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Los Babies are Bilingüe: Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, Language, and Age in Baby Books

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Abstract

A growing number of babies in the United States are being raised in bilingual homes, without an easily identifiable first or native language, but rather two or more languages being acquired and spoken simultaneously. It is imperative that the richness and diversity of race and language be centered and valued at the onset of the nation's youngest population. Additionally, research demonstrates that the early years are critical to the maintenance of home language(s) as well as to the development of a racial consciousness that foregrounds the socialization of race and language that will continue to develop throughout childhood. With this knowledge, it is essential that, even at these youngest ages, and early stages of literacy development, there are books that attend to bilingual babies and early learners' linguistic and racial identities. As bi/multilingual researchers, former early elementary teachers, and women of color, we know that representation matters, and at this stage, as foundations of identity and literacy are taking root, it is imperative that children's literature be present and representative of the intersection of race/ethnicity, age and language. This article utilizes a critical multimodal framework to explore the representations of bilingualism for Brown and Black babies in American books designed for 0–3 year olds and the families that raise them. A critical multimodal framework allows for a rich analysis of the multiple modes in the children's literature through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Critical Language and Race Theory. Intentional criteria were utilized in the collection of the baby books which included age, type of book, author, publication year and location. In addition to the aforementioned criteria, the books also had to be bilingual or demonstrate the intentional use of two languages including Spanish and any variety of English. As we disrupt white monolingual norms and

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create more bi/multilingual representation for Brown and Black babies, this article serves as a conversation that centers the “linguistic genius” of bilingual babies of color and offers ways of viewing and reading about them and to them.

Keywords Baby books · Race · Language · Bilingualism · Linguistic representation

Introduction

Despite deculturalization projects that have attempted to strip racially and linguistically minoritized communities of their home languages (Spring, 2016), linguistic diversity persists across the United States of America. According to the 2020 United States census, more than 60 million residents aged 5 and older (21.5% of the population) speak a language other than English at home, of which over 40 million speak Spanish (Census, 2020). These numbers suggest that a multitude of babies are growing up with bilingual home realities that include a combination of Spanish and English. Therefore, despite myths that associate raising bilingual babies with language confusion and/or delay, we must leverage the linguistic assets of our youngest “linguistic geniuses” (Alfaro and Bartolome, 2018). Viewing our bilingual babies as “linguistic geniuses” offers the opportunity to celebrate the cognitive rigor that bilingual babies participate in when creatively engaging their entire linguistic repertoires, even when it includes the mixing of languages (Alfaro and Bartolome, 2018). Building on this conceptualization, this paper contends that embracing the “linguistic geniuses” of babies of color requires intentionally acknowledging and celebrating their bilingual realities through linguistically and racially affirming bilingual baby books. This is ever more important considering that early childhood is critical to avoiding home language rejection (Fillmore, 2012), as well as to building positive racial/ethnic identities (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001).

Although there are multiple forms of literacy in the homes of linguistically and racially minoritized communities (Wang et al., 2021), books and the practice of read-alouds are constantly praised as an important tool for enhancing literacy.

However, whiteness, including the hegemony of English, is perpetuated through publishing practices that undermine the linguistic and racial/ethnic diversity present in the United States. That is, monolingual English books with anthropomorphic characters and/or white characters continue to be the norm in children’s books. According to 2021 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 234 out of 3,183 received US publications were about Latinx people and 311 of those 3183 books were by Latinx authors (CCBC, 2021). The percentages highlighting the lack of linguistic and racial/ethnic representation in books are in sharp contrast with the linguistic and racial/ethnic diversity present in the United States.

As research demonstrates, there are a multitude of benefits associated with raising bilingual and biliterate children and especially with raising simultaneous bilinguals—children learning two languages at the same time. Benefits of bilingualism include increased socioemotional skills, cross-cultural awareness, advantages in the

workforce (Callahan and Gándara, 2014), and metacognitive functions (Bialystok and Craik, 2010). The growing research on the benefits of bilingualism has led states such as California to dismantle previous bans on bilingual education (Proposition 227) and to enact more equitable language policies. California now embraces the bilingual assets of our “linguistic geniuses” through policies such as Proposition 58, the California English Learner Roadmap, Global California 2030, and the Seal of Bilingualism; however, we must ensure that the bilingual assets of our youngest population are sustained before they enter formal schooling.

Working from the premise that bilingualism and biliteracy starts at birth and that racial/ethnic and linguistic representation matters, this paper analyzes the intersections of race/ethnicity, language, and age in bilingual (Spanish-English) baby books. More specifically, through a lens informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Language and Race Theory (LangCrit), we look at how asymmetrical power dynamics, such as whiteness, get reproduced in the publishing of bilingual baby books. As early elementary school dual-language educators and as bi/multilingual womyn of color, the authors write to advocate for texts that sustain, celebrate, and affirm the racial/ethnic, and linguistic experiences of our youngest children. Through these efforts, babies of color would be reminded early on that who they are matters despite being born into a society where they are covertly and overtly inundated with messages that elevate whiteness (Love, 2019). First, a review of literature in relation to language, race/ethnicity, and age is provided. Second, the research design and the research analysis are described. Third, main themes from the findings are explained. Next, a discussion and conclusion, including implications for practice, are incorporated.

Literature Review

Babies and Bilingualism

Despite claims to the contrary, babies have the capacity to linguistically thrive in bilingual home environments (Espinosa, 2013). The reality is that raising bilingual and biliterate babies has many benefits. Research on cognition and bilingualism delineates that raising simultaneous bilinguals—learning more than one language at the same time—may be a more optimal approach to language learning than additive bilingualism—learning one language first and then an additional language later in life (Petitto et al., 2012). Cognitive research on bilingual children suggests that children have the capacity to sort sounds based on language as well as to determine what language to use with what audience at a very young age (Conboy and Kuhl, 2011; De Houwer, 2009; Serratrice, 2013). A study conducted by Garcia-Sierra et al. (2011) provides evidence that the brains of babies raised in Spanish-English bilingual home environments had more flexibility to different languages in comparison to babies raised in monolingual environments. Additionally, when children learn more than one language at a time their brain is able to more easily move between tasks (Bialystok, 2008). Some cognitive evidence points to protection from Alzheimer's disease when two languages are learned in early childhood (Craik et al., 2010). As

multiple studies evidence, there are a myriad of benefits associated with raising children bilingually early on. Consequently, the myth of language confusion in relationship to raising bilingual babies must be debunked, especially since it undermines the nature of dynamic bilingualism. Dynamic bilingualism highlights that a bilingual person's named languages are not in distinct systems but rather part of one singular linguistic repertoire, which explains why people, including young children, mix and borrow from each named language (García, 2009).

Babies and Race

Besides the innate ability to acquire multiple languages from babyhood, children also have the capacity to learn notions of race early on. Being born into a racially stratified society, children begin to categorize and internalize negative messages regarding differences such as skin color at a very young age (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Research shows that children notice and begin to make judgements based on race and to do race as early as three years of age (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). According to Aboud (2008), at age four there is evidence of children having negative expressions that are based on racial prejudice. By kindergarten, children begin to mimic and adopt some of the same racial attitudes and stereotypes that adults exhibit (Kinzler, 2016). Considering the research on young children and race, the age range from 0 to 5 is not too young to talk about race, but instead a crucial point to insert conversations of race, language, and other intersections of identity and diversity. As described, similarly to grasping multiple languages due to early exposure, babies begin to internalize notions of race and racism early on because they are being socialized in a society where whiteness is the cultural norm. Children's literature is the perfect vehicle to enter into conversations about race as well as for racially and linguistically minoritized students to see their identities represented (Fontanella-Nothom, 2019).

The Power of Baby Books

Even at the earliest stages of babies' lives, baby books have the power to build literacy and to affirm racial and linguistic identities. Read-alouds can assist in building foundational emergent literacy skills (Duursma et al., 2008) and by using "literature as an instrument of power" (Ching, 2005); baby books, like other children's literature, can serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for both the baby and the parent/caregiver. Flores et al. (2020) suggest that "racial socialization is itself a social, literacy practice; a dialogic endeavor that shapes both child and parent" (p. 292). These shared spaces of read-alouds and early literacy practices can facilitate positive parent-child attachment and bonding and provide dialogic spaces around issues of race, ethnicity, and culture. While read-alouds and literacy practices have commonly been referred to as school activities, these literacy practices and activities begin long before students enter a classroom. It is during preschool years that sustaining the cultural and linguistic practices of children and families must begin—these practices that "foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate,

and cultural pluralism” (Paris and Alim, 2017, p. 1). Although much of the research around culturally sustaining practices features teachers and schooling, considering the power that baby books hold, it is essential that the books entering the homes of children complement and sustain their cultural and linguistic practices.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) analyzes, critiques, and challenges the ways in which racial stratification upholds white supremacy primarily through “race-neutral” laws and policies (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). CRT, originating in the legal field from the contributions of Derrick Bell and other scholars, allows researchers to name the processes and practices happening in social contexts. Consequently, a CRT lens examines how racism is entrenched in society as well as how it intersects with other forms of oppression. CRT also argues for decentering hegemonic and white-centric epistemologies through counternarratives that work to validate the ways of being of racially and linguistically minoritized communities (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Following the work of Ladson-Billings, Crenshaw and other educational researchers, we employ CRT as the theoretical underpinning for this study. Building from CRT, Critical Language and Race theory (LangCrit) problematizes the intersection between identity, language, and race (Crump, 2014). LangCrit focuses on how identity, language, and race are socially constructed yet in relationship with one another, thus bringing into conversation how an individual is simultaneously seen and heard. By employing a CRT and LangCrit lens, this study analyzes how racial stratification is reproduced through the positioning of race and language as well as through the constructed audience the baby books are created for. Through the employed lenses, this study posits that baby books can become counternarratives when the intersections of race, language, and age are intentionally accounted for.

Data Collection

In gathering the corpus for this study, the books had to meet certain criteria. These criteria include: (1) being identifiable as a baby book, (2) published between 2002 and 2022, (3) published in the United States, (4) with Spanish and English text, (5) incorporation of human characters, (6) not a biography, (7) part of a recommended baby book list on a website. The first requirement was for the text to be intentionally designed as a baby book. Two factors led to this determination; (1) listed for ages 0–3 or 0–5 (as designated by the details on the search engine), and (2) the book had to be sturdy, meaning it was a board book or a bathtub book. We also found the “indestructible” book, *¡Bebé, Vamos a Comer!/Baby Let's Eat!*, which is created from nontoxic, untearable, thick and washable material meant to hold up during use with babies. The second requirement was for the books to be published in the last twenty years. In order to be sure, we were able to obtain physical copies of the books, as well as our focus on the US context of race/ethnicity and language, we limited the publication location to the United States. We specifically focused on bilingual books which included both Spanish and English text. The other important

delineation was that there had to be human characters in each of the books, whether solely on the cover or throughout. Since the goal was to analyze baby books at the crux of language, race, and culture, it was important for the books in this study to incorporate human characters. Although biographies would fit the aforementioned criteria, we chose to focus on fiction. Since making sense of the world begins with making sense of visual information (Serafini, 2014, p. 25), we incorporated books that had very few words such as *Besos For Baby* and *¡Bebé, Vamos A Comer!/Baby Let's Eat!*, as well as others that provided a full narrative like *Me gusta como soy/I like Myself!* and *I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre*.

Once the criteria for the selected baby books were defined, we opted to search for the books in a similar manner to how many parents and early childhood educators would conduct a search. Using Google as the main engine, we scoured the top ten search results for “baby books” and “bilingual baby books”. After reading through each webpage and collection of recommended books, a total of 182 baby books were found, of which seven fit the defined criteria. This number is not inclusive of multiple books or a set of books by one author. For example, Leslie Patricelli has additional bilingual baby books such as *Huggy Kissy/Abrazos y Besitos*, and *No No Sí Sí/No No Yes Yes*; however, for the purposes of this study, we chose to only include one title from each of the authors that appeared in our search multiple times, even though their other texts may have fit the criteria of the study.

Analysis

Table 1 lists the titles and other characteristics of each text. To conduct a thorough analysis of the baby books in this data corpus, Botelho and Rudman's (2009) critical multicultural analysis (CMA) was employed. This analysis “acknowledges that all literature is a historical and cultural product and reveals how the power relations of class, race, and gender work together in text and image, and by extension, in society” (Botelho and Rudman, 2009, p. 1). While the CMA methodology includes attention to the visual, as multimodal researchers and early elementary educators, it was essential to closely analyze the illustrations. Many baby books, due to the limited quantity of words, rely heavily on the illustrations, and fall into the category of nearly wordless picture books. Serafini (2014) asserts that these types of books “may be better defined by what they do contain—visually rendered narratives” (p. 24). These visually rendered narratives, as well as other visual aspects of the texts, such as font type, size, colors, and position of the words were also included in the analysis. We also realize that, despite our conscious positionalities and attention to equity and social justice issues, we are both womyn who have been socialized as Latina and Black, both minoritized and othered within US society. We realize that even we are tapping into the social construction of race by ascribing race to characters based on their physical characteristics. This level/layer of “doing race” is also a byproduct of our interactions in education, the country, and the world.

Three rounds of analysis were conducted. In the first round of analysis, each author conducted an initial read while keeping researcher memos. In this initial

Table 1 List of baby books and study criteria information

| Name of book | Author/illustrator/publishing info | Age | Book type |
|--|---|-----|----------------|
| <i>Hop! Hop!;/;Salto! ;Salto!</i> | Leslie Patricelli Candlewick 2018 | 0–3 | Boardbook |
| <i>Besos For Baby</i> | Blanca Gómez Little, Brown Books for Jen Arena Young 2014 | 0–3 | Boardbook |
| <i>I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre</i> | Scholastic Inc, 2016 Caroline Jayne Church | 0–3 | Boardbook |
| <i>Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/ Cabeza, hombros, rodillas y dedos de los pies</i> | Sarah Dellow Child's Play International Republished 2018 Annie Kubler | 0–5 | Boardbook |
| <i>¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let's Eat!</i> | Workman Publishing Stephan Lomp Company 2018 | 0–5 | Indestructible |
| <i>¡Me gusta como soy!/I Like Myself!</i> | David Catrow Houghton Mifflin | 0–3 | Boardbook |
| <i>De Colores</i> | Karen Beaumont Harcourt 2018 Patty Rodriguez Ariana Stein Lil' Libros 2022 | 0–5 | Boardbook |

round, we each read the book individually and jotted down notes. We brought our own racial analysis and ways of ascribing race from our personal perspectives. The second round of analysis was conducted using the analytical template (See Appendix) which utilized the components of the aforementioned CRT and LangCrit frameworks, more specifically, the possibility of baby books as counternarratives, and a focus on how identity, language, and race are socially constructed. From this context, this second round was guided by language, race, and culture. In addition to the aforementioned components, the factor of age was also incorporated. The final round of analysis was conducted collaboratively. Both researchers engaged in read-alouds of each title and discussed each other's notes and analytic templates on each title. Then a discussion across the entire corpus and researcher memos was done.

Findings

Through a lens informed by CRT and LangCrit, the findings of the multimodal analysis of seven bilingual baby books underscore the following three themes: (1) shortage of culturally sustaining bilingual baby books, (2) language imbalance, and (3) predominance of whiteness through characters. The first theme, shortage of culturally sustaining baby books, examines the scarcity of bilingual baby books as well as the lack of cultural relevance present in the selected books. The second theme, language imbalance, analyzes the elevated positioning of the English text in relation to that of the Spanish text throughout the book. The third theme, predominance of whiteness through characters, examines the racial makeup of the characters throughout the books.

A Shortage of Culturally Sustaining Bilingual Baby Books

Although close to 50,000 children's board books are sold in the United States annually (Errera, 2022), with a nuanced market for these texts (i.e. daycares, baby showers, children's birthday gifts, etc.), only seven books met the criteria outlined for this study after close investigation of sites and blogs such as *50 Best Books For Baby*, *30 Best Baby Books of 2021*, *My 1-Year-Old's Favorite Spanish and Bilingual Books: Best Board Books for Babies and Toddlers*, and other curated blogs and book lists. That is, only 0.03% of the books found met the criteria set up for this study. The lack of availability of bilingual baby books with human characters was a major finding in this study. This shortage was not only evident in the availability, or lack thereof, of baby books that met the criteria, but also in the lack of culturally sustaining characteristics in the limited amount of texts found. Drawing on Paris and Alim's (2017) conceptualization of culturally sustaining pedagogies, culturally sustaining characteristics decenter whiteness and center the experiences of racially and linguistically minoritized communities. For the purpose of this study, this includes the incorporation of heritage practices associated with a particular culture, the presence of racially/ethnically minoritized characters in racially affirming ways or the lack thereof, as well as intentionality with creating a bilingual text.

Of the seven books reviewed in this study, only one, *De colores*, has intentional connections to heritage culture by including a well-known Spanish folk song also titled "De colores". This song, which is written in both Spanish and English throughout the book, talks about the various places, things, and seasons in which all the colors are visible. The book concludes with the line "Y por eso, mis grandes amores de muchos colores me gustan a mi" ("And this is why the greatest loves of many colors are pleasing to me"). This song has origins in Spain and it is a well-known song throughout many Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. Due to the themes of unity, peace, and hope, this song was also popularized during the 1960s United Farm Workers movement in California.

While the text *De colores* draws on a popular song with heritage connections to the Latinx community, thus rendering the book culturally sustaining, *Me gusta como soy/I Like Myself* takes a contrasting approach. Although the book includes a Black character, this character is not portrayed in racially affirming ways. Instead, the Black character is portrayed stereotypically (as discussed in depth later), and is constantly policed by a white officer. Considering the cultural reality and history of police brutality against Black bodies, the recurrent policing of a Black child by a white police officer lacks cultural sensitivity and fails to embody culturally sustaining characteristics critical to decentering whiteness. Similarly, the remaining five books, despite incorporating the Spanish language, also lack connections to heritage culture and/or racially affirming representations, thus unable to render the books culturally sustaining.

Another finding that evidences the lack of culturally sustaining elements is that many of the bilingual books were originally published solely in English.

Due to the subsequent incorporation of Spanish, it can be gleaned that the goal of the bilingual editions is more about the market-value advantages, rather than the creation of culturally and linguistically sustaining children's bilingual

literature at the onset. For instance, the English publication of *Hop! Hop!* was released in 2015, and the bilingual version was published in 2018. The English version of *I Will Love You Forever* was published in 2016 and the bilingual version was published in 2017. *I like Myself!* was published in English in 2004, and the bilingual version was published in 2018. The lack of intentionality behind publishing bilingual baby books at the onset undermines the linguistic and racial diversity present in the United States, thus elevating the status of English and, simultaneously, perpetuating whiteness.

The inadequate acknowledgements to the translators are another example of the lack of culturally sustaining characteristics. Many of the authors (or publishers) employed translators for the Spanish portion, yet credited them in ways that undermine the work necessary to translate from English to Spanish. In *Hop! Hop! ¡Salto! ¡Salto!*, translation credit is given in small text underneath the copyright. Similarly, in *Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/Cabeza, hombros, rodillas y dedos de los pies*, translation credit is offered in the back matter at the bottom of the book. *I Will Love You Forever! ¡Te amaré por siempre!* states in small print in the back matter “this book was originally published in English as *I Will Love You Forever*.” As quoted, it fails to offer an individual’s name for translation credit and solely names Scholastic Inc. as the publishing company. *¡Me gusta como soy!/I like Myself!* similarly offers translation credit in small text to Carlos E. Calvo. *¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let’s Eat!* and *Besos For Baby* offer no visible credit for translation. *De Colores* stands out as it is the only book where translation credit is visible on the front cover. By clearly positioning the credit to the translators, the authors, Patty Rodriguez and Ariana Stein, validate the labor involved in translation. While the invisibility and/or undermining of translators is common in translations of foreign texts into English or adult literature into children’s literature, in the context of the United States, where power dynamics often elevate English and devalue Spanish, placing translation credit at the forefront is of critical importance.

Bilingual baby books have the potential to become counternarratives through which the experiences of racially and linguistically minoritized communities are both validated and celebrated. The appearance of Brown and Black characters and of the Spanish language, however, is insufficient to describe a book as culturally sustaining and/or racially affirming. Instead, it is the intentionality of linking race/ethnicity with the stories told that matters. In addition to the shortage of culturally sustaining books, language imbalance is another prominent finding from this study.

Language Imbalance

The finding of language imbalance highlights the overuse and extra attention attributed to English in comparison to Spanish in the collection of bilingual baby books. This imbalance was noted via differences in the covers of the books in relation to text color choices, font style, position of words and pictures, and print size. Out of the seven books reviewed, six prioritized English in the title by positioning it before

the Spanish title and/or by having a larger font. Similarly, a majority of the books prioritize English throughout the storyline by positioning it before or above Spanish. While the findings vary in each of the individual books, an imbalance in the treatment and placement of print between Spanish and English was present throughout. Considering the asymmetrical power relations that exist within English and Spanish in the context of the United States, the constant minimization of Spanish in relation to English works to uphold the hegemony of English that permeates society (Macedo et al., 2015).

In *Hop! Hop! ¡Salto! ¡Salto!*, Spanish is placed beneath English, which works to position the English language as superior and to render the Spanish language as secondary. Although the size of the text stays consistent throughout the book across both languages, the English text is black and the Spanish text is white and italicized. While black can be thought of as a neutral color, black tends to be the standard choice in written text; thus, by English being the go-to, normalized, and/or standardized language in black text, it effectively others the Spanish that appears in a non-standard color. The use of italics for the Spanish text further others it, since it is italicized to mark its contrast to the English language. This “othering” via font conventions gives way to the minoritized status of Spanish in the US societal context. Similarly, in *Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/Cabeza, hombros, rodillas y dedos de los pies*, the English is also positioned above the Spanish both on the cover and throughout the book. On the cover, the English title is placed in a larger black font while the Spanish title is white and in a smaller font. Meanwhile, throughout the book, although presented in the same size font, the English font remains black while the Spanish font appears in green; thus, again, the Spanish is being othered through its inferior positioning and nonstandard text color. Another example of the othering and minimization of Spanish is present in *I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre* both on the cover and across the book, through the positioning of the English text before the Spanish text, the use of a larger font for the English text, and the italics used for Spanish. In the books *¡Me gusta como soy!/I like myself* and *¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let's Eat!*, the Spanish titles are positioned before the English titles; however, the former book still upholds the dominance of the English language by placing the English title in a larger size than the Spanish one. The book *¡Me gusta como soy!/I like myself* more equitably balances both of the languages throughout the book by placing the Spanish text before the English text as well as by using the same color font for both languages. The book *¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let's Eat!* elevates the status of the minoritized language, Spanish, not only by placing the Spanish title before the English but also by ensuring that the Spanish title appears in a comparatively larger size to that of the English language. The positioning and size of the Spanish language remains throughout the story, which works to celebrate the Spanish that is oftentimes undermined in society. Taking into account that language imbalance is present within bilingual contexts (Valdés, 1997), in this case bilingual baby books, it is critical that language imbalances in books are disrupted by elevating the status of the minoritized language.

In *Besos for Baby*, the initial use of translanguaging between Spanish and English taps into dynamic bilingualism; however, a close analysis of how the English is positioned in relation to the Spanish suggests that English is still upraised. For instance,

accompanying the translanguaged title, *Besos for baby*, there is an additional line that reads “a little book of kisses.” The fact that this additional line only appears in English tilts the focus of the book towards the dominance of English. Additionally, although the storyline includes translanguaging, the story emphasizes English while Spanish takes on a secondary role through the repetition of the word *besos* (kisses) and through the incorporation of only one Spanish word which recaps the longer English section. Although it is important to recognize the dynamic bilingualism of children growing up with two languages through books that celebrate translanguaging, it is ever more important that language equity and/or the elevation

of Spanish is still present within translanguaging stories. In *De Colores*, although the Spanish title is placed front and center with a larger font than the rest of the text on the cover page and the Spanish is positioned above the English in a similar size font throughout the text, there are still remnants of the dominance of English. For instance, above the title there is text that reads “singing-cantando” which prioritizes the positioning of English. Within the cover page, there is also additional text in English that reads “a bilingual book of harmony,” as well as text in English that gives credit to the illustrator and translators.

Considering that bilingual baby books in the United States exist within a society where there are asymmetrical power relations between English and Spanish, as well as other minoritized languages, authors and publishing companies must intentionally elevate the status of the minoritized languages. With the societal (and global) power of English, Spanish has to be elevated to work towards language equity. Since English holds dominance, author and publisher choices, such as the position of Spanish above English, can help make small gains towards centering languages that for too long have been minoritized.

Predominance of Whiteness Through Characters

A close analysis of the characters in the selected bilingual baby books exemplifies the predominance of whiteness that permeates US society. More specifically, three of the seven selected books solely represent white characters both on the covers and throughout the book; one has a white character on the cover but multiracial representation throughout the book; one has multiracial representation on the cover and throughout the book; one represents a Black child on the cover and throughout the book along with three additional white characters; and one represents a Brown child solely on the cover page. Besides the overrepresentation of white characters, whiteness is upheld through the distorted representations of the Brown and Black protagonists in two of the books.

In *Hop! Hop! ¡Salto! ¡Salto!*, a white baby is represented on every page at least once and on certain pages multiple times for a total of 28 representations. Additionally, on three occasions two white parents representing a mother and a father are depicted. The mother has blonde hair while the father is mostly illustrated as having no hair. In *Besos for Baby*, a white girl with straight brown hair is depicted on every page at least once for a total of 14 representations. The white mother and father

appear three times. The mother has orange/reddish straight hair and the father has brown hair. In *I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre*, a mixed-race child with golden curly hair is present on the cover and throughout the pages for a total of 12 representations. The white mother with straight golden/orange hair appears on the cover, as well as throughout the book, for a total of three full appearances (partial appearances, such as part of her legs or arm, are not accounted for). Similarly, throughout these three texts, white characters are overemphasized, which perpetuates whiteness and fails to represent the racial diversity of bilingual babies in the United States.

In addition to the mixed-race child in *I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre*, two of the selected books represent multiracial characters. In *Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/Cabeza, hombros, rodillas y dedos de los pies*, there is a white baby on the cover and throughout the story, eight representations of white babies, and eight representations of babies of color. Some of the babies of color are represented with hints of stereotypical exaggeration. For instance, the baby with darker skin and with curly dark hair is wearing clothes with musical lyrics and playing with maracas which stereotypically suggests that the child is a baby of color. Another baby's exaggerated straight black hair sticking out through a ponytail suggests that this baby is stereotypically being depicted as Asian. The difficulty and uncertainty in identifying babies of color within this text alludes to the need to represent characters of color that Brown and Black babies can easily identify themselves with. Although the babies are portrayed with different skin tones, racial representation does not appear to be intentional in the representation of characters. Additionally, the positioning of a white baby on the cover of this book, while the book attempts to represent babies with different skin tones, further works to uphold whiteness. Interestingly, this book, which was originally published in 2009, was republished in 2021 and the new edition of the book portrays a baby of color on the front cover, which echoes the importance of decentering whiteness. *De Colores* also has multiracial character representation. The cover page shows five children of distinct racial backgrounds and throughout the book the representation of white characters and characters of color appears evenly distributed. Unlike *Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/Cabeza, hombros, rodillas, y dedos de los pies*, the racial differences are easily identifiable in this book due to the clear representation of Black and Brown children both on the cover and throughout. It is evident that the illustrator was deliberate about having diverse racial representation, which makes sense considering that the book is meant to celebrate the beauty of color. However, through the lyrics and illustrations, the emphasis is placed on the beauty of different colors in nature, such as animals and flowers, rather than on the difference in skin color among the characters. Considering that Black and Brown children begin to internalize negative notions about their racial identities at an early age (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001), it is critical that baby books center racially affirming narratives about differences in skin color through both illustrations and storylines.

Of the reviewed books, two depict characters of color as the protagonists; however, these characters are misrepresented and not present throughout the narrative. In the book *¡Me gusta como soy!/I like myself*, there is a Black child portrayed 15 times from the cover to the end of the book. The dark skin tone as well as the

representation of the hair with locks, and in two instances with an afro-like hairstyle, support the racialization of the main character as Black. Additionally, four white characters appear throughout the story—a white police officer appears twice, a white man appears once, a white baby appears once, and a white boy appears twice. A close analysis of the multiple ways the Black character is portrayed highlights the misrepresentation of the character as well as the presence of power imbalances between her and the white characters. One of the opening scenes depicts the Black child on the recto in a comparatively smaller size than the white characters and animals that surround her. The central focus of this scene is a white police character that is largely portrayed in the middle with a whistle in his mouth and looking away from the Black child. Additionally, there is a white baby, another white man, and a dog that are portrayed in larger size than the Black child. The accompanied text, which reads, “There is no one else I’ll rather be,” contradicts the inferior positioning and depiction of the Black character. Instead of elevating the Black child and placing her front and center to more closely align with the accompanied text, whiteness is perpetuated through the elevated position of the multiple white characters. In another scene, a white boy is depicted in large size on the verso and as mocking the Black child; meanwhile, the Black child is portrayed in a drastically smaller size on the recto page. The accompanying text states, “I don’t care in any way what someone else may think or say”, which suggests that the white character is negatively addressing the Black character. Although the Black child claims her power through the aforementioned statement, the juxtaposition of the size of characters, as well as the storyline, suggest an imbalance of power between the characters which works to elevate the white character and belittle the Black character. The white police officer appears in another scene alongside the white boy. This time, he is portrayed standing upright with a whistle in his mouth and holding a baton behind his back as if ready to strike. Meanwhile, the Black child is parading on what appears to be an abstract bicycle while the text reads “No matter if they stop and stare, no person ever anywhere can make me feel that what they see is all there really is to me.” Once more, an empowering statement is undermined by the predominance of whiteness and, in this case, by white policing. The Black character is further misrepresented through the portrayal of her natural hair as “nappy” and “messy”, which alludes to negative biases about Black girl hair (Barton et al., 2022). For instance, the child is portrayed waking up with an afro and the accompanying text reads, “Even when I look a mess, I still don’t like me any less. ‘cause nothing in this world, you know. Can change what’s deep inside, and so...” In addition, throughout the narrative, the Black character is attributed animalistic features by being compared to animals as well as othered by being represented either the same size or smaller than the animals. These animalistic representations include illustrating her with “a silly snout that snorts,” with “horns protruding from [her] nose,” and with “hair that is like a porcupine.” Although the storyline is meant to celebrate being different, these misrepresentations further contribute to the othering of Black bodies.

In *¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let’s Eat!*, there is a Brown child on the cover of the book. This Brown child is positioned front and center and can be racialized by his dark skin complexion, his dark eyes, and his dark brown hair. However, this Brown baby is missing throughout the rest of the book. The Brown child disappears

from the narrative and, instead, only vegetables and fruits are depicted throughout. The disappearance of this child from the storyline in one of the only books that depicts a Brown child, even if solely on the cover, elevates whiteness through the erasure of Brown bodies. Through an intentional awareness of the importance of racial/ethnic representation, the Brown child could have been presented and uplifted throughout the book; instead, the Brown child was done away with.

Bilingual books have the potential to embrace the bilingualism of linguistically and racially/ethnically minoritized babies; however, these babies also need to see themselves positively represented through the characters. This requires a decentering of whiteness, which will allow space for raising the status and increasing the representation of Black and Brown protagonists. Providing babies of color the critical racial/ethnic representation needed to remind them early on that they are important, despite their constant othering in society, is critical to them developing a positive sense of their racial identities.

Significance

Botelho and Rudman (2009) wrote their book on CMA “to disturb the scholarly and pedagogical silence around how class, race, and gender work together in children’s literature” (p. 259), and we want to continue this call to action and extend it to the genre of baby books. The creation of racially and linguistically affirming baby books can support the dismantling of racial and linguistic stratification that upholds whiteness. Baby books that offer cultural, linguistic, and racial/ethnic representation have the potential to offer literary spaces of mattering. This mattering (Love, 2019) offers a restorying of cultural, linguistic, and racial/ethnic being, even with our youngest members of society. While all of these books have some merits, and are contributions in the gaping hole of multilingual and multicultural books created for birth through age five, each left us wanting more in terms of the creation of counternarratives through the intentional affirmation of the linguistic and racial experiences of minoritized Brown and Black babies. We hope readers find this article as a loving critique of the titles included as we call the authors and publishing companies to work with intentionality towards dismantling the stratification of race that also permeates publishing practices. We are also aware that, due to our data collection processes, as well as the limitations we placed on our criteria, this is not an exhaustive list of bilingual baby books. We would like to highlight amazing books such as *Cerca/Close* and *Lejos/Far* by Juan Felipe Herrera that we feel are exemplars of what is possible in racial/ethnic and linguistic representation in baby books. Although we did note some occurrences of language imbalance, we would also like to highlight Lil Libros, as this #ownvoices publishing company also rises to the call of intentionally publishing bilingual books with culturally relevant content.

As we work towards equity in language, it has to be more than equalizing. It is not enough that Spanish and English have equal presence, because, in light of the hegemony of English, more has to be done to raise the status of Spanish. By elevating the status of Spanish in print, we contribute to the work of disrupting the dominance of English. It is also imperative to honor the “dynamic bilingualism” of

linguistically and racially minoritized children who live a reality of translanguaging; therefore, publishing companies must also go beyond bilingual books that create a dichotomy between “named languages” by separating the English and Spanish sections. The reality is that many children incorporate translanguaging practices in a way that taps into their full linguistic repertoires, and this also needs to be represented in baby books. By doing this in baby books, we attribute the necessity, and the urgency of this work with the earliest consumers of literacy. This work is not just for the babies and toddlers, but for the parents and caregivers that will partake in the shared literacy experiences with our youngest “linguistic geniuses”.

Appendix

Analytic Template

| | Language | Race | Culture | Age | Multi-modal effects | Other |
|--|----------|------|---------|-----|---------------------|-------|
| <i>Hop! Hop!/¡Salto! ¡Salto!</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Besos For Baby</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>I Will Love You Forever/Te amaré por siempre</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes/Cabeza, hombros, rodillas, piernas, pies</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>¡Bebé, vamos a comer!/Baby, Let's Eat!</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>¡Me gusta como soy!/I Like Myself!</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>De Colores</i> | | | | | | |

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