

Bilingualism and language acquisition in early childhood: research and application

Virginia Yip (CUHK) and Stephen Matthews (HKU)
Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre



Department of Linguistics and Modern Language
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
香港中文大學語言學及現代語言學系



THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

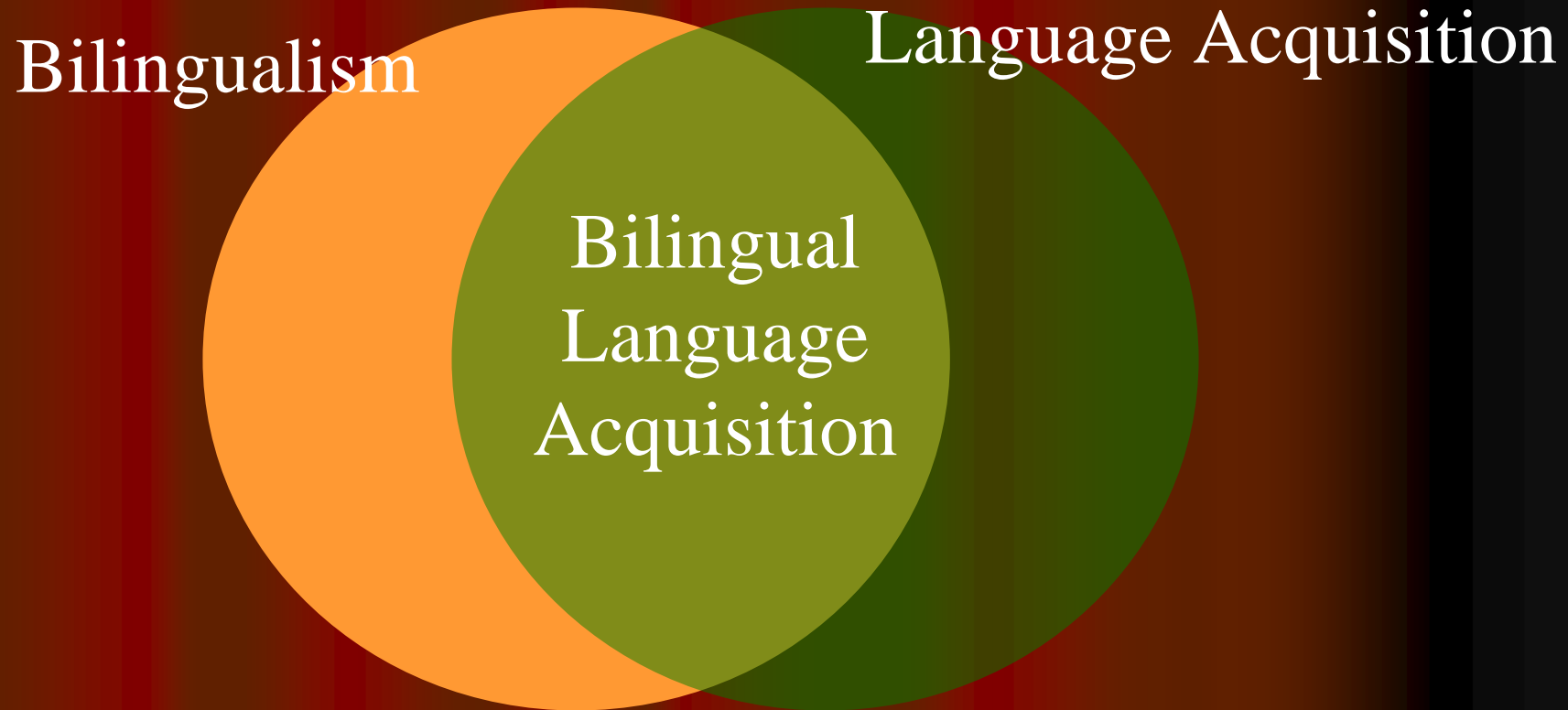
Outline

- Early bilingual acquisition as an emerging field standing at the intersection of the fields of bilingualism and language acquisition.
- Bilingual development in 2 groups of bilingual children in our longitudinal studies:
 - (a) one parent-one language families;
 - (b) one parent-two language families.
- Integration of research and application: need for education practices, parental strategies to be informed by current research



Workshop on

Bilingualism and Language Acquisition

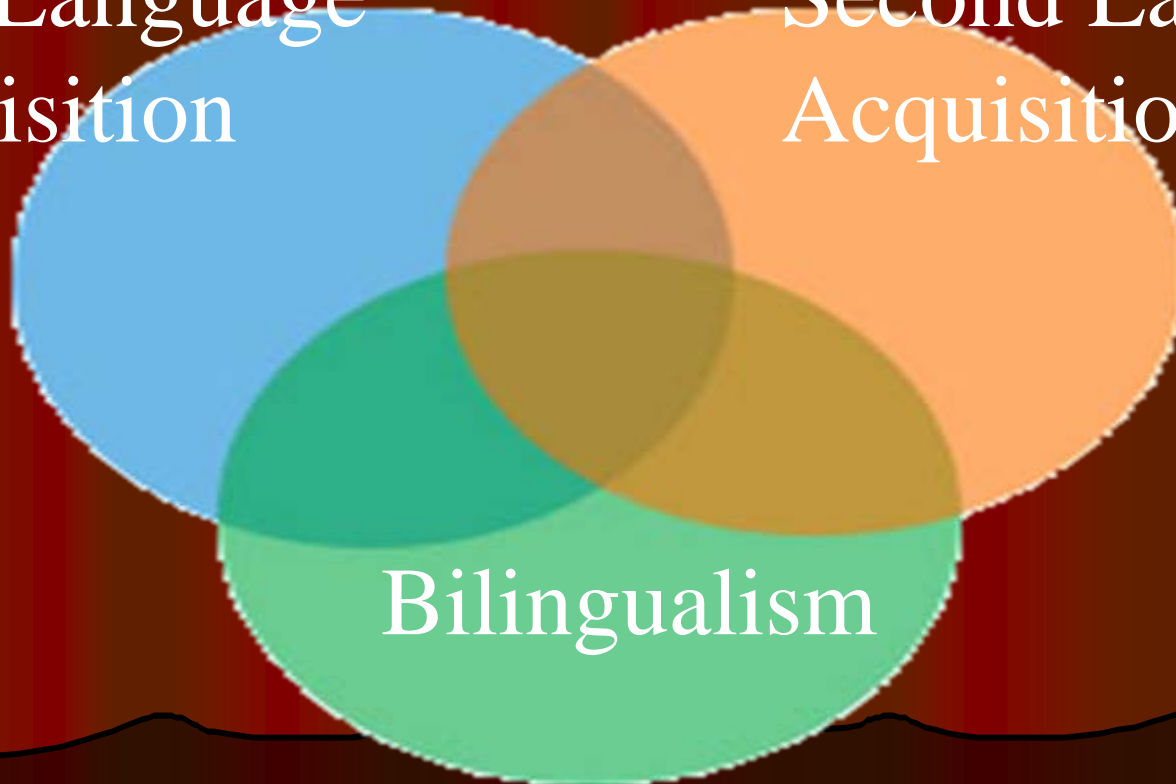


Language acquisition across monolingual and bilingual contexts

First Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition

Bilingualism



Different Language Policies



One Parent -
One Language

One Parent -
Two Languages



Children from one parent-one language families

- Currently 7 children in Hong Kong Bilingual Child Language Corpus from one parent-one language families.
- 6 children's longitudinal development in Cantonese and English has been analyzed and presented in our book *The Bilingual Child* (2007: Cambridge University Press)

7 bilingual children in CHILDES



Timmy



Sophie



Alicia



Kathryn



Llywelyn



Charlotte



Janet

Launch of new longitudinal corpora



Kasen 2;4 -4:0



Darren 2;0 -3:8

- Children from one parent-two language families with both parents speaking Cantonese as L1 and English as L2
- An increasingly common situation in Hong Kong

Children from one parent-two languages families

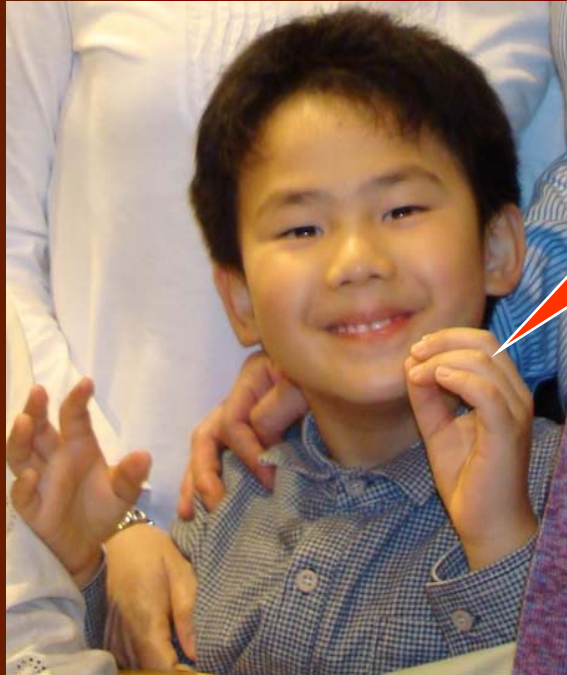
- Kasen: 2;04- 4;00 (20 English files and 20 Cantonese files)
- Darren: 1;07-3;11 (28 English files and 27 Cantonese files)
- Parents are native speakers of Cantonese who speak English as a second language.
- Children are addressed in both languages with varying degrees of code-mixing.

Different types of input conditions

- Both one parent-one language and one parent-two languages families provide support for development of early bilingualism
- With **consistent** and **frequent** exposure to dual input, children are able to develop bilingualism in the first few years of their life.



Kasen



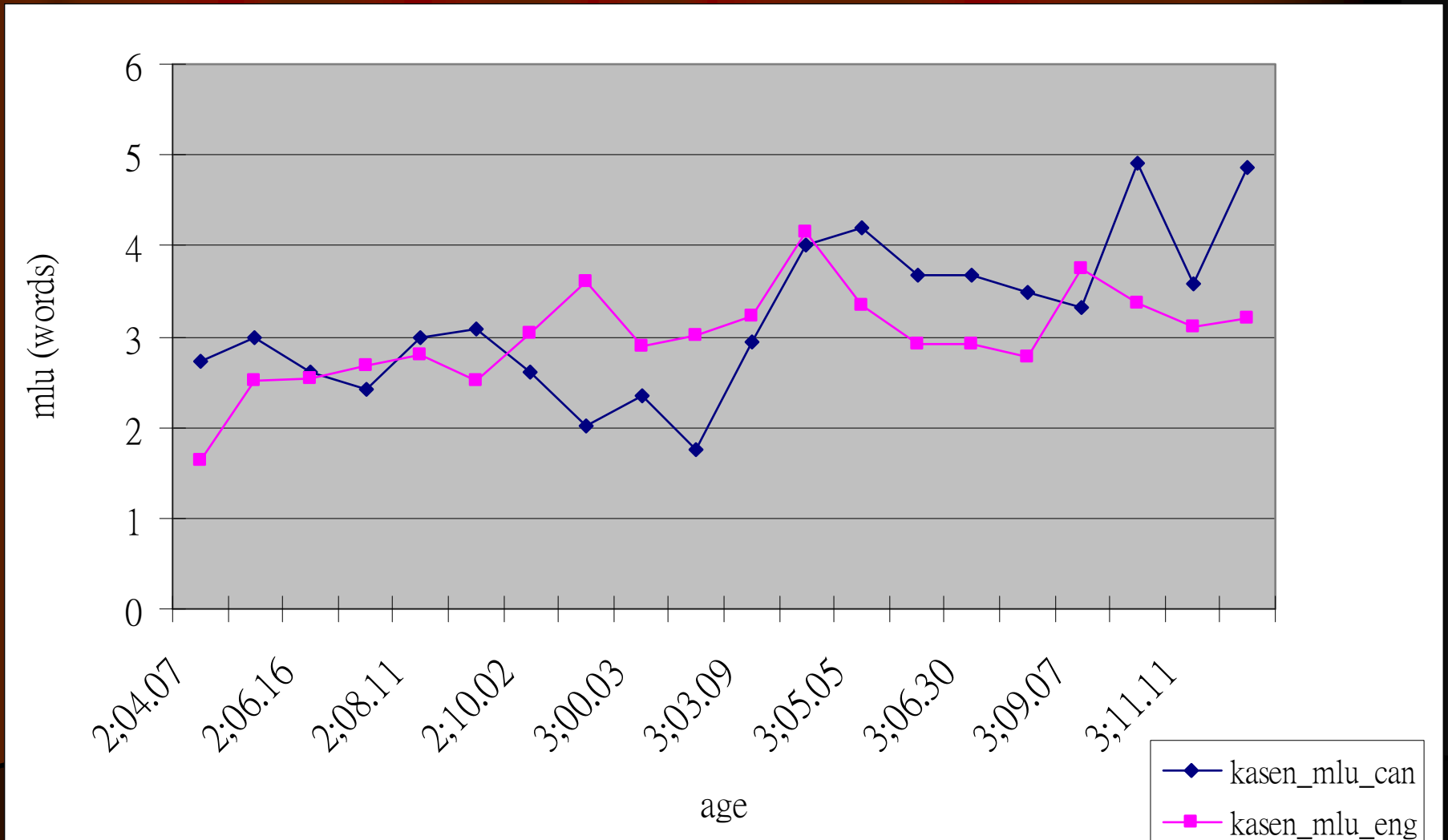
I speak English and
Cantonese. (2;11;05)

Video clip

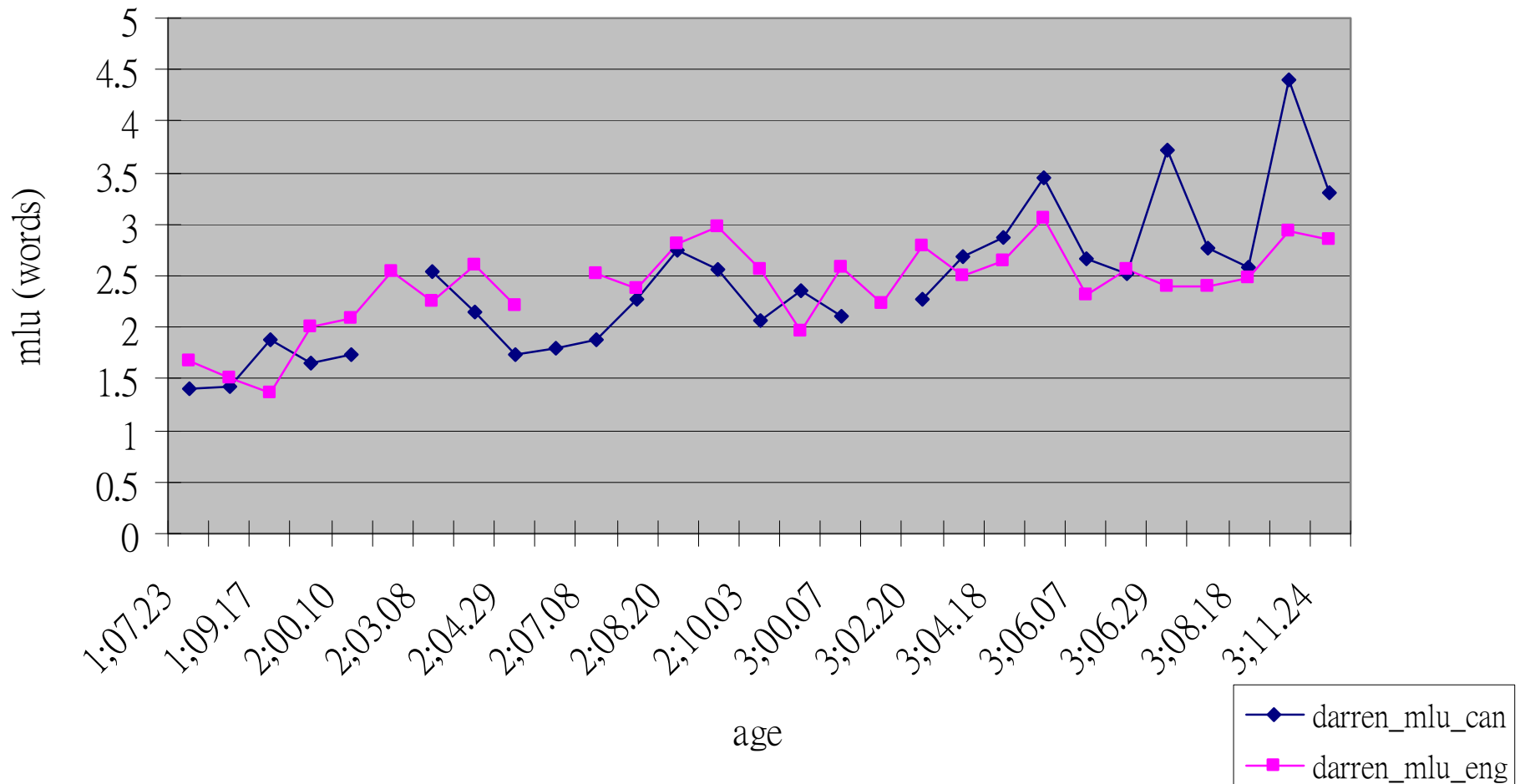
Research questions for one-parent two-languages children

- Is code-mixing quantitatively or qualitatively different from one-parent one-language children?
- Is cross-linguistic influence similar to or different from one one-parent one-language children?

Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) in Cantonese and English - Kasen



Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) in Cantonese and English - Darren



Wh-in situ questions

Kasen: occasional use of wh-in situ

- It's who? (Kasen 2;06.16)
- She is so angry with who? (Kasen 2;11.05)
- Do you know the next one is where?
(Kasen 3;11.11)

Darren: rare use of wh-in situ

- they clean what body
(Darren 3;10.10)



Code-mixing by Kasen in Cantonese and English contexts

- Kasen's code-mixing pattern is asymmetrical: consistently more mixed utterances in Cantonese contexts than in English contexts.

CHI: 我 drink 囉

I drink SFP

'I drink obviously'

INV: 你飲呢個嘅? (Kasen 2;07)

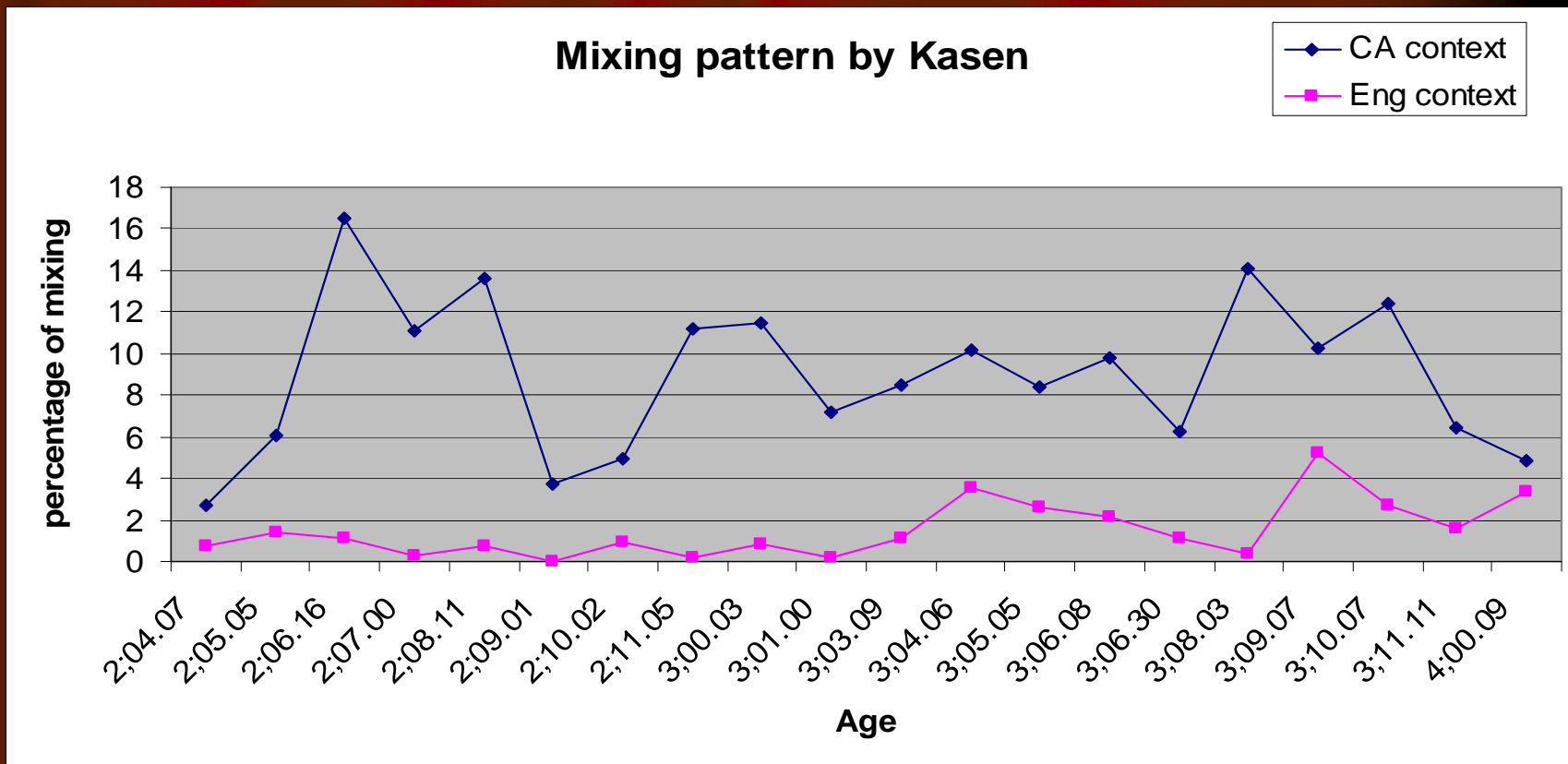
'You drink this?'

- Mixed utterances are rare in English contexts:

CHI: let me show you 呀

CHI: 呢度喇 (Kasen 3;03.09)

Code-mixing by Kasen in Cantonese and English contexts



The bilingual vs monolingual child



- Bilingual and monolingual development show quantitative and qualitative differences
- Bilingual children may take a different path to reach the target
- They are not two complete or incomplete monolinguals but have their own unique profile

Bridging research and application

- Application of research findings in bilingual acquisition to early childhood education.
- Systematic research integrating bilingualism and language acquisition is needed more than ever in informing educators as well as developing assessment tools that are sensitive to bilingual children's profiles.
- We argue that research and application go hand in hand in deepening our understanding of how children develop bilingual competence in early childhood.

Common views among parents

- Bilingualism as burden:
“two languages may be too much for my child”
- Preference for sequential bilingualism:
“let’s wait until her English is established first,
then we can teach her Chinese”



Our views as linguists

- Parents who delay exposing children to both languages on the grounds that it will be a burden for them are under a misapprehension.
- When the input conditions are favorable, there are strong grounds for children to learn two or more languages in tandem from early on and thus achieve bilingual competence.

Our views as linguists

- The first few years of life are the golden years for language acquisition: the child is equipped to acquire multiple languages in an effortless manner.
- Some researchers even argue that merely exposing the child to one language is tantamount to underutilizing the child's potential.
- The outcome of bilingual acquisition in most respects converge with adult native speakers. By age 3-4, the child has mastered a high level of complexity in phonology and structure of the languages.

From bilingual to trilingual

- Growing demand in Hong Kong for children to be exposed to and receive trilingual education in Cantonese, English and Mandarin.
- While encouraging children to learn English and Mandarin, it is important to preserve Cantonese as a foundation for the acquisition of additional languages, and as part of the cultural heritage of the majority of speakers in Hong Kong.

Implications for preschool teachers

- Awareness of language development: how language develops over time from infancy to early childhood; code-mixing as natural part of bilingual development
- Adult's role in supporting development
- Learning and teaching that address the youngest age group including infants



Teacher training

- Take courses that connect linguistics and teaching; early childhood education, child development
- Preferably taught by educational linguists who can relate learning to the real work of teachers
- A challenge: inspire teachers of young children and bring about improvement in teaching and learning for our children

Conclusions

- Bilingual acquisition draws on and interacts with many fields: L1 acquisition, L2 acquisition, bilingualism, early childhood education, developmental psycholinguistics
- The collective research on childhood bilingualism in the international academic community including our own shows: It's not too early to regularly expose children to two or three languages from birth. The child will benefit from the host of advantages of early bilingualism.

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