



19th Annual Symposium | September 6-8, 2023

Bilingual Fiction Reading in Swedish for Immigrants

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of migrant adult learners in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) with bilingual fiction reading, and to understand how their teachers perceived its impact on the learners' literacy and language development. Bilingual fiction reading in this study involved reading fiction in both the mother tongue and in Swedish as a Second Language.

The study applies a theoretical framework using translanguaging-based pedagogy (cf. García, 2009) combined with Langer's (2017 [1995]) theories about learning through transformative fiction reading, Paran's (2008) model for literature and language integrated didactics and Cummin's (2011, 2017) concept of literacy engagement.

Based on semi-structured interviews with adult migrant learners and their teachers, and an analysis of reading journals written by the learners, this research was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews with learners and teachers, and reading journals written by the learners. Findings suggest that bilingual fiction reading is seen as supporting learning through translanguaging and an experience-based, collaborative pedagogy. However, to some learners, the reading task was too challenging, which might be due to the literature choice and a low literacy level. A general observation is that there is a shortage of translated fiction for adult learners in Sweden.

Keywords: Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), bilingual reading, translanguaging, migrant adult learners, Swedish as a Second Language

Introduction

This study explores migrant adult learners' and their teachers' experiences of bilingual fiction reading in SFI - "Swedish For Immigrants" [Svenska För Invandrare]. SFI is a state-funded form of adult education, organized by the municipality but regulated by the national syllabus (The Swedish national agency for education, 2022). The courses are free of charge and offered to most newly arrived adult learners. The aim of SFI, according to the national syllabus for municipal adult education in Swedish for immigrants, is to develop a functional second language and to enable active participation in social life, work life and in pursuing further studies. Many, but not all teachers have a teaching degree, and about 50 percent of the teachers also have a specialization in teaching Swedish as a second language (The School Inspectorate, 2024:1; cf. Colliander, 2018; Norlund Shaswar & Wedin, 2019).

LESLLA-teaching is offered within the SFI system, which is built on four courses and three study tracks depending on the student's educational background (The Swedish national agency for education, 2022). Study track 1, course A is offered to students with little or no formal schooling. After completing the B course, the students can go on to the C and/or D course. Swedish is the main language of instruction, but the student's mother tongue can also be used as a tool for Swedish language development (The Swedish national agency for education, 2016; cf. Colliander, 2018). The fiction traditionally used in SFI is most often stories written in simplified Swedish. This might be due to the practice of using Swedish only, compared to translanguaging (cf. García, 2009). According to Reichenberg (2014), such "easy-to-read- texts" often have poor content with short sentences, which makes it difficult to hold in-class discussions that promote reading understanding. Furthermore, the reader does not get training in reading between the lines, i. e. making inferences.

The starting point for SFI in Sweden, as noted by Zachrisson (2014:19), has been preparing the learners for the job market and for socialization into the Swedish society. However, the teaching of Swedish L2 has been perceived as low-status education. The education is neither desired, nor are the responsible authorities well informed about the education: the education is not prioritized, and degrees from the education are not required or respected in society (SOU 2003:77; cf. Zachrisson, 2014: 20). As the Schools Inspectorate's report shows (The School Inspectorate (2024:1), the aforementioned problems are still standing today.

Hence, new ways of teaching Swedish L2, such as translanguaging based, and teaching in more collaborative ways are currently discussed in Sweden. Professional development courses for teachers are therefore offered by the Swedish national agency for education (2024) in collaboration with universities.

There is an increased global recognition and attention to literature in foreign language education (Tsang, Paran & Lau, 2023). It is argued that reading literature gives essential input for students and is often used as a major method in second language education to increase learning (Krashen, 2004; McRae, 2022; Zhang & Webb, 2019).

Thus, exploring the relatively under-researched context of migrant adult learners and their experiences of bilingual fiction reading in Swedish and in their mother tongue or first language, as well as their teachers' perceptions of this kind of teaching, is of great practical and theoretical importance. It might, as stated by Hall (2005), stimulate language learning as well as cultural knowledge. The contribution and significance of this study lie in giving voice to both the learners

and their teachers concerning experiences of bilingual reading and perceptions of teaching bilingual reading in classes of newly arrived migrant adult learners.

In the following sections we introduce the theoretical framework for this study. Thereafter, we describe the methods, the data and ways of analyzing before presenting the findings. The article concludes with a discussion and a conclusion.

Aim of the Study

This bilingual reading project aimed to explore adult learners' experience with bilingual fiction reading, in their mother tongue or first language (L1) and Swedish as a second language (L2), as well as their teachers' perception of how bilingual fiction reading influenced the adult learners' literacy and language development in Swedish L2.

Research questions are:

1. How do adult learners in SFI experience bilingual fiction reading in both mother tongue/first language and Swedish L2?
2. How do SFI teachers perceive the influence of bilingual fiction reading on adult learners' literacy and language development in Swedish as an L2?

Analytical Perspectives and Previous Research

This bilingual fiction reading project was based upon the intersection of language and literature (Paran, 2008). Translanguaging (Williams, 1996; García, 2009) is here useful as it refers to various aspects of multilingualism and multiliteracy (New London Group, 1996; Skerrett, 2015). Translanguaging was first practiced by Williams in the 90's in Wales, using both Welsh and English in classroom, in order to revitalize Welsh. Williams called the dual language practice *trawsiethu* in Welsh and later it was translated to translanguaging. García (cf. 2009) has developed the concept of translanguaging, arguing that languages are dynamic and present simultaneously, challenging monolingual bias. Two concepts are vital in translanguaging as a theory and pedagogy: Social justice and social practice which in this context form the ground for the pedagogy used, based upon authentic literacy practices connected to the students' experiences and cultural background, and overt instruction facilitating students' developing of metalanguage. As argued by Juvonen and Källkvist (2021) the pedagogical concept of translanguaging is about teaching methods that involve the intentional and planned use of students' multilingual resources in language and content subjects.

Similarly, Skerrett (2016) discusses how multiliteracies pedagogy can use a transformal practice in a critical framing, as she draws upon the multiliteracy pedagogy discussed by the New London Group (1996) and the so-called New Literacy Studies (cf. Pettitt, 2023). When Pettitt defines literacy (2023), this critical framing instead is named Critical Practices "with an overt focus on working to dismantle various kinds of injustice" (p. 4). Skerrett argues that multiliteracy are closely related to language and literacy practices, and practices is the key word, rather than the literacy skills that people have, regarding reading and writing.

In the context of translanguaging, multimodality is discussed by García and Wei (2014), as a part of complex multilingual environments, and defined as semiotic tools, which includes gestures, objects, visuals, touch, sounds, tone and other forms of communication. Similarly, semiotics is referred to by Skerrett (2015), as she defines multimodality as patterns of meaning, which includes “linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, multimodality” (p. 28). Pettitt (2023), however, elaborates about semiotics solely instead of the concept of multimodality, as “writing, speech, images, gesture, gaze, posture” and so on. (p. 4). García and Wei (2014) conclude that multimodality always has been a part of communication and nowadays has been reinforced by technology.

While the concept of translanguaging provides the project with pedagogical and analytical perspectives upon views on language learning, Langer’s reader-based theory (1994, 2017 [1995]) regarding literature didactics and a description of the reader’s perception of the literature work complements the perspectives of this study. Langer (1994, 2017 [1995]) argued that transformative learning through reading literature works through “horizons of possibilities” and is important for L2 learners. When readers start reading, they orient themselves towards these different horizons of possibilities in their interpretation. This exploration eventually includes critical thought and thinking beyond the situation in the literature, reflecting on their own lives or others’ situations, or conditions. By building on the thoughts of the readers /learners in literature didactics, Langer suggests teachers should focus on discussion-based literature work.

Translanguaging and the intersection of literature and language

Previous Swedish studies using a translanguaging perspectives examined language learning strategies and teaching practices in SFI for migrant adult learners with limited previous education (Norlund Shaswar & Wedin, 2019). However, research suggests there is still a dominant monolingual norm in Sweden (Norlund Shaswar, 2020; Rosén & Lundgren, 2021). Wedin, Rosén and Straszer (2021), among others, problematized the monolingual norm and argued that the dominant language paradigm is based on European notions of nationalism and colonialism.

In a Swedish context, there is a growing field of studies using a translanguaging approach (Ganuza & Hedman, 2017; Straszer, Rosén & Wedin, 2022; cf. Fuster & Bardel, 2024). However, the research field with a focus on migrant adult learners with little-to-no formal education with a translanguaging perspective is still a minor field (Stranger-Johannessen & Damiani, 2024). A study by Mörnerud (2010) used interviews with students with very short educational or non-educational background and their teachers to explore the students’ views on the role of their mother tongue for their own learning of the Swedish Language in both spoken and written form. Mörnerud (2010) found that the students experienced support from the use of their mother tongue when they studied on the early levels, but most students considered it necessary with support from use of their mother tongue also later in their education. The interviewed teachers believed that it was obvious that the mother tongue was an asset and necessary for understanding, learning and development.

Translanguaging and multimodality was used as a framework for Wedin, Rosén and Hennius (2018) when performing research in two SFI-schools, where adult learners with short school background blogged to develop their writing skills. The authors argue that written language teaching, aiming to prepare students for participation in society, should not separate learning, citizenship and everyday life, but instead stimulate the use of varied linguistic resources. Lundgren and Rosén (2022), also in Sweden, conducted a study with seven teachers in SFI, which was based on biliteracy and translanguaging in a reading project with an easy-to-read book, *The Diary* (Drewsen, 2016), published in six languages. Findings show that translanguaging stimulated meta-

linguistic discussions and that teachers realized the benefits of using the students' linguistic repertoires, e.g., the students' comparisons between languages. However, the teachers were surprised by the difficulties the Arabic speaking learners had with the text, which the authors argue might be due to their/the learners' unfamiliarity with Modern Standard Arabic. On the contrary, teachers and other learners thought the easy-to-read text in Swedish was too easy and thus some learners lost their motivation to read (Lundgren & Rosén 2022: 178).

Internationally, there is today a large body of research arguing for the benefits of translanguaging and bilingual reading, both in general, and specifically for LESLLA learners (see Arteagoitia & Howard, 2015; Blom et al., 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; González-Davies, 2017; Kucukali & Koçbaşı, 2021; Lyster, Quiroga & Ballinger, 2013; Makalela, 2015; Turnbull, 2018; Young-Scholten & Maguire, 2009). Also, LESLLA learners benefit from bilingual reading and bilingual programs as they have the possibility of developing literacy in their home language alongside the language of instruction, leading to biliteracy (Wall & Thapa, 2023). Dual language models of schooling are thus spreading rapidly as the results seem promising (Collier & Thomas, 2017). Accordingly, research on dual language reading can be found from several contexts (Naqvi et al., 2013 a and b; Thibeault & Matheson, 2021; Zaidi, 2020), highlighting the contribution of dual language reading to raising language awareness and improving vocabulary, as well as developing their personal and cultural identity.

In this field, Cummins (2011) also introduce the concept of “reading engagement”, e.g. learners literacy engagement and its impact on academic growth, particularly for L2 and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Cummins suggests that students who are actively engaged with reading materials tend to develop stronger reading comprehension skills and achieve higher academic success (Cummins, 2011).

International research also supplements with results showing that regular reading, and reading with listening (Webb et al., 2023: 175), is important for L2 learners as reading exposes learners to a wide range of vocabulary in context, helping them understand how words are used in different situations (Bamford & Day, 2004; Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). Regular reading practice is also shown to enhance comprehension skills, making it easier for learners to understand and process new information (Grabe, 2012), help improve reading speed and fluency, which are crucial for overall language proficiency (Maluch & Sachse, 2020). Renandya and Jacobs (2016) show that through reading, learners can get insights into the culture and customs of the language they are learning, which can enhance their overall understanding and appreciation of the language. Success in reading can also boost learners' confidence and motivation to continue learning the language (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). In this line, Filimban et al. (2022) conducted a study on a program with “pleasure reading” for migrant adult learners with low literacy/limited education. The study showed success in establishing a habit of pleasure reading for the learners with different levels of literacy in L1. However, the authors also mention that “the lower-literate, low proficiency learners” had difficulties to comprehend what they read.

Yet, there are ongoing discussions on advantages and disadvantages in bilingual reading (see Bailey et al., 2019; Phelps & Filippi, 2020). As researchers point out, the field is complex and researchers approach the study of bilingualism from various disciplines, each of which uses its own methodologies and theoretical frameworks, thus getting different results (Austin et al., 2015). These findings highlight the importance of research on bilingual reading and bilingual teaching and their possibilities in supporting diverse learners, including those with limited formal education. Thus, we argue that research on bilingual reading and literature work for language acquisition (cf. Paran, 2008) focusing on migrant adult learners is highly relevant as this area of research remains

a minor field and most researchers focus on children’s literature (Young-Scholten & Maguire, 2009).

Method and Methodology

The bilingual reading project was carried out in collaboration between a university and a local SFI organizer in an urban area in South Sweden and lasted for six weeks. Teachers from the local SFI organizer participated in a professional development course at the university, studied biliteracy, initiated the research and applied the method in slightly different ways in their teaching groups. Table 1 shows the duration of the project.

Table 1 Timetable for the project.

Time	Content
Summer- Autumn 2022	Planning the project involving researchers, head of the school and the coordinator at SFI. Developing reading journals. Applying for ethical approval.
November 2022	Decision on approved ethics application (Dnr 2022-05620-01)
December 2022	Focus group interviews with learners Collecting 38 reading journals
January 2023	Individual online interviews with six teachers
Spring 2023	Analyzing data together, while reading together
September 2023	Presentation at conference of LESLLA (leslla.org)

Participants

The reading project included 45 adult learners. The learners were at various proficiency levels of L1 and L2 literacy and language. Many of them were L2 “beginning-level learners” comparable to what Christenson describes when defining different levels of LESLLA-learners in the US (2023: 105). Christenson argues that most migrants into the US have decoding skills in another language. This is also the case in the Swedish context and in this project, which included learners with diverse origins, most from outside Europe. Focus group interviews using semi-structured open-ended questions were conducted with the adult learners after the project finished (see Appendix 2).

Data collection

Data collection included focus group interviews with learners and teachers and analysis of learners’ reading journals. The focus group interviews consisted of learners from courses B-D and lasted approximately 60 minutes. (see table 2). Each focus group interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Originally the focus group interviews were planned to be held in Swedish, but in practice, multiple languages were used. We aimed at a dialogical and dynamic interview situation to allow the learners to develop their views on their experiences. The focus group interviews were shaped by the participants, the social context and the moderator and were embedded in complex group dynamics (cf. Cyr, 2019; Morgan, 2012). Hence, the focus group interviews were quite different in both length and dynamics, much due to language issues. A bilingual (Swedish-Arabic) teacher took part in one of the focus group interviews due to expected language difficulties. This teacher made some short translations and clarifications, which might have influenced the learners’

willingness to talk. This was, however, not noticeable during the group discussions. The learners seemed rather relieved to get language support.

The teachers in turn were interviewed individually because of the teachers' integrity and an interest in what each of them had experienced as teachers (cf. Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). The interviews with the teachers, also using semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), aimed at exploring how they experienced teaching bilingual reading, and if this kind of reading influenced the learners' literacy and language development in L2 Swedish. We were aware of the impact we as researchers might have on their answers, although their answers seemed nuanced. Transcriptions of all interviews were made, partly by employing the transcription function in Microsoft Office, partly manually. When needed we used an authorized translation agency.

The printed reading journal had two versions and was developed by us researchers in collaboration with the teachers: one for course B and one for courses C–D (see Appendix 2) with tasks for the learners each week. The questions focused on both literature and language, e.g., quotes and reflections on learning, translations of words and sentences (see Appendix 3), thus contributing to a social literacy environment (see Pettitt, 2023).

Table 2.
Data and learners

Data production and learners	Number	Pseudonyms	Data for analysis
Focus group interviews (F1, F2, F3, F4) with learners. F1: Course B F2: Course B F3: Course C-D F4: Course C-D	Four groups with 3–7 members in each group	Language presentations: F1: Arabic-speaking group Ahsan Akila Aras Amina Amal Aya Aishya F2: <i>Bhumi</i> : Bengali, English <i>Bahram</i> : Arabic <i>Behroos</i> : Arabic and Kurdish <i>Bernard</i> : French, Dutch <i>Bahar</i> : Persian, Dari, Pashtu <i>Bojana</i> : Russian F3 <i>Etenesh</i> : Tigrinya, Amharic, Arabic <i>Esther</i> : Persian and Dari <i>Elam</i> : Dari <i>Emani</i> : Dari <i>Eshe</i> : English, French and Swahili F4:	4 transcribed focus group interviews. =240 minutes

		<i>Firouz</i> : Persian, Dari, English, Urdu <i>Filip</i> : Polish, English, French <i>Felicia</i> : Latvian, Russian	
Individual interviews with teachers	n=6 All teachers participated	Named <i>Carina</i> , Newly arrived emergent readers <i>Berit</i> : Teacher at low literacy level <i>Susanne</i> : Coordinator and teacher in course C-D <i>Sven</i> : Teacher, course C-D <i>Sonja</i> : Newly arrived emergent readers <i>Marie</i> : Teacher at low literacy level	6 transcribed interviews, =180 minutes
Reading journals	n=38	Named Kayo, Group B Amin, Group B Ibrahim Course B Saima, Course C Ahmed, Course C Firouz, Course C-D Maryam, Course C	38 journals, Course B=16 Courses C–D= 22

Reading materials

The literature consisted mainly of three fiction books by the Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren. The choice of these fiction books depended on the availability of fiction translated to the number of languages needed and was made by the librarian and the coordinator in SFI. *The Brothers Lionheart* [*Bröderna Lejonhjärta*] (Lindgren, 2003) tells the story of two brothers with a single mother during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Prominent themes in the book are sibling love, loyalty, hope, life and death. *Emil, That Boy*, [*Emil i Lönneberga*] (Lindgren, 2003) is about a farm boy with a good heart who always seems to get into trouble. *Mio, my son*, [*Mio min Mio*] (Lindgren, 2003) depicts an orphaned nine-year-old boy who ends up in a magical land where he meets his father, a king. Due to the teacher's choice one lower-literate B-group read folktales with parallel text in two languages in the same book instead.

Analysis

The analysis was divided into different phases, from transcriptions of all interviews via quotation selection, concentration and coding, identifying concepts, from which we together chiseled out a few key concepts, following a reflexive thematic analysis in line with Braun and Clarke (2013) and Braun, Clarke and Weate (2016). The reading journals were analyzed in the same way as the transcribed interviews. We worked both individually and together with the data, checking analysis and revisiting key concepts, generating initial themes in the data, and compared, revised, and discussed our own interpretations. These were reflected upon, together with the theory, translanguaging, based on the research questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019 [1983]).

However, even if the analysis took place in different stages (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the discussion on the coding and the generated themes was on-going through the analysis and the writing process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As researchers, we position ourselves within a qualitative and constructionist orientation and understand meaning 'in' qualitative data as contextualized and provisional (cf. Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

The project has been approved by an ethical review board in Sweden (Dnr 2022-05620-01). The project and the ethical guidelines (The Swedish Research Council, 2017; cf. ALLEA, 2017), which we have followed, were presented at a teacher's meeting, when written information about the project was also distributed by e-mail in case anyone wanted further information.

The learners were informed at the start of the project that it was a collaborative project with a university and that the researchers wanted to use their anonymized reading journals. Once the project had passed a few weeks, the learners were asked verbally and in writing if they wanted to be part of a focus group and discuss their experiences of the project. Seventeen learners agreed to this.

Creating an ethical research process with people considered vulnerable needs deep reflections on imbalance in power dynamics which we are very aware of (see Fox et.al., 2020). However, research involving people in situations of migration and refugee status can deepen our understanding of their experiences and has the potential to inform evidence-based decision-making and is thus important (Clark-Kazak, 2017).

The question of the extent to which the learners understood the ethical guidelines on information, consent, confidentiality, and use can always be questioned. Malessa (2023) underline that too much focus on information and consent may create concerns from many LESLLA-learners with non-academic backgrounds. Rather, the procedure around ethics is a process where security is created through mutual trust. Concerning our study, we tried to be clear and repeated the information orally before each interview, but we also took our time and tried to de-dramatize the interviews. The learners were eager to participate, and no specifically sensitive questions arose.

Findings

The findings are presented in the following section under three subheadings, namely 1) reading engagement and reading comprehension, 2) the learner's experienced benefits of reading, and 3) linguistic awareness and literacy learning (for original quotes, see Appendix 3). The article ends with a discussion and a conclusion.

Reading Engagement and Reading Comprehension

Teachers and learners expressed both in interviews and reading journals, that the reading project evoked reading engagement. Carina, a teacher with a group of newly arrived emergent readers, said: "it was really good that they could listen in their own pace." The learners read *Emil, that boy*, and had the books in their L1 digitally in their mobile phone and in their L2 Swedish, the books were physical. One learner had no L1 literacy skills, hence the others read aloud with her. Carina noticed that the learners' speech flow developed faster than usual. Berit, the teacher with a low literate B-group with international folk sagas, expressed: "The learners in course B worked much, much harder than course C.", the more advanced literacy group. Berit perceived that her learners had developed their L2 vocabulary after this project. Thus, different ways of acquiring fiction should be considered while reading bilingually (see Webb et al, 2023).

Susan, teacher in course C-D, also told us that her learners read *The Brothers Lion Heart* aloud in their L2 to each other in class, which enabled reading comprehension for those with lower literacy level in their mother tongue. It also emerged during the interviews that one's own voice is important. Sven, teacher in course C-D, told us his students did not have to "google as much as

they used to.” Sven continued that he could immediately notice “where they [the students] were in their reading, by their engagement”.

Firouz, a learner in course C-D said: “Oh, I have read everything in Persian, then the film, then in Swedish. Wow, what I have read! It was so fun”. Saima (course C-D) a learner with Persian as mother tongue, did not do as the teacher told her, to read a few pages in her mother tongue, and then in Swedish. Instead, she read it all in Persian and then in Swedish, but she “remembered it all and understood it all and it was fun”. Ahmed (course C-D) a learner with Persian as mother tongue, expressed that he “never liked to read books, but this was fun”. However, this did not apply to everyone. The Arabic-speaking F1 group with low L1 literacy level having read *Emil, That Boy* in Arabic agreed that “This book was really difficult” and told us that they wanted to read only in Swedish. Other learners with low L1 literacy level found listening and reading aloud collectively helpful. Kayo and Amin expressed that, “it [L2 reading] was difficult at the beginning, but with reading exercise it became easier”. Thus, teachers and learners of different literacy levels expressed reading engagement and reading comprehension in various ways.

The Learners’ experienced benefits of reading

Comments in both the reading journals and interviews showed how the learners as readers connected with the literature and experienced benefits of reading. One task in the reading journal (see Appendix 1) was to copy a quote from the book and make a comment in their mother tongue, then in Swedish. The following quotes are from *The Brothers Lion Heart*, with the learners’ comments:

‘The world we left. Here is all I want’ A person will live another life again, without pain and sorrow. (Ahmed)
I will write a note and put it on the kitchen table to my mother. I write to my mother. (Mariam)

During the interviews, the learners expressed that bilingual reading provided deeper reading experiences than easy-to-read books in Swedish, and in F4, course C-D, the learners discussed how bilingual reading helped them “get absorbed in a story”

- When you read now you are one in the book. /Filip

- Yes. /Felicia and Firouz

- Then it feels like a character in the book. /Firouz

[Everyone laughs.]

- You are full of words about how they should do it, just like the people in the theater who shout, ‘be careful.’ /Filip

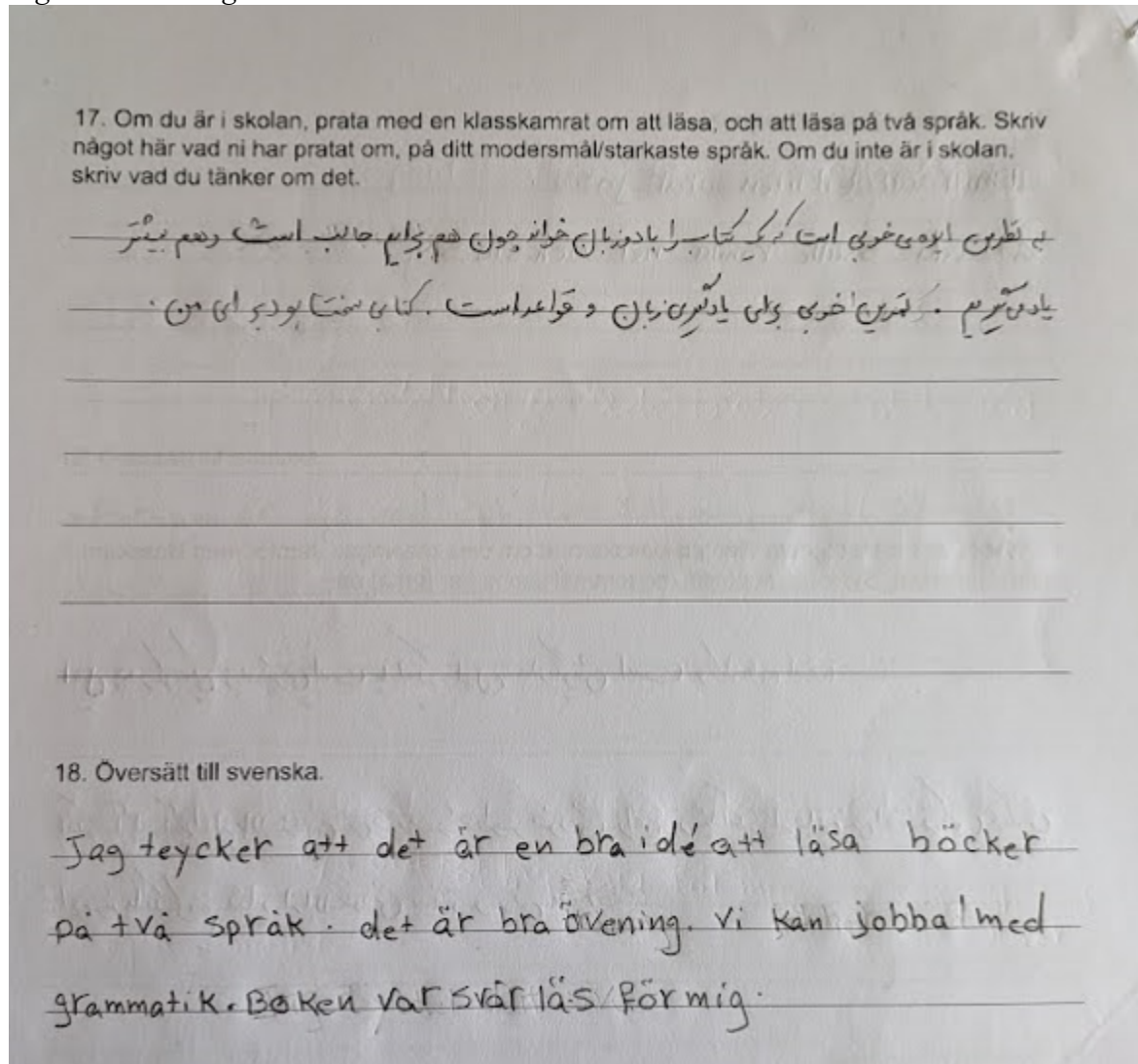
The conversation by Filip, Felicia and Firouz in group C-D shows how the learners switch focus between the literature content: “like a character in the book”, and language: from “full of words” to a reflection upon language and the importance of being able to express oneself. Furthermore, we see that these learners are accustomed to discussing literature, and even if they are beginners in Swedish, they use words like “character”.

Linguistic Awareness and Literacy Learning

Reflections on grammar are in this study shown both through discussions in the interviews and comments in the journals, where the learners highlight how language comparisons provide

them with insights about how languages can be constructed. An example is seen in this comment by a B-course-learner: “I think it is a good idea to read bilingually. It is good practice. We can work with grammar. The book was difficult to read for me.” So, even though the book was difficult for this learner to read, the learner confirms that it was “a good practice”. The learner links this statement to working with grammar which shows a linguistic awareness and the possibility of literacy learning. Figure 1 below shows the comment in full in the reading journal, where the translanguaging is shown in the translations between the mother tongue and Swedish.

Figure 1: Reading Journal



The fact that the translations were sometimes of different lengths in the fiction texts gave rise to discussions about grammatical constructions and discussing them in even more than two languages. Bojana, (course B) who read *The Brothers Lion heart* in Swedish, Russian and English, described how bilingual reading enhanced her reading comprehension and grammar awareness.

The translation was okay between Russian and Swedish. It helped me understand how to construct sentences that I would not otherwise understand. I compare Swedish with other languages such as Russian and English.

In group B, the translations in the reading journal gave rise to language comparisons. Bhumi wrote: “I learned a lot of words, which I did not know.” Bahar in a B-group added that he “learned how words are used”. This indicates that bilingual fiction reading can provide the learners with rich language input. In the reading journals the learners were given a task to work with words. From the words chosen in Course B we see common verbs, such as: “breed/cultivate”, “smell”, “wondered”, common adjectives like “curious” and “wise”, but also less common words, such as “adventure”.

The teachers also noticed how the learners’ L2 vocabulary increased. Carina (course B) said: “I noticed a big difference in their vocabulary” and Marie, (course B), told us: “They could discuss better”. This appeared even more clearly in course C-D with learners with higher educational backgrounds. Sven (course C-D) told us: “they discovered many linguistic differences”. In sum, the teachers basically corroborate students’ experiences of becoming more engaged with the story, noticing linguistic differences and acquiring novel words from the input.

Discussion

This study involved migrant adult learners with different educational backgrounds on a scale from low literacy to high literacy in education in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) in Sweden. The aim was to explore the adult learners’ experience with bilingual fiction reading, in their mother tongue or first language (L1) and Swedish as a second language (L2), as well as their teachers’ perception of how bilingual fiction reading influenced the adult learners’ literacy and language development in Swedish as a Second Language.

Pedagogical translanguaging referring to an understanding of teaching approaches that involved the intentional and planned use of students’ multilingual resources (Juvonen & Källkvist, 2021; García, 2009) formed the basis for the study. The teachers initiated the project after a professional development course. It was carried out in different ways according to the language groups and the teachers’ pedagogical style. The teachers underlined that the teaching must be student-oriented and adapted to the learners’ L1 and L2 literacy levels.

Our findings suggest that both learners and their teachers expressed that bilingual reading as a method of reading fiction, created interest and engagement in both L1 and L2 language and literature. This emerges from the learners as they stated that bilingual reading was fun and that they read a lot.

The engagement was also shown as the learners returned several times to the translation aspect based on their bilingual fiction reading and the reading journals. The learners stated that they could use their languages more efficiently (cf. García, 2009) and thus interpret fiction (Langer, 2017 [1995]) more easily. The learners described how they felt supported in their L2 development by bilingual fiction reading. The learners also expressed that the vocabulary in L1 increased which aligns with previous research by Webb et al. (2023).

The learners compared their languages and gave examples of how languages differ grammatically. The language issue, however, was also raised from a wider perspective. When the learners in the interviews introduced themselves and their own linguistic backgrounds, there was an enumeration of which languages they spoke, and some of them had difficulties putting their finger on which of these languages constituted their mother tongue. The study also shows that bilingual reading can rather be seen as multilingual reading when conversations about books and

reading are included. The translanguaging practice seems to inspire an interest in discussing and comparing languages (cf. García, 2009).

A group of L1 lower-literate learners, which in our data happened to be L1 Arabic speaking learners, found the bilingual fiction reading difficult. The threshold for overcoming reading difficulties was too high. This aligns with the findings of Filimban et al. (2022) and with Lundgren and Rosén (2022). Filimban et al. (2022) discuss the lower-literate learners who could not comprehend the content and lost motivation, whereas Lundgren and Rosén (2022) stated that the Arabic-speaking group in their study had difficulties with the Modern Standard Arabic script. In our study, it may also have been the case that the choice of literature did not suit the group.

Concerning the teachers, they reported on raising language awareness when reading bilingual fiction. They also reported that the learners' vocabulary in L2 increased, that speech flow developed faster and that the learners worked harder when reading bilingual fiction. The teachers noticed the learners' reading engagement, and as argued by Cummins (2011), such "literacy engagement" might lead to further literacy and academic growth, however not the focus for this study.

In terms of teaching methods, the teachers noted that decoding the text collectively by reading aloud proved to be helpful for learners on various literacy levels. Listening to audiobooks while reading also helped decoding. This shows the importance of listening while reading as a L2 learner at the beginning level. Therefore, multimodality should be considered (see Stranger-Johannessen & Damiani, 2024) and as the New London Group also suggested (1996). Also variously reading activities, that is, book talks and writing thoughts, should be considered.

The access to bilingual fiction books for adults turned out to be problematic for the project as the selection of translated literature for low literate learners is scarce in Sweden. Even though the learners in general appreciated fiction books, we ask ourselves whether the content in these books is relevant and interesting for migrant adult learners at SFI-level.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed bilingual reading of fiction in teaching of Swedish L2 in the SFI classroom. The research shows that bilingual fiction reading and the use of translanguaging practices support reading engagement and provide deeper reading experiences to the learners than the often used Swedish-only easy-to-read-books. Bilingual fiction reading might also increase L1 and L2 vocabulary as well as linguistic awareness, as noticed by the teachers. Although we see learning possibilities with the rich language input bilingual fiction reading provides, the method, teaching, and materials need to be adapted to different literacy levels. In Sweden, there is a need for more translated books in different languages for migrant adult learners as well as adult books with bilingual texts, for lower-literate learners. Reading activities as reading aloud and/or listen in both the adult migrants mother tongue and in Swedish and with book talks proved to be helpful.

Furthermore, it is important to investigate which language to use as dominant language in bilingual reading for the adult learner, as the mother tongue might be the language with the least literacy, and the official second language, might be the language more appropriate to use, when reading bilingually.

It is important to note that there are limitations to the study. Our sample size was small, and the design was mostly directed towards learners' and teachers' experiences. Alternative designs can further the depth and scope of bilingual fiction reading in language and learning.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the involved learners and teachers, who participated in this project, thereby being pioneers in Sweden.

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