



International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

ISSN: 1367-0050 (Print) 1747-7522 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rbeb20>

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To cite this article: Anna Marie Dillon, Zeina Hojeij, Alecia Perkins & Rima Malkawi (2018): Examining the text quality of English/Arabic dual language children's picture books, International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, DOI: [10.1080/13670050.2017.1415867](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1415867)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1415867>



Published online: 09 Jan 2018.



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Examining the text quality of English/Arabic dual language children's picture books

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ABSTRACT

Children's literature plays an essential role in the development of children's literacy skills. Dual language learners can particularly benefit from the use of picture books to facilitate comprehension, formulaic language acquisition, and vocabulary acquisition. This paper explores the availability and quality of English/Arabic dual language books in an early years setting in the United Arab Emirates. It is a qualitative study that examines the text quality of 24 English/Arabic dual language picture books available within the setting itself and the affiliated university library. The researchers' combined experiences with literacy in the context of young children, including experience in choosing appropriate texts for young children, as well as their ontological perspectives as researchers, guide this personal appreciation. The study found issues with availability of book information, translation accuracy, and cultural relevance. In order to have a high quality bilingual picture book, it is crucial that the translation is accurate and reviewed very carefully by experienced authors/editors in both languages to avoid any errors. The major categories generated from this study can serve as a checklist to guide researchers in future studies, educators in various settings and parents in the community, in choosing appropriate dual language books.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 September 2017
Accepted 4 December 2017

KEYWORDS

Text quality; English/Arabic; picture books; children's literature; dual language books; multicultural literature

Introduction

According to UNESCO's 2010 report, more than half the world's population speaks more than one language. As such, bilingual and multilingual contexts are now the norm throughout the world rather than the exception (UNESCO 2003). Language is not just a means for education or communication anymore, but an essential aspect of 'cultural identity and empowerment' (UNESCO 2010, 16) for individuals and nations. Given the fluid and changing linguistic demographics around the world, dual language books have become even more important in the classroom. Using these types of books teaches respect for other cultures and languages and helps teachers raise their students' awareness of diversity in both text and context. Edwards, Monaghan, and Knight (2000) contend that there are benefits to having two languages or more present in the classroom in terms of scaffolding for both bilingual and monolingual children.

With this said, children's literature plays an essential role in the development of children's literacy skills. Through children's books, students are exposed to opportunities that go beyond their own place, experience, and culture. They become aware of different settings and are able to build bridges between their own culture and the cultures of others (Botelho and Rudman 2010). Dual language books in the classroom lead students to transfer abstract knowledge and skills across

different languages. Learners are able to compare and contrast similar concepts in their native language and additional languages (Semingson, Pole, and Tommerdahl 2015). Therefore, children develop their literacy skills in more than one language at the same time.

According to Huang and Chen (2016), it is imperative to provide high-quality teaching and learning resources in diverse classrooms. This study follows Huang and Chen's model, where they examined the text quality of English/Chinese bilingual children's picture books (2016). Reading their article prompted us, as a research team, to explore the availability and quality of English/Arabic dual language books in an early years setting in the United Arab Emirates. These books may also be termed bilingual parallel books, as each page has two linguistic versions of the unfolding story (Mendoza and Reese 2001). The particular setting is the Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC), which is a laboratory school affiliated with Zayed University facilitating the care and education of young children aged 6 months to 4 years. The ECLC is committed to providing a dual language environment where both Arabic and English are equally valued and promoted. The ECLC is a nursery for the children of staff, faculty and students in Zayed University. Approximately 70% of children attending speak Arabic as L1, while most of the others speak English as L1. To this end, the quality of the dual language books available is 'both complicated and of critical importance' (Huang and Chen 2016, 475). Mendoza and Reese state that various text types within the genre of picture books can offer young children 'a multitude of opportunities to gain information, to become familiar with print, to be entertained, and gain perspectives other than their own' (2001, 1).

Literature review

Picture books are the ideal genre for sharing with children in the early years, whether for read aloud sessions or for independent use (Mendoza and Reese 2001). There are three types of picture books – wordless books, picture storybooks and illustrated books (Mendoza and Reese 2001; Temple et al. 1998). Dual language learners can particularly benefit from the use of picture books to facilitate comprehension, formulaic language acquisition, vocabulary acquisition, and so on (Gillanders and Castro 2011; Tabors 2008). Dual language learners participate in storybook reading in different ways, depending on their stage of acquisition (Gillanders and Castro 2011). Regardless of which stage the young learner is at, high-quality experiences can be best facilitated by using high-quality materials; in this case, high-quality dual language books. Dual language picture books are accessible to a much wider range of children and teachers than books written in a single language (Sneddon 2008). Sneddon refers to Conteh, who states that 'their potential as teaching resources for all children may have never been fully realised' (2003, 151).

Importance of selecting high-quality bilingual books in early years settings

Even if teachers are not involved in formal reading instruction, all teachers involved in the care and education of young children must be considered teachers of reading in some manner (Mendoza and Reese 2001; Saracho and Spodek 1993). Sharing literature with young children benefits their language and literacy development, as the foundations of literacy are laid in early childhood (Huang and Chen 2016; Mackenzie and Veresov 2013; Mendoza and Reese 2001; Scarborough and Dobrich 1994). The term 'emergent literacy' accounts for 'what young children know about reading, writing and print in the early years before beginning school and in the early years of school' (Mendoza and Reese 2001), and before they have conventional writing and reading skills (Gort and Bauer 2012).

Before learning to read, children need to be aware of how sounds work. Having phonemic awareness allows them to think about and work with individual sounds in a spoken language; this is especially important in a bilingual context. In order for teachers to support their students' early literacy development, phonemic awareness must be integrated into oral and written instruction. Teachers must provide an active learning environment with a variety of learning materials to increase

their students' motivation to learn. One way to do so is through storytelling and picture storybooks. Slegers (1996) indicates that children engage more with literacy in print-rich environments. Listening to stories and talking about them are crucial activities in early childhood classrooms. For very young children, oral language development can be supported by short stories and conversations post reading/listening.

For students learning in a bilingual setting such as ours, where the children are exposed to both English and Arabic, picture books can help deepen their understanding of oral language and written structures. Children should be given time to explore literacy at their own pace and based on their own attention spans (Neuman and Bredekamp 2000). Children can construct their own literacy knowledge and language strategies in a playful and natural manner if literacy is an integral part of daily classroom activities (Teale and Yokota 2000).

With that said, in both monolingual and bilingual settings, children need daily exposure to high quality books. Books which positively reflect children's identity, home language, and culture will increase the children's sense of pride in and belonging to their language. Neuman and Bredekamp (2000) also explain that engaging in stories at early literary stages can foster vocabulary learning and comprehension skills in both languages.

Velasco and Garcia (2014) consider that languages form an integrated system. They see that emergent bilinguals engage in translanguaging, which involves languages being 'in functional inter-relationship with other languages' (2014, 7). Translanguaging, as a pedagogical practice for dual language classrooms, brings advantages to the learner in terms of developing skills in both languages (Zhang and Guo 2017). Translanguaging can be promoted through the use of dual language books. Bialystok (2001) mentions that the outcome of learning to read in two languages can be quite different depending on the language pairs. However, the ability to make sense of print can transfer in ways to indicate that development in one language supports development in the other (Cummins 2000; Gort and Bauer 2012; Kenner 2004; Sneddon 2008). Palviainen, Protassova, Mard-Miettinen and Schwartz refer to recent research that calls for 'planned, intentional cross-linguistic pedagogy' rather than the separation of languages (2016, 615). Therefore, the opportunities afforded by bilingual experiences, including the experience of engaging with dual language books, warrants careful selection of high-quality dual language books in early-years settings. The success of bilingual programs depends not only on teacher quality, but on a 'vigorous text-rich literacy curriculum' (Curdt-Christiansen and Sun 2016), of which bilingual books could be an integral part.

What makes a high-quality bilingual text?

Huang and Chen (2016) mention that many criteria should be referred to in the creation of dual language texts. They consider that the three main categories are typography, production, and language. In this study, we add one further criterion: cultural relevance.

Typographic features refer to how features such as font, size, weight, space and color compare with each other (Huang and Chen 2016; Walker, Edwards, and Blacksell 1996). This can be described as text appearance. Different fonts can suggest different attitudes and are appropriate for different audiences, whether they are serif, sans serif, monospace cursive, or fantasy (see Bidjovski 2013 for a detailed analysis of fonts).

Production refers to the equal quality of both scripts, including the arrangement of two scripts within the pages of the book (Huang and Chen 2016; Walker, Edwards, and Blacksell 1996). The arrangement of the texts might be difficult to manage equally and may indicate power of one culture over another (Naidoo and Lopes-Robertson 2007). These arrangements, which also incorporate the background color and the placement of images within a picture book, contribute to the overall language effects. In the Arabic language context, this may also include the directionality of words on individual pages and the directionality of the book.

Production also refers to information about the book. This includes the blurb, a short description on the back cover of a book (Önder 2013), as well as other information such as the title, author,

illustrator, publisher, and dedication, if applicable. As blurbs are often included as a vehicle for promotion, the use of positive evaluative language is vital to attract the readers' attention (Önder 2013).

Cultural relevance refers to how well the content of a book reflects children's 'cultural identities and literary heritage as well as their language knowledge' (Sneddon 2008, 140). Sneddon refers to Blackledge, who highlighted in 2000 that the best types of dual language books are those which are written from the perspective of the home culture and translated into English, rather than vice versa. This helps to make the books more culturally relevant.

Translation from one language to another can be problematic. Baker and Perez-Gonzales suggest that translated language is a sort of compromise between the norms of the first language and those of the target language (2013). Equivalency may not be achievable in a translation of English to Arabic and vice versa. Rather, an equivalent effect might be the goal of a translation. In the context of this paper, it is important to have an understanding of the particular features of the Arabic language, as explored in the following section.

Arabic written language

Arabic is the official language of 22 countries, stretching from the Arabian Peninsula up to Syria, and across North Africa. In fact, Arabic is the 5th most common language in the world. Around 300 million people speak Arabic around the globe. It is one of the oldest spoken languages and it carries a great history and civilization with it (UNESCO 2016; UN official languages 2017).

There are two versions of the Arabic language: Spoken Arabic and Written Arabic. Both versions vary greatly. Spoken Arabic derives from the region, the country, and the dialect of the region within the county where it is spoken. Written Arabic is used as the official mode of communication in news broadcasts, legal documents, books, newspapers, and all official communication in all 22 countries (Jenkins 2004; Rogers 2005). Furthermore, within written Arabic, there are two types: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Classical Arabic. MSA is common to all the countries in the Arab world, and is used in newspapers, magazines, books, government documents, and for business transactions. Classical Arabic, on the other hand, is the language of the Qur'an and classical Arabic literature (Holes 2004; Rogers 2005).

The Arabic alphabet (abjadīyyah arabiyyah), which is derived from Aramaic, consists of 28 consonants, 3 short vowels, 3 long vowels, and 2 diphthongs. Arabic spelling is mostly phonemic with letter-sound correspondence. Interestingly, the Arabic alphabet is used to write several other languages such as Persian, Urdu, Pashto, Malay, Panjabi and Kurdish among others across many countries (Habash 2010). Arabic letters and numbers are written from right to left in a cursive style. In Arabic writing, letters are always joined together in both written and typed text, except in very rare cases. Some Arabic letters change form depending on their place in a word such as beginning, middle, end, or standalone (Habash 2010).

In English, both short and long vowels are mainly indicated by letters. However, in Arabic only long vowels are indicated by letters while short vowels are not. Instead, vowel marks are used to indicate short vowels. These diacritics are essential to learn if one wants to read Arabic. The 'Harakaat' 'الحركات' which literally means 'motions' are the short vowel marks but 'Tashkeel' 'تشكيل' refers to other vowel or consonant diacritics (Arabic Vowel Marks: Tashkeel or Harakat n.d.). Arabic vocalization (Tashkeel) is used to indicate the short vowels (a, i, u) which are usually not written in Arabic. There are three short vowel signs (Harakaat) and a few more additional signs to indicate the absence of a vowel, the prolongation of an Alif (Fat'hah) and the double pronunciation of a consonant. Table 1 below summarizes the short vowel signs in Arabic.

To further clarify, the vowel marks are explained.

Fathah /-/
The Fatha  is a small diagonal line placed above a letter and represents a short /a/. The word Fatha itself means 'opening' and refers to the opening of the mouth when pronouncing any letter with this mark.



Table 1. Short vowel signs in Arabic.

Sign	Name	Sound
ـ	fatha	a
ـ	kasra	i
ـ	damma	u
ـ	sukoon	no sound
ـ	madda	prolongs the <a>-sound of the alif
ـ	shadda	doubles the letter underneath

Kasrah / - /

Kasrah كسرة is a short diagonal line below a letter and refers to a short /i/. The word kasrah literally means ‘breaking.’

Dammah / ـ /

The Dammah ضمة is a small curl-like diacritic placed above a letter to represent a short /u/ or /o/.

Sukoon / ˘ /

The Sukoon السکون is a circle-shaped diacritic placed above a letter. It indicates that the consonant to which it is attached is not followed by a vowel. The Sukoon is a necessary symbol for writing consonant–vowel–consonant syllables which are very common in Arabic.

Maddah / ī /

The Maddah مَدَه is a tiled-like diacritic (it looks like a bird flying). Maddah appears only on top of an Alif /*ā*/ and indicates a glottal stop (Hamza) followed by another Alif representing the long /a:/ or /aa/.

Shaddah / ّ /

The Shaddah is a diacritic shaped like a small written Latin 'w'. It is used to indicate consonant doubling or extra length, which is phonemic in Arabic. It is written above the consonant which is doubled. It is the only Haraka that is sometimes used in ordinary spelling to avoid ambiguity. It is important to note that when a Shadda is applied to a letter and the 'Tashkeel' is also written, the Tashkeel is put over or under the Shadda itself and not the letter (Arabic Short Vowels 2009).

In sum, the Harakaat or vowel points serve two purposes. Firstly, they serve as a phonetic guide. They indicate the presence of short vowels (Fatha, Kasra, or Damma) or their absence (Sukoon). Second, at the last letter of a word, the vowel point reflects the inflection case or conjugation mood. Vowel marks are very important in Arabic. The word's meaning can differ completely if a vowel mark applied to one letter is changed (Arabic Vowel Marks: Tashkeel or Harakat [n.d.](#); Arabic Short Vowels [2009](#)).

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that examines the text quality of English/ Arabic bilingual picture books for young children. The methodology followed is similar to that implemented by Huang and Chen (2016) in their study of English/ Chinese bilingual children’s books. Methodologically it can be seen as an example of ‘educational connoisseurship’ (Eisner 1985). The researchers’ combined experiences with literacy in the context of young children, including experience in choosing appropriate texts for young children, as well as their ontological perspectives as researchers, guide this personal appreciation of the quality of dual language texts. The success of the analysis can only be measured in relation to how it illuminates the affordances and qualities of these texts for young children (Butzkamm 1998).

Researchers' background

The research team is important to consider as part of this qualitative examination of text quality. The research team comprises four members with different backgrounds and different languages:

- the Director of the ECLC and faculty member in the College of Education, who is a native English speaker with bilingual proficiency in other European languages
- A faculty member in the College of Education who has native proficiency in Arabic, English and French
- the Coordinator of the CRC in the Library and Learning Commons at Zayed University, who is a native English speaker
- one ECLC teacher working as a research assistant, who has native Arabic proficiency and high proficiency in English.

Since all members of the team have extensive living experiences in the UAE, other Arab and Gulf states, and in English-speaking countries, they are sensitive to the linguistic and cultural issues portrayed in children's picture books, similarly to Huang and Chen (2016).

Books selection

The books were selected based on the current availability of published dual language books in the Curriculum Resources Center (CRC) in the library of Zayed University, and published dual language books in the separate library of the Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC).

The following criteria were used to identify and select dual language English/Arabic books for the purposes of this study: (1) picture books published in English/Arabic; and (2) books suitable for children under the age of six. A total of 24 dual language picture books were selected and used in this study (see [Appendix A](#)).

Research questions

Based on Huang and Chen's recent work, the researchers formulated the following research question: What is the text quality of dual language English/Arabic picture books for young children? To answer this question and expand on the definition of 'text quality of bilingual books' (Huang and Chen 2016, 479), five aspects are investigated: translation accuracy, text appearance, language effects, accessibility of book information, and cultural relevance. The first four were explored by Huang and Chen (2016) in the context of English/ Chinese bilingual books, while the fifth aspect has been added by the current research team in the context of English/Arabic dual language books. Translation accuracy refers to the language in which the book was originally available, and how well it is translated into the other language. Text appearance refers to similarities or differences in font size, color, shape. Language effects refers to the ways in which the two scripts are emphasized and arranged on the page, including pictures and background colors. Accessibility of book information refers to the languages in which information about the books is available, including the blurb and title. Cultural relevance is concerned with how well the content reflects children's cultural identities and literary heritage (Sneddon 2008).

Data analysis

Although there is no official framework or rubric established for evaluating picture books, a commonly held practice for evaluating literary materials consists of developing criteria to describe the content or quality within a book. Correspondingly, a rating or qualifier (i.e. 'good', 'fair', 'always', 'never') is often attached to the evaluation to establish a specific hierarchy of overall quality (AAAS 2013). For the purposes of this study, the researchers developed a rating scale indicating excellent, good, fair and poor ([Appendix B](#)). This four-point rating scale includes specific definitions of each criterion, based on the literature reviewed.

Two of the researchers, the bilingual teacher and the Coordinator of the CRC, read aloud and evaluated all 24 English/Arabic dual language children's picture books separately and made judgements

about the text quality of these books using the rating scale. The whole team then worked together to highlight examples of excellent, good, fair and poor text quality across the sample of books.

Findings

In the presentation of findings, all of the books reviewed are referred to using the name of the book in italics.

Translation accuracy

Upon close examination of translation accuracy of the 24 English/Arabic dual language picture books reviewed, it was discovered that the majority of the books maintained the same meaning in both languages, with minor translation errors in many books. For example, in the book *My First 100 Words*, the translated word in Arabic and English (bed) does not match the picture shown in the book (bathtub). Therefore, these errors, albeit few, earned ratings of 'good' in this category. The book *Khalid & the Nursery* was the only book given an 'excellent' rating in translation accuracy. This book had no noticeable errors with meaning, content or sentence structure, in either language.

Some of the books were given 'fair' ratings in translation accuracy. In the book *Nora's Habits*, the title in English suits the content of the story more than the Arabic title (سلوكيات) (*souloukiyat*), which essentially means 'Nora's Behavior'. The Arabic word that should have been used is (عادات نور) (*aadat nura*) because the story shows words and pictures of a little girl going about her day doing things like brushing her teeth, making her bed, etc. The book also includes activities for children at the end of the story that are only written in Arabic.

Another example of an incorrectly translated title is the book, *I Am a Human Being*. This title is listed in English, but includes the Arabic title, حواسٍ, (*My Senses*) which is the more correct translation because the book features words and pictures of different senses. In the book *Belling the Cat*, the title is translated into الشجاعة (which means 'The Courage' in English). The Arabic translation is not accurate because the book is mostly about the cat. It appears that the word 'Belling' is used as a verb in the title (i.e. the 'bell' is 'belling') because a 'bell' is used by the mice in the story to warn each other where the cat is at all times. In this context, the word 'Belling' in English is an incorrect use of a noun and an even more incorrect use of an attempted verb. In *The Tortoise & the Eagle*, the translation in Arabic does not include the word 'Eagle' in Arabic. Instead, the Arabic title listed is السلحفاة الطازرة, which means 'The Flying Turtle' in Arabic. The word 'Flying' is added and 'Eagle' is omitted entirely in the Arabic title. For these reasons, these books were given a 'fair' rating.

It should also be noted that it appears as if thirteen of the books reviewed in this study were originally written in Arabic and translated into English (see Table 2). These books open and are read according to the Arabic manner, by turning the pages from left to right. It also appeared that eleven of the books are of English origin and have been translated into Arabic. These books open in the English reading fashion, by turning the pages from right to left.

An important matter that should be revisited at this point is the Arabic tashkeel or harakat. As mentioned above, the tashkeel serves as a phonetic guide and indicates the importance and correct pronunciation of a word. Thus, when it comes to literature for very young children, the tashkeel indicators are necessary so that children can become familiar with the correct pronunciation and identification of words when reading. Of all of the books reviewed, only one book failed to include the tashkeel markers. Not only did this book, *Bee & Me*, omit the tashkeel markers, but it was also the only book that added the transliteration of English to Arabic. It is unclear if this is the reason why the tashkeel markers were omitted.

Text appearance

When reviewing the text appearance, the researchers found that most of the books used fonts of similar size and color in both languages. However, some of the books (i.e. *The Shepherd Boy*, *The*

Table 2. Language origin of books reviewed.

Arabic Origin	English Origin
<i>The Shepherd Boy</i>	<i>Feelings</i>
<i>The Tortoise and the Eagle</i>	<i>Indoors</i>
<i>Belling the Cat</i>	<i>Outdoors</i>
<i>The Butterflies</i>	<i>Opposites</i>
<i>Nora's Habits</i>	<i>Sports</i>
<i>I am a Human Being</i>	<i>A Day</i>
<i>Hazem and the Professions</i>	<i>Al Hamdoullah</i>
<i>I am a Human Being</i>	<i>I Wonder</i>
<i>My First 100 Words</i>	<i>Am I Small?</i>
<i>Nora and the Professions</i>	<i>Bee & Me</i>
<i>Khalid and the Nursery</i>	<i>Picture Dictionary</i>
<i>My Body</i>	
<i>Khalid and the Nursery</i>	
Total: 13	Total: 11

(*Butterflies, The Tortoise & The Eagle, Belling the Cat*) contained portions of the Arabic text in different font colors on various pages. Sometimes the Arabic text was written in white, which made it more difficult to see and read. This feature, upon first glance, made the Arabic text appear smaller and less significant than the English text. The difference between Arabic and English scripts also has a bearing on font spacing. Because written Arabic requires the joining of some letters and not of others, font spacing will almost always vary from word to word, making some words (or fonts) appear loosely spaced and others more tightly bound.

Overall, the text appearance in the books reviewed was given a rating of 'good' or above. One exception to this rating is present in the book *Bee & Me*, which rated 'poor' in text appearance because of the noticeable differences between font color and font size in each language, and the unequal emphasis of specific words, which made the English text more visible and appear more valuable than the Arabic text.

Language effects

Many of the books, such as *Khalid and the Nursery, Feelings, Opposites, A Day*, and *Outdoors*, contained text that is very balanced and organized in its layout, indicating ratings of 'excellent' and 'good'. These board books are easy to read, with a single sentence or idea taking up one full page. However, in the book *Sports*, some of the pages contain text with two or more ideas (including pictures) per page, which is not pleasing to the eye and may be confusing to children. This book was rated 'fair' because of this issue.

In the books *I Wonder* and *Alhamdoullah*, the same fonts were used throughout the book in both languages. Often, words that require specific emphasis are printed in bold fonts or red fonts throughout the story. For example, in both of these books, words such as 'Allah' and 'Alhamdoullah' are emphasized (and written in different font colors) in both Arabic and English. This is an excellent example of font sizes and colors consistently being used equally in both languages in order to highlight different aspects of the story.

In the book *Bee & Me*, different fonts and sizes are used within the same page throughout the book. The leading word (in English) on each page is printed in a very large font and bright color. Three different types of font are used. There is one font used for the English text, another font with bold print used for the Arabic text, and another font used for the transliteration of the Arabic text. All of these passages are displayed on the same page and underneath one another, making it difficult for the reader to follow any one version of the text. It should also be noted that some of the text is printed on top of the very large pictures included on every page of the book. This makes the text difficult to see because it is competing with pictures and colors in the background. Due to these factors, the book appears very disorganized and is difficult to read and/or identify the text. This book earned a 'poor' rating in this category.



Book information

Of all of the books reviewed in this study, only two books, *Khalid and the Nursery*, and *My First 100 Words*, contained information about the book in both languages. *Khalid and the Nursery* included publisher name, date, author, illustrator, and also dedication information in both languages, earning an 'excellent' rating. In *My First 100 Words*, there is book information in both languages, but the objectives of the book are written only in Arabic. This book was given a 'good' rating. Approximately ten of the books contained information only available in English, and five of the books included information available only in Arabic, earning 'fair' ratings. However, in the books *Belling the Cat*, *The Butterflies*, *The Shepherd Boy*, and *The Tortoise & the Eagle*, no author is listed and there is very little book information available. Where it is available, it is given only in the Arabic language. These books were all given 'poor' ratings.

Cultural relevance

Of all of the books reviewed for cultural relevance, two books stood out and earned an 'excellent' rating for being the most culturally relevant and representative of the population within the United Arab Emirates: *Alhamdoullah* and *Khalid and the Nursery*. In *Alhamdoullah*, for example, there are pictures of a boy making a culturally significant hand gesture while praying and a girl wearing an appropriate head covering. The word 'Alhamdoullah' is used and explained throughout the book. In *Khalid and the Nursery*, there are pictures of women wearing head scarves, men wearing traditional clothing (kandoora), and a woman wearing an abaya. There are also references to family throughout the book, which is a very important characteristic of culture in the Middle East.

The majority of the books earned a 'good' rating for being age appropriate and containing topics of interest to young children. Additionally, in the book *Sports*, words such as 'soccer cleats and football pitch' were written alongside the words 'soccer field and football boots', which shows that different words may sometimes be used to describe the same object (e.g. American English versus British English). However, this book earned a 'fair' rating because many of the sports listed are sports played outside of the local culture.

Discussion and implications

In this study, the text quality of 24 English/Arabic dual language picture books for young children was evaluated in relation to text appearance, language effects, accessibility of book information, translation accuracy and cultural relevance. The findings show that the reviewed bilingual picture books were of higher quality in the Arabic language than in the English language. Nevertheless, some of the books contain grammatical errors in Arabic.

There were some minor issues in translation in most of the books. In some cases, specific words were written incorrectly in both languages and did not correspond with the pictures on the page. However, overall the translations were good in terms of meaning, content and sentence structure. The titles of some of the books presented more critical translation issues. The Arabic language titles presented in these cases had a tenuous relationship with the meaning of the story. In some cases, the direct word-for-word translation resulted in translations that did not make grammatical sense in English. Further examination of some of the problematic translations reveals two probing assumptions by the research team: the books appeared to have been originally written in Arabic and then translated into English by a native Arabic speaker; and it appears that many of these books were translated by a native Arabic speaker who may have studied English, but does not have much experience with speaking it. Similar translation issues in bilingual books have arisen in other studies, including Huang and Chen's study of English/Chinese books (2016), and Naidoo and Lopes-Robertson's study of English/Spanish books (2007). Huang and Chen note that the difference in text quality between both languages 'fails to deliver the full potential of these books' (2016, 484). In

order to have a high quality bilingual picture book, it is crucial that the translation is reviewed very carefully by experienced authors/editors in both languages to avoid any errors.

The books that were of better quality were attributed to an author. Books that had been published by the same publisher and had the same format tended to have the same strengths and challenges. Just over half of the books originated in the Arabic language. Interestingly, there was a case of one particular book which appeared to originate in the Arabic language for the version, but originally derived from an English well known story. *The Shepherd Boy* seemed to be based on 'The Boy who Cried Wolf', but had been written into Arabic and then translated into English. One consideration that is beyond the scope of discussion in this paper is that of the book directionality. Directionality of print refers to knowing which way to move your eyes across the pages when reading. This is the most basic skill that makes reading possible. However, it is a skill that needs to be taught at early stages of literacy. When designing and/or creating bilingual books, directionality can present a serious challenge if the books are in languages that are read differently (Ernst-Slavit and Mulhern 2003). In the context of this article, English is read from left to right while Arabic is read from right to left. It appeared clear at a glance which books had originated in either the Arabic or English language due to the directionality of the book itself.

Most of the books reviewed used fonts of similar shapes and sizes. Wherever there was a difference in emphasis, the book had originated in English and the Arabic text appeared less significant. There was a significant difference between the languages in only one book, *Bee and Me*, which favored neither English nor Arabic. Most of the books were well organized and emphasized both languages equally and appropriately. The findings from this study differ from Huang and Chen (English/Chinese dual language books, 2016) and Naidoo and Lopes-Robertson (English/Spanish dual language books, 2007), who found variation in font sizes, and that the English language was favored in the overall presentation. Most of the books reviewed for this study were presented in an age-appropriate manner, including one main idea per page with a corresponding picture. Reading would be equally inviting in either language in the context of the books reviewed.

Only two out of 24 books included book information in both languages, including one book that also showed the dedication written in English and Arabic. The lack of book information in both languages makes it difficult for a potential reader to decide whether or not to choose the book for inclusion in a library or for use in the classroom. Readers of English only or Arabic only in this context might be deterred from choosing a book based on the availability of information in one language only.

With regard to cultural relevance, very few of the books reviewed reflected the cultural and literary experience and heritage of the UAE. In the few books where this was the case, culture was reflected through culturally appropriate pictures of characters and specific words used within the culture which are also appropriately transliterated to English. These books would be culturally relevant across the Middle East and within many Muslim communities worldwide, specifically. Sneddon (2008) advises that dual language books be written from the perspective of the home language culture and then translated into English. While this is a relevant recommendation for publishers and authors, it might also be challenging and limiting for them. What is culturally appropriate in one Arabic-speaking context might not be appropriate in another – Arabic speakers live in diverse populations, regardless of religion. For example, what is culturally appropriate for an Arabic-speaking Christian in the Middle East might not be appropriate for an Arabic-speaking Muslim in the United States. Therefore, it is difficult to cater to all Arabic/English speakers and learners in all publications. The cultural diversity of the UAE provides a particular challenge to this – approximately 11% of the population is Emirati. Other Arabs and Iranians comprise approximately 18% of the population, while South Asians, European and other Westerners, East Asians and Africans comprise approximately 72% of the population (Wikipedia 2017). Many of these expatriates have children learning Arabic in schools and in early years settings. It is difficult to say which cultures should be represented in dual language books for expatriate children, or local children. Dual language books that are written from the perspective of the local culture can provide opportunities for expatriate children

to learn about culture and helps teachers raise their students' awareness of diversity in text and context. However, dual language books might not be culturally relevant and therefore less appealing to those children. The concept of cultural relevance is worth further study in terms of the purpose of dual language books.

As sharing literature with young children benefits the development of emergent literacy (Mackenzie and Veresov 2013; Mendoza and Reese 2001), part of the purpose of using dual language books is to enhance children's engagement with literacy. Dual language books offer opportunities for children to view languages in functional interrelationship with each other (Velasco and Garcia 2014) and enhance opportunities for translanguaging and engaging in 'intentional cross-linguistic pedagogy' (Palvaiinen et al. 2016, 615). It is beyond the scope of this study to explore how dual language books are used in the classroom or in the home. Further studies exploring the use of dual language picture books in the classroom are needed. One study could explore whether the books are used for translation purposes, and how they are read aloud (English, then Arabic, or Arabic, then English; or both at the same time; or on an ad hoc basis), and indeed how children themselves engage with them in terms of conversations about the directionality, pictures, or language used. There are a number of different pedagogical approaches which could be applied when there are two linguistic versions of the unfolding story (Mendoza and Reese 2001) within a book.

The qualitative nature of this study has highlighted our personal evaluations of the books available. While our backgrounds and ontological perspectives are critical and of value to this context, there are some limitations inherent to conducting a study of this kind. There are limitations to rating the books according to the criteria with only two reviewers, despite their rich experience in this area. During our review, we decided to increase the scope of the study in a further paper by applying a different methodological perspective. To this end, in our next study we intend to strengthen the validity and reliability of the text quality analysis by reviewing the coding scheme and engaging some qualified others in reviewing the text quality of the books. By doing this, we will measure the inter-rater reliability of the books used in this study and then be in a position to highlight and describe more specifically what we consider to be examples of an excellent, good, fair, and poor quality dual language book. Practitioners will then be able to refer to these guidelines in the context of any dual language picture book.

Conclusion

Considering the recent increased emphasis on reading in the UAE, and the increased emphasis on English as language of instruction for English, Mathematics and Science in kindergarten schools (Mayer, 2017), English/Arabic dual language picture books for young children are ideal materials for enhancing teaching and learning. Therefore, we posit, similarly to Huang and Chen (2016), that the quality of English/Arabic dual language picture books should be of concern to educators and parents. The dearth of research in the area of dual language picture books prompted us to explore this area, inspired by Huang and Chen's study (2016). This study seeks to begin to fill the gap in the area and also provide directions for future research. It illuminates the affordances and qualities of these texts for young children. This study found deficiencies with availability of book information, varying standards with regard to translation accuracy, and raised questions about cultural relevance. The criteria used can serve as a checklist to guide researchers in future studies, educators in various settings, and parents in the community, in choosing appropriate dual language books. In order to ensure that children have opportunities to read high-quality dual language books, publishers, educators, translators, and authors must work together to guarantee that the highest quality standards are maintained through the entire evolution of a book.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Zayed University Research Cluster Funding 'Dual Language Education in the Early Years' R17083.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Bibliography of English/Arabic dual language children's picture books reviewed

A day. (2015). West Sussex, England: Milet. 9781785080357.

Aguleh, A. *Alhamdoullah*. (2015). Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: Learn With Me. 9781329058491.

Aguleh, A. *I wonder... .* (2015). Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: Learn With Me. 9781329059009.

AlThawadi, F. *Khalid and the nursery*. (2015). Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

YaMaKan. 9789948184645.

Belling the cat. (n.d.). Beirut, Lebanon: Digital Future. 9786144080498.

- The butterflies.* (n.d.). Beirut, Lebanon: Digital Future. 9786144080504.
- Feelings.* (2015). West Sussex, England: Milet. 9781785080692.
- Hazem and the professions.* (2016). Egypt: Lamasay. 9789778502572.
- I am a human being.* (2016). Egypt: Lamasay. 9789776433878.
- I am a human being.* (2016). Egypt: Lamasay. 9789776433533.
- Indoors.* (2015). West Sussex, England: Milet. 9781785080012.
- Mazen and the vegetables.* (2016). Egypt: Lamasay. 9789778502503.
- My body.* (2016). Egypt: Lamasay. 9789776433885.
- My first 100 words.* (2015). New York: Scholastic. 9781338056129.
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Appendix B

Criteria and Ratings for Dual Language Books.

CRITERION #1 – TEXT APPEARANCE	RATING
Equal font style, size, color, spacing throughout the book	Excellent
Some differences in font style, size, color, spacing, but not distracting	Good
Some differences in font style, size, color, spacing, that distract from text	Fair
Many differences in font style, size, color, spacing that changes viewpoint of content and gives preference to one language	Poor
CRITERION #2 – LANGUAGE EFFECTS	
Equal language effects were used throughout the book in both languages, including book information	Excellent
Some changes in language effects were used in both languages in order to place emphasis on specific words in the story	Good
Minor changes in language effects were used in some parts of the book, in one language only	Fair
Different language effects were used throughout the book, which placed a higher emphasis of one language over the other	Poor
CRITERION #3 – BOOK INFORMATION	
Description of the book and information about the author is available in both languages, in equal scripts	Excellent
Description of the book and information about the author is available in both languages, with less information given in one of the languages	Good
Description of the book and/or about the author is available in one language	Fair
There is no information about the book or author available	Poor
CRITERION #4 – TRANSLATION	
Translation of all content matches and has the same meaning in both languages, with no errors	Excellent
The translation is written with equal comprehension level/age level in both languages	Good
There are minor translation differences in meaning in one language	Fair
The translation has minor comprehension level/age level issues in both languages	Poor
There is word for word translation with minor consideration for content meaning	Excellent
The translation contains words not appropriate for the age/comprehension level in both languages	Good
Translation of most of the content contains many errors	Fair
It is obvious that the book was translated from one language into another, with no consideration for age/comprehension level	Poor
CRITERION #5 – CULTURAL RELEVANCE	
The entire book is culturally appropriate and reflects children's cultural identities and literary heritage very well (e.g. 3 or more references to or pictures of local culture)	Excellent
The book is culturally appropriate and reflects children's cultural identities and literary heritage moderately well (e.g. includes one or two references to or pictures of the local culture)	Good
The book includes references to or pictures from a known culture, but not the local culture.	Fair
The book is not culturally appropriate because it includes pictures of or refers to tales that are not appropriate in the culture	Poor