forward in cognitive development and enhanced their comprehension as readers” (Kenner et al., p. 96). Therefore, bilingualism and the reading of texts in more than one language, in particular, causes students to gain further knowledge about the meaning of words, their significance, and literary terms (Kenner et al.). By studying two languages, students have a greater perspective of the linguistic connectedness between languages (Kenner et al.).

Bilingualism does not only allow students to understand the unique grammatical and literary elements that are found in different languages, and how these elements are conveyed, but it also helps individuals to understand the culture of the people who speak the language (Kenner, Al-Azamil, Gregory & Ruby, 2008). Kenner et al. illustrates that by reading a poem in Bengali and English, students had the opportunity to have conversations with their parents about the poem which “…enabled them to engage more fully with their Bangladeshi cultural heritage” (Kenner et al., p. 90). Hence, bilingualism invites students to make connections with two different spheres – the culture of the L2 as well as the culture of the L1. Dyc (2002) found similar benefits when working with students who were learning Navajo and English. Dyc (2002), like Kenner et al., (2008) found that by studying the language of Navajo, students had the opportunity to acquire great knowledge about their heritage. The researcher found that “[w]hile students may not have strong opinions about Navajo language and culture upon entering a class, they typically leave with an understanding that preservation is imperative, and that bilingualism allows them to see out of two windows, rather than one” (Dyc, 2002, p. 616). Thus, learning two languages is a major benefit for individuals because not only do they gain skills in two languages, but they also
experience greater open-mindedness by being cognizant of different customs, traditions, and ways of life (Kenner et al., 2008; Dyc, 2002).

There are more benefits of bilingualism, as justified by the parents whose children are bilingual (Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006). Three researchers (Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006) did studies regarding how Chinese parents, who live outside of China, view the language learning process of their children. The three studies took place in different settings; Lao (2004) took place in California, Hancock (2006) occurred in Scotland, and Li (2006) took place in Canada. Although the method of acquiring the information from the parents and the geographic locations were different, many similarities among the three studies surfaced (Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006). Parents advocated for their children to become bilingual and highlighted that by knowing a second language, students may have greater chances of finding a profession (Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006). Another benefit of bilingualism is that it provides students with the skills needed to converse with people who only know their first language (Lao, 2004), and it also gives them the chance to live abroad (Li, 2006); therefore, bilingualism enables students to have a wider communication audience (Lao, 2004), as well as potential for movement across different cultures (Li, 2006). Hence, the opportunities that are available for bilingual students are endless because they have the chance to correspond with others (Lao, 2004), live in different locations (Li, 2006), and have greater access to different professions (Hancock, 2006; Lao, 2004). These benefits of bilingualism lead parents to believe that students will have more confidence (Lao, 2004). Lao found that the parents that she interviewed perceived that “Chinese-English bilingual education would help children develop a positive self-image” (p. 107). The notion of the impact of bilingualism on confidence (Lao) is unique because it is another benefit
of bilingualism that is not commonly pointed out; however, it is an important advantage because students have pride in knowing and applying another language.

The advantages of bilingualism are diverse, but enduring because the benefits stretch into many different aspects of individuals’ lives (Dyc, 2002; Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006; Kenner et al., 2008; Poulin-Dubois et al., 2010). The benefits, provided through bilingualism, consist of strengths in executive functioning (Poulin-Dubois, 2010), improving critical thinking skills when analyzing literature in two languages (Kenner et al., 2008) embracing diversity through learning about different cultures and customs (Kenner et al. Dyc, 2002), greater professional opportunities (Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006), having the knowledge to communicate with others (Lao, 2004), living in another country (Li, 2006), and feeling more positive about one’s skills (Lao, 2004).

**Conclusion**

The literature review reflects that the field of bilingualism is intricate because there are a number of varying dimensions that are prevalent in bilingualism. These dimensions consist of many of the subtopics that have been presented in the review, such as the unique occurrence of learning two languages at the same time, the ways in which the first language aids in the acquisition of the second language, the possibility of bilingual students turning monolingual, the significance of maintaining the native language despite the obstacles of accomplishing it, and the advantages of bilingualism. Hence, this literature review surveys the different findings that are evident in bilingualism, and thus, has an impact on the current case study of analyzing which, if any, literacy strategies does a bilingual (Greek and English) first grader use when discussing and reading texts in both languages.
Method

Context

The current study, which is on the literacy strategies that a bilingual (Greek and English) first grader uses, took place in two different settings. The two settings were the library and the participant’s home. The purpose of utilizing the library was so that Lauren, a pseudonym for the student, could be observed in a quiet location. The participant’s home was a significant location because this is where Lauren and Heather, a pseudonym for the mother, were interviewed. Also, the home setting, which is in a tight knit suburban community near the local elementary school, provided me with a natural place to observe the participant’s interaction with her mother as she read and discussed texts in both Greek and English.

The library, which is located in the surrounding suburb, from where Lauren and her family reside, is a quiet place. As stated earlier, the observation of the student’s reading and retelling skills in Greek and English, took place in the library. The interviews and observation of Lauren and Heather took place in Lauren’s house. The student lives with her parents and younger sister in a suburb in upstate New York. Lauren grew up in the house. She lives in a peaceful neighborhood, and there is another child that lives right next to her.

Participants

Lauren, a seven year old, successfully completed first grade at the elementary school that she attends in her school district. Lauren’s mother, Heather, age 39, was born and raised in Greece, and her father, Alex, a pseudonym for the father, age 43, was born and raised in India. Lauren was born in the United States of America. Thus, Lauren is a Greek-Indian-American. Heather’s first language is Greek, and she speaks Greek and English fluently. Alex’s first language is Bengali, and he speaks Bengali and English fluently. Lauren speaks Greek and
English. She speaks Greek with her mother and English with her father. She also speaks English at school.

Lauren has frequently traveled abroad and has been to Greece, India, and the United Kingdom. Lauren can have discussions regarding the settings and cultures found in the United States, Greece, and India. She is aware of the different languages that are used in the different countries that she has been to, and Lauren can differentiate with whom she can speak Greek and English. Her upbringing has allowed her to appreciate different languages and cultures; therefore, she is truly embracing diversity.

Lauren is a bright child. She does well in school and has received good marks in first grade. She is an advanced reader. At the end of the school year, she was reading at guided reading Level M, which is the level that a beginning third grader reads. Lauren likes to read and write, and was very enthusiastic about participating in this study. Lauren is taking violin lessons and traditional Indian and Greek dancing lessons. She enjoys playing outside and likes to color.

Lauren is a quiet, serious, and responsible seven year old. She wants to do well on all tasks that she participates in, such as reading. When she goes home, she spends time completing literacy and math activities. Education is emphasized in her home, and Lauren takes pride in her work. She has a younger sister, who is two years old, and she likes playing with her. Lauren also wants to take care of her.

As articulated earlier in this section of the study, Heather was born and raised in Greece. Her parents and siblings live in Greece, and she visits the country often. Heather is a professor at the school of nursing at a university near her house. She practiced nursing in Athens, Greece and then came to the United States where she completed her Ph.D. in nursing. Alex was born and raised in India. His parents reside in India, and his brother, along with his family, live in
England. Alex is a researcher at a local company. He also came to the United States for a part of his education and has a Ph.D. in chemistry.

**Researcher Stance**

In this study, I worked with Lauren in order to assess the literacy skills that she uses when discussing and reading texts in both Greek and English. I observed Lauren, with her mom, Heather, while they read and discussed books that were written in both languages. Hence, during the study, I administered a “structured formal interview” (Mills, 2011, p. 79), in which I asked Lauren and Heather a series of questions that I have written. Their responses to these questions provided me with data regarding Lauren’s literacy strategies in Greek and English. Also, during the study, I served as an “active participant observer” (Mills, p. 75), because I worked with Lauren by observing her reading strategies, asking her to retell the passages in both languages, and questioning her thoughts on reading in Greek and English. Therefore, I engaged in conversation with Lauren (Mills, p. 75). Another role in this study was the one of “passive observer” (Mills, p.75). In this role, I only observed, without engaging in dialogue, Lauren and Heather while they read and discussed texts in Greek and English (Mills, p.75).

I am certified in social studies (grades 7-12) and students with disabilities-social studies (grades 7-12). I am currently a special education teacher at a high school, and I am a student in the graduate literacy program at St. John Fisher College. I am working towards earning a Master’s of Science in Literacy Education.

**Method**

The purpose of this study was to analyze which, if any, literacy strategies does Lauren, a bilingual first grader use, when discussing and reading texts in English and Greek. Hence, this study consisted of interviewing Lauren and Heather, observing Lauren when she was reading and
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retelling passages in Greek and English, and observing Lauren and Heather while they were reading and discussing texts in both languages. These three events (interviewing Lauren and Heather, observing Lauren when she is reading and retelling passages, and observing Lauren and Heather together) occurred once over a period of a week and a half.

I first served as an interviewer by executing a structured formal interview (Mills, 2011). The structured formal interview consisted of questions that I had written for Heather and Lauren. I asked Lauren the questions and recorded her answers. The same occurred when I interviewed Heather. The structured formal interview occurred in the student’s home and took place separately. The purpose of the separate interviewing locations was so that Lauren and Heather would not influence each other when answering the questions. The questions that I asked Lauren, during her interview, were on bilingualism and the literacy practices surrounding bilingualism (i.e. When do you use each language?, Do you like one language more than the other language? If yes, why? (See appendix A for questions). I asked her mother, Heather, similar questions about her upbringing and her daughter’s bilingualism and literacy skills (i.e. How did you learn the languages? Did you learn both languages at the same time, or did you learn one language first and then a second language? Does she [your daughter] read the same in both languages or does she read better in one language than in the other language? Why do you think this is the case? (See appendix B for questions). The purposes of these questions were to give Lauren and her mother the opportunity to share their responses of how they view bilingualism and literacy.

While at the library, I served as an active participant observer (Mills, 2011) by asking Lauren to read a passage out loud in English and a passage in Greek. The passages were on different topics (the passage written in English was about sports, while the passage in Greek was about family – see appendix C). While the student read each passage, I kept a running record and
observed what strategies the student used (i.e. pointing at the words). This information provided me with data on what types of strategies the student used when reading texts in Greek and the types of strategies she employed when reading information in English. Similarities and differences regarding the strategies that Lauren used were noted. After the student read each passage orally, I asked the student to provide a synopsis (a retelling) of each passage. The retelling enabled me to compare and contrast the patterns that the student used when providing the synopsis in English and in Greek. After Lauren read both passages and completed the retelling, I asked Lauren questions about which passage was easier to read, which text she liked the most and why, and which text she liked to further discuss and in which language she wanted to discuss it.

While Lauren and Heather read a book in Greek, and a book in English, and discussed both readings, I served as a passive observer (Mills, 2011). This observation occurred in Lauren’s home. The purpose of the observation was to note how Lauren and Heather discussed books in Greek and English, which language they used to communicate, and the types of strategies that Lauren used while reading books in both languages. By observing Lauren and her mother, I noted the similarities and differences between how they read books in English and Greek, and how they discussed the books. I also took note of how eager they were to read and discuss the books in the respective language (i.e. Does Lauren look forward to reading the book that is written in English or the book that is written in Greek?).

Throughout the study, different artifacts were collected. These included the participants’ responses to the interview questions, the running records, the student’s retelling of the texts, and my observation notes. These artifacts helped me answer the research question that focuses on
which, if any, literacy strategies does a bilingual (Greek and English) first grader uses when reading and discussing passages in both languages.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

Mills (2011) states that credibility “…refers to the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in the study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). Hence, credibility is essential when carrying out action research (Mills). Guba (1981) provides recommendations to guarantee that there is a state of credibility. Some of the recommendations consist of having triangulation, discussing the study with a colleague, and having artifacts (Guba). These (Guba) are included in the current study, because triangulation was reached through the diverse data collected. In the current study, I interviewed Lauren and Heather, observed and worked directly with the participant (Lauren), and then observed the participant with her mother. Throughout the study, I discussed my work with my colleague in order to receive feedback. Finally, artifacts were collected during this study. These artifacts consisted of the responses to the interview questions, running records, retellings of the passages, and field notes.

Another significant aspect of research is transferability. Transferability, as defined by Mills (2011), “…refers to qualitative researchers’ beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 104). Guba (1981) provides strategies to make sure that transferability is present. Guba suggests that specific information during the study is gathered, and that specific information regarding the framework of the study is recorded and made known. In this study, it has been clearly articulated that the findings are based upon the data that has been accumulated through observations and interviews in the current study. Hence, the artifacts
collected came directly from this case study in the prescribed settings, as discussed earlier in this section of the research, and the findings are illustrative of this particular case.

Dependability, which is also necessary when implementing studies, “…refers to the stability of the data” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). Guba (1981) suggests that dependability can be reached when there are many ways in which information is collected, as well as through keeping track of the information in an organized manner. Dependability occurred throughout the current study because information was accumulated through observations and interviews. Therefore, there was more than one mode of information collection. Also, all the information gathered from the study was persevered and organized.

Studies need to have confirmability which is “…the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (Mills, 2011, p. 105). Guba (1981) writes that in order for confirmability to occur, there needs to be more than one way of gathering information, as well as for the researcher to think about his thoughts, particularly predispositions, regarding the study. In the current study, there was triangulation because information was accumulated through observations and interviews. There were running records, retellings, interview responses, and field notes. Also, I discussed my preconceptions regarding the study with my colleagues which enabled me to recognize them.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

In order for the current study to be facilitated, informed consent was received from the participants. Both participants, Lauren and Heather, were provided with assent, consent, and permission forms. On the forms, their rights were stated, and they had the opportunity to decline or accept participation in the study. Since Lauren is a minor, she was provided with the assent form and her mother, Heather, was provided with the permission form. Heather, who is an adult,
was also provided with the consent form. The participants had a thorough understanding of their rights, and they both willingly agreed to participate. To ensure that the participants’ privacy was protected, pseudonyms were used for the participants (the names Lauren and Heather are both pseudonyms). The artifacts that were collected do not contain information that will cause Lauren and Heather to be recognized.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected throughout the study. First, both Lauren and her mother, Heather were interviewed. Their interview responses served as data. When I worked with Lauren to observe the strategies that she used when she read texts in Greek and English and how effective her retellings were, artifacts were collected. These artifacts consisted of running records and retellings. In addition, field notes also served as artifacts. The field notes consisted of my observations while Lauren and Heather were reading and discussing books in both Greek and English. Hence, my observations and interviews from the study, along with my artifacts (interview responses, running records, retellings, and field notes), served as data.

**Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed in a systematic manner which allowed for thorough examination of the interview responses, running records, questions, and observation notes. First, in order to study the data, the artifacts were read several times. Each time the data was read, I made annotations of my observations, thoughts, and links that occurred throughout the data sets. I also had a notebook available where I wrote notes for myself, and I continued to refer to my research question: which, if any, bilingual literacy skills does a first grader use when discussing and reading texts in Greek and English. By consistently referring to my research question, I was grounded in finding clues in my data that enabled me to answer the question. First, I drew a
Venn diagram. In the Venn diagram, I wrote which strategies the student uses when reading texts only in English, which strategies the student uses when reading texts only in Greek, and which strategies the student employs when reading in both languages. The strategy of creating a Venn diagram helped me in answering my research question; however, because I had re-read and made notes of my data, I noticed that even though Lauren used similar strategies when reading in both languages, there were two other factors that were evident in the data that impacted the research question. In my notebook, I listed the factors that I had observed. After listing these factors, I divided them into two different categories: variations that exist between the two languages and the student’s language preference. Hence, a comprehensive study of the data, which included coding, along with discussing my data analysis with my colleague, enabled me to answer the research question, as well as to determine other components that affected the response to the research question.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

After examining the data methodically, three themes emerged that are significant components in answering the research question of which, if any literacy strategies, does a first grader use when reading texts in Greek and English? These themes are the reading strategies that the student employs in both languages, reading variance among the two languages, and language inclination.

Reading Strategies in Greek and English

Based upon the data analysis, Lauren uses the same four strategies when she reads in Greek and in English. These strategies are: reading the title, looking at the pictures, sounding out the words, and asking for help.
When I interviewed Lauren, as well as when I observed Lauren and Heather read texts together, Lauren read the titles of the books in order to determine the book’s subject. She also read the title to determine if she wanted to read the book. According to the personal interview, Lauren likes to read books about princesses, Barbies, animals, nature, and different countries. If a book, in either language, contains one of these subjects in the title, Lauren is likely to read that book. The strategy of reading the title to predict the book’s story line is a strategy that Lauren uses when reading books in both Greek and English.

While interviewing Lauren, she explained that she uses the pictures when reading in Greek and English in order to better comprehend and visualize the story. Her mother also stated the same during her interview. Lauren explained that she uses pictures because “they describe the words, and the pictures are more interesting than the words” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). In both languages, Lauren first read and then looked at the pictures, because “the words are on the top of the page, and then are the pictures” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). The student explained that she enjoys looking at the pictures because she wants to see how the characters look like, particularly their visual appearance. When I asked what part of the character she focuses on, she explained that she looks at the character’s hair color and skin color, and if the character has the same hair color and skin tone as Lauren, then she likes the book. Lauren also added that “I like the pictures better in English books than in Greek books. In English books, the pictures show more expression than in Greek books” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). The student articulated that she connects better to the pictures in English books because she finds characters that have the same color tone as her. Lauren’s identification of skin tone in books is essential because it illustrates that the student has recognized differences between English books and Greek books. Therefore, she does not only differentiate books based upon the language that
they are written in, but the student also categorizes books based upon their illustrations. During the observation with Lauren and Heather, the student looked at the pictures while reading books in both Greek and English and discussed the pictures in Greek, regardless of whether the book was written in English or Greek. For example, when Lauren and Heather were reading *Froggy Goes to Camp* (London, 2010), Lauren paused to look at the pictures. Also, in practice, the student first read the words on the page and then analyzed the illustrations. Hence, Lauren has created a systematic book pattern when reading in both languages. This pattern consists of first reading the title, then reading the words on each page, followed by studying the pictures.

During both interviews (Lauren’s interview and Heather’s interview), the strategy of sounding out words was discussed. Heather explained that Lauren sounds out words in both Greek and English, when she is having difficulty with a word. Sounding out words in both languages illustrates that the student recognizes that this strategy aids her when attempting to read words in both languages. Hence, sounding out words is a significant similarity because Lauren is cognizant that there are reading strategies that she can use while reading books in English and Greek. Lauren, during her interview, also said that she sounds out the words. The student articulated the importance of sounding out words because it helps her read passages in both languages. She explained that her mother taught her to use this strategy when reading books in Greek and in English and the sounding out strategy was also taught in school. Therefore, the student finds sounding out words as a strategy that she can effectively use in both Greek and English. During the observation, when Lauren and Heather read in Greek and English, and when Lauren needed to sound out a word, Heather would point to the letters in the word with a pencil in order to aid Lauren with the sounding out process. When Lauren continued to struggle with sounding out the word, Heather would ask Lauren in Greek, regardless of whether or not the text
was in Greek, which letter this was (which letter she pointed to). Lauren’s ability to be asked a question in Greek, such as being asked to identify the letter, and to be able to respond in English, by stating the letter’s name, correlates to Haritos (2003). Haritos, who studied bilingual (Greek and English) students, found that they were able to translate among the two languages. Lauren did the same when translating during reading. Thus, the strategy of sounding out words, and the process of doing so (using the pencil to point to the letters and asking to identify the letters), is the same in both Greek and English. The similarity of sounding out words and using the pencil to point to the letters is significant because Lauren and Heather have built common strategies to use when reading in both languages; therefore, the student and her mother are not as concerned about which language they are reading in but have created procedures that allow Lauren to be successful while reading. Hence, the focus is not on the language per se, but on the overall literacy strategy, which can be applied to either Greek or English.

The last strategy that Lauren uses when reading texts in both languages is asking for help when she continues to struggle with reading a word. Lauren explained that it is important to ask for help so that “you know what you are reading” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). The student asks her mother when she is having difficulty with reading a word. Therefore, another strategy that Lauren uses in both languages is advocating for herself when she is struggling with decoding words. Based upon the data that was collected and analyzed, the literacy strategies that Lauren uses (i.e. reading the title, looking at the pictures, sounding out the words, pointing to the letters, and asking for help) illustrates that Lauren uses the same methods when reading texts in either English or Greek. Using similar literacy strategies between two languages has also been reflected in Sneddon (2008) who found that bilingual students use the same literacy skills when reading in their languages.
Reading Variance among the Two Languages

According to the data, Lauren uses the strategies of reading titles, analyzing the pictures, sounding out words, and asking for help, while reading books in both languages. Nevertheless, the student makes fewer miscues and reads more fluently when reading passages in English. According to the personal interview, Heather explained that Lauren’s reading in English is better because more time is dedicated to learning how to read in English at home and at school. Thus, the finding illustrates that even though Lauren employs the same literacy strategies in Greek and English, when she does not receive enough time to practice her reading skills in Greek, the reading strategies that she has does not impact her reading level. Therefore, in order to improve her reading in Greek, she needs to spend more time reading Greek so that her reading in that language can improve. I wrote and gave the student two passages to read. One passage was in Greek, and it contained 108 words. It was a narrative about sports (appendix C). The other passage was written in English, and it consisted of 111 words. This was a narrative about a family (appendix C). On the passage written in English, Lauren made four miscues. She was able to explain what the passage was about; therefore, she understood the subject that she was reading. On the Greek passage, the student made twenty four miscues, but was still able to articulate the subject of the passage. During both narratives, the student used the strategy of sounding out words. Even though she applied the same strategy, Lauren had difficulty with sounding out the words in Greek. The reason for struggling with decoding the words in Greek could be due to the fact that Lauren does not practice reading in Greek as much as she does in English, as stated by her mother in the personal interview. Hence, as described earlier, the student can clearly articulate the literacy strategies that she uses when reading texts in both Greek and English, but a lack of practice in reading in Greek, has caused the student to make
greater miscues when reading in Greek. As studies have illustrated (Proctor, August, Carlo, & Barr, 2010; Dahl, Rice, Steffensen & Amundsen, 2010), it has been documented that bilingual students have the capability of losing one of their languages if that language is not used. Perhaps, the same may occur with Lauren’s reading skills if she does not practice reading in Greek.

According to the interviews, Lauren and Heather recognize that Lauren’s reading skills are at a higher level when reading texts in English than when reading passages in Greek. When I asked the student which language was easier for her to read in, she replied that “English is easier because I [Lauren] learned to read in English first and then in Greek” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). Heather (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011) explained the following regarding her daughter’s reading in Greek and English:

She can read in both languages. Her English is much better. She reads at the 3rd grade level. If I had to compare it with Greek, she is a year behind. Her Greek reading is at a beginning/middle kindergarten. She knows the letters, but we don’t practice Greek as much. She learned to read both at home and school, in English. During the school year, it was hard to find time to fit in reading, in Greek. When it comes to homework, homework that I assign to her, because they do not get a lot of homework in school, it is all in English.

The above illustrates that due to time constraints and instruction occurring in English, Lauren has made greater strides in reading in English, than in Greek. Hence, although the student employs similar strategies when reading in both languages, a lack of time and instruction has had an adverse impact on the student’s reading progress in Greek. Therefore, a student can have the reading skills to apply when reading in different languages, but if there is not a sufficient amount of time spent reading in both languages, such as in Lauren’s case, then a student may not read
equally well in both languages. Hence, a student like Lauren, will develop greater fluency in reading the language that she spends more time practicing in.

**Language Preference**

While Lauren reads more effectively in English than in Greek, the student prefers to discuss texts in Greek, according to the observation that I had with Lauren when she was reading the two passages. Although Lauren made four miscues while reading the passage that I gave her in English, compared to twenty four miscues that she made when reading the passage in Greek, Lauren articulated that she liked the Greek passage the most because “they [passage] talk about families” (Observation, June 27, 2011). Hence, Lauren may have preferred the Greek passage due to its subject matter, even though family is not a subject that she mentioned as being one of her favorite topics (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). When asked which passage she liked to discuss, the Greek or English passage, Lauren explained that she wanted to discuss the Greek passage “…because it is more interesting than English. Greek has more words than the English words” (Observation, June 27, 2011). When asked to expand upon her response, she was unable to articulate what she meant. Then, when I asked Lauren which language she wanted to discuss the passage in, Lauren explained that she preferred to talk about it in Greek and provided the following reasons:

It is kind of funny how you say the words in Greek. When my mom says something in Greek, I say what and she laughs. I like Greek because I speak Greek more often than English. Greek is a funny language, and I like funny stuff. (Observation, June 27, 2011).

Lauren’s response suggests that although her reading level in English is higher than her reading level in Greek, she likes to discuss stories in Greek. As suggested by the student, her language preference may be based upon the fact that she uses Greek to talk about stories, and thus, has
created a routine in discussing stories in Greek. Heather, during her interview, explained that she speaks to Lauren only in Greek, and they discuss English and Greek texts only in Greek. Heather articulated that “[i]f we [Heather and Lauren] read a book in English, we discuss it in Greek. We never discuss in English, because it interferes with the way we communicate. It is unnatural because we only communicate in Greek” (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011). The procedure of conversing about both English and Greek books in Greek was also evident when I observed Heather and Lauren. When the mother and daughter were reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* (Kinney, 2008), Heather asked Lauren, in Greek, to explain the cheese touch. Lauren answered the question in Greek. Hence, Lauren was able to use her knowledge of the Greek language in order to explain a concept that she read in English, in this case, the cheese touch. Lauren’s language behavior has been evidenced by Reyes (2006) who found that bilingual (English and Spanish) students were able to create associations between the languages, as well as form stronger bridges between Spanish and English. Lauren’s explanation of the cheese touch also illustrates the work of Kenner, Al-Azamil, Gregory & Ruby (2008) who found that a benefit of bilingualism is being able to critically think about subjects in two languages, such as in Lauren’s case who was able to read about the cheese touch in English and then explain it in Greek.

It is also essential to note that not only do conversations occur in Greek when Heather and Lauren read books, but other commentary, such as how many pages should be read and compliments, are also said in Greek. When Lauren was reading fluently, her mother complimented her in Greek. Hence, literacy interactions occurred in Greek. Perhaps, the student expects to discuss texts only in Greek, despite whether or not they are written in Greek. Since
Lauren is a primary student, the literacy routines that have been established with her mother may influence her language preferences.

Another finding that was analyzed from the data illustrates that a paradox exists between Lauren’s language preference when talking about books and the language in which Lauren chooses to read books in. As discussed earlier, Lauren relates more to the pictures in books that are written in English because she finds characters that look like her. Also, according to the interview with Heather, the mother stated:

She [Lauren] prefers to read books in English, because she is good at reading in English and she realizes it. She picks books in English. She only picks books in Greek that she knows how to read. She gets discouraged when she reads in Greek because some words are longer. If she sees that she does well or is given compliments, she works even harder in both languages. (Personal Interview, June 25, 2011).

The above passage illustrates that even though throughout the interviews and observations, Lauren consistently preferred to speak in Greek when conversing about texts and indeed did speak in Greek, she prefers to read books in English because she has greater confidence in her reading skills. As discussed earlier, Lauren and Heather are aware that Lauren reads better in English than in Greek. Therefore, it appears that two factors play a role in language preference. Perhaps, Lauren prefers to talk about texts in Greek because this has been the practice, and she is at ease when discussing passages in Greek. However, she prefers to pick books that are written in English because she identifies that her reading skills in English are at a higher level. Another reason for picking books in English could be related to the illustrations. Nevertheless, during the personal interview (June 25, 2011) Lauren articulated that she is proud of herself for being able to speak Greek and English, and Lao (2004) describes feeling proud as a benefit of bilingualism.
Conclusion

The data analysis reflects that Lauren uses four of the same reading strategies when reading texts in Greek and English. These strategies are: reading the title, analyzing the pictures, sounding out the words, and asking for help. Although the student uses the same strategies in both languages, her reading skills in Greek and English are at different levels. Based upon the data, she makes fewer miscues when reading passages in English, and she reads more fluently when compared to reading in Greek. Nevertheless, Lauren prefers to discuss all books in Greek; however, she favors reading books in English. Lauren’s preferences reflect that a bilingual student can be in a difficult situation between her two languages; she may feel the pressure of liking both languages because her bilingualism is a part of her daily life, and the student may want to please people who speak and use both languages. In Lauren’s case, she may want to please her mom and dad; therefore, she may be attempting to find a balance between literacy and these two languages and thus likes to talk about books in Greek, but wants to read books that are written in English.

Implications and Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to discuss which strategies, if any, does a bilingual (Greek and English) first grader use when discussing and reading texts in both Greek and English. The research question is a significant one because Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Gee (2001) discuss literacy as a social practice. Hence, by understanding the literacy strategies that bilingual students use, educators can better recognize the literacy skills that bilingual students encompass, and by doing so, educators identify how bilinguuals communicate.

After analyzing the data that was collected, it is evident that Lauren, the bilingual first grader in this study, uses the same literacy strategies in both languages. Sneddon (2008) findings
concur with my research because Sneddon found that bilingual students use similar literacy strategies in both languages. In my research, Lauren was able to also convey information that she had read from English to Greek and vice versa. The diffusion of information relates to Haritos (2003) who found that bilingual (Greek and English) students are able to translate what has been read in both languages, as well as to Reyes (2006) who like Haritos (2003) found that bilingual students could form links of knowledge among their two languages. Based upon my findings, as well as those of Sneddon (2008), Haritos (2003), and Reyes (2006), when students learn a foreign language in school, foreign language educators can refer to the literacy skills that students have developed in their first language (English) so that these skills can be applied when reading and discussing texts in the foreign language (Spanish, German, French, etc.).

As discussed earlier, even though Lauren has an array of literacy skills that she applies when reading texts in Greek and English, she read English more fluently and with fewer miscues than in Greek. Heather, during the personal interview, articulated that Lauren’s reading is more advanced in English than in Greek because Lauren spends more time practicing reading texts in English. Proctor, August, Carlo, and Barr (2010) as well as Dahl, Rice, Steffensen, and Amundsen (2010) found that if bilingual students do not use both languages, then their skills in one language deteriorate. Although Lauren practices her English and Greek speaking skills on a daily basis, she does not spent time receiving instruction in Greek reading, according to the personal interview. Hence, Lauren’s Greek reading skills are lacking. Priven (2010) recommends that bilingual students are allowed and welcomed to use books written in both of their languages as one way to gain further knowledge, but to also help students maintain their skills in both languages. Therefore, school libraries, as well as public libraries, can have books written in the students’ first language, which is also recommended by Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006).
As Priven (2010) suggests, bilingual students should be encouraged to use books written in their first languages for classroom assignments. In terms of learning a foreign language, educators need to place emphasis on reading fluency in that language so that students can become fluent readers in the language that they are studying. In Lauren’s case, she could apply the literacy strategies when reading in Greek, but her Greek reading was not fluent because there was not enough instruction, according to the personal interview. Foreign language teachers can use the literacy strategies that students have acquired in learning their first language (English), but they also need to give students the opportunity to practice their reading in their second language. Perhaps, fluency assessments can be administered to students in their foreign language classrooms so that students can receive tailored instruction to become better readers in their second language. By providing students with instruction, such as reading fluency instruction in the foreign language that they are learning, will enable students to experience the many benefits of bilingualism (Dyc, 2002; Lao, 2004; Hancock, 2006; Li, 2006; Kenner, Al-Azami, Gregory & Ruby, 2008; Poulin-Dubois, Blaye, Coutya & Bialystok, 2010).

A limitation of this research study was time. Due to time constraints, the research was completed in a short amount of time. Hence, if this study was to be repeated in the future, I would have provided myself with more time in order to ease the pressure of deadlines. Another limitation of the study was the time of year that it occurred. The study took place in late June, and the student had completed her school year. Hence, since the student did not have a stringent homework and work time schedule due to summer, it may have been difficult for her to answer the interview questions thoroughly since she was not in school mode and may not have been focused on her reading practices. Therefore, if the study was to be repeated again, it would occur
in the middle of the school year, so that the student would have been experiencing regular literacy instruction at school and at home.

The research also causes more significant questions to arise. These questions are in regards to bilingual students’ language preferences. Some of these questions are: What causes bilingual students to prefer one language more than the other? Does the country in which the students live in cause them to prefer one language more? Does the sex of the parent and the sex of the child cause the student to prefer one language more than the other (i.e. Would a female student prefer the language of her mother?)? Further research needs to be dedicated to examining the language preferences of bilingual students in order to better understand their comfort level with each language. By researching the comfort level that bilingual students have in regards to their languages may impact the field of foreign language education so that educators can help students feel more confident with speaking their second language.

The research illustrates that the field of bilingualism holds more discoveries to be examined. Bilingualism stretches beyond students being able to speak two languages; instead, it entails the skill sets in each language, the feelings that students have about their languages, and how being bilingual impacts their daily lives.
References


Appendix A

Interview questions for student:
1. Tell me a little about yourself. What do you like to do?
2. How was your school year?
3. Which languages do you speak?
4. When do you use each language?
5. When do you know with which person to speak which language?
6. Do you like one language more than the other language? If yes, why?
7. Can you read in both languages?
8. Which language is it easier to read in? Why?
9. If a story is written in English, and you want to know what the story is about, how do you figure it out?
10. If a story is written in Greek, and you want to know what the story is about, how do you figure it out?
11. If you do not know how to read a word in English, what do you do?
12. If you do not know how to read a word in Greek, what do you do?
13. Do you like talking about stories in Greek or in English? Why?
14. When is it easier to talk about stories in Greek?
15. When is it easier to talk about stories in English?
16. What would you like to read first – a passage in English or in Greek? Why?
17. How do the kids in your class feel that you know two languages?
Appendix B

*Interview questions for parent:*

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Which languages do you speak?
3. How did you learn the languages? Did you learn both languages at the same time, or did you learn one language first and then a second language?
4. What reading strategies do you use when you read texts in Greek?
5. What reading strategies do you use when you read texts in English?
6. How did your daughter acquire the languages that she knows? Did she learn both languages at the same time, or did she learn one language first and then the second language?
7. Can your daughter read in both languages? If yes, how did she learn to do so?
8. Does she read the same in both languages or does she read better in one language than in the other language? Why do you think this is the case?
9. Where did your daughter learn the reading strategies that she learned?
10. Does she prefer to read books in both languages or does she prefer to read books in one language more than the other? Why do you think this is the case?
11. When you discuss books that she has read in English, do you use English to talk about the books or do you use Greek? Why?
12. When you discuss books that she has read in Greek, do you use Greek to talk about the books or do you use English? Why?
13. Do you read together? If yes, do you read books that are in both languages, books that are written only in English, or books that are written only in Greek? Why?
14. When your daughter reads books in English and Greek, does she use any of the same literacy strategies? If yes, which ones?
Appendix C

Passages:

English reading passage:
Connor is ten years old, and he is in fourth grade. Connor loves to play sports, and he plays many sports. Connor plays soccer, basketball, and baseball. He also swims. He is on the soccer team, basketball team, baseball team, and swim team. His favorite part of the week is when he has practices and games. Connor also likes to spend time with his family and enjoys playing sports with his younger brother Kevin, and his younger sister, Mary. When Connor grows up, he wants to be a famous athlete. His dream is to go to the Olympic Games and to win a gold medal. He wants to be on television!

Retell the passage that you just read:

Greek reading passage:
Ο Πέτρος είναι εφτά χρονών. Μένει σε ένα ωραίο σπίτι στην Σπάρτη. Το σπίτι του είναι μεγάλο γιατί έχει μεγάλη οικογένεια. Η μαμά του Πέτρου, η κυρία Άννα, είναι δασκάλα. Ο μπαμπάς του Πέτρου, ο κύριος Θανάσης, είναι ταχυδρόμος. Ο Πέτρος έχει δύο αδελφές και έναν αδελφό. Η αδελφή του, η Δέσποινα, είναι πέντε χρονών. Η αδελφή του, η Χριστίνα, είναι τέσσερα χρονών και ο αδελφός του, ο Νίκος, είναι δύο χρονών. Ο Πέτρος αγαπά τα αδέλφια του και παίζουν μαζί. Η γιαγιά και ο παππούς μένουν μαζί στο ίδιο σπίτι. Ο Πέτρος αγαπά την γιαγιά και τον παππού του γιατί παίζουν κρυφτό και τον πηγαίνουν στις κούνιες.

Retell the passage that you just read:

Questions after the reading of the passages and retellings:
1.) Which passage was easier to read (Greek passage or English passage)? Why?
2.) Which passage did you like the most (Greek passage or English passage)? Why?
3.) Which passage would you like to discuss (Greek passage or English passage)? Why?
4.) In which language do you want to discuss the passage (Greek or English)? Why?