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Exploring the relationship between home literacy exposure and oral narrative skills in French-English bilingual and emergent bilingual first graders

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Studies on young monolinguals report significant relationships between the frequency of shared reading and the development of general oral language skills (Mol & Bus 2011) and vocabulary (Sénéchal 2006). Shared reading provides exposure to low-frequency words, complementing vocabulary encountered in daily parent-child interactions (Sénéchal et al. 2008). For young bilinguals, depending on family language practices, one language may be less present at home, for example when the family language and majority language differ. Language enrichment, promoted through shared book reading in the home, may then occur mainly in the family language, which may not be accessible in school for academic purposes. We focus on first grade students attending a French/English dual language program in France, from three home language backgrounds - English-dominant; French-dominant; and English and French. We analyse their French and English oral narrations of a wordless picture book and explore how home literacy environments impact on literacy development in each language. In particular, we examine their sense of story. We close with implications for educators working with emergent bilinguals.