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Navigating multiple multilingual spaces at home and in the day care centre: a case-study in Luxembourg

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ABSTRACT

Mismatches between language and literacy practices at home and in day care centres can negatively influence children's development. This article examines a young child's engagement in literacy activities in multiple languages at home and in a centre in Luxembourg, as well as his meaning-making of these differing practices. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the study shows that the language and literacy experiences, supported by collaborative home-centre relationships, fostered Etienne's language and literacy development. The findings highlight the role of the centre's translanguaging practices which enabled the child to connect experiences across settings and prompted the adults to reflect on their practices and language ideologies. The study underscores the importance of parental and educator collaboration to bridge potential gaps and promote children's learning and well-being.

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Introduction

Learning involves connecting new information to prior knowledge and experiences, then building upon these. Young children may have different experiences related to multilingualism at home and in early childhood education and care (ECEC). These experiences shape their understanding of which languages could or should be used. Their learning may be negatively influenced if their home and ECEC experiences differ widely. This article explores the ways in which a young emergent multilingual boy engages in and connects multilingual literacy experiences at home and in his day care centre. To understand his meaning-making and language use in literacy activities and in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, various multilayered and interrelated structures need to be considered.

The focus of this article is 2.5-year-old Etienne who is raised in French at home by his parents who live in Luxembourg. Bordering Germany, France and Belgium, this small country has three official languages – Luxembourgish, French and German – and hosts many small, locally, nationally, and transnationally interconnected communities that differ in origin and socioeconomic and legal status. Etienne's parents are part of the 47% of the foreign population comprising 180 nationalities in 2023 (Fehlen et al. 2023). About half of all residents reported speaking Luxembourgish and almost all indicated using several languages daily at work or at home. This was also the case for Etienne's parents. At work, his father spoke French and English and his mother Luxembourgish, at times in addition to French and German. At home, the parents spoke French although the

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mother occasionally used Luxembourgish and German when doing homework with the older son Louis. These language practices are representative of other families in Luxembourg. Based on a large survey, one third of parents reported using one language with their young children, another third two and the final third three or more, frequently combining Luxembourgish with French or French with English (SNJ 2023).

Because of Luxembourg's multilingual programmes in school and ECEC, children are exposed to several languages. Louis learned German in primary school and Etienne was introduced to Luxembourgish at his day care centre. The multilingual ECEC policy requires educators to familiarise children aged one to three with Luxembourgish and French, value home languages, and collaborate with parents (Kirsch and Hornberger 2024). Etienne attended a Luxembourgish-dominant centre we called *Earth*. Previous findings based on observations and interviews have shown that the educators at *Earth* offered various types of literacy activities mainly in Luxembourgish, but that translanguageing (García 2009), the use of the entire semiotic repertoire for communication, was a frequent practice (Kirsch 2024a).

The present study expands earlier findings of the research project *Collaboration with Parents and Development of Multiliteracy in Early Childhood Education* (COMPARE) by analysing the ways in which Etienne engaged in literacy activities in his French-dominant home and Luxembourgish-dominant centre, thereby drawing on his entire semiotic repertoire and various experiences. I argue that the rich interactions between the educators, parents and children and the translanguageing practices enabled Etienne to develop his language skills and make connections between his complementary learning environment while also prompting the adults to reflect on their own practices.

Theoretical framework

Language development is influenced by child and family factors as well as the wider sociolinguistic, sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), understanding the complexities of learning requires examining five interconnected and nested structures. At the centre of this model is the child, embedded in the micro-system which includes the home and education facilities. The mesosystem encompasses the links between these immediate settings. The exosystem refers to environments such as the neighbourhood or parents' workplace that do not involve the child directly. The macrosystem reflects the larger geographical, historical, social, economic and political conditions while the chronosystem captures the role of time and change. The ongoing, reciprocal interactions between individuals and environments propel development. In particular, to learn multiple languages, children need regular and sufficient exposure to all of their languages as well as meaningful opportunities to use them in high quality interactions with a range of interlocutors in various settings (De Houwer 2021).

As outlined in the introduction, Luxembourg fosters both societal and individual multilingualism on account of the high level of immigration and the national language policies which lead to specific language-in-education policies, institutional norms and curricula. These reflect particular language ideologies, that is, widely held beliefs about the value and social utility of languages (Kroskrity 2004). Prominent examples include 'the one-language-one-nation' and the 'mother-tongue-ideology' which prompt individuals to prioritise certain languages over others. Ideologies shape persons' perceptions of which languages should be transmitted at school or at home and in what ways this occurs (Quirk et al. 2024). Within the home context, parents overtly or covertly plan language use and literacy practices. The language management, actual practices and language ideologies constitute 'family language policies' (FLP) (Curdts-Christiansen 2022). Parents' decision-making regarding their children's exposure to multiple languages is influenced, as detailed later, by language-in-education policies and home-school-partnerships (mesosystem). Research studies show that strong and supportive relationships between parents

and educators enhance consistency and drive children's learning and well-being (Norheim and Moser 2020).

Having explored the impact of macro- and meso-level dimensions on language ideologies, the following section turns to family and school (microsystem) as well as to children to further clarify key influences on language learning.

Becoming bilingual: actors and factors

At the family level, factors that influence child language development include the parents' socioeconomic status, language backgrounds, ideologies and competences. They affect parental linguistic choices and interaction strategies, thus, family language policies that, in turn, shape children's language preferences and development (De Houwer 2021). Empirical studies indicate that parents generally view multilingualism as beneficial for their children's social, cognitive, academic and cultural development (Kircher et al. 2022). At the same time, many also express concerns about language delays, fluency and academic outcomes. For example, some voiced negative attitudes toward translanguaging, fearing that it hampered fluency in the home or societal languages (Curdt-Christiansen 2020; Kaveh and Sandoval 2020). Nonetheless, translanguaging is a common discursive practice in bilingual families (García 2009). Beyond concerns about language outcomes, parents wondered if their home environment – media and shared reading – provided consistent and sufficient exposure to the home language and, at the onset of school, also to the societal language (Quirk et al. 2024). Recognising the role of the societal language for inclusion and academic success, some parents with migrant background reassessed the relevance of the home and societal languages when their children started school and adjusted their language practices (Curdt-Christiansen 2022). For example, a study in Belgium found that multilingual parents began using more Dutch with their partner and children and increased the child's overall exposure to Dutch (Hollebeke 2024). In Israel, Rose, Armon-Lotem, and Altman (2024) reported that parents encouraged the older siblings to use the societal language Hebrew with the younger ones and discouraged the use of TV in the home language English. Over time, some parents may move away from the exclusive use of their mother tongue(s) and one-person-one-language method that call for language separation, toward more flexible and multilingual approaches to accommodate shifting needs.

At the school level, language learning is shaped by teaching practices. Some teachers continue to advocate for language separation based on the mistaken belief that home language use hampers children's development of the school language. Moreover, even positive beliefs and knowledge about the benefits of bilingualism do not always translate into classroom practice. In Germany, for example, expert ECEC professionals focused on the institutional language and did not build on children's home languages in literacy activities (Montanari and Lengyel 2025). By contrast, in Luxembourg, some ECEC teachers and educators translanguaged and allowed children to draw on their minority language(s) during the day and in language and literacy learning activities (Kirsch 2020; Kirsch and Hornberger 2024). Translingual interactions in play, read-and-tell and storytelling activities have been shown to support children's meaning-making, participation and inclusion (Seltzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, and Aponte 2020; Sembianti et al. 2023) while also affirming their multilingual identities (Moses and Torrejon Capurro 2024). While some teachers translanguaged spontaneously or as part of a resource-based pedagogy, others implement translanguaging pedagogies intentionally to counteract the negative effects of monolingual ideologies on bilingual students' academic outcomes. The framework of translanguaging pedagogies (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017) encourages teachers to design curricula and activities that leverage students' entire semiotic repertoire, and promote flexible, strategic language use. A systemic review of studies in the United States has found that these pedagogies foster child engagement, support learning and well-being and increase opportunities for collaboration (Hamman-Ortiz et al. 2025).

Finally, children themselves are important actors in their language development. Grasso (2024) and Sun, Loh, and Bakar (2023) found that children may accept or refuse to speak or read in their

home language. These choices may stem from their awareness of linguistic differences between home and societal languages and from their understanding of the role of the societal language. For example, Kaveh and Sandoval (2020) reported that some children perceived English as a symbol of identity, belonging and academic achievement, which led them to use more English at the expense of the home language. Children's increased exposure to the societal language not only affects their own language skills but also influences the language development of younger siblings. Generally, younger siblings are less proficient in the home language than older siblings owing to their earlier exposure to the societal language (Quirk et al. 2024; Rose, Armon-Lotem, and Altman 2024). While children's language choices shape their language development, they may also prompt parents to adjust their language management. This can result in a language shift (Curd-Christian-sen 2022) and affect parent-child relationships (De Houwer 2021; Grasso 2024).

To develop languages at home and in ECEC, children need to make sense of language and symbols (semantic meaning) as well as of the social practices in which they participate (pragmatic meaning). Interactions with adults and peers help them understand not only the meaning of words but also the purpose and interaction patterns in language and literacy practices (Kemp 2024). Meaning-making can be more challenging when experiences differ significantly between home and ECEC. In this case, children may need support in building connections. At school, teachers can open up translanguaging spaces to draw on children's rich language and cultural experiences and to make classroom learning more meaningful and inclusive (Hamman-Ortiz et al. 2025). Play represents one such space where children, sometimes spontaneously and other times prompted by specific multilingual and multicultural resources, engage in literacy activities with peers. Drawing on their experiences and competences, they create new expressions and incorporate different languages in their role-play (Moses and Torrejon Capurro 2024; Seltzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, and Aponte 2020). Children have also been found to blend social practices at home. Gregory and colleagues observed that multilingual children of minority background combined different experiences, practices, tools, and media to create hybrid multimodal forms of meaning-making (Gregory, Long, and Volk 2004). These 'syncretic literacy practices' testify of children's endeavours to reinterpret their experiences and create something new.

This review has highlighted studies on the interplay between beliefs and language practices within the microsystem and their impact on child multilingualism. It has also shown that research on the development of multiple languages across home and ECEC settings (mesosystem) remains scarce. In addition, few studies have explored how young emergent multilinguals engage in meaning-making by connecting learning experiences across settings. Therefore, the current study asks the following research questions:

- In which literacy activities and in which languages does Etienne engage at home and in the centre?
- How similar or different are the literacy activities?
- In what ways does Etienne connect his various literacy experiences?

Methodology

Data collection and participants

The data for this study were collected within the COMPARE project (2020-2023). Kirsch, Kemp, Aleksić, Bebić-Crestany, the researchers, observed and interviewed educators and nine families in three day care centres, following the approval from the ethics comity of the University of Luxembourg ([ERP 19-050]). This article focuses on Etienne on account of his contrasting language practices at home and in the centre, we called *Earth*. Fieldwork at *Earth* took place between September 2020 and July 2021. In our role as observers, we took fieldnotes of naturally occurring adult-child interactions and video-recorded routine literacy activities. Many activities were

conducted outdoors on account of the Covid-19 pandemic and, therefore, we were allowed to observe spontaneous or planned literacy activities, sometimes involving parents. To complement these observations, we invited nine parents to document storytelling, singing, rhyming or other literacy activities for two weeks. Furthermore, we interviewed the educators Ms. Dominique and Ms. Joana as well as the parents twice, asking about language policies, language use, literacy activities, children's participation and home-centre collaboration. We also prompted reflection by watching excerpts of video-recordings together. While we have previously published on language and literacy practices, we had not triangulated data on children across settings. I addressed this gap by focusing on Etienne, his parents and educators.

Etienne's mother and father were born in two different French-speaking countries. The mother moved to Luxembourg at the age of three and learned Luxembourgish with the help of teachers, peers and other Luxembourgish-speakers. She became a civil servant and, at the time of the interview, used Luxembourgish, German and French at work. Etienne's father, an engineer, spoke French at home and French and English at work. The couple had two children; Louis, aged 6, and Etienne aged 2.5 in Autumn 2020. The parents had enrolled Etienne at *Earth* because the centre was Luxembourgish-dominant and renowned for its child-centred pedagogy, its inclusive values and holistic approach to learning (Kirsch and Hornberger 2024). The educators at *Earth* were fluent in Luxembourgish, German, French, and English, with some also able to communicate in Portuguese. The children in the group of two-to-three-year-olds came from diverse backgrounds and spoke Luxembourgish, French, German, Portuguese, Swiss German and Icelandic (Kirsch 2024a). In October 2020, Etienne was able to communicate in single words or short phrases in French and by July 2025, he could express himself in short sentences in French and follow instructions and parts of stories in Luxembourgish.

Data set and analysis

For this paper, I analysed almost four hours of video-recorded literacy activities with Etienne at his home and the centre as well as the parents' photographs and notes (see Table 1). The mother's documents depicted Etienne alone, with his brother or a parent as he sang, picked a book from a shelf, played with alphabet blocks and shared a book with a parent. The materials were captured at various times of day in a playground, the parents' kitchen, dining room, bathroom and Etienne's bedroom. Most of the videos were transcribed during the project and relevant contextual details were added. Other videos were described in detail. Further, I drew on four transcribed interviews (six hours in total) with the mother and the educators of which I analysed three and a half hours that focused on language and literacy practices.

The analysis of the adult-child interactions during the literacy activities was guided by Seedhouse's (2005) conversational analysis based on a sociocultural perspective. In particular, at the level of each microsystem, I coded the type of literacy activity (e.g. reading, telling stories, naming letters, writing), the languages used, the adults' strategies to promote interaction and language learning (e.g. asking questions, correcting, expanding, translating, repeating), as well as Etienne's non-verbal engagement (e.g. gestures, mime, gaze) and speech acts (e.g. repeating, answering). To understand similarities and differences across settings, I compared interaction patterns in reading and writing activities in relation to the overall literacy approach, the focus of the activities (e.g.

Table 1. Overview of the data set.

	<i>Earth</i>	Mother at <i>Earth</i>	Home
Video-recordings	21 activities (9 days, 3 h)	3 activities (2 days, 40 min)	17 activities (7 days, 12 min)
Pictures			12
Notes			2 pages
Interviews	2 (2 h)		2 (1.5 h)

vocabulary) and language practices (e.g. language separation; translanguaging) (Seltzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, and Aponte 2020; Sembiente et al. 2023). This analysis was informed by previous findings that showed that the educators at *Earth* approached learning from a child-centred and holistic perspective, understood bilingualism as flexible, and conceptualised literacy both as a sociocultural practice and a set of skills to be developed (Kirsch 2024b). In order to understand Etienne's meaning-making and emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement across settings, I analysed his verbal and non-verbal actions (e.g. being on task, expressing himself; showing persistence) as well as observable emotions (e.g. joy).

The purpose of the content analysis of the interviews was two-fold. Firstly, to triangulate the observational data on literacy activities, I identified information in relation to frequency and types of activities, language use, child engagement and changes over time. Secondly, to understand some of the reasons behind the adults' differing approaches to language and literacy development (e.g. translanguaging practices, language separation), I moved beyond language management and practices. I identified the individuals' attitudes to particular languages (e.g. significance of the mother tongue) and their beliefs about language learning and teaching (e.g. confusion) (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen 2020, 2022) and interpreted these in relation to outcomes of mother-educator-interactions (e.g. mother's interest in ECEC approaches) and curricular frameworks (e.g. educators' need to implement a multilingual programme). In this way, I could connect dimensions of the micro-, meso- and macrosystem.

Findings

To understand Etienne's literacy activities at home and in ECEC, it is important to first examine the contrasting language policies. The subsequent sections will show that Etienne meaningfully engaged with print by drawing on his experiences and semiotic repertoire.

Contrasting language policies

Etienne's home language environment was predominantly French. Although the initial plan (family language policy) had been for the father to speak French and the mother Luxembourgish, the mother eventually communicated in her mother tongue. She explained:

I did not really feel it [Luxembourgish] when they were born, well, my mother tongue came out immediately. But I wanted to try to tell a story in Luxembourgish every day, but Louis was never a big fan and Etienne even less. (December 2020)

In July 2021, Etienne continued to ask his mother to speak French or ignored her whenever she used Luxembourgish during shared reading. The mother's attitude to Luxembourgish appeared ambivalent: while she wished to expose her sons to the national language, she felt guilty when shifting to Luxembourgish in their presence. This happened, for example, when she collected Etienne at the centre. She considered Luxembourgish 'the wrong language' and believed 'it may confuse Etienne' (December 2020).

The mother tongue ideology and the principle of language separation were noticeable throughout the interviews. The mother had enrolled Etienne at *Earth* to learn Luxembourgish 'because I want to speak my mother tongue' (December 2020). She disapproved of the educators speaking French and translating, especially as some had no mastered French in her eyes.

I want him to speak Luxembourgish only, but I very often hear some of the educators talk to him in French. This bothers me. Ms. Dominique said the rule is that we speak Luxembourgish and when he does not understand we say it in French. But there are some who say everything in French. In addition, it is broken French. (July 2021)

She was concerned that too much French would discourage Etienne from making an effort to learn Luxembourgish. Over time, she noticed changes. In parent meetings, the educators reported

Etienne's growing understanding of Luxembourgish, and, at home, she noticed that he asked for words and uttered formulaic expressions (Mother, July 2021). This shift may have been influenced by his exposure to Luxembourgish and German during his brother's homework sessions with the mother. While the home language practices had become more flexible based on children's needs and the role of the institutional languages, the belief in language separation based on an additive view of bilingualism persisted as shown later on in Example 1.

The mother's views clashed with the centre's language policies and translanguaging practices which were in line with the multilingual education programme in ECEC. While the educators at *Earth* tended to speak Luxembourgish, they switched to children's home languages to support their understanding and engage them in conversations (Kirsch 2024b) as shown later in Excerpt 2. Ms. Dominique explained that translanguaging was 'authentic' and that she had 'a terribly bad conscience' (July 2021) when she narrated a story in Luxembourgish without switching to French to accommodate for Etienne's needs. She spoke 'a lot of French' to him because 'he spoke more on such occasions'. When reviewing a video of her reading in Luxembourgish, she noted Etienne's attentiveness and non-verbal participation which sparked reflection on the educators' 'automatic' language shifts (July 2021).

Complementary literacy practices

Both at home and in the centre, literacy activities happened daily. Surrounded by books in literacy-rich environments, Etienne frequently saw family members and educators read and write. In both settings, adults made books available and read stories and, in this respect, Etienne enjoyed similar experiences. At home, he spent up to 45 min looking through books, uttering relevant words, humming or talking in an imaginary language. His parents read two to three stories to him daily. They noticed that Etienne had become more attentive, at times asking questions. However, he quickly disengaged when the mother read in Luxembourgish. Similarly, in the centre, children shared books in the morning, before nap or in the afternoon and Etienne was frequently observed looking at books on his own or with a peer. The educators also read stories daily to small groups of children.

Despite similarities, the settings differed in the media, interaction styles, focus of activities and overall approach. At home, Etienne chose picture dictionaries or stories he wanted to read and the focus of the activity tended to be on accuracy. The parents engaged their son in label quests and supported him by making the initial sounds of words, confirming, correcting and providing explanations.

Example 1: Labelling animals (April 2021)

(Utterances originally in Luxembourgish are presented in bold and those in French are in italics. Incorrect words underlined.)

Etienne points to the animals in the book, uttering in French "*ruche, loup, un aigle, singe, chasouris, balaine, tigre, opard, equin, un serpent"* (ostrich, wolf, an eagle, monkey, bat, whale, tiger, leopard, shark, snake). The mother corrects his pronunciation, gives him the correct label (*chauvesouris, léopard, requin*) and, at times, provides a translation in Luxembourgish, labelling the language as well "*une autruche, **a Strauss***" (ostrich), "*un loup, **e Wollef***" (wolf) and "*serpent en français, **Schlaang ob Letzebuergesch***" (snake in French, snake in Luxembourgish)

The mother used the same strategies when sharing stories. For example, when she read 'Dear Zoo' in French, she pointed to details in the pictures and asked completion questions. She offered translations and corrected incomplete words and wrong lexical items (e.g. 'dromedary' instead of 'camel'), adding explanations. For example, when Etienne uttered 'fray' instead of 'effrayant' (frightening), she offered the correct word and explained 'it is frightening, it is scary'. The observations showcased her language-focused strategies, her wish to separate languages and her understanding of language as a bounded system.

The skills-based approach was also visible in videos where Etienne engaged with print. In February 2021, when Louis was writing German words with the letter T, Etienne identified the letter 'T'

and offered the word ‘tomato’ in Luxembourgish. Other recordings and pictures show him point to particular magnetic and wooden letters. Etienne also pretended to write or asked his mother to write for him. On such occasions, she encouraged him to copy but he still ‘lacked the fine motor skills’ (July 2021) to do so.

At *Earth*, educators understood literacy as a social practice (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič 2000), encouraging both meaning-making and literacy skills. They chose longer stories based on the themes they worked on, asked closed and open questions and translanguaged. Excerpt 2 stems from a 15-minute activity in mainly Luxembourgish and shows translanguaging practices and Etienne’s engagement. Utterances originally in Luxembourgish are presented in normal script and those in French are in italics.

Excerpt 2: 999 frog siblings (July 2021)

1	Ms J.	What do the frogs do in order to move?
2	Etienne	<i>In the water.</i>
3	Ms J.	They jump.
4	Etienne	<i>In the water.</i>
5	Ms J.	<i>They get out of the water, correct.</i> That’s possible, yes. And look, this is how they move. <i>They jump to the grass</i> {makes sound of jumping and movement}. <i>They jump, jump, jump, they leave all together.(...)</i>
6	Ms J.	{pointing to the big belly of the snake}. And why do you think that the snake has a big belly?
7	Etienne	<i>Has eaten frog.</i>
8	Ms J.	<i>Do you think it ate the frogs? No, I think the snake had already eaten other things and it has a full belly</i> {rubbing her belly} <i>and therefore, it did not eat them.</i>
9	Etienne	<i>Big belly</i> {rubbing his belly}{...}
10	Ms J.	A bird, look! Now comes the hawk and it sees many small frogs in the grass.
11	Etienne	<i>This is an owl.</i>
12	Ms J.	<i>Do you think it’s an owl?</i>
13	Etienne	{nodding}
14	Ms J.	<i>I’d say it is a hawk, no?</i>
15	Etienne	<i>No.</i>
16	Niklas	No, it is an owl.

Etienne appeared confident when expressing himself. He reiterated statements (lines 4, 13), repeated Ms. Joana’s expression and imitated her gesture (line 9), offered input (lines 11) and, like Niklas, disagreed with Ms. Joana (lines 15, 16). He understood Ms. Joana in Luxembourgish but expressed himself in French. In response to Etienne’s language shift and bearing the whole group in mind, Ms. Joana alternated between French and Luxembourgish. She helped Etienne make meaning through sound and actions, repetitions, translations, questions, corrections and explanations in his home language. To address the group, she used Luxembourgish, offering words, asking questions and repeating expressions. The examples are representative of the flexible ways in which the participants used their semiotic repertoire and moved between languages and modes.

The participatory translingual dialogic reading practices resulted in ‘growth in children’s vocabulary, knowledge, narrative skills and interest in reading and writing’ (Ms. Dominique, July 2021). Children pretended to read during free play, scribbled on their drawings, and asked educators to write their names. In line with their sociocultural and child-centred-approaches, the educators illustrated the function of print by writing recipes and a letter and engaged children in conversations about print when situations arose. For example, when children played with letter-shaped candles or wooden letters, they sounded out letters and encouraged children to compare the letters’ shapes. In June 2021, Ms. Joana helped Etienne make sense of the nametag ‘LOUIS VILLE’. Etienne insisted in Luxembourgish and French that the name on his hat read Etienne. The educator asked him to point out where exactly his name was written. When the boy circled the whole tag, she typed ETIENNE VILLE in capital letters into her phone, sounding out each letter. She then held the screen next to the tag. Etienne counted all the E’s on the screen and on the tag and understood that that the name on the tag was not Etienne.

Connecting experiences

The mediating role of language bridges home and centre experiences. The educators' pedagogical translanguaging created an inclusive and participatory environment where children's language and cultural backgrounds were respected and their needs acknowledged. The educators and Etienne opened translanguaging spaces to communicate and facilitate meaning-making. The educators also encouraged parental involvement and home language use. Etienne's mother visited twice, singing songs and narrating stories in French (Aleksić, Bebić-Crestany, and Kirsch 2024; Kirsch 2024a). On both occasions, Etienne navigated this bilingual context confidently, blending his home and ECEC experiences. When he identified letter-shaped candles, he addressed his mother in French and Ms. Dominique in Luxembourgish. When his mother pointed to the word 'Bienvenue' (welcome), arranged with the candles, and whispered 'B for Bertrand', Etienne's father, the boy showed the letter to the educator and repeated 'my daddy' in Luxembourgish. Ms. Dominique confirmed, repeated 'Bertrand' and emphasised 'B'. During the storytelling moments, Etienne engaged in French with his mother, offering and repeating words like he did at home. With the educator and peers, he communicated in Luxembourgish and French. He answered comprehension questions and used gaze, mime and gestures to include his peers.

These examples highlight Etienne's language and literacy skills and his agency. The pedagogy benefited not only Etienne but also prompted the mother to reconsider her negative attitudes toward translanguaging. This happened thanks to Ms. Dominique's principle of 'no education without relationship' (June 2021) and the educators' invitations. The mother visited the centre because she wished to 'familiarize herself with the educators' language practices' and 'experience how Etienne coped with languages' (December 2020). In July, she appreciated the regular, productive talks with the educators about child development and language use, adding, 'I can see how they do it with him and, ok, I could try this also at home with him'. These conversations and her observations of Etienne's confident use of French and Luxembourgish may explain why the parents had begun to read bedtime stories to both boys together. In sum, the home-centre partnership led her to reflect on her strict language separation and accuracy-focused approach.

Discussion

The article explores Etienne's engagement in literacy activities at home and in the childcare centre, as well as his meaning-making across the differing settings. The findings show that Etienne benefited from complementary multilingual literacy experiences. At home, he joyfully engaged in French mainly and learned to express himself accurately. In the centre, he additionally learned to make meaning of texts and express himself in Luxembourgish, drawing on his full semiotic repertoire. In both settings, he explored letters, sounds, and writing. At *Earth*, he additionally discovered the communicative functions of print. Etienne adapted to the rules of each setting and aligned his behaviour with adults' expectations, blending language and literacy practices when the mother visited the centre.

Understanding Etienne's behaviour requires examining the multiple interrelated structures that shape his language and literacy development. Seen from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the interactions within and across the microsystem home and ECEC centre promote learning. While the language policies at home were largely monolingual, those at the centre were mainly multilingual. At home, Etienne's parents exposed him primarily to French and provided direct literacy instruction and shared readings with an emphasis on accuracy and vocabulary. By contrast, the educators at *Earth* adopted a holistic, participatory approach to language and literacy, underpinned by pedagogic translanguaging. Like other professionals, they reported – and we observed – that this approach enhanced children's language skills, knowledge, and interest in literacy (Hamman-Ortiz et al. 2025; Seltzer, Ascenzi-Moreno, and Aponte 2020; Sembianti et al. 2023). Overall, the literacy practices of both settings are beneficial: direct literacy instruction predicts early literacy

skills (Puglisi et al. 2017), while storytelling fosters both language and early literacy development (Puglisi et al. 2017; Sénéchal and Lefevre 2014).

Practices are often influenced by community-held ideologies and individual beliefs. The present study indicated that the parents and educators held differing language ideologies and understandings of literacy and bilingualism. While the mother viewed language as a bounded system and adopted an additive view of bilingualism (García 2009), the educators embraced a translanguaging stance (Hamman-Ortiz et al. 2025) and moved beyond the understanding of language as systems and bilingualism as parallel monolingualism. Furthermore, the mother, but not the educators, expressed the belief that languages need to be separated in order to avoid confusion and language delays (Kircher et al. 2022; Quirk et al. 2024). The parent-educator-relationships and the mother's visits to the childcare centre may have helped the mother reconsider her beliefs and thus contributed to the family's shift in language practices. The mother began to communicate in Luxembourgish and, during homework sessions, in German with the oldest son. At the same time, this change is unsurprising as research studies in the field of family language policies have shown that parents adjust language use in response to their children's growing exposure to the societal language and the need to develop skills in the institutional language(s) (Curdts-Christiansen 2022; Hollebeke 2024; Rose, Armon-Lotem, and Altman 2024).

The way Etienne makes meaning of the different and changing language and literacy practices is influenced not only by the language policies and practices but also by the relationships between home and childcare facilities. Within the microsystem, contrasting views and mismatches of home and ECEC practices can negatively impact children's development (Kelly, Gregory, and Williams 2001). At the same time, supportive parent-educator relationships (mesosystem) can mitigate this effect and promote learning (Norheim and Moser 2020). Our findings suggest that all actors benefited from the home-ECEC collaboration. Etienne's increased exposure to Luxembourgish at *Earth* and his developing competence may have contributed to his changed behaviour at home: he refused Luxembourgish less and began using it at home. He performed a multilingual identity (Moses and Torrejon Capurro 2024), particularly during his mother's visits at *Earth*, when he blended home and centre language and literacy practices (Gregory, Long, and Volk 2004; Kelly, Gregory, and Williams 2001). The centres' translanguaging practices enabled him to make meaning not only of words but also of diverse practices. Moreover, the mother's exposure to and engagement in translanguaging practices at the centre (Kirsch 2024a) prompted her to question her strict language separation at home. Conversations about translanguaging practices between her and the educators, along with my interviews, also encouraged the educators to reflect on their practice of spontaneous translanguaging. They noticed they switched languages automatically rather than intentionally. This underscores the need for educators to translanguague strategically and responsibly rather than merely responsively (Kirsch 2020).

Conclusion

This article analysed a young child's engagement in multilingual literacy practices at home and in an ECEC centre as well as the ways he connected his differing experiences. Although the study drew on data collected across two settings over 11 months, it has limitations. The data from the home setting came from a multilingual mother and a child whose home language, French, is one of Luxembourg's official languages. Findings vary with practices that, in turn, depend on parents' socio-economic status, language backgrounds, beliefs and contextual factors (De Houwer 2021; Sénéchal and Lefevre 2014). While our sample included children of minority background, the differences between the parents' and educators' practices and ideologies were less pronounced than in Etienne's case. Future studies should focus on families of migrant background to explore these dynamics.

This case study contributes to the field of family language policies, home-childcare partnerships and early literacy by highlighting the agency of a very young child and the ways in which parents, educators and the child connect differing practices. Etienne benefited from his complementary

language and literacy experiences largely because of the home-centre partnership. Without such supporting relationships, other children may struggle to bridge similar gaps and parents and educators may not have opportunities to reflect on their practices and language ideologies. It is, therefore, crucial that parents and educators collaborate to understand children's experiences and promote their learning and well-being (Norheim and Moser 2020).

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Data availability statement

The research supporting data, securely stored at the University of Luxembourg are not publicly available. The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly owing to the sensitive nature of the data.

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