

Shaping Early Bilingualism through Conversational Practices at home

Dr. Yvonne Tse Crepaldi

*Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Linguistics,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences, XJTLU*

MOTHER TONGUE LANGUAGE SYMPOSIUM, SINGAPORE, 1 AUG 2026



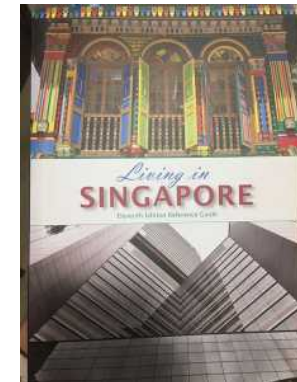
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About me



- Yvonne Tse Crepaldi, Assistant Professor in **Applied Linguistics** at XJTLU
- **Shanghai & Hong Kong**; lived in the UK, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Canada, Singapore (16 years!), 8 languages
- Authored a book chapter in *Living in Singapore* (11th & 12th ed.)
- **PhD, Nanyang Technological University (NTU)**
- Researcher & Lecturer at NTU, NIE, UofAlberta.
- Research:
 - **Multilingualism: parent-child interaction, heritage language**
 - Healthcare communication
 - using Conversation Analysis and Ethnography
- Recipient of **Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism (LK YFB)** to launch a science communication project '**Raising Bilingual Babies in Talk (RaBBiT)**'



Today's talk

- Focuses on **EARLY Bilingualism**, meaning for babies and toddlers about 3 years old or younger, who have been exposed to two languages or more
- Target audience: parents, caregivers and educators
- This session aims to help:
 - explore your **language ideology**
 - become more aware of your **conversational practices**

Why do we talk about language ideology?

Thoughts influence actions and thus outcome

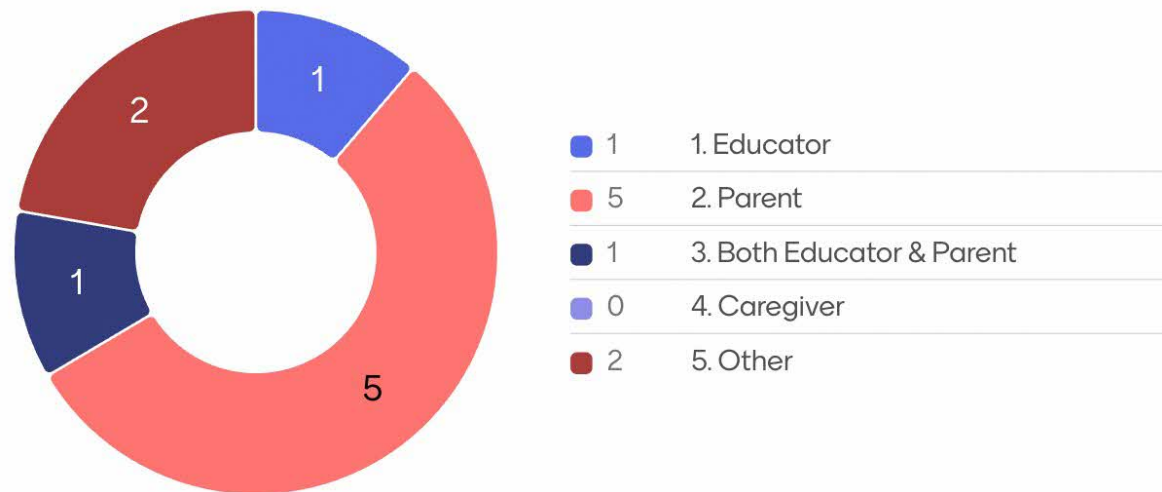
What's your language ideology?



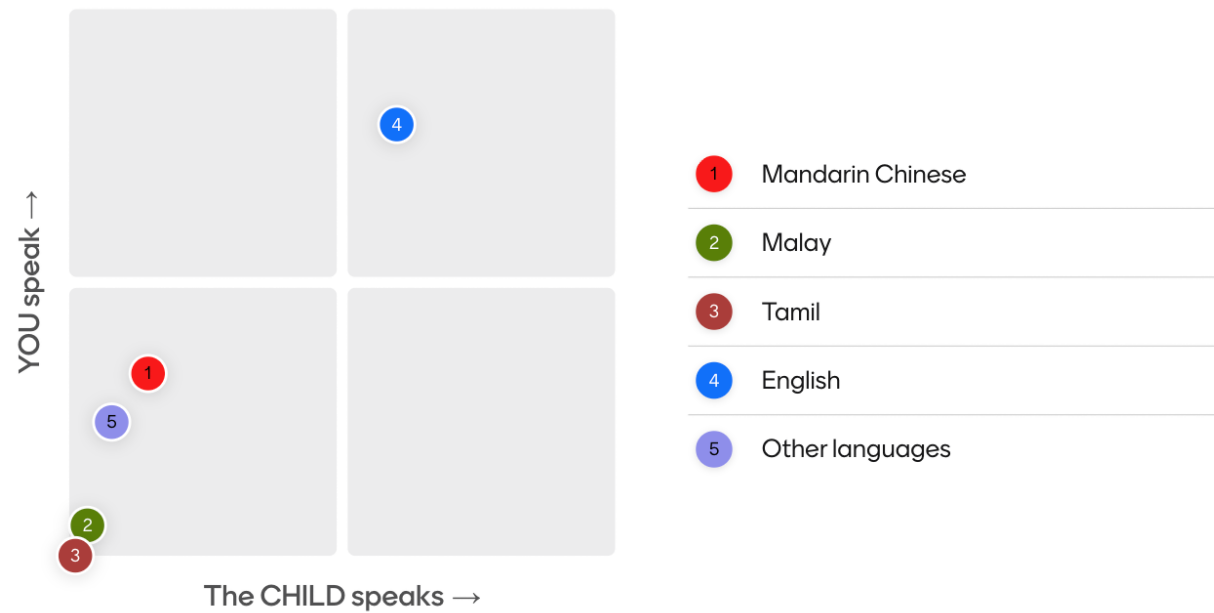
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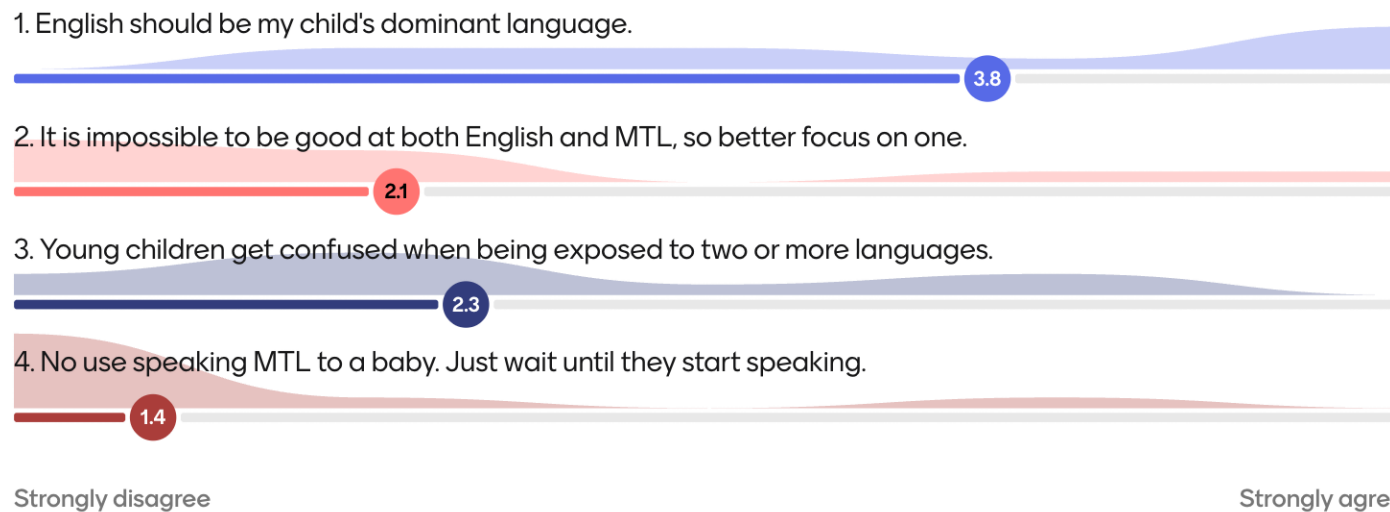
1. What is your role at MTLs?



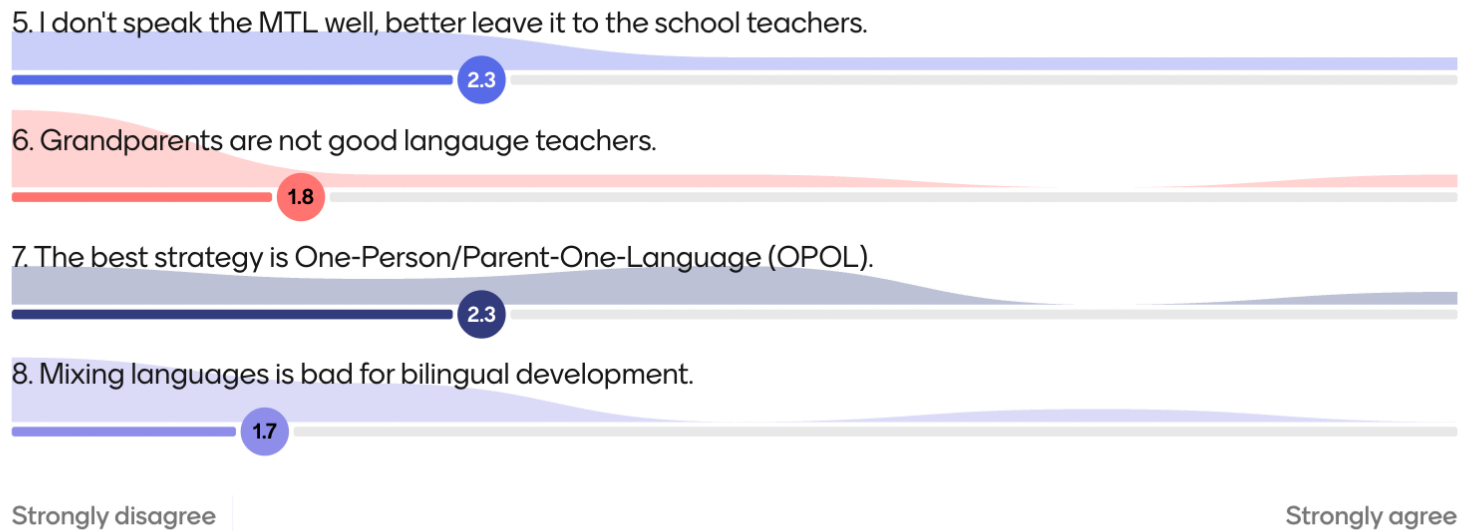
2. What languages do you and your child use?



Do you agree with these statements?



Do you agree with these statements?



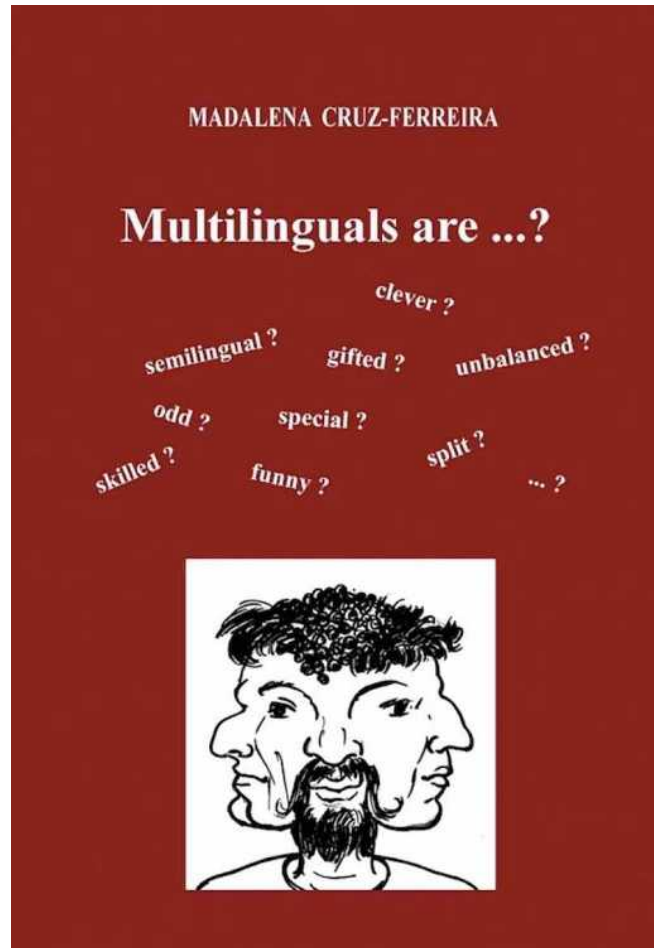
Some Beliefs are Myths



We must speak to children in only ONE language

Bilinguals must have balanced languages

Chinese is very hard



Young children get confused with 2-3 languages

Only school teachers can teach languages properly

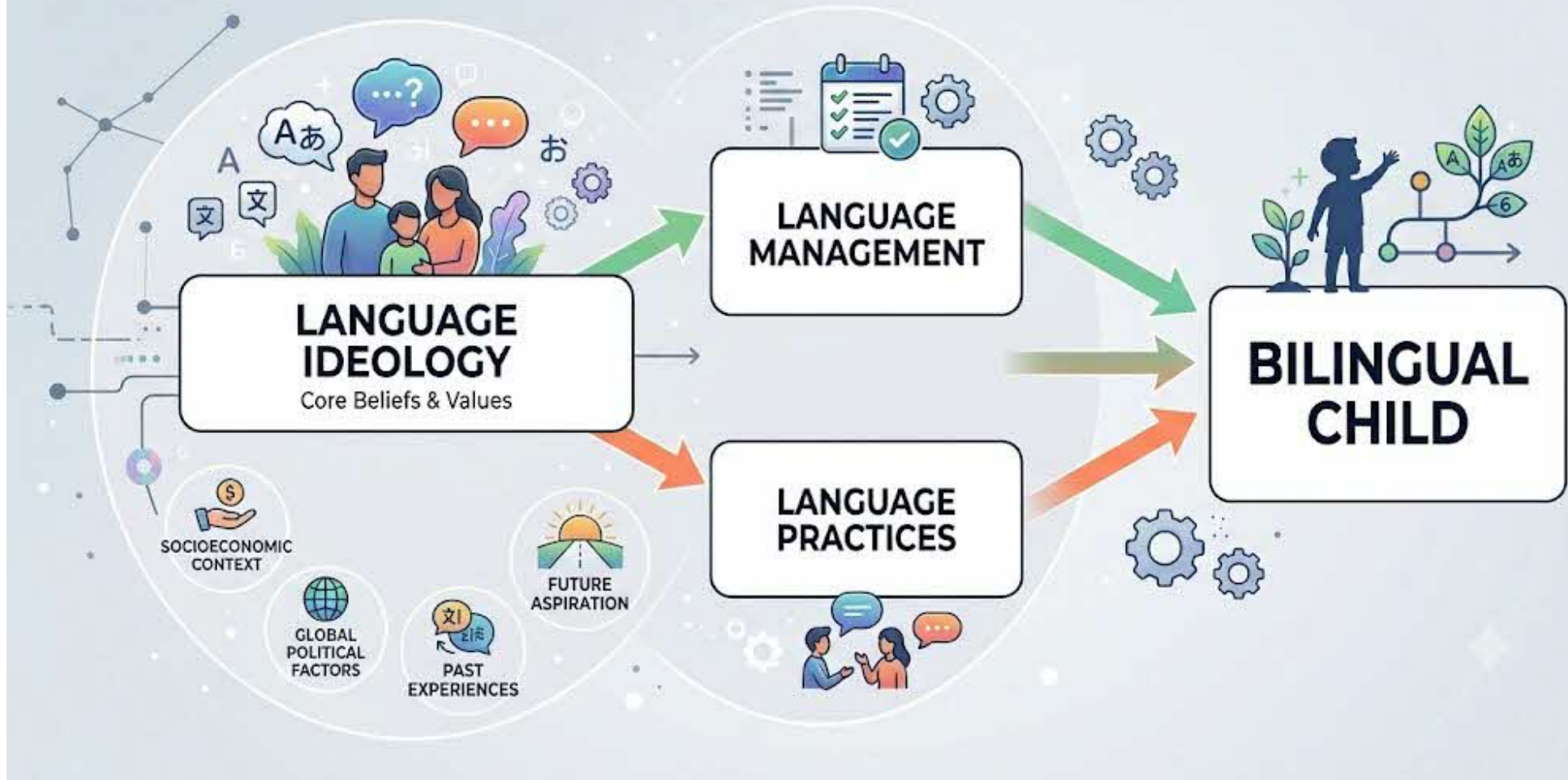
Bilinguals must have one dominant language

Family Language Policy

1. **Language ideology** – What do you think about languages, bilingualism and language development-related matters
2. **Language management** – How do you manage the child's language development? E.g. choice of school, activities, caregivers, media, etc.
3. **Language practices** – How does the daily interaction with the child look like?

(Spolsky 2004; King, Fogle & Logan-Terry, 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016)

HOW PARENTAL IDEOLOGY SHAPES MULTILINGUAL FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY





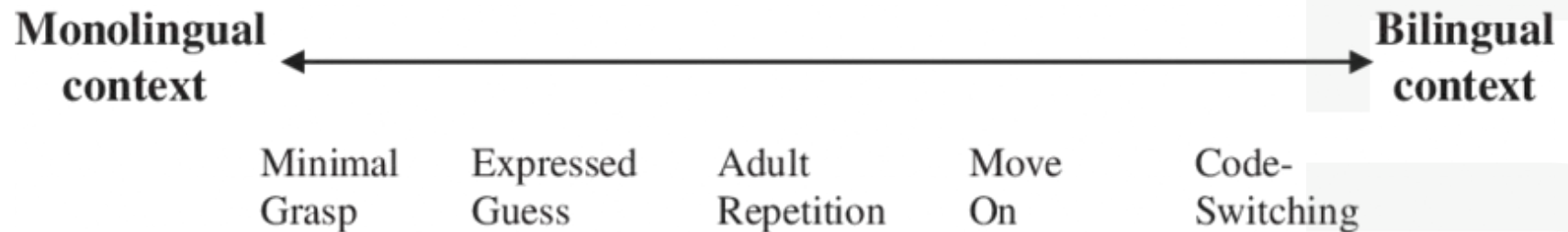
Conversational Practices



Parental Discourse Strategies with Bilingual Children



By Prof. Elizabeth Lanza (1997)



A public friendly explanation:

<https://multilingual-families.com/parental-discourse-strategies/>

Minimal Grasp

Parent: 宝贝, 要喝什么?
'Baby, what do you want to drink?'

Child: Apple juice Or

Parent: 什么? 没听懂 哼? 什么橘色?
'What? I didn't understand' 'Huh? What jui-se (orange)'

Expressed Guess

Parent: 宝贝, 要喝什么?
'Baby, what do you want to drink?'

Child: Apple juice

Parent: 是什么? 苹果汁吗?
'What is it? Apple juice?'

How is this strategy different from the previous Minimal Grasp?

In the long term, what do these two strategies achieve?

Adult Repetition

Parent: 宝贝, 要喝什么?
'Baby, what do you want to drink?'

Child: Apple juice

Parent: 啊. 你要苹果汁哈.
'Oh. you want apple juice.'

Move On

Parent: 宝贝, 要喝什么?
'Baby, what do you want to drink?'

Child: Apple juice

Parent: 好, 我来拿, 等一下哈.
'ok. I'll get it. Wait a while.'

How does this differ from the previous strategies?

This will develop into '**dual-lingual discourse**' and likely nurture **receptive bilinguals (or passive bilinguals)** - prevalent in Singapore

Adult code-switching

Parent: 宝贝, 要喝什么?
'Baby, what do you want to drink?'

Child: Apple juice

Parent: Okay... wait ah, mummy get for you.

Adults accommodate the child's language preference.

Can you think of any positive side of this strategy?

Exercise

Now, we'll watch a video, and I'll pause at the relevant examples for you to think about their efficacy and possible consequences.



Intentional use of
Mother Tongue at home

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiyiTTQIU04&source_ve_path=MTc4NDI0

Actions – ‘ORA’

1. Observe YOUR parent-child interactions
(record, if it helps)

2. Reflect

- Do you have any constraining ideology?
- How does your ideology (belief and expectation) compares with your actual practices?

3. Adjust your practices gradually

Be mindful of practices with negative emotions

- **Challenging / Forcing** the child to speak in MTL (inviting, reminding, quizzing are okay)
- **Blaming** the child for failing to say something in MTL
- **Shaming** the child in front of acquaintances for not speaking MTL
- **Complaining** about the difficulty of a language

Reflect on your own interacting with your child...

Questions?



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What about if my child is older?

- As children enter preschools, **peer influence** may shape their linguistic proficiency; in SG, children are likely to become **English-dominant**, or they may **mix more English** into their MTL speech. This is normal.
- Parents should keep **using MTL consistently**, or parents may **adjust** their expectations and practices
- Lanza's model may not be applicable for older preschoolers because **children** (even 2 y.o.) **are aware of others' language repertoires**
- Parents should maintain a **positive attitude towards** all languages and multilingualism
 - Inject more MTL **gradually**
 - Foster a conducive **ecology** at home and outside
- Maintain 'Harmonious Bilingualism' (De Houwer 2017; Sun 2023)

yvonne.tse@xjtlu.edu.cn



IG @bilingualrabbit

THANK YOU Q&A



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