

Title: The Role of Home Literacy Environment and SES for Early Language Skills in bilingual Preschoolers: Preliminary Data from the COPING Project.

Background: Children from immigrant backgrounds acquire more than one language, their heritage language and the societal language, often receiving less quantity and quality of input than monolinguals in L2. Consequently, bilingual children often lag in L2 skills, a gap that can persist without rich exposure to the societal language. Shared book-reading (SBR) interventions have proven effective in supporting language development with long-term academic benefits, particularly among children from low-SES and immigrant families. Moreover, home literacy environment (HLE), as family literacy practices, and family socioeconomic status (SES) (e.g., income, parental education) have been considered influential for variability in children's language development. In particular, previous research shows that the association between SES and children's language skills is mediated by the HLE and by children's language knowledge. However, most SBR interventions generally target children aged 4 to 5 and, to our knowledge, no prior intervention study has targeted three-year-old children in the context of early L2 Italian language, especially while accounting for HLE and SES vulnerability in relation to early L2 learning.

Aims: The COPING project aims to promote Italian in preschoolers, testing an interactive SBR intervention for monolingual and bilingual children aged 3-4, and examining how adult-led activities support L2 development. This study presents preliminary T1 (pre-test) analysis exploring the relationship between contextual factors, such as HLE (e.g., access to books and shared book reading frequency), SES and language background, and children's language skills in Italian (e.g., vocabulary, oral comprehension, and narrative skills). It also explores whether monolingual versus bilingual status is associated with differences in early language profiles, while considering the role of the HLE and SES. These exploratory objectives will allow us to characterize the linguistic profiles present at baseline and to identify potential predictors of variation in children's language development.

Methodology: The project at T1 adopts a quantitative, multimethod approach and it is implemented within 8 kindergartens using a waiting-list control group design. The sample comprised 125 three-year-old preschoolers (65 females and 60 males), monolinguals and bilinguals. Data are collected through standardized child assessments and parent questionnaires. At T1, children complete measures of receptive and expressive vocabulary and oral text comprehension and production, providing a baseline of linguistic abilities. Through parent questionnaires, we gather sociodemographic information and HLE characteristics.

Expected Results: Through analysis at T1, we anticipate that children's performance will be associated with HLE richness and SES, with those from higher SES or richer HLE backgrounds performing better on Italian L2 measures, even among bilinguals. We also expect to identify differences in language skills between monolingual and bilingual children, consistent with variability in early Italian exposure at age three. These findings will help explain variation in linguistic profiles and L2 proficiency at three years old.

Keywords: Bilingual children, three-years-old, L2 Italian, shared book reading, language development, socioeconomic status, home language environment.