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Lexical Size, Cultural Self, And Heritage Bilingual Belonging: A Semantic–Stylistic Analysis Of English "Big" Synonyms In Family-Mediated Language Use

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Abstract: Heritage bilingualism is sustained or disrupted through everyday lexical choices that simultaneously carry semantic content and social meaning. This study examines how English size adjectives (e.g., big and its near-synonyms) function as a semantic–stylistic resource in heritage bilingual usage, and how such choices interact with identity positioning, belonging, and family-mediated language maintenance. Building on theoretical accounts of lexical semantics and synonymy, the analysis treats "size" not as a purely denotational category but as a culturally indexical domain in which register, affect, and stance become visible through word selection (Palmer, 1981; Soule & Smith, 1946; Taylor, 2017). The study integrates (a) corpus-guided semantic mapping using lexicographic sources and WordNet-informed synonym networks as a pedagogical and analytic scaffold (Phan, 2024; WordNet, n.d.; Wehmeier, 2015), and (b) interpretive analysis of bilingual family and youth experiences reported in contemporary bilingualism scholarship, emphasizing interactional context, family language policy, and community support as mediators of bilingual outcomes (Andrea et al., 2024; Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Jo et al., 2023). Findings show that heritage bilingual speakers' lexical preferences for big synonyms cluster around three interrelated functions: (1) identity alignment through "safe" high-frequency vocabulary versus identity display through marked or regionally salient synonyms, (2) affective nuance and evaluative control in family and peer interaction, and (3) social integration strategies that minimize linguistic friction in majority-language spaces while preserving culturally meaningful expressions within heritage contexts (Kadir, 2021; Irving Torsh, 2020; Lundberg, 2020). The article argues that size adjective choice provides a micro-level indicator of macro-level heritage language dynamics, and proposes implications for heritage language pedagogy, digital preservation initiatives, and family/community support models (Hutson et al., 2024; Kubota & Bale, 2020).

Introduction: Heritage bilingualism is often described through broad constructs—language maintenance, intergenerational transmission, educational policy, or cognitive outcomes—yet the lived reality of bilingual identity is enacted through fine-grained linguistic decisions made in ordinary interaction (Jo et al., 2023;

Andrea et al., 2024). In bilingual homes, classrooms, peer groups, and digital communities, speakers constantly select between lexical alternatives that appear "equivalent" at a dictionary level but diverge in register, affect, stance, and social meaning (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017; Soule & Smith, 1946). This article focuses on a deceptively simple lexical domain—

English size adjectives associated with big—to examine how heritage bilingual users mobilize synonymy and stylistic variation to manage cultural identity and social integration.

The interest in "size adjectives" is not only lexical. Size words are frequent, early acquired, and heavily used in evaluative talk, narration, and interpersonal alignment, which makes them ideal "high-contact" items where bilingual processing, community norms, and identity signaling can intersect (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Bialystok & Craik, 2022). Because bilingual outcomes are shaped by interactional context, the same speaker may prefer "neutral" and high-frequency vocabulary in one setting while choosing more marked synonyms in another, reflecting the context-sensitive nature of bilingual language use (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). In heritage bilingual trajectories, such context-sensitivity is especially consequential because home and community domains often carry different expectations about what "counts" as authentic, polite, educated, or socially acceptable speech (Andrea et al., 2024; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Jo et al., 2023).

At the same time, the bilingualism literature shows that language experiences vary widely: some bilinguals develop robust linguistic resources supported by family and community networks, while others experience attrition, reduced confidence, or identity conflict (Andrea et al., 2024; Kadir, 2021; Irving Torsh, 2020). Family language policy and emotional belonging are particularly central in second-generation bilingual identity, where bilingualism can be a source of pride and distinctiveness but also a site of vulnerability if it becomes linked to stigma or correction (Jo et al., 2023). Intermarriage and migration contexts further complicate language transmission, often creating mixed linguistic ecologies in which children's lexical repertoire is shaped by shifting family configurations and wider social pressures (Irving Torsh, 2020; Kadir, 2021).

This socio-interactional dimension must be connected to linguistic theory. Lexical semantics highlights that word meaning is not merely "reference" but a structured system of relations: synonymy, hyponymy, metaphor, and pragmatic constraints shape what counts as an appropriate word in a given context (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017). "Synonyms" are rarely perfectly interchangeable; they differ in stylistic weight, collocational tendencies, and the social impressions they create (Soule & Smith, 1946; Semak, 2022). In stylistics and discourse, such differences become tools: speakers choose among near-synonyms to create emphasis, soften impact, signal intimacy, or project competence (Semak, 2022). Heritage bilingual users, negotiating belonging across linguistic worlds,

may use synonym choice to position themselves as integrated, authentic, or academically competent depending on context (Jo et al., 2023; López et al., 2023).

A further contemporary motivation comes from the digital age. Linguistic diversity and heritage continuity increasingly depend on scalable models that preserve not only languages but also culturally meaningful usage patterns, including lexical preferences and stylistic practices (Hutson et al., 2024). If digital preservation focuses only on "core vocabulary," it may fail to capture the micro-choices through which identity is performed and transmitted across generations (Hutson et al., 2024).

Despite these connections, an identifiable literature gap remains: bilingualism and heritage language research often focuses on macro outcomes—proficiency, executive function, educational achievement, or broad identity measures—while lexical semantics research often treats synonymy and meaning relations without embedding them in heritage family ecologies and identity processes (Bialystok, 2021; Gunnerud et al., 2020; Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017). Even when bilingual identity is studied richly, the analysis frequently centers on narratives and policy rather than specific lexical domains that can operationalize how identity is enacted through everyday choices (Jo et al., 2023; Lundberg, 2020). Conversely, lexical semantic tools like WordNet are increasingly applied pedagogically, but their potential to model heritage bilingual stylistic variation is underdeveloped (Phan, 2024; WordNet, n.d.; Siegel et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research aims:

1. to develop a semantic–stylistic mapping of English big synonyms using lexicographic and WordNet-informed resources (Phan, 2024; WordNet, n.d.; Wehmeier, 2015);

2. to interpret how heritage bilingual usage contexts—family policy, community support, intermarriage/migration settings—shape lexical selection strategies and identity positioning (Andrea et al., 2024; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Irving Torsh, 2020; Jo et al., 2023; Kadir, 2021);

3. to connect micro-level lexical variation to broader bilingual outcomes and social integration dynamics described in bilingualism research (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; López et al., 2023; Lundberg, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative, theory-integrative

design that links lexical semantic modeling with interpretive bilingualism analysis. The approach is structured as a two-strand method: (A) semantic–stylistic mapping of a synonym field; and (B) contextual interpretation grounded in bilingual family and identity scholarship.

Corpus-guided semantic–stylistic mapping

The first strand constructs a structured description of the big synonym group through a corpus-informed orientation and lexical resource triangulation. Corpus approaches are widely used to analyze how word meanings distribute across contexts and how semantic fields are shaped by usage patterns (Taran, 2023). In line with this orientation, the study treats lexicographic sources not as final authorities but as entry points for mapping semantic relations and stylistic constraints. The mapping draws on the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary for learner-oriented sense distinctions and usage notes (Wehmeier, 2015), a classical synonym dictionary emphasizing "apt and varied diction" (Soule & Smith, 1946), and WordNet as a relational database for synonym sets and conceptual organization (WordNet, n.d.). The use of WordNet is aligned with applied studies that demonstrate how WordNet supports teaching and learning of lexical semantics by making semantic relations explicit and navigable (Phan, 2024). The inclusion of WordNet-linked resources is also justified by broader work on building WordNet-like infrastructures for languages and domains, showing how thesauri and semantic networks can be incorporated for systematic analysis (Siegel et al., 2023).

The mapping procedure proceeds conceptually through:

1.   identifying a candidate set of near-synonyms of big from lexicographic and synonym resources (Soule & Smith, 1946; Wehmeier, 2015);

2.   organizing these synonyms into semantic micro-categories, such as physical size, intensity/emphasis, social importance, and evaluative stance, consistent with lexical semantic theory that meaning is multi-dimensional and context-dependent (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017);

3.   annotating stylistic and register properties—formal, informal, colloquial, emphatic, euphemistic—drawing on the notion that synonymy is constrained by stylistic fit and pragmatic effect (Semak, 2022; Soule & Smith, 1946);

4.   identifying modality-like stance effects when size adjectives function as evaluative operators in discourse (Palmer, 2001).

Rather than presenting counts or effect sizes, the study produces a descriptive semantic–stylistic account, consistent with the instruction to keep results text-based and interpretive, and consistent with usage-oriented lexical semantics as discussed in cognitive linguistics perspectives (Taylor, 2017; Taran, 2023).

Contextual interpretation in heritage bilingual ecologies

The second strand interprets the semantic–stylistic mapping through the lens of heritage bilingual experience. Because bilingual outcomes and language processing are shaped by interactional context, lexical selection is analyzed as a context-sensitive practice rather than a stable trait (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). Family and community factors are treated as key mediators of bilingual development and maintenance, consistent with evidence that community support, family resources, and everyday practices shape bilingual language trajectories (Andrea et al., 2024). Parenting and early bilingual environments are conceptualized as culturally situated, with bilingual and monolingual parenting practices differing across contexts such as Belgium and beyond, implying that lexical exposure and reinforcement patterns vary by family configuration and cultural norms (De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022). Intermarriage and migration are incorporated as structural conditions that affect language transmission, language choice norms, and the social meanings attached to lexical forms (Irving Torsh, 2020; Kadir, 2021).

Identity and belonging are treated as central outcomes, aligning with work showing that bilingual adolescents may frame bilingualism as a source of pride and specialness, shaped by family language policy and emotional experience (Jo et al., 2023). The analysis also acknowledges intersectionality and resilience as necessary lenses for understanding bilingual experience beyond single-factor explanations, since bilingualism is not uniform and interacts with social identities and contextual constraints (López et al., 2023). Educational policy contexts are included because institutional language ideologies influence which lexical forms are legitimized in schooling and which are marginalized, affecting how heritage speakers manage lexical choice in public contexts (Lundberg, 2020; Kubota & Bale, 2020).

Analytic logic and credibility

To connect these strands, the article uses an integrative explanatory logic: (i) lexical resources define the range of available choices and their semantic–stylistic affordances (Palmer, 1981; Soule & Smith, 1946; WordNet, n.d.); (ii) bilingual interactional contexts shape which affordances become "safe," "prestigious," or "identity-marked" in use (Beatty-Martínez et al.,

2020; Jo et al., 2023); and (iii) family/community/ecology explains the direction of maintenance and the emotional meaning of lexical behavior (Andrea et al., 2024; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Hutson et al., 2024). This design also remains compatible with contemporary bilingualism scholarship that emphasizes mechanisms and mediators rather than simple bilingual-versus-monolingual contrasts (Bialystok & Craik, 2022; López et al., 2023).

RESULTS

The results are presented as descriptive findings organized around semantic–stylistic structure and bilingual identity function. Because the goal is to maximize theoretical elaboration, each result is treated as a claim supported by the provided scholarship rather than as a statistical report.

Semantic micro-structures within the "big" synonym field

The first result is that the synonym group around big is best understood as a set of overlapping micro-structures rather than a flat list. Lexical semantics emphasizes that meaning relations structure vocabulary into networks where near-synonyms cluster by sense, connotation, and usage constraints (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017). Classical synonym dictionaries similarly frame synonymy as a guide to choosing the "apt" word for context, implying systematic stylistic differences among alternatives (Soule & Smith, 1946). WordNet's synset structure reinforces this relational view by grouping words into sense-based sets, separating, for example, physical size from metaphorical importance or intensity (WordNet, n.d.). When these perspectives are combined, the big field becomes a semantic constellation rather than a single meaning.

Within that constellation, size adjectives show at least four recurrent functional zones. First, physical magnitude is the prototypical zone—describing objects, spaces, bodies, or quantities in literal terms—where synonyms differ in degree and typical collocations (Wehmeier, 2015; Taylor, 2017). Second, evaluative intensity emerges when size words are used to amplify or dramatize an assessment, shifting from description to stance (Palmer, 2001; Taylor, 2017). Third, social importance appears when big is metaphorically extended to status, influence, or relevance, reflecting lexical semantic mechanisms of extension and categorization (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017; WordNet, n.d.). Fourth, affective coloration appears where synonyms carry warmth, humor, irony, or disapproval—differences that stylistic analysis of synonym usage treats as central to meaning-in-use

(Semak, 2022; Soule & Smith, 1946).

This structure matters because heritage bilingual usage often operates under pressure: speakers may seek lexical choices that are semantically adequate but also socially safe, minimizing the risk of sounding odd, too formal, or too "foreign" in majority-language settings (Jo et al., 2023; Lundberg, 2020). A network model of synonymy therefore predicts that bilingual users will not use the full set equally; instead, they will converge on "high-certainty" items for public interaction and reserve marked items for identity-rich contexts.

Lexical choice as identity alignment versus identity display

A second result is that lexical choice in the size adjective field can function as either identity alignment or identity display. Identity alignment refers to selecting mainstream, high-frequency, socially unremarkable vocabulary to blend into the majority-language environment. Identity display refers to selecting distinctive items that foreground personal style, cultural belonging, or educational identity. The bilingualism literature suggests that bilingual behavior is highly sensitive to interactional context; bilinguals adapt their language use depending on interlocutor, setting, and social expectations, with measurable consequences for language and cognition (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). This context mediation aligns with the idea that lexical selection is a strategic act shaped by social evaluation.

Family language policy and emotional belonging offer a direct bridge between identity and lexical behavior. When bilingual adolescents report pride in bilingual identity, that pride is not abstract; it is sustained through family practices that validate bilingual expression and allow the speaker to inhabit bilingual identity without shame (Jo et al., 2023). Such validation can expand the range of lexical choices a heritage speaker feels comfortable using, especially when "marked" vocabulary becomes a resource for style rather than a liability. Conversely, when heritage speakers experience pressure to conform to monolingual norms in public institutions, they may restrict lexical choices to avoid being singled out, an outcome consistent with the influence of educational language ideologies and policy environments (Lundberg, 2020; Kubota & Bale, 2020).

Community and family support further predict identity display capacities. When families and communities actively support bilingual development, children and youth gain richer lexical exposure and confidence, making stylistic exploration more viable (Andrea et al., 2024). In contrast, in contexts where intermarriage or migration leads to reduced heritage-language input or

contested language norms, the bilingual repertoire may narrow, and speakers may become cautious with lexically marked choices (Irving Torsh, 2020; Kadir, 2021).

Affective nuance and the management of interpersonal stance

A third result is that size adjectives are frequently used as tools for managing interpersonal stance, not only for describing magnitude. In lexical semantics, evaluative and stance meanings often emerge via pragmatic extension, where a lexical item becomes a carrier of speaker attitude (Palmer, 2001; Taylor, 2017). Synonymy becomes crucial here because speakers choose among alternatives to calibrate intensity, politeness, humor, or solidarity, consistent with the stylistic use of synonyms as discourse tools (Semak, 2022).

In heritage bilingual usage, affective and stance calibration is often performed under dual constraints: the speaker must be intelligible and socially appropriate in the majority language while also maintaining culturally resonant ways of expressing evaluation. Because bilingual experience is shaped by interactional context, the same adjective choice can be "safe" in one context and socially risky in another (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). Family language policy can protect experimentation: when bilingual expression is normalized and emotionally supported, youth may feel able to deploy a broader stylistic palette without fear of correction or ridicule (Jo et al., 2023; Andrea et al., 2024). Where such support is weaker, speakers may default to minimal-risk vocabulary, which can reduce stylistic nuance and constrain identity expression (Kadir, 2021; Irving Torsh, 2020).

This result also relates to resilience and intersectionality in bilingualism. Bilingual identity is shaped by social positioning; therefore, what counts as "appropriate" lexical style is not universal but mediated by social expectations and the speaker's perceived legitimacy in a community (López et al., 2023). Consequently, lexical variation in the big synonym field can reflect broader dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, with speakers adjusting their word choices as a micro-level response to macro-level social pressures.

Lexical networks, digital resources, and heritage continuity

A fourth result concerns the role of lexical resources and digital infrastructures in sustaining nuanced heritage bilingual knowledge. Digital-age linguistic preservation is increasingly framed as needing scalable models for cultural heritage continuity, suggesting that preservation must include not only language presence but also patterns of meaning-making and cultural-linguistic practice (Hutson et al., 2024). Lexical semantic networks like WordNet provide an architecture for representing meaning relations, enabling learners and researchers to navigate synonymy systematically (WordNet, n.d.; Phan, 2024). Moreover, efforts to build WordNet-like resources for other languages and domains demonstrate that semantic infrastructures can be adapted to support specialized vocabulary and conceptual mapping (Siegel et al., 2023).

From a heritage bilingual perspective, this implies that digital tools can support identity as well as vocabulary. If learners can see not only that big has synonyms but how each synonym differs in sense and style, they can make more confident choices and avoid the social anxiety that emerges when lexical nuance is opaque (Phan, 2024; Wehmeier, 2015). Such confidence, in turn, may support bilingual maintenance by reducing friction in majority-language environments and enabling expressive richness in heritage contexts (Andrea et al., 2024; Jo et al., 2023). The result is not a claim that WordNet "causes" identity outcomes, but that semantic transparency is a plausible mechanism for supporting confident bilingual performance within supportive ecologies (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Andrea et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The discussion interprets these findings through three lenses: (1) what lexical semantics contributes to heritage bilingual identity research, (2) what bilingualism research contributes to semantic–stylistic theory, and (3) what the combined perspective implies for policy and practice.

Reframing heritage bilingual identity through micro-lexical practice

Heritage bilingual identity is often studied through narratives, policy, or broad measures, yet identity is enacted through language in use. The present analysis shows that synonym choice—particularly in frequent evaluative domains like size adjectives—provides a concrete site where belonging is negotiated. Lexical semantics clarifies why this is so: near-synonyms are not interchangeable, and their meanings are shaped by networks of relations, usage constraints, and stylistic effects (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017; Soule & Smith, 1946). When heritage speakers choose a "safe" high-frequency word, they are not merely selecting a label; they are selecting a social stance toward audience and context, often aiming for smooth integration (Lundberg, 2020; Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). When they choose marked synonyms, they may be performing identity display, creative voice, or cultural-linguistic competence (Semak, 2022; Jo et al., 2023).

This reframing supports a more granular understanding of family language policy effects. Research on bilingual adolescents demonstrates that feelings of pride and specialness are tied to family language policy and belonging (Jo et al., 2023). A micro-lexical lens suggests that such pride becomes sustainable when the family environment legitimizes stylistic exploration and allows the speaker to treat language as expressive rather than merely correct. Community support similarly functions as more than "input"; it shapes the speaker's willingness to risk linguistic distinctiveness (Andrea et al., 2024).

Context as a mechanism: why the same speaker varies lexical style

Bilingualism research emphasizes mechanism and mediation. Rather than assuming bilingualism produces uniform advantages or uniform outcomes, scholars argue that interactional context mediates bilingual consequences for language and cognition (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020). This claim dovetails with the current analysis: synonym selection is predictably context-dependent because social risk differs across settings. In majority-language institutional spaces, heritage speakers may minimize marked vocabulary to avoid stigma or misinterpretation, consistent with policy environments that privilege certain forms of bilingualism while excluding others (Kubota & Bale, 2020; Lundberg, 2020). In heritage community contexts, the same speaker may expand stylistic range because the social rewards differ and cultural resonance is valued (Andrea et al., 2024).

This mechanistic perspective also helps interpret why bilingual outcomes in cognition are mixed and contested in the literature. While some work links bilingualism to cognitive reserve and protective effects, other work emphasizes variability, mechanism, and boundary conditions (Bialystok, 2021; Bialystok & Craik, 2022; Gallo & Abutalebi, 2023). Reviews and meta-analyses similarly note that bilingual advantages in executive function are not uniform and depend on factors such as experience and measurement (Grundy, 2020; Gunnerud et al., 2020). If bilingual experience is shaped by context, then lexical style management—being forced into narrow "safe" repertoires versus being supported to flexibly switch—may plausibly contribute to the kind of bilingual engagement that matters for cognitive and social outcomes, without reducing the issue to simplistic claims (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; López et al., 2023).

Synonymy, style, and cultural identity: what "big" reveals

A size adjective field is valuable precisely because it is mundane. Mundane words are where socialization is most constant: children learn them early, use them frequently, and receive repeated feedback from caregivers, teachers, and peers (De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Andrea et al., 2024). This means size adjectives become a "high-density" site for style learning. Lexical semantics predicts that such frequent words develop rich pragmatic functions—intensifiers, stancemarkers, evaluative shorthand—because they are repeatedly used in affective contexts (Palmer, 2001; Taylor, 2017). Stylistics predicts that speakers use synonymy to manage rhythm, emphasis, and interpersonal effect (Semak, 2022; Soule & Smith, 1946). Heritage bilingual identity research predicts that these choices become socially meaningful when bilingualism is linked to belonging, pride, or stigma (Jo et al., 2023; López et al., 2023).

Thus, the "big synonym field" operates as a microcosm of heritage bilingual life: a speaker's lexical preferences can reveal whether they orient toward integration through linguistic invisibility or toward bicultural voice through stylistic visibility (Lundberg, 2020; Jo et al., 2023). Importantly, the analysis does not treat either orientation as superior. In many contexts, linguistic invisibility is a rational response to social risk and institutional norms; in others, stylistic visibility is a pathway to cultural continuity and personal confidence (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Hutson et al., 2024).

Implications for pedagogy and digital heritage support

The findings support practical implications consistent with the literature's emphasis on support systems. First, family and community support models should recognize that lexical confidence and stylistic flexibility matter, not only "speaking the language" in a minimal sense (Andrea et al., 2024; Hutson et al., 2024). Second, educational policy should be cautious about promoting narrow, institutionally acceptable bilingualism that marginalizes heritage stylistic practices, echoing critiques that immersion education can promote bilingualism in ways that do not necessarily support plurilingual realities and heritage diversity (Kubota & Bale, 2020). Third, semantic-network tools can be leveraged to make stylistic differences explicit, supporting learners who need to navigate social meaning as much as denotation (Phan, 2024; WordNet, n.d.; Wehmeier, 2015). WordNet-informed mapping can help learners see how synonyms cluster by sense and register, reducing uncertainty and enabling more intentional identity expression (Phan, 2024; Siegel et al., 2023).

Finally, digital preservation initiatives should consider capturing and supporting everyday lexical nuance rather than focusing solely on "core" vocabulary lists. Scalable models of cultural heritage continuity require

attention to the practices through which meaning and identity are transmitted, and synonym choice is a compact but powerful indicator of such practice (Hutson et al., 2024).

Limitations and future scope

This study is intentionally theory-driven and integrative, which implies certain limitations. It focuses on a single lexical domain, which cannot represent the entirety of heritage bilingual stylistic practice, even though it offers a rich and frequent site for analysis (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017). It also relies on interpretive linkage between lexical semantic resources and bilingualism research rather than presenting new experimental datasets, consistent with a conceptual–analytic research goal grounded in the provided scholarship (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Taran, 2023). Future research could extend this approach by applying corpus analysis more systematically to bilingual community data and by examining whether semantic-network pedagogy influences heritage speakers' confidence and identity positioning across contexts (Phan, 2024; Hutson et al., 2024). It would also be valuable to examine how educational language policy regimes shape lexical style norms over time in multilingual societies, building on comparative policy viewpoints (Lundberg, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This article argued that English size adjectives and their near-synonyms—anchored in the big semantic field—serve as an illuminating micro-domain for understanding heritage bilingual identity and cultural belonging. Drawing on lexical semantics, synonymy theory, and semantic-network resources, the study showed that "big synonyms" form a structured field where denotation, evaluation, and style intersect (Palmer, 1981; Taylor, 2017; Soule & Smith, 1946; WordNet, n.d.). Integrating bilingualism research, the analysis demonstrated that lexical selection is context-mediated and deeply embedded in family language policy, community support, and migration/intermarriage ecologies (Beatty-Martínez et al., 2020; Andrea et al., 2024; De Houwer & Bornstein, 2022; Irving Torsh, 2020; Kadir, 2021; Jo et al., 2023). The resulting account reframed lexical choice as a mechanism of identity alignment and identity display: heritage bilingual speakers calibrate lexical style to manage social integration risks while preserving cultural selfhood in supportive domains (Lundberg, 2020; López et al., 2023). Finally, the article suggested that digital and pedagogical tools based on semantic networks can support heritage continuity by making lexical nuance visible and learnable, aligning with scalable models of cultural heritage preservation

(Hutson et al., 2024; Phan, 2024; Siegel et al., 2023). In sum, the cultural life of bilingualism is partly carried by small words—chosen carefully—through which speakers claim belonging, negotiate identity, and preserve heritage in everyday talk (Jo et al., 2023; Andrea et al., 2024).

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