

Background

Parents have often been advised to use only one, mostly the cultural predominant language with their child with ASD (Harlin & Paneque, 2006).

Arguments focus mainly on a more straightforward language acquisition through less confusion (Yu, 2015).

Because a person may develop socio-cultural knowledge via language and develop linguistic knowledge via socialization, the choice of language may have an effect on the child's socialization and the family's dynamics (Brinton & Fujiki, 1993; Damico & Damico, 1993; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984).



Objectives

Investigate whether the use of language in the upbringing of children with ASD is related to:

- the children's social skills
- the parents' ability to feel comfortable, authentic, and free to express themselves when interacting with their child

with no limitation to language combinations and considering parent's and children's language proficiencies.

Participants

Participants were recruited via email, social media, and websites of different associations and institutions for people with ASD.

68 parents (89,7% female; 27 – 56 years old, $M = 39.86$; $SD = 6.59$) of **25 nationalities (and languages)** reporting for 68 children (89,7 % male; 4 – 11 years old, $M = 8.08$; $SD = 2.31$).

4 groups according to the language used at home:

- Monolingual mother tongue $n = 17$
- Monolingual foreign language $n = 17$
- Multilingual mother tongue $n = 26$
- Multilingual foreign language $n = 8$

Acknowledgements

Image: Freepik.com. This poster has been designed using resources from Freepik.com

Online Study

Socio-Demographic Data

Language use & Proficiencies

- 7-point Likert scales: "How would you rate your proficiency in [language]?" "no proficiency", "fair proficiency", "good proficiency", "very good proficiency", "fluent proficiency", "native proficiency", and "mother tongue"

Feeling comfortable, authentic, and free to express oneself

- 5-point Likert scales: "Regarding the language I use, when interacting with my child, I feel ..."
 - "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable"
 - "very unauthentic" to "very authentic",
 - "very restrictedly" to "very freely"

Social skills

- the Social Responsiveness Scale™, Second Edition (SRS-2; Constantino & Gruber, 2012) 65 items; $\alpha = .95$

Autistic traits

- the Autism Spectrum Quotient – Children's version test (AQ-Child; Auyeung et al. 2008) 50 items; $\alpha = .97$

Results: Social skills

Differences in the social skills of children with ASD depending on languages used:

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs – with Bonferroni and Gabriel's post hoc tests) and additional independent samples *t*-tests did **not** show **sign.** differences between the different language groups regarding children's social skills:

- $F(3,64) = .84, p = .48, \eta^2 = .04$

Results: Parent's well-being

Differences in parents' well-being depending on languages used:

Kruskal-Wallis tests with pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni corrected *p*-values):

- Feeling comfortable (Figure 1; $H(3) = 18.18, p < .01, r = .39$)
- Feeling authentic (Figure 2; $H(3) = 21.21, p < .01, r = .42$)
- Feeling able to express oneself freely (Figure 3; $H(3) = 23.97, p < .05, r = .38$)

Additional Mann-Whitney tests:

- Parents using only their mother tongue feel **sign. more comfortable, authentic, and able to express themselves freely** than all other parents
- Parents using only a foreign language feel **sign. less comfortable and authentic** than all other parents
- No sign. differences** between monolingual households and multilingual households
- Parents using their mother tongue feel **sign. more comfortable and authentic** than parents using foreign languages

Conclusions

- In our study, language use is **not related** to social skills in children with ASD
- Monolingual households and multilingual households **do not differ sign.** on parents' ability to feel comfortable, authentic, and to express themselves freely
- Parents who do not use their mother tongue feel **sign. less comfortable and authentic** when interacting with their child
- Limitations include: subjectiveness of parent-report variables, data collected online by only one parent

Our results indicate that the common advice to use only one language (often a foreign one) does not provide social skills benefits for children and may actually have negative implications for the parents.

References

- Auyeung, B., Baron-Cohen, S., Wheelwright, S., & Allison, C. (2008). The autism spectrum quotient: Children's version (AQ-Child). *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 38(7), 1230–1240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-007-0504-z>
- Brinton, B., & Fujiki, M. (1993). Language, social skills, and socioemotional behavior. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 24(4), 194–198. <https://doi.org.proxy.bnl.lu/10.1044/0161-1461.2404.194>
- Constantino, J. N., & Gruber, C. P. (2012). *Social Responsiveness Scale* (2nd ed.). Western Psychological Services (WPS).
- Damico, J. S., & Damico, S. K. (1993). Language and social skills from a diversity perspective: Considerations for the speech-language pathologist. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 24(4), 236–243. <https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461.2404.236>
- Harlin, R., & Paneque, O. M. (2006). Good intentions, bad advice for bilingual families. *Child Education*, 82(3), 171–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2006.10521371>
- Ochs, E., & Schieffelin, B. (1984). Language acquisition and socialization. In R. Shweder, & R. Levine (Eds.), *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion* (pp. 276–320). Cambridge University Press.
- Yu, B. (2015). Bilingualism as conceptualized and bilingualism as lived: A critical examination of the monolingual socialization of a child with autism in a bilingual family. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 46(2), 424–435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2625-0>

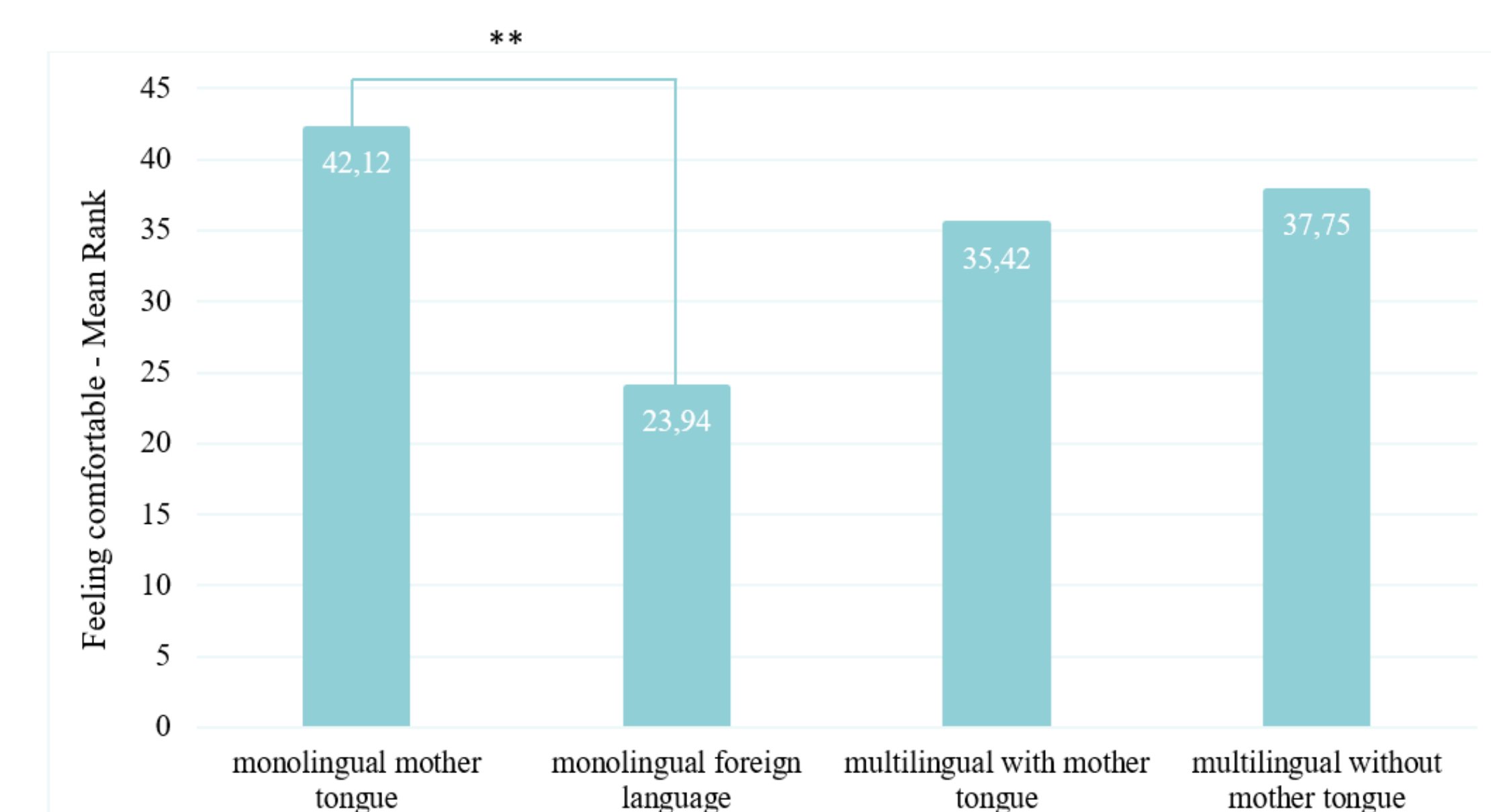


Figure 1. Pairwise comparisons of feeling comfortable (mean ranks) in parents regarding their use of language with their child. ** $p < .01$

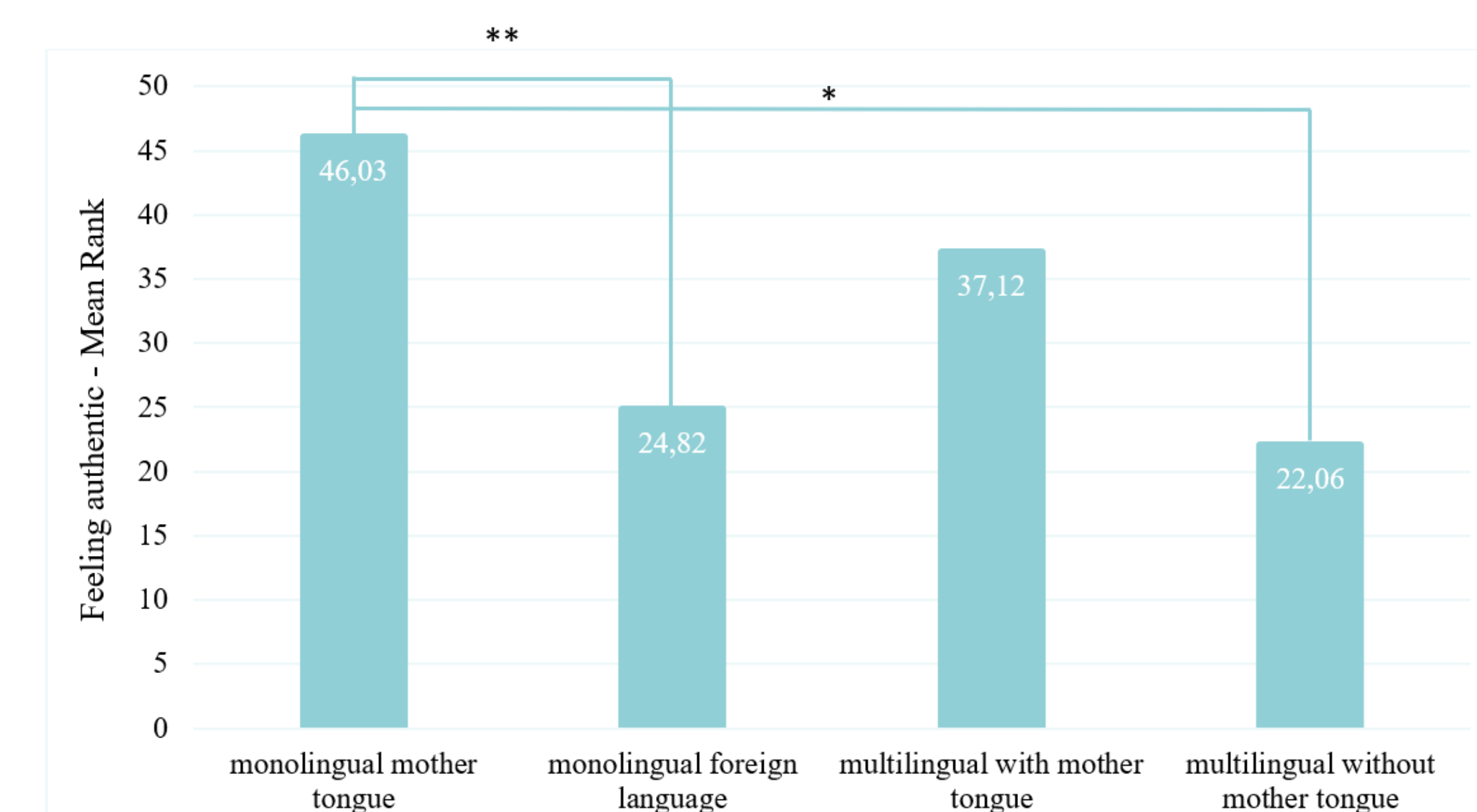


Figure 2. Pairwise comparisons of feeling authentic (mean ranks) in parents regarding their use of language with their child. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

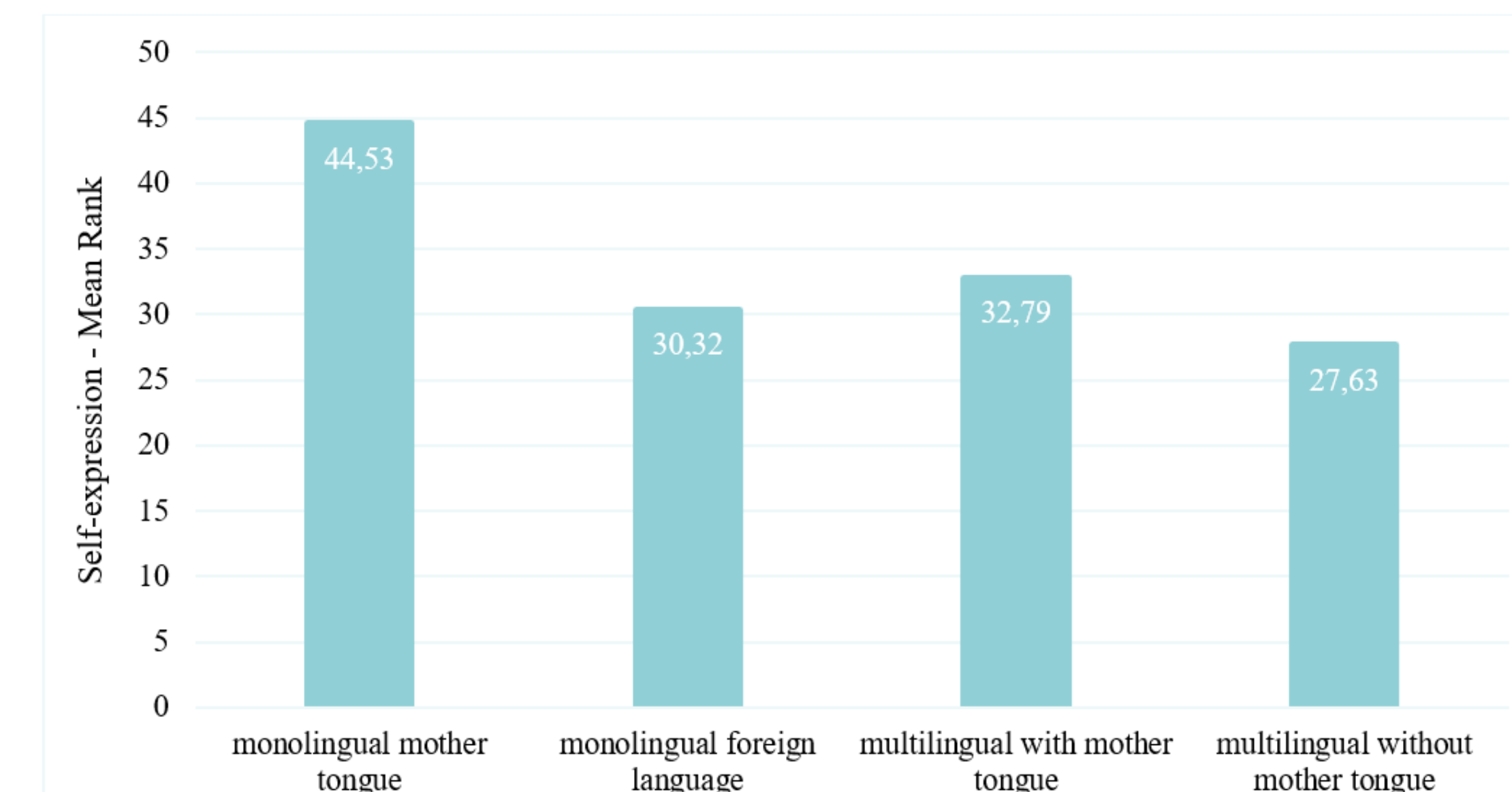


Figure 3. Pairwise comparisons of self-expression (mean ranks) in parents regarding their use of language with their child.