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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Function, Type, and Distribution of Teacher Questions in Dual-Language Preschool Read Alouds

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This exploratory study investigated the nature and distribution of dual-language preschool teachers' questions across parallel Spanish- and English-medium read-aloud activities. The notions of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and language output (Swain, 1985), along with a reciprocal interaction model of teaching (Cummins, 2000), guided our understanding of teachers' use of questions to engage students in book-based extended dialogue in each target language. We utilized digital video recordings and field notes to capture the naturally occurring teacher-child interactions of read-aloud activities in two dual-language preschool classrooms over a period of two months. Findings revealed that teachers asked a variety of questions, exhibiting a multitude of functions and levels of cognitive challenge; however, question types were not equitably distributed across the two instructional languages as teachers asked significantly more *inference-based* and *factual* questions during Spanish-medium read alouds and more *experience-based* and *word-focused* questions in English-medium read alouds. Implications for practice are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

For emergent bilinguals—children who have the potential to become bilingual and biliterate if supported in their immediate environments, including home and school—the ability to develop two languages depends on multiple and varied experiences with each language across a variety of contexts (De Houwer, 2009; DePalma, 2010). Dual-language (DL) schooling plays a critical role

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in the bilingual acquisition process because it supports the development of language and literacy skills that build on and extend what students typically learn in their homes and communities. For example, teachers can create meaningful opportunities for students to engage in dialogic interactions that reflect natural and varied uses of language (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). It is through such relevant and systematic exposure to and practice with both languages that emergent bilingual children come to realize their full linguistic potential.

Teacher questions, a prevalent component of typical teacher–student interactions in and beyond preschool, serve various purposes in support of extended interactive discourse (Dickinson, 2006). While research in monolingual-English early childhood settings has highlighted the variation of teacher questioning strategies—most notably, question type and quantity—by activity (Massey, Pence, Justice, & Bowles, 2008), little is known about the functions, types, and prevalence of teacher questions in dual-language instructional contexts. This article presents findings from an exploratory study of teacher questioning practices across parallel DL preschool Spanish- and English-medium shared book reading, or read-aloud, activities. Specifically, the study examined how function, type, and prevalence of teacher questions compare across Spanish- and English-medium read alouds to provide insight into young learners’ access to and engagement with book-related conversations in each language in support of bilingual development.

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF TEACHER QUESTIONS

Studies concerning the nature of teacher and caregiver questions in a range of settings have investigated teacher (Massey et al., 2008; Tienken, Goldberg, & DiRocco, 2009; Walsh & Blewitt, 2006; Zucker, Justice, Piasta, & Kaderavek, 2010) and caregiver (De Temple & Snow, 1996; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton, & McGrath, 1997) question type as well as question frequency, both in academic and nonacademic settings. Previous research has classified teacher and caregiver questions primarily as either more or less cognitively challenging (e.g., Van Kleeck, Vander Woude, & Hammett, 2006; Zucker et al., 2010); other researchers have added management as a third question type (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Massey et al., 2008; Van Kleeck et al., 1997). Management questions have been defined as “those used to maintain conversation, manage behavior, clarify student utterances, or provide directives” (Massey et al., 2008, p. 348). Examples include *Where should you be sitting?* or *Who is talking?* Van Kleeck et al. (2006) distinguish less cognitively challenging from more cognitively challenging questions by determining whether the information required to answer a question is explicitly provided or readily accessible (e.g., in the text of pictures of a book) or must be deduced using previous knowledge and reasoning skills. Given our interest in the types of questions that support extended classroom interactions, help teachers model conversational discourse, and scaffold children’s meaning-making, we focused our investigation on less and more cognitively challenging questions.

Less cognitively challenging questions—which have also been referred to as “embedded” (Van Kleeck et al., 2006), “literal” (Zucker et al., 2010), “closed” (Cotton, 1989), and “high constraint” (De Rivera, Girolametto, Greenberg, & Weitzman, 2005)—are more perceptual in nature and are defined as those that require direct identification or recall of information that has

been presented directly (Van Kleeck et al., 2006), thus representing a low level of abstraction. Examples include questions such as *What color is the table?* or *What is that?* (while pointing to a picture in a book). Conversely, more cognitively challenging questions—also referred to as “decontextualized” (Curenton & Justice, 2004), “inferential” (Zucker et al., 2010), “open-ended” (Cotton, 1989), and “low constraint” (De Rivera et al., 2005)—are more conceptual in nature and require moving beyond that which has been directly stated (Van Kleeck et al., 2006), such as making predictions, connections, and inferences, and drawing conclusions. These questions exhibit a high level of abstraction. Examples include questions such as *What might happen next?* or *How do you think [the character] would feel if . . . ?*

Previous research has conflated the notions of question function (purpose) and question form (e.g., open-ended, closed; known, unknown answer) in determining a question’s level of cognitive challenge. As described above, closed questions and known-answer questions tend to be characterized as less cognitively challenging, while open-ended questions and unknown-answer questions are often considered to be more cognitively challenging. Closed questions are limited to a dichotomous response (yes/no) or include one of a supplied range of answers (e.g., *Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable?*). In contrast, open-ended questions are not limited to either a dichotomous response (yes/no) or a supplied range of answers. Examples include *How does a plant grow?* and *What might she do next?* Additionally, known-answer questions are associated with a range of specific responses of which the teacher already has some knowledge (e.g., *Who wrote this story?*). Alternatively, unknown-answer questions are associated with responses that the teacher does not have prior knowledge of and/or cannot anticipate (e.g., *How did you figure that out?*). It has yet to be investigated whether question function (and the inherent level of abstraction it engenders) and question form—when viewed as distinct characteristics of questions—each contribute uniquely to the level of cognitive challenge of a question.

BENEFITS OF DIFFERENT QUESTION TYPES AND THE FUNCTIONS THEY SERVE

Less- and more-challenging questions have been utilized for various instructional purposes. Through the integration and orchestration of a variety of question types, teachers scaffold students’ learning and assess their knowledge, as well as model and support the development of conversational discourse (Kintsch, 2005). Research suggests that more cognitively challenging questions generate more complex, elaborated responses than less cognitively challenging ones (De Rivera et al., 2005); these types of responses are characteristic of extended discourse, a strong predictor of later literacy skills (Dickinson, 2006). In addition to supporting language development in children (Curenton & Justice, 2004), engagement with more cognitively challenging questions is related to positive cognitive and academic outcomes (Laumann & Elliot, 1992). For example, Zucker et al.’s (2010) study of preschool teachers’ use of more and less cognitively challenging questions during read alouds indicated that more cognitively challenging questioning served as a catalyst for children to develop higher-level cognitive skills, such as inferencing and analysis. However, studies also reveal that teachers typically ask known-answer questions in order to test students on information that has already been presented (see, for example, Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). Based on this work, Boyd and Rubin (2006) challenge teachers

to “pose questions that allow students to infer, predict, hypothesize, and evaluate” because “questions that simply ask about information in the text, rather than about students’ personal responses to the text, are presumed to squelch student dialogue” (p. 143). All of these studies have been conducted in monolingual education settings, however. Thus, little is known about the nature and prevalence of teacher questions in dual-language early childhood instructional contexts.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine how function, type, and prevalence of teacher questions compare across preschool Spanish- and English-medium read alouds. The following questions guided our investigation:

1. What are the functions of teachers’ questions in Spanish- and English-medium read alouds?
2. What level of cognitive challenge do these functions represent?
3. Are specific functions represented significantly more in one language context than the other?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dual-language (DL) programs integrate students from two different language backgrounds (e.g., English, Spanish) with the explicit goals of promoting bilingual/biliterate development, academic achievement in two languages, and cross-cultural understanding (Christian, 1996). Since children with varying levels of bilingual proficiency learn together in DL programs, the amount and level of support provided in the language of instruction must be differentiated to accommodate the distinct needs of each language group (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Another challenge in planning and implementing DL education is the equitable distribution of both target languages in support of the program goals. That is, the two languages of instruction must be distributed across the instructional day in ways that provide students meaningful, systematic, and equitable exposure to each. However, simple exposure to each language is not sufficient for DL development; learners need opportunities to use their developing linguistic skills for multiple purposes and across various contexts with the support and guidance of more-skilled speakers (e.g., teachers, peers; Swain, 1985). Together, comprehensible language input (Krashen, 1985) and meaningful opportunities to practice (Swain, 1985) allow emergent bilinguals to not only hear and comprehend the languages they are learning, but also to engage with each so that they acquire new forms that meet their conversational purposes. Therefore, teachers who deliver instruction in two languages must have highly sophisticated linguistic and pedagogic skills in order to use each language strategically and effectively to support students’ meaning-making and bilingual development (Christian, 1996; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Valdés, 1997).

The reciprocal interaction model of teaching is an effective instructional strategy for engaging students in conversation (Cummins, 1986, 2000). This model describes the ways that teachers and students interact during specific instructional activities such as shared book reading. The reciprocal interaction model includes scaffolding techniques similar to dialogic reading, which emphasizes specific instructional strategies to support student talk (e.g., the use of open-ended questions, prompts, recasts, and extensions of children’s responses; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Rather than follow a specific set of techniques such as those of dialogic reading, however, the reciprocal interaction model promotes flexible and responsive communicative exchanges between

teachers and students that build collaborative learning environments and facilitate extended conversation (Wells, 1982).

Questions are one way to engage students in dialogue (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Kintsch, 2005), inviting them to produce meaningful language output. By asking a variety of questions in each of the target languages—particularly those that have been shown to invite extended, authentic conversation—teachers are able to (a) draw on students' existing knowledge in both languages, (b) promote language learning, (c) allow students to progress according to their own rate and style, and (d) scaffold students' learning by adjusting their speech according to the students' conceptual and linguistic level (Genesee, 1984, 1987; Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

METHOD

Setting and Participants

The study was situated in two prekindergarten classrooms within an additive Spanish/English DL preschool program in a multilingual/multicultural community in the southeastern United States. The program followed a policy of language separation, which meant that at different times throughout the day, teacher-led activities were conducted in either Spanish or English.

Participants included four Latina teachers, native speakers of Spanish and proficient in English, whose ages ranged from 27 to 53 ($M = 37.42$, $SD = 11.96$). All teachers had completed associate degrees and state requirements toward early childhood teaching certification, with teaching experience ranging from five to 21 years ($M = 10.25$, $SD = 7.37$). They demonstrated great commitment to the DL program, including enacting the program's language separation policy as consistently and reliably as possible in order to model each target language, and enthusiasm for their role as partners in children's early bilingual and biliteracy development. The ages of children in the two focal classrooms ($n = 28$) ranged from 4;0 to 5;7 ($M = 4;7$, $SD = 0.42$). Children reflected the community's diversity in terms of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic background. Home languages included Spanish ($n = 22$; this number includes students from Spanish/English bilingual homes where there was at least some usage of English), English ($n = 3$), Arabic/English ($n = 2$), and Portuguese/English ($n = 1$).

Data Collection

Given read alouds' prevalence in preschool classrooms (Karweit & Wasik, 1996), their grounding in oral language and dialogic interaction (Dickinson, Cote, & Smith, 1993), and teachers' integration of text reading and questioning to support students' meaning-making (Kintsch, 2005), we focused our data collection efforts on teachers' questioning practices in the context of this activity. Read alouds occurred on a daily basis in both focal classrooms and lasted approximately 15 minutes. The teachers preselected the focal book, usually being guided by an instructional theme or relevant topic of study. Book selections included both fiction and nonfiction. During read alouds, the students and teachers sat on the floor, in a circle, with each person facing inward so that each participant could see everyone else and the focal book.

We used digital video recordings to capture the naturally occurring teacher-child interactions of read-aloud activities in both focal classrooms over the course of two months. We visited each

classroom weekly and recorded a total of 13 read-aloud sessions: five in English and eight in Spanish. We were unable to videotape a matched number of Spanish and English read-aloud sessions within the data collection period due to scheduling changes that were beyond our control. Some English read-aloud activities were cancelled, for example, because of field trips or other special events at the school. The videos were transcribed verbatim soon after each recording by the second author, a Spanish/English bilingual doctoral student in Language and Literacy Education. A Spanish/English bilingual research assistant verified the transcripts for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data were coded using *Atlas.ti* (Muhr, 2004) qualitative analysis software and analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Parallel to Massey et al.'s (2008) framework, teacher utterances were first coded as either questions or nonquestions. Nonquestions, partial utterances (i.e., those abandoned by the teacher herself or interrupted by someone else), and questions unrelated to the read-aloud task were not considered for further analysis. Management questions, due to their non-book-related nature, were also excluded from further analysis. Remaining teacher questions were then analyzed for function (i.e., purpose). While some existing frameworks (e.g., Blank et al., 1978; Massey et al., 2008; Pentimonti & Justice, 2010) informed our coding of question functions, the data suggested additional functions that were not represented in these existing frameworks. In these cases, we used a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to code the data and create new categories of question functions. As such, our procedure was both deductive and inductive. Four broad categories of questions emerged from this level of analysis, each representing specific functions: *Draw a Conclusion*, *Make a Personal Connection*, *Recall*, and *Focus on Words* (see Table 1 for an overview of the coding scheme, organized by broad category and including definitions and examples of each).

After coding for question function, teacher questions were further coded for form (i.e., open-ended, closed; known-answer, unknown-answer). Table 2 presents definitions and examples for each form category.

Questions were then coded as more or less cognitively challenging based on the form and the perceptual language distance (i.e., level of abstraction; Blank et al., 1978) inherent in each question. *Perceptual language distance* was defined as the distance between the material and the language as it widened. For example, a more contextualized question (e.g., *What are the names of those animals?* while pointing to a picture of two animals on a trip to the zoo) places fewer demands on children to abstract the information from the material that was available to them. In contrast, a less contextualized question (e.g., *What is the same about both of them?* referring to the same animals from the previous example) requires greater abstraction (Blank et al., 1978). Less cognitively challenging questions were those requiring direct identification or recall of directly presented information. More cognitively challenging questions required moving beyond that which had been directly stated or was available in the immediate context.

The second and third authors engaged in the iterative process of code generation, assessment of goodness-of-fit between the codes and the data, and code revision, until codes were adequate to describe the nature of teachers' questions within and across Spanish and English

TABLE 1
Coding Scheme (Organized by Broad Category) for Function of Teacher Questions

<i>Specific Function</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Draw a Conclusion		
Make an Inference	Asking a child a question where the answer is not based on explicit evidence from the text or discussion but where children have to use indirect premises (from the text or discussion) to answer the question.	What do you think she has to do to make the cake bigger?
Make a Prediction	Make an inference about the future.	So what do you think she's going to do? What is going to happen next?
Analyze Character's Feelings	Having children identify or describe a character's feelings and/or emotional experiences as they pertain to the text.	¿Cómo piensan que se sentía Leo? ("How do you think Leo felt?")
Expand on a Previous Statement	Asking a child to provide more information regarding their prior response.	Paola, what makes you think that?
Make a Personal Connection		
Justify a Personal Preference	Asking a child to provide more information regarding their prior response; students drew on their personal opinions/preferences to respond.	[After a child stated that her favorite fruit was strawberry] Why do you like strawberry?
Make a Text-to-Life Connection	Specifically asking the child to make a connection with the text by bridging the current topic to a child's life experience.	[While reading a book about fruits and vegetables] Do we get fruit and vegetable/s in our lunch?
Assume a Role	Specifically asking the child to make a connection with the text by taking on a role of a character or putting herself in a hypothetical situation.	How would you do it if you were the mom and you came to the house and you found painting all over the place?
Formulate an Opinion	Provide a preference-based response in reaction to the text.	What's your favorite part of the story?
Recall		
Direct Identification of Information	Asking about information that has been made explicit via text or in past discussion.	[In reference to a book that had been read recently] Who wrote this story?
Indicate Cause/Effect	Asking for either the cause or effect of a completed set of events where both the cause and effect have been made explicit via text or in past discussion.	¿Por qué los monos querían llevárselas (las gorras)? ("Why did the monkeys want to take the caps?")
Focus on Words		
Provide a Type	Give examples of a referent for a particular category of a given idea or concept.	¿Qué más podemos ver en esta clase que tiene un rectángulo? ("What else can we see in this class that has a rectangle/is in the shape of a rectangle?")
Discuss Vocabulary	Provide a definition for a word encountered in the text.	¿Qué es una audición? ("What is an audition?")
Label/Locate	Identify and/or find the name of print, an object, a characteristic, place, or activity.	¿Qué es esto? [pointing to a kangaroo in the illustration on the cover of the book] ("What is this?")
Translate	Restate in one language what had just been said in another language.	¿Cómo dirías Froggy went to school en español? ("How would you say Froggy went to school in Spanish?")

TABLE 2
Coding Scheme for Form of Teacher Questions

Form	Definition	Example
Open-Ended	Answer is not limited to a dichotomous response (yes/no) or a supplied range of answers.	¿Cómo se puede llamar la historia? ("What could the story be called?")
Closed	Answer is limited to a dichotomous response (yes/no) or may include one of a supplied range of answers.	Could that be a cucumber?
Known-Answer	Associated with a range of specific responses of which the teacher already has some knowledge.	[When the answer had already been made clear in the reading] ¿Porqué estaba enojado el vendedor? ("Why was the salesman upset?")
Unknown-Answer	Associated with responses that the teacher does not have prior knowledge of and/or cannot anticipate.	What makes you think that?

read-aloud activities at each level of analysis. To increase the credibility and consistent identification and assignment of the resulting codes, the first author acted as critical friend (Schuck & Russell, 2005), challenging the codes, descriptions, and examples; asking for clarification; and offering alternative interpretations of the data. This procedure yielded 94% agreement between the two coders. Agreement data were obtained by using the following formula: (number of agreements/[number of agreements + disagreements]) x 100 (Girolametto, Hoaken, Weitzman, & Van Lieshout, 2000). Coding disagreements were resolved through discussion among the three authors.

For the final step in our analysis, we compared the frequency of each function across the two language contexts (Spanish, English) using a chi-square test for independence to determine if a particular function was represented significantly more in one of the two language contexts. Because we analyzed teachers' questions from two classrooms, we tested for significant differences of prevalence of each question function between classrooms, and the results of a *t*-test supported our decision to collapse these questions by language (Spanish, English). In addition, since there were an unequal number of English read alouds and Spanish read alouds collected across the two focal classrooms, it was necessary to match them on a given variable. To do so, we chose time, and we included all five English read alouds and subsequently selected five Spanish read alouds that totaled approximately the same amount of time as the English read alouds to ensure that the results were not confounded with time (i.e., duration) of read aloud. Our two grouping variables for the chi-square test were question *function* and *language* of read aloud.

FINDINGS

The interactive nature of both Spanish and English read alouds permitted teachers to ask a variety of questions, exhibiting a multitude of functions (i.e., teacher's purpose for asking a question) and types (i.e., levels of cognitive challenge). Our analysis further revealed that most question functions represented different levels of cognitive challenge; that is, question function did not

automatically determine the level of cognitive challenge inherent in all questions associated by function. Finally, some question functions were found to be more prevalent in one language context, and thus inequitably distributed across English and Spanish read-aloud activities.

Functions of Teachers' Questions in Spanish and English Read Alouds

Draw a Conclusion

Almost half of teacher questions (88/189, 46.6%) required students to draw on a variety of sources, including their personal experiences and experiences with literature in general (and specifically with print), to make connections. Functions in this broad category included *Make an Inference*, *Analyze a Character's Feelings*, *Make a Prediction*, and *Expand on a Previous Statement*.

Make an inference. Inference-based questions were defined as those not based on explicit evidence from the text or discussion but where children had to use indirect premises from the text or the text-based discussion to produce an answer. For example, while reading the book *Froggy se viste* (London, 1997 [*Froggy Gets Dressed*]), a recursive story about a personified frog who attempts several times to dress himself appropriately to go play outdoors in the snow, the teacher asked: *¿Qué pasa si uno va así a la nieve?* ("What happens if you go out in the snow like that?"). At that point in the story, the main character had put on a few articles of clothing but was still significantly underdressed for the frigid temperature outside. Because the answer to this question was not immediately available and had not been explicitly discussed, the children had to draw on their own experiences and existing knowledge to respond.

Another example comes from the reading of *Sally the Pastry Chef* (2009), an unpublished book written by one of the teachers. In the story, the main character bakes several cakes for a princess, none of which is quite right in size. Early in the story, Sally makes a cake that is too small. The teacher posed the question, *What do you think she has to do for the cake to be bigger?*, inviting children to infer what Sally must do differently to get the desired results.

Make a prediction. Prediction was found to be a special case of inference that specifically applied to events or actions that had not yet happened. These questions require students to use knowledge that they have gained from the events in the book that have already taken place and then to apply that knowledge to consider what is likely to occur at some point in the future, given the current circumstances (e.g., "So what do you think she's going to do?"; *¿Qué creen que va a pasar?* ["What do you think is going to happen?"]).

Analyze a character's feelings. Some questions required students to identify or describe a character's feelings and/or emotional experience as they pertained to the text. Like the previous two functions, these questions required students to draw on personal experiences, including their experiences with literature, to participate in the interaction. However, responses to these questions were not geared toward the future and focused specifically on a character's emotional state. Questions that asked students to analyze a character's feelings drew on their ability to use both the focal text and other resources (e.g., books previously read, a time when they had experienced a similar situation, a story in which a friend or relative had experienced comparable circumstances). Some examples include: *¿Cómo creen que se sintió Froggy?* ("How do you think

Froggy felt?”); ¿Cómo piensan que se sentía Leo? (“How do you think Leo felt?”); Do you think she was surprised?

Expand on a previous statement. Teachers sometimes asked children to provide more information regarding a prior response and/or to explain their thinking process. In response to these questions, children made explicit what knowledge they used to generate their previous contribution. Examples of questions representing this function are: ¿Porqué [crees eso]? (“Why do you think that?”); and what makes you think that?

Make a Personal Connection

Questions that required students to purposefully tap into their personal experiences were categorized as *Make a Personal Connection*. This function characterized 11.1% (21/189) of all documented questions. This broad category represented four specific functions: *Justify a Personal Preference*, *Assume a Role*, *Make a Text-to-Life Connection*, and *Formulate an Opinion*.

Justify a personal preference. This question function was defined similarly to *Expand on a Previous Statement* in the previous broad category of *Draw a Conclusion*. However, this particular function differs in that teachers sometimes asked questions that prompted students to rely strictly on their personal reasons for choosing their answer. For example, these questions asked children to explain their stated opinions/preferences (e.g., *Why do you like this part?*; *Why is that your favorite part?*).

Make a text-to-life connection. Questions that asked students to make a text-to-life connection required children to make a connection with the text by bridging a story-related topic to a child’s life experience. The focus of these questions was the child’s experience, not the text at hand. With these questions, teachers asked students to think of their own situations and experiences in relation to those portrayed in the text (e.g., *What happened when you . . . ?*).

Assume a role. *Assume a Role* questions asked children to make a connection with the text by taking on a role of a character or putting themselves in a hypothetical situation. This function differed from *Make a Text-to-Life Connection* because it specifically asked the child to imagine he or she was in a particular situation in order to be able to provide an answer. Examples include: *What would you do if you are the mom and you come to the house and you find painting all over the place?*, and *What advice would you give me so I can have friends again?*

Formulate an opinion. Other questions asked children to provide a preference-based response in reaction to the text. Children’s answers were based strictly on personal choice, as shown in the following examples: *What did you think about the story?*; *What’s your favorite part of the story?*; and *What did you like about the story?*

Recall

This broad category included questions whose answers had been directly presented previously, usually during the read aloud, and represented 15.9% (30/189) of all teacher questions. Specific functions in this category included *Indicate a Cause or an Effect* and *Direct Identification of Information*.

Indicate a cause or an effect. This question function was defined as requesting either the cause or the effect of a completed set of events in which both the cause and the effect had been made explicit via the text or in a past discussion. All instances of this function were documented during the same read aloud in which the teacher played a recording of *Se venden gorras* ([*Caps for Sale*]; Slobodkina, 1995) while holding up the book and interjecting questions throughout. For example, after it had been revealed that the monkeys had stolen the vendor's caps, making him irritated as evidenced both by his speech and his physical manner, the teacher asked what it was that made the vendor upset (*¿Porqué estaba enojado el señor?* ["Why was the man upset?"]). The students were required to refer to previous events from the story that had been explicitly addressed in order to answer the teacher's question. Other examples included: *¿Qué pasó cuando durmió?* ("What happened when he fell asleep?") and *¿Por qué los monos se robaron las gorras?* ("Why did the monkeys steal the hats?").

Direct identification of information. Some questions required that students provide information (not the cause or effect) that had been made explicit via the text or in a related discussion. For example, the answers to all of the following questions had been related at a previous point during each read aloud.

- *¿Cómo se llama la abuela* (referring to a character in the story)? ("What is the grandmother's name?")
- *¿Qué pasó en la historia?* ("What happened in the story?")
- *¿Qué más le dijeron a ella?* ("What else did they say to her?")

Focus on Words

Just over a quarter of all questions (50/189, 26.4%) focused on the nature of words. More specifically, these questions required children to *Provide a Type*, *Discuss Vocabulary*, *Label/Locate*, or *Translate*.

Provide a type. Teachers asked children to provide examples of a referent for a particular category of a given idea or concept. As such, these questions asked students to provide an example within a category. For instance, teachers asked students about the types of parties they liked, the types of shapes they noticed around the room, and the types of fruit and vegetables they liked to eat.

Discuss vocabulary. At other times, teachers asked children to discuss vocabulary. In these instances, children were expected to provide a definition for a word that emerged from the story being read (e.g., *¿Qué es una cotorra?* ["What is a parrot?"]).

Label/locate. When asked to label/locate, children needed to identify and/or find the name of a letter, an object, a characteristic, a place, or an activity. Examples include: *What fruit is this* [pointing to a pear]?, *What were they playing here?*, and *What is this part of the book* [pointing to the front cover]?

Translate. Teachers also asked questions that required students to restate in one language what had just been said in another language. These questions only appeared when students were producing answers or otherwise engaging in the book-related discussion in the nontarget language

(i.e., not the language of instruction for that particular read aloud). To encourage children to use the target language, teachers asked children to repeat their contributions in the instructional language (e.g., *¿Cómo dirías Froggy went to school en español?* ["How would you say *Froggy went to school* in Spanish?"]).

Level of Cognitive Challenge Represented in Functions

Our analysis of question difficulty revealed that most functions represented different levels of cognitive challenge. However, what distinguished questions as more or less cognitively challenging differed by specific function (i.e., *Make an Inference*, *Indicate a Cause or an Effect*, *Make a Text-to-Life Connection*, *Translate*, etc.). Within each function, question form (i.e., open-ended, closed; known-, unknown-answer) and perceptual language distance (i.e., level of abstraction) determined the level of cognitive challenge of a question (type). Some function categories were associated with questions that represented the same form or the same inherent perceptual language distance. In these cases, it was either the form or the perceptual language distance that determined the level of cognitive challenge of a particular question within a specific function.

Functions Comprised of Questions with Different Forms and Perceptual Language Distances

It was both question form (open-ended/closed) and perceptual language distance that determined the level of cognitive challenge of an inference question. Of all questions that required children to *Make an Inference*, the majority were known-answer questions; inference questions that were open-ended were more cognitively challenging, and inference questions that were closed were less cognitively challenging. For example, the question *Do you think it is nice to treat somebody bad[ly] because he's from a different place?* represents a closed, known-answer inference question (less cognitively challenging). Because of the dichotomous response nature of this question (e.g., yes/no), the perceptual language distance is less than had the question been open-ended and encouraged the child to think more abstractly. Although the topic itself may require children to do some thinking about their developing ethics, the actual answer to the question is still less cognitively challenging.

Question form varied more for the function *Analyze a Character's Feelings*. Within this function, unknown-answer questions were closed questions and less cognitively challenging. Questions that were open-ended were more cognitively challenging, even though they were all known-answer questions, as in *¿Cómo piensan que se sentía Leo?* ("How do you think Leo felt?").

In the categories *Expand on a Previous Statement* and *Justify a Personal Preference*, open-ended, known-answer questions were more cognitively challenging, while open-ended, unknown-answer questions were less cognitively challenging. However, some function subcategories of the broader category *Make a Personal Connection* were less cognitively challenging due to a lesser perceptual language distance (e.g., *Why do you like this part?*) in comparison to questions that were a part of the broader function category *Draw a Conclusion* and required students to draw on their knowledge of story elements and/or personal experiences to make connections (e.g., *What makes you think that?*).

Make a Text-to-Life Connection showcased a range of more and less cognitively challenging questions. The only open-ended, unknown-answer question of this function that was documented proved to be less cognitively challenging, whereas the remainder of the questions—a mix of closed, known-answer and open-ended, known-answer questions—were more cognitively challenging.

Functions Comprised of Questions with the Same Form and Different Perceptual Language Distances

All questions categorized as *Direct Identification of Information* had the same form: open-ended, known-answer. Therefore, the perceptual language distance distinguished the level of challenge in this case. Questions that required one- or two-word factually-based comprehension responses, such as *¿Cómo se llama la abuela?* (“What was the grandmother’s name?”) were less cognitively challenging, whereas questions that required an application of more abstract thinking, including sequence of events, cause/effect, knowledge of ordinal/cardinal numbers (e.g., *Who is going first?* while pointing to an illustration of several characters on a slide) were more cognitively challenging. Similarly, all of the questions categorized as *Provide a Type* were open-ended, known-answer questions, but the perceptual language distance varied. For example, the question *¿Qué tipos de fiestas te gustan?* (“What kind of parties do you like?”) asks students to identify the class of parties that they prefer, whereas *¿Qué cosas podemos encontrar que figura de un rectángulo?* (“What things can we find that are rectangularly shaped?”) asks students to find objects in the classroom that are in the shape of a rectangle. Because there are more steps involved in answering the second question, such as understanding what a rectangle is, finding an object that is shaped like a rectangle, and finally naming the object, there is a greater perceptual language distance, and it is, therefore, a more cognitively challenging question.

Functions Comprised of Questions with Different Forms and the Same Perceptual Language Distance

Because the perceptual language distance was the same for questions classified as serving the function of *Discuss Vocabulary*, it was question form that ultimately determined the level of cognitive challenge. Closed, unknown-answer questions were less cognitively challenging, while open-ended, known-answer questions were more cognitively challenging. Thus, questions that began with *Who knows . . .* or *Do you know . . .* were generally less cognitively challenging, while questions that explicitly asked for a definition (e.g., *¿Qué es una cotorra?* [“What is a parrot?”]) were more cognitively challenging since the student had to provide a definition, example, or set of characteristic traits instead of simply responding whether he did or did not know the answer.

Functions Comprised of Questions with the Same Form and Perceptual Language Distance

Questions classified as *Indicate a Cause or an Effect* and *Translate* all exhibited the same form (open-ended, known-answer) and the same perceptual language distance; therefore, they were all of the same level of cognitive challenge. Similarly, questions that asked students to

Assume a Role and to *Formulate an Opinion* were also characterized by the same form (open-ended, unknown-answer) and same perceptual language distance and could not be classified as more or less cognitively challenging since there was nothing to which they could be compared in our sample.

In summary, within each specific function, it was often possible to distinguish two types of questions: more cognitively challenging and less cognitively challenging. The process of categorizing questions as such was determined by question form (open-ended, closed; known, unknown) and perceptual language distance inherent in each question. Because each specific function represented different forms and different perceptual language distances, it was difficult to determine more generally (i.e., at the level of our broad categories) what broad function categories constituted more and less cognitively challenging questions.

Distribution of Functions Across Language Contexts

We tested the relationship between broad function categories (i.e., *Draw a Conclusion*, *Make a Personal Connection*, *Recall*, *Focus on Words*) and language context (Spanish, English) to determine their influence on one another. A chi-square test for independence showed a significant relationship between question type and language: $\chi^2(3, n = 163) = 30.329, p < .001$. It was therefore determined that a question's function depended on the language context (i.e., certain functions were more prevalent in one language context). Specifically, teachers asked more inference-based, *Draw a Conclusion* questions during Spanish read alouds than expected and fewer than expected during English read alouds. That is, teachers provided more opportunities during Spanish read alouds for students to infer, analyze a character's feelings, make a prediction, or expand on a previous statement. More experience-based, *Make a Personal Connection* questions than expected were documented in English while the opposite was true in Spanish, indicating that students had more opportunities in English to purposefully tap into their personal experiences by responding to questions that encouraged them to make connections between their own lives and the text, consider a character's experience or point of view, and formulate and justify opinions in reaction to the text. *Recall*, or factual, questions were more prevalent than expected in Spanish and less prevalent than expected in English, thereby showing that as well as providing more opportunities to draw conclusions in Spanish, teachers asked more questions in Spanish whose answers had been directly presented previously, usually during the read aloud. Finally, word-focused questions occurred more often than expected in English and less often than expected in Spanish, demonstrating greater emphasis on the nature and meaning of English-language words.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the function, type, and distribution of teachers' questions across Spanish- and English-medium read-aloud activities in a DL preschool in order to better understand how teachers use questions to support students' meaning-making and emergent bilingual development. The study was guided by the assumption that systematic and equitable *exposure* to both languages does not suffice in helping children become bilingual and biliterate; in addition, authentic *opportunities to use developing linguistic skills* in both languages for multiple purposes with the guidance of more proficient language models (e.g.,

teachers) are necessary (Swain, 1985). By looking at DL teachers' questions across Spanish and English instructional contexts and their potential for providing opportunities for students to use their developing linguistic skills in each language, the current findings add a uniquely biliterate component to the literature. Specifically, our findings provide a window into the characteristics of different types of questions used by DL preschool teachers during Spanish- and English-medium read-aloud activities, how teachers attempt to engage children in different ways of thinking about books across language contexts by using different types of questions, and how teachers use similar types of questions across two instructional language contexts.

Previous research has highlighted the more abstract nature of certain teacher question functions over others (e.g., *Making an Inference* is more abstract than *Directly Identifying Information* [Van Kleeck et al., 2006]). Typically researchers have looked across functions, assuming that all questions represented within that function were all either more or less cognitively challenging. We, however, found that some questions *within* each function were either more or less cognitively challenging, depending on the question's form and/or perceptual language distance. Therefore, we argue that one cannot simply look across question functions to determine the level of cognitive challenge; it is important to look *within* those functions.

Further, we found that DL teachers used different types of questions during both English and Spanish read alouds and, thus, used questions as a tool for developing young, emergent bilinguals' linguistic and academic skills in both languages, allowing them to scaffold students' learning and assess their knowledge, while simultaneously modeling and supporting the development of conversational discourse (Kintsch, 2005). Across Spanish- and English-medium read alouds, teachers asked questions that engaged students in drawing conclusions, making personal connections, recalling information, and focusing on word meanings, all with varying degrees of cognitive challenge. By asking a variety of questions types, students were presented with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) and afforded opportunities to apply their developing dual-language repertoire (Swain, 1985). They were both exposed to and engaged in responding to different types of questions in each language with support from their teachers.

However, results from our quantitative analysis show that the prevalence of question functions depended on the language of instruction. Teachers asked more questions that required students to recall information in Spanish-medium read alouds. Unfortunately, these were questions that did not facilitate extended conversation. Because recall questions always required students to provide a known-answer response, they did not support a reciprocal interaction model of teaching (Cummins, 1986, 2000) or go beyond the traditional teacher–student triadic discourse pattern (Lemke, 1990; Mehan, 1979) of [teacher] question – [student] response – [teacher] evaluation. As such, students did not appear to be experiencing equitable opportunities to engage in extended book-related dialogue in both Spanish and English through read-aloud activities.

In contrast, teachers asked significantly more questions that required students to make a personal connection in English read alouds, thus asking students to do more than merely recall an event from a story by encouraging them to relate story elements to their own experiences. These questions prompted students to make connections with and compare what they were reading to their life experiences, interactions with text, and experiences with the world. Many of these questions had the potential to generate extended conversation due to the nature of the connections being made, as is often the case with more cognitively challenging questions (De Rivera et al., 2005). Through opportunities to engage in extended dialogue in English, students were being prepared for the more complex English-language demands of kindergarten. However, this practice was considerably less prevalent in Spanish read-aloud activities, suggesting that students'

developing Spanish language and literacy development was not being supported equitably. This lack of opportunity to engage in similar extended dialogue in Spanish might hinder students' ability to realize their linguistic potential across both languages.

Limitations

Several limitations of the study should be considered. First, we combined teachers' questions due to lack of significant differences in distribution of questions asked within the individual classrooms. Looking at teachers individually would allow us to see each teacher's use of questioning, which might reveal significant differences in distribution of question functions by teacher. Certain question functions might have only been utilized by one teacher and, thus do not represent a pattern across all teachers in both languages.

Second, we had to strategically select Spanish-medium read alouds to match the smaller number of English-medium read alouds in the quantitative analysis, therefore excluding three Spanish read-aloud activities. Including these sessions might have altered the quantitative findings, revealing a significantly greater distribution of certain question functions in Spanish read alouds.

Finally, we did not analyze for the role of the book to see if certain types of books lent themselves to asking questions with a particular function or level of cognitive challenge, as was the case in Zucker et al. (2010). This information might have aided us in understanding why teachers (a) asked particular questions and (b) asked them with the distribution that we found.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study provide insight into young learners' access to and engagement with book-related conversations in each language in support of bilingual development. However, new questions emerge that future research might address. Firstly, it may be that the differences found in the prevalence of broad functions were related to the type of book that was read. Thus, subsequent research might look at whether and how teacher questions in early childhood DL classrooms differ based on book genre (e.g., fiction, informational). Secondly, research has found that questioning styles vary by teacher (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Hammett Price, Bradley, & Smith, 2012; Martínez & Teale, 1993; Moschovaki & Meadows, 2005a, 2005b; Torr & Clugston, 1999). Future studies might investigate whether individual DL teachers ask different types of questions and utilize them uniquely, thereby providing differentiated opportunities for students to engage in thinking that reflects various levels of cognitive challenge. Finally, future research might examine the ways in which teachers respond to students' contributions in the context of shared reading activities, with a focus on question/response/follow-up question patterns. Such investigations would provide additional insight into the ways that DL preschool teachers respond to the specialized language and literacy needs of young emergent bilingual children.

Implications for Educational Practice

Theories of bilingual development that undergird dual-language programs (e.g., Common Underlying Proficiency Model [Cummins, 1986, 2000]; Continua of Biliteracy [Hornberger,

2003]) point to engaging students in genuine dialogue in a variety of authentic situations in both languages as critical for bilingual development. Teachers should take note of the questions they pose in each language, asking themselves if they are allowing students to engage in relevant, authentic, and extended conversation or merely testing them on information that has been presented. It may be that teachers are not yet comfortable asking questions that elicit extended conversation (Zucker et al., 2010) and, thus, may need more training on how to use a variety of questions as a way of engaging students in meaningful, extended conversation, or on the differences between more and less cognitively challenging questions.

Beyond being cognizant of the types of questions asked, teachers must be aware of both (a) the question's function and (b) the individual question's form and perceptual language distance when attempting to engage emergent bilingual children in book-related conversation. As our findings suggest, it is not enough to ask a question that requires a student to make an inference since, within this particular function, a question may be either more or less cognitively challenging, and more cognitively challenging questions tend to elicit more conversation. However, more cognitively challenging questions may also require more teacher scaffolding. Second-language acquisition instructional strategies, such as slowing the rate of speech, using realia and other visuals, paraphrasing, and adjusting vocabulary while asking questions, are but a few ways that DL teachers can provide emergent bilinguals with more access to extended conversations in both target languages. Additionally, teachers should purposefully preview the book(s) they intend to read aloud and consider questions that will likely foster extended conversation, allowing them to enact a reciprocal interaction model of teaching in support of emergent bilingual children's developing dual-language and literacy skills.

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