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The Bilingual Dance: Factors that Contribute to the Language Choice of Bilingual Mothers

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THE BILINGUAL DANCE: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE LANGUAGE CHOICE OF BILINGUAL MOTHERS

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The study of the factors which contribute to the language choice of bilingual mothers was designed to more deeply examine how parenting in the United States works in families for whom English is a second language. In-depth interviews were used to explore the beliefs and experiences concerning language choice of eight bilingual mothers with young children.

Previous literature in the field has described attitudes towards and strategies for bilingual language maintenance, but little is available on how this process actually works in families. All of the women interviewed were from Mexico, with Spanish as their original language. Literature relating specifically to Spanish-language issues in the United States was also explored.

The study identified some important insights about the ways that parents and children adapt to each other in their language use, and the manner in which outside and inside factors impact the family in its developing language environment. These insights can support professionals in their service to bilingual families, as well as assisting the parents themselves as they continue in their endeavor to raise bilingual children in the United States.

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This study would not have been possible without the women who so generously opened their homes to me, making time in their busy lives to share their stories. I extend my gratitude to them, as well as to my academic advisors, family, and friends, for their patience and assistance in bringing this project to fruition.

All the regions of the world will become one, the superstitions caused by
race, countries, individuals, languages, and politics will disappear.
A mutual language will become the mightiest means towards universal progress.
In the schools of each nation, the mother tongue will be taught,
as well as the revised universal language.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i Writings

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INTRODUCTION

Parents who are bilingual, especially those with a mother tongue other than the dominant one of the country which they have adopted, face the choice of which language to use in their home with their developing children. Conflicting advice abounds. Schools provide advice for parents on how to speak with and raise their children, but much of this advice can be limited or even misleading. Extended family members, as well as other parents in the community, may offer ideas as well. Parents ultimately consider many factors, both internal and external, when they make their choices, which often evolve over time.

This study identifies and explores the factors that contribute to the choice of home language made by bilingual mothers whose first language is Spanish. Although much of the language choice that parents make may not be consciously decided, we can still benefit from exploring how bilingual parents think about language use and how it "works" in their families. Since language is embedded in culture (Schrauf, 2000), a study of the factors contributing to the language choice of bilingual mothers informs our knowledge of the acculturation process in the bilingual community. The role that language shift from one generation to the next plays in the families' decision-making about language is also considered.

Families whose first language is Spanish face unique pressures in the United States to abandon their mother tongue. The language policies of schools can have a direct impact on language choice, and the role that the children's preschool and school experiences play in contributing to the language use within their own families is considered in this study. Societal attitudes can also affect the language choices made in families, and the study examines whether the recent anti-immigrant, "only English" public sentiment displayed in this country is having an impact on language choice of these families. The interplay between parent and child, between home and community, is prominent in the studies' findings.

Delimitations

The study will be limited to mothers who identify their first language as Spanish, who consider themselves to be bilingual (Spanish/English), and who have at least one child between the ages of 2 and 7. The mothers in the study have lived in the United States for at least 5 years. The study will not explore issues of socioeconomic status of the families or gender of the children.

Definitions

Bilingual: although the dictionary definition suggests that such an individual would be using two languages with near equal proficiency, the operational definition that Grosjean (1998) suggests is more useful for our purposes: an individual who uses two languages in one's everyday life.

Latino and Hispanic: I use these terms interchangeably to describe individuals of Latin American origin or descent who live in the United States. Although "Latino" is often preferred in academic settings, the local school system uses this term "Hispanic," originally created for census purposes, and the women in this study mirror this usage.

Mexicano: a person or persons born in Mexico, or born into families from Mexico, now living in the United States. Although not a factor in the determining the sample population, all of the participants in the study were from Mexico, so this term is occasionally used as well.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant not only in regard to the situation of those parents who are raising their children in a bilingual environment, by design or default, but to the next generation of children, born into families whose language is other than English, who are now becoming bilingual. Many of these formerly monolingual families have made commitments to remain in America; their children will be the next generation of bilingual parents to raise young children. Having more research knowledge about the decision making process can assist families as they make choices about child rearing in America, and will add to the support the educational and social service communities can offer these young trail-blazers, first in their families to raise their young children bilingually.

United States policy and attitudes often value monolingualism above the strengths which bilingual, bicultural individuals and families bring to American

society. The mothers in this study are the first generation in their families to be bilingual. Knowing more about what it is like to raise children in a bilingual environment in which the first language is other than English can clarify the assistance offered by educators, social workers, and health professionals. It can also assist the families themselves as they develop strategies to maintain bilingual development in their children.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to understand the factors contributing to the language choice of bilingual mothers, this study undertakes a representative examination of the literature exploring various aspects of bilingual language use, language socialization, and the cultural and societal underpinnings underlying these choices. These aspects are directly related to the lives and language usage of the women in this study. It is not within the scope of this literature review to examine educational interventions or children's linguistic development.

Search Strategy

The literature of the language choice of bilingual parents spans a number of related fields. Electronic searches of Academic Search Premier using various combination of the search terms *language choice, bilingual, bilingual child, home,* and *family language policy* yielded few findings related directly to home choice either in 2005 or 2008, when I updated my search. Dr. Jennifer Schwanberg shared introductory articles which she had used in her recent research with bilingual women and language of retrieval of traumatic memory, and I was referred to other relevant works by Dr. Teutsch-Dwyer. Combing the reference lists of these first articles led me

to other valuable resources, and browsing the stacks at St. Cloud State University Learning Resource Center helped me locate other related references.

Dimensions of Bilingualism

In a world where intercultural contact is increasingly common, many researchers assert that most individuals in the world are in some sense bilingual or multilingual (Altarriba, 2002). Since the 1970s, there has been a marked increase in the number of families in the United States speaking a language other than, or in addition to, English. The 2000 census reported that almost 18% of the U.S. population fell into this category, with almost half of these reporting that they speak English "less than well" (Goldstein, 2004). Spanish is the language used other than or in addition to English in almost 60% of these families; 78% of children identified as English Language Learners in U.S. schools speak Spanish.

Our earlier concise definition of bilingualism suggests a need to expand on the dimension of proficiency of language. Grosjean (1998) asserts that:

> Bilinguals acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually quite different that bilinguals rarely develop equal fluency in their languages. The level of fluency attained in a language (more precisely, in a language skill) will depend on the need for that language and will be domain-specific. (pp. 21-22)

He clarifies:

> Thus, our definition includes people ranging from the migrant worker who speaks with some difficulty the host country's language (and who cannot read and write it) all the way to the professional interpreter who is totally fluent in two languages. In between we find the foreign spouse who interacts with friends in his first language, the scientist who reads and writes articles in a second language (but who rarely speaks it), the member of a

> linguistic minority who uses the minority language at home only and the majority language in all other domains of life...and so forth. Despite the great diversity that exists among these people, all share a common feature: they lead their lives with two (or more) languages.

Bilingual individuals acquire either a *compound* or *coordinate* language system, depending on how they learned their respective languages. A compound bilingual learns two languages in the same context and timeframe, typically from birth. A coordinate bilingual, such as the women in this study, learns each language at differing times, often where the two languages are rarely interchanged as when one language is exclusively spoken at home, the other at school (Altarriba, 2002).

Elite bilingualism or *additive bilingualism,* terms often used synonymously to refer to families choosing to develop two or more languages in the home with little or no loss of the existing language, has in recent years become more common in Western families, as demonstrated by the dramatic increase in language enrichment materials marketed for English-speaking parents who want their children to learn a second language (King & Fogle, 2006). This situation contrasts with that of the families in this study, language minority families who for the most part desire for their children to maintain the parents' first language as well as learning the language of the host country. However, for both types of families, raising children to become competent, active users of both languages has remained difficult in the United States for a number of reasons, including the high status of English, lack of high quality bilingual education, national and local policies that fail to support non-English languages, and the role of peers and siblings in exhibiting a preference for English (King & Fogle, 2006).

Bilingual Language Acquisition

Children are born ready to become bilingual (Baker, 2000; Genessee, 2001). Yet many educators and others in North America continue to believe that that early exposure to two languages is detrimental to language acquisition. More specifically, this belief implies that the child's mother tongue will hinder the child's acquisition of English. Although many children go through a silent phase when they are acquiring a second language (Krupa-Kwiatkowski, 1998), there is little or no evidence to support the assumption that the two languages would interfere with each other (Goodz, 1994, Schecter & Bayley, 2002, Schecter & Cummings, 2003). Instead, children discriminate different linguistic systems before age 5 months, and can use their developing languages differently and appropriately by age 2, when they are beginning to use formed sentences, if they have been exposed to both languages from birth (Genessee, 2001).

The natural language mixing that occurs in bilingual homes also does not have a negative effect on language acquisition. Preschoolers who received Spanish-English mixed input from their mothers experienced no difficulty in keeping the two systems separate themselves (Hammer, Miccio, & Rodriguez, 2004). The quantity of exposure to each language that a bilingual child receives is of course less than that of the monolingual child. Thus, depending on the degree of exposure to each language and the circumstances of that exposure, bilingual children will show varied acquisition characteristics.

Code-switching

Since the 1960s, linguists and others interested in bilingual language development have been examining code switching, or switching back and forth between two languages, sometimes sentence by sentence and sometimes within a phrase, as a phenomenon unique to bilingual learners. Much of the conclusions on adult code-switching have been found to relate to child code-switching (often described as "mixing" or "borrowing" languages) as well.

In examining the code-switching of adult Spanish/English speakers, Becker (1997) notes that even though monolingual speakers may negatively assess code switching behavior, believing that it demonstrates limited proficiency in either language, those who engage in it understand the separateness of both languages. Language switching only occurs when the switch respects the syntactic rules of each grammar.

Bilingual code-switchers show extreme sensitivity to contextual cues, Becker (1997) asserts, especially those of the other speakers, the setting, and the topic of conversation. Code-switchers generally speak the strongest language of the person being addressed, often selecting the language to use with a stranger based on the physical attributes of the person, and children do this as well. Code-switching is rarely employed in the more formal settings of work or business. It is mostly reserved for the street or the home, in everyday informal conversations, or, among school children, on the playground rather than in the classroom.

Becker (1997) underscores that linguists, psycholinguists, and sociolinguists alike now recognize code-switching to be an indication of competence in two languages. It serves to help the speakers, both adults and children, fully express their dual identity and offers the psychological advantage of shifting relations between the two cultures in which the individuals thrive. Heredia and Altarriba (2001) draw similar conclusions, noting that the two languages can be activated or deactivated to different degrees depending on the similarity of the languages.

As bilingual individuals switch from one language to the other, they may also experience a concurrent switch in cultural context and values. Language by itself can provide the strong enough stimulus to evoke a selection of culture-bound values (Shrauf, 2000). The prevalence of codeswitching in a number of contexts by bilingual speakers of various ages, including those in the families of this study, underscores its versatility as a function of bilingual language usage.

Learning and Feeling in our "Mother Tongue"

Long before an infant comprehends or speaks a single word, s/he has developed a remarkable repertoire of signals to communicate internal states (Izard, 1991). Even before children's first words emerge, when exposed to two or more languages, they recognize differences in the prosody of each language, such as intonation, stress, and rhythm as their cues (Goodz, 1994).

Language develops in the socio-affectively rich matrix of caregiver and child. Adult and child together produce the meanings of ascribed words, the link between the

language code and real events in the world, as a result of their shared experiences. It is not accidental that the term "mother tongue" is associated not only with the mother's role in transmitting a language and a culture, but serves as an embodiment of that culture or ethnicity, which lie at the core of the personality (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Feelings, repressed emotions, and emotional awareness are more likely to reside in the mother tongue, and thus may best be expressed in that language. Memories from childhood and adolescence that were experienced in the first language are typically richer in emotional significance when recalled in that specific language. When the bilingual individual learned the emotion concepts and the language used when they were first expressed will impact the coding of the emotions in either language (Altabarra, 2002).

At first glance, one might think that memory retrieval might only be effective in the first language, but the second language for a bilingual can often serve a desired distancing function when emotions become too overwhelming (Aragno & Schlachet, 1996). An internalized sense of oppression can be associated with some languages; individuals often favor their second language when it frees them from constraints associated with their mother tongue (Pavlenko, 2006). Guttefreund (1990) reports that it is not the primacy of the mother tongue, but the qualities of a particular language that can have an impact on a bilingual's emotional experience, noting that Spanish to English and English to Spanish bilinguals both report that they experience and express more affect in Spanish than in English.

The role that each language plays in the individual's life, as well as the qualities of that specific language, will exert a combined impact on a bilingual's emotional experience. The first language is not always the language of emotions for bilingual parents; "adult social language in the private space of the family may make other languages seem equally, if not more, emotional than the first" (Pavlenko, 2004, p. 200).

Guardians of the Mother Tongue

The effects of gender are often overlooked when examining issues of second language learning. Beyond the many other roles that they enact, women are often culturally regarded as guardians of the home language (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). The responsibility of passing on a language then may take on the greater meaning of maintaining the culture itself (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). To the Mexicano parents interviewed by Blum-Martinez (2002), preserving the language is crucial to preserving ethnic and personal identity. Dual language maintenance cannot occur without a strong commitment on the part of the home to protecting the first language (Bayley, Schecter, & Torres-Ayala, 1996; Fishman, 1991).

Even when working long hours, the mothers in Pease-Alvarez's study (2003) felt responsible for continuing the use of Spanish in the home, perhaps because of the cultural expectation of their role in child-rearing and the socialization process. Similarly, the mothers from Central America and Mexico whom Pastor (2005) interviewed about their language experiences in the United States indicated that they attempted to hold on to the "moral language order" of the homeland. They struggled

daily with strong feelings, reinforced by the outside community, about not speaking English well enough, in contrast to their pride in maintaining and defending Spanish. These women not only resisted language barriers but drew moral lessons from them, constructing a moral order which they transmitted to their children. Bilingualism then became a skill to help these mothers maintain respect at home and expect respect from the outside.

Language Socialization in the Bilingual Family

To understand bilingual children's language socialization, one must recognize the social and cultural context in which this development takes place (Hammer, Miccio, & Rodriguez, 2004). Parental understanding about language development, the dynamics of the family surrounding language, and the language climate of the wider community must all be taken into account.

Relatively little research exists on parent's beliefs about language development and their role in supporting this, less still on the beliefs of mothers from diverse backgrounds, or Latina mothers in particular (Hammer et al., 2004). When women regard themselves as being responsible for the maintenance of their native tongue, they are exhibiting an understanding that they are actively involved in their children's language learning. Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) confirmed this, noting that the women they interviewed supported the children's language abilities from the time that they were newborns, seeing themselves as deliberate partners in their children's learning processes. The Mexican American mothers of young children

with language difficulties whom Mendez Perez (2000) interviewed also described themselves as active participants in their children's language learning, describing listening to their children and interacting with them, labeling objects and ideas, and creating opportunities for interacting.

De Houwer (1999) hypothesizes that for active early bilingualism to occur, parents must have positive attitudes to both languages and to child bilingualism as well as believing that they are active participants in their child's language learning. The Mexicano families encountered by Schecter and Bayley (2002), Pease-Alvarez (2003), and others shared a common and active commitment to transmitting the Spanish language and cultural identity to their children; they differed only in the ways that they pursued this goal.

Goodz (1994) points out that before children begin to say their first words in bilingual families, parents use their non-native language relatively infrequently, even when these parents are committed to bilingual development. Similarly, Pearson (2002) notes that most Latino families speak mostly Spanish with their infants and toddlers, even in families who value and can practice bilingualism.

Language socialization is by no means a one-way process. The "dynamic network of mutual family influences," where children are as much agents as receptive vessels, must always be taken into account (Luykx, 2003, p. 41). Parents may shape children's speech behavior and attitudes, but children's evolving competencies influence parents' language choices. Later born children tend to learn English at an earlier age than their older siblings (Fillmore, 1991), and, as they learn to value

English more from their older siblings and the community at large, may subtly be discouraged from speaking the native language (Shin, 2002). In homes where bilingualism is encouraged, children, make the necessary adaptations when they encounter unfamiliar linguistic environments (Parke & Drury, 2001). Yet, Fillmore (2000) points out, when parents don't realize that a change in language behavior also signals a shift in their children's language loyalty, English could supplant the family language completely in the children's speech.

Although Tuominen (1999) suggests that it is children who actually decide what the home language will be, the information that we have already reviewed indicate that the interplay between parent and child, between forces inside and outside the home contribute more strongly to the actual language choice at any point in the lifespan of that family. Pearson (2002) notes, as does Baker (2000), that shifts in the balance of language spoken in the house often occur concurrently with life transitions such as changes in jobs or which relatives live in the house. Schecter and Bayley (2004) note that language use "tended to be reconfigured as circumstances shifted and people struggled to accommodate the continuities and discontinuities that defined their lives" (p. 608). They recognize these shifts as "a series of choices that constitute affirmations and reaffirmations of a commitment to the minority language" (p. 614).

"Language attitudes are an indelible part of language socialization" (Zentella, 2005, p. 9). The extent to which a group is proud of its Spanish will have an effect on how committed that group is to teaching Spanish to their children, yet children and adults alike quickly learn that English is the preferred language in the United States.

Parents valuing their home language must struggle against "English only" attitudes and values which stigmatize the Spanish language and by educational policies urging parents to prioritize English with their children. Their children recognize that a stereotypic Spanish accent is often the butt of jokes in ads and television shows, although most Latinos were born in the United States, many carrying little or no trace of a Spanish accent. Some Latinos with a more elite background may distance themselves from the rural dialects of Spanish which they associate with a lower class (Schecter & Bayley, 2002).

Schecter, Sharken-Taboada, and Bayley (1996) conducted in-depth interviews with Latino families who had chosen to retain the use of Spanish in the home. The most common reason cited concerned the instrumental benefits of speaking more than one language. Parents also stated that knowledge of Spanish would serve their children well academically, help them adapt to geographic relocation, and help give them an edge in the job market. The parents interviewed recognized Spanish as an important part of their children's Latino identity, with use of the minority language offering an affirmation of this identity. The language attitudes and practices both of the family and society at large clearly all play a role in determining the child's ultimate language usage (Hammer et al., 2004).

Language Shift

A shift across generations away from the languages which immigrants bring to their new homelands has been documented around the globe. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) maintains that language shift is especially characteristic of the American

situation, noting that the native language often becomes a social stigma, with little outside recognition of the native language. Bilingualism under these circumstances becomes subtractive, with the second language gradually replacing the first.

Anderson (2004) also notes that language loss usually occurs in a context in which minimal support has been given for the use and maintenance of the home language, one of the most documented examples being that of Spanish speakers in the United States. She indicates that typically, the immigrant community's native language originally has prominence, with members fluent in their native language but with limited skill in the host language. The offspring of this generation become proficient in both the native language and the host country, often demonstrating higher proficiency in the second language. Their children tend to become fluent only in the host language, thus replacing the minority language as the first language. Fillmore (1991) states that language shift is language loss. A main concern is that school socialization contributes to the loss of the parent language within these three generations.

Anderson (2004) notes other factors that can foster first language loss, including early immersion in English preschool programs, low status of the minority language for vocational and educational advancement, lack of peer and community interactions in the native language, and younger siblings with whom English is spoken. Rural communities tend towards higher Spanish maintenance than urban ones; women tend to experience first language loss more than men.

What has changed is the speed at which this shift takes place. Especially in the case of the Spanish language in America, what used to take three generations has begun to take only two. A pattern of incomplete acquisition of the first language before shifting to the majority language has also been described by Schecter and Bayley (2002). Spanish-English children use more English than would be predicted based on the time they are spoken to in each language (Patterson & Pearson, 2004). The amount of exposure to English through the media and wider community is often not taken into account. The devaluing of Spanish previously noted also may be reflected.

Children growing up in bilingual households are learning from parents whose language use is also evolving (Luykx, 2003). Malave (1997) notes that parents may be learning English to the detriment of maintaining Spanish as their dominant language, evidence contradicting the notion that Hispanics do not learn English or encourage their children to do so. Hurtado and Vega (2004) and Pease-Alvarez (2003) note that language shift cannot be used as a measure of shift of acculturation. Receptive knowledge of the language may be maintained, as well as a vibrant ethnic identity which is not dependent on the knowledge of the language itself.

Language Development at Home and at School

As we have already noted, the home cannot be treated "as an isolated sphere with regard to language socialization, given that wider social pressures penetrate the most intimate of domestic interactions" (Luykx, 2003). Past toddlerhood, as children

enter preschool and are exposed to a wider variety of cultural influences, parental norms become less central to children's language development.

Parke and Drury (2001) give rich context in describing the home language learning environment of three preschoolers whose first language is a variant of Punjabi, and conclude that a tension between home and preschool language can arise when the children enter school, if the roles of the mother tongue and of English within the school system are not clarified and supported. Blackledge (2001) extends this concern in his study of minority language speakers in Britain, citing the tensions between the Bangledeshi women's views of themselves as "competent providers of community literacy instructors for their children" (p. 71) and the majority-culture teacher's perceptions of them as deficit in this and related areas.

Concerns have also been voiced by Fillmore (1991) about the influence of preschool exposure to the second language on the development of the first language before that development is fully established in the young child. She states that the younger the children are when they learn English, the greater the erosion of their home language, at least in North America where linguistic diversity is not supported or valued.

In contrast, Winsler, Diaz, Espinoza, and Rodriguez (1999) found only language gain in both languages with Spanish-speaking children in a high quality bilingual preschool. They report that language choice does not always reflect language proficiency, and question the methodology on which Fillmore based her

findings, but recognize that their results, dependent on programs of a quality rarely available, may not be easily generalized.

The question of exposure and usage, even when the first language is fully supported in the home, is often complicated by school and community language policies. Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994) point out that language differences among the many groups in schools are tied to larger societal factors, recognizing that the language practices of linguistic minority families do not match those in the classroom. Children are quick to note when the school does not value using or maintaining Spanish, as is usually the case in the United States. Even with the best of parental support for the native language, children often begin to prefer English once they begin formal schooling.

Research indicates that the best predictors of academic success for non-native English speakers are fluency and literacy in their native language (Paneque, 2006). Children deserve to be afforded schools where the use of their primary language is supported along with English (Fillmore, 2000). Zentella (2005), in her attention to the multifaceted aspects of language use, goes further in her challenge to educators to construct classrooms which create "a multilingual culture with an international perspective."

Summary

The literature related to the factors contributing to the language choice of bilingual mothers spans a number of disciplines and subjects. After examining issues concerning bilingual language development, the mother tongue, language

socialization, language shift, and the interplay between home and school, a picture of the importance of maintaining the home language in both bilingual and monolingual Spanish-speaking homes emerges (Schecter & Bayley, 1998).

We still find relatively little material available to assist our understanding of how such language choice works in bilingual families. This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the language interplay between parent and child and between home and the outside community in families where the mother is bilingual.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The study of the factors that contribute to the language choice of bilingual mothers began with my interest in understanding how these choices work from the participants' point of view. Qualitative research methods offered the best fit for gathering, describing, and understanding such information about language choice in family life (Leedy, 2005, p. 94).

The language choice study was an endeavor to understand bilingual mothers' perceptions and understandings of language use with their young children by examining multiple perspectives on the same situation (Leedy, p. 139). It used a phenomenological approach to the research question. I sought through this study to understand and interpret this aspect of family life through the perceived experience of the individuals involved.

Population Sample

A purposeful sample of eight individuals was obtained (Leedy, p.144). All were women in the a small rural community in central Minnesota area, where I am well known to the Mexican community through my former work with the school

district's Family Literacy and Early Childhood Family Education programs and as a parent educator at the Women, Infant, and Children clinics.

I used a convenience sample approach, beginning the process of finding participants by personally contacting mothers who met the criteria of the study and whom I already knew. Four participants were located in this way. I met another mother in the screening program who agreed to participate. Although I asked each of these individuals for the names of other potential participants, hoping to create a snowball effect, none were located in this way. Instead, staff members of three programs serving young children and families in the community (Head Start, Family Literacy, and School Readiness) each suggested one mother who met the criteria and agreed to participate. A bilingual aide at the elementary school also examined her data base for potential contacts, but the women whom she suggested were already participating in the study.

I chose to limit the study to mothers rather than parents for a number of reasons. Two of the mothers had previously indicated that their husbands were not bilingual, and I had reason to believe that this would be the case in other families as well. In the author's experience, mothers in this culture tend to defer to the men in a mixed setting, even if more of the childrearing decisions are being made by the mothers, and, as has already been discussed, mothers maintain a strong role in guarding and transmitting the mother tongue. This study does not address fathers' perceptions about language use. The interview questions, however, address the

mothers' perceptions of the fathers' choices about language use with the children and their roles in making this family decision.

The women who participated in this study identified their first language as Spanish. Each considered herself to be bilingual, and was the mother of at least one child who was living in her home and between 2 and 7 years old. All of the women speak to their children in some combination of Spanish and English, and all have lived in the United States for more than 5 years. The sample size was influenced by a limited participant pool. No other potential participants came to my attention.

Data Collection

The main method of data collection was in-depth interviews in the families' homes. Interviews were preceded by a basic demographic questionnaire. The semi-standardized format of the interview facilitated the organization of the data, increasing comparability of response. The open-ended nature of the questions invited description of behavior, beliefs, and feelings concerning the language experience of parents and their children.

"Typically, qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). Rubin and Rubin (2005) term this approach "responsive interviewing," emphasizing the relationship which forms between interviewer and interviewee and emphasizing the flexibility of both design and questions to accommodate new information, adapt to the participants actual experiences, and to adjust to unexpected situations. The prepared interview questions often became the foundation for further

questions which arose during the course of the interview process. Follow-up questions were developed after reflection on the course of the in-depth interviews for one of the mothers, whose answers most strongly diverged from the responses of the other mothers interviewed, to clarify some points that had been left ambiguous, as suggested by Schecter, Sharken-Toboada, and Bayley (1996).

Interview Procedure

I set appointments to meet in the participant's homes by telephone, sharing the purpose of the study with each person. Each of the mothers whom I contacted agreed to participate. On two occasions, I was asked if I could come later that day, and I was able to comply.

At least one child was in the home during each of the interviews, but the mothers in most homes had another family member attending to them, or had the children absorbed in another activity. We occasionally turned off the tape recorder to attend to children's needs.

I drew on my experience as a parent educator to build rapport and ease the conversational flow. The interviews were conducted in English, but I offered the possibility of the woman's mixing the two languages in their responses, as I understand Spanish on a functional level. I reviewed the consent form with each mother verbally before she signed it, restating the purpose of the study and reminding her that she could pass on any question or stop at any time.

Throughout the interviews, I offered opportunities to expand on a concept or add other ideas, and used probes for further clarification of the impressions generated.

The interviews were shorter than originally anticipated, lasting from 22 to 42 minutes in length. The average interview was 30 minutes long. The two shortest interviews were in homes where the mothers demonstrated that English was still something of a struggle for them.

At the end of each interview, I offered each mother a choice of a framed Golden Rule print in either Spanish or English as a thank you gift for her time. After examining these, seven chose the Spanish one. The mother who chose the English print had displayed it on the living room of her home when I returned to do follow-up questions a few weeks later.

The interviews were audio-taped using a digital tape recorder. I recorded field notes after each interview, describing details and impressions that could not be captured on tape. The transcriptions were completed within 3 weeks of each interview.

To maintain the family's privacy, each family was assigned a number for both the field notes and transcriptions. Family member's names in the data analysis were replaced by the notations "father" or "child 1", etc., so that no identifying names would be included in the data.

Additional Procedural Factors

A variety of methods to achieve reliability were used in this study. I conducted a pilot test of the interview procedure with a bilingual parent in a different town. This helped me to become comfortable with the interview procedure and to arrange the questions so that they flowed more smoothly.

Feedback was sought from my advisors and from peers at every step of the research design. I made every effort to maintain objectivity during the interview process, suspending previous experience which could influence what was heard (Leedy, 2005, p. 135) and striving for a position of "empathic neutrality" (Patton, 2002) as much as possible during the interview process.

I personally conducted each of the nine interviews and produced verbatim transcriptions of each session as well as field notes corresponding to each session. Validation of the data was sought from respondents prior to interpretation of the findings by sharing transcripts with the two participants who requested them, asking for feedback.

The study met ethical standards by gaining the written informed consent of participants. The Institutional Review Board at St. Cloud State University approved the research design.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The Transcription Process

Producing verbatim transcriptions contributed to my detailed knowledge and understanding of the data. It focused my attention on the meaning of what the participants were saying as I read and reread the conversations I had enjoyed with them.

After completing each transcription, I listened to the recording a second time, listening for omissions or re-phrasings and correcting the transcription where necessary.

Analyzing the Content

After transcribing the data, I began separating out irrelevant information in the interview. Spending time reading and rereading through the data helped me to become "intimately familiar" with the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). I categorized the relevant information into small segments, examining for dominant and recurring themes, then classifying the data into thematic units and synthesizing it. The parents' ideas and beliefs were the unit of analysis.

In this process of content analysis, I sought divergent perspectives to construct a composite of relevant information (Leedy, 2005) and interpret it. As Patton (2002) notes, "Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions,...considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world" (p. 480).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sample size of eight participants was small, though large enough to generate some saturation of response. The interviews and my own observations were the only source of data. I did not attempt to verify anything that was stated in the interviews.

Even when every attempt is made to maintain objectivity, the perspectives of researchers do affect their findings. I am aware that I place a high value on bilingualism itself, as did most of the mothers interviewed. When a differing understanding was expressed, I maintained a respectful attitude, using probes and follow-up questions to more fully understand this perspective.

As the women in this study consider themselves to be bilingual, I made the decision to conduct the interviews in English rather than use an interpreter. I did give each woman the option to switch into Spanish, but none did so, other than an occasional word used when quoting another person. It became clear that at least two of the women had some difficulty expressing themselves conceptually in English, but using an interpreter in this setting would have compromised the bilingual self-definition of these women by not showing confidence in their ability to communicate (Goldstein, 2001).

Chapter IV

RESULTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE CHOICE STUDY FAMILIES

The eight mothers interviewed varied in their background and family structure. Their ages ranged from 23 to 36, with an average age of 30. All were originally from Mexico. Five of the women were originally from the south-central agricultural state of Michoacan. The husbands of at least four of the women were also from this area. Two of the women were sisters, and two of their brothers were the two bilingual fathers reported in the study. Six of the mothers had come to the United States as a teen with her family or other community members. One had come as a 6-year-old with her family and the other came alone at age 21. They had resided in the United States from 8 to 30 years. Only one did not have a high school diploma or GED certificate, and two had some college experience.

Six mothers were married, one was cohabitating, and one was single. One of the married fathers was out of state working. All of the fathers were working full time. Five mothers were employed full time outside the home. Three were not employed. One family reported making less than $20,000 last year, and two more than $40,000. The remaining five families made between $20,000 and $40,000 in a year. The family

homes in which the interviews took place ranged from a trailer home and an apartment to three large, very new homes, one of which had just been built by the family.

The children's ages in the home ranged from 1 to 13. There were from one to four children in each family. All of the children were born in the United States, granting them dual citizenship. The grandparents in four of the families lived in Mexico. Two mothers lived with their mothers or family of origin, and two had parents in Minnesota but not in the same home. Each mother had at least one sibling who lived in or near the local community.

Each mother has a distinctive background and family situation which ultimately influences the language choices which she made with her children. The following is a description of some of the factors in each mother's family life, both past and present, which contribute to the language choices which she is currently making in her home.

Mother one came to the United States with her family when she was 6 years old. She went to school in California from kindergarten to 10th grade, subsequently earning her GED. She was one of the first children in her school who did not speak English, and remembers being kept "on the side" until an ESL program was established. She moved with her husband from California to Minnesota, where they have been raising their three children, ages 12, 8, and 4. They speak a mix of Spanish and English with their children. She is concerned that her younger children may be losing their Spanish.

Mother two came to the United States after graduating from high school in Mexico. She had English classes since seventh grade in Mexico, and attended community college in California. She met her husband in another state and moved with him to Minnesota. They speak mostly Spanish together, but are prioritizing English in their home. She reports that they speak mostly English with their three children, ages 5-13. She is concerned that much of the Spanish used in the local community is not "good" Spanish, and believes that if her children learn English as their first language, they will not develop an accent in speaking the language.

Mother three came to California with her family when she was 13, and was the only Spanish-speaker in her class from sixth to 12th grade. She followed her parents to Minnesota, seeing it as a better place to raise her son, with fewer social problems than in California. She speaks a mix of Spanish and English with her two younger children, ages 4 and 9. Her parents, in a separate household, are raising her older son, and mostly speak Spanish with him. Her daughter knew more English than Spanish at Head Start, where most of the children spoke Spanish, and she was teased for it. This single mother decided to speak more Spanish with her younger son, reasoning that he would be able to learn English in school later, as well as avoiding any teasing.

Mother four is living with her mother and sisters and 2-year-old child. Her husband is working in another state. She came to the United States when she was 12, starting the eighth grade in California. Her family moved to Minnesota when she was a high school senior, in part to avoid the "gangs and criminals and drugs" in California. She graduated from the local high school. This mother speaks a mix of

Spanish and English with her child, prioritizing English. Her mother speaks only Spanish, and her sisters speak a lot of English with the child.

Mother five came to Minnesota with her family when she was 16. She had stopped going to school in Mexico when she was 13, and did not attend school in the United States. She reported learning English from watching TV and trying to talk back to the characters. She and her boyfriend, the father of their 2- and 4-year-old children, live with her parents and two younger sisters, one of whom is a toddler. The adults speak mostly Spanish with the children, but the 4-year-old, in preschool 5 hours a week, has a distinct preference for English, which concerns this mother.

Mother six came to Minnesota with her family when she was 15. After high school, she completed 2 years at a state university, and also a recent semester at SCSU. She mostly speaks Spanish at home unless it involves homework for her older child, and holds a job as a bilingual receptionist. Her husband is not bilingual, but encourages her to expose their three children, ages 7, 3, and 5 months, to both languages.

Mother seven is the sister of mother six, and came to the United States with the family when she was 17. She had finished high school in Mexico, but attended 3 years of high school in Minnesota in order to learn English. Her husband is not bilingual, and she considers English to still be a struggle, even though her husband encourages her to use it with their four children, ages 8, 6, 5, and 2. The older children usually speak English among themselves. She is concerned and wants them to maintain Spanish.

Mother eight came to the United States with relatives briefly when she was 16, and returned to stay when she was 21. Although she went to school in Mexico until she was 16, she had only completed six grades there because of illness. She learned English in ESL classes and by studying language tapes, and completed her GED locally. She and her husband used to talk more in English to their two children, ages 9 and 7, but they are concerned that the children may be losing their Spanish now that they are both in school, so are switching back to more Spanish. This mother would love to learn more languages, and hopes that her children will become multilingual.

The following table summarizes the family composition and language use as reported by the mothers. Language spoken by adults and children's ages are included.

Table 1

Families' Reported Home Language Use Patterns

Family	Parent-to-Child Language	Child's Primary Fluency
Family 1:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish/English Mix	
Father (S)	Spanish	
Child 1 (12)		Both
Child 2 (8)		English
Child 3 (4)		Both
Family 2:		
Mother (S/E)	Differed by child:	
Father (S/E)	Differed by child:	
Child 1 (13)	Spanish/English mix	Both
Child 2 (9)	English	English
Child 3 (5)	English	English
Family 3:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish/English mix	
Child 1 (9)		English
Child 2 (4)		Spanish
Family 4:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish/English mix	
Father (outstate, S)	(Spanish)	
Grandmother (S)	Spanish	
3 aunts (S/E)	English	
Child (2)		Both
Family 5:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish	
Father (S)	Spanish	
Grandmother(S)	Spanish	
Grandfather(S)	Spanish	
Aunt 1(age 8, S/E)	English	
Aunt 2 (age 1 ½)	N/A	
Child 1 (5)		English
Child 2 (2 ½)		Spanish
Family 6:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish/some English	
Father (S)	Spanish	
Child 1 (7)		Both
Child 2 (3)		Both
Child 3 (5 mos.)		N/A
Family 7:		
Mother (S/E)	Spanish/some English	
Father (S)	Spanish	
Child 1 (8)		Both
Child 2 (6)		Both
Child 3 (5)		Spanish
Child 4(2)		Spanish
Family 8:		
Mother (S/E)	Both	
Father (S/E)	Both	
Child 1 (9)		English
Child 2 (7)		English

LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT OUTSIDE THE HOME

It became clear in analyzing the data that these women were trailblazers. Although most of them clearly valued bilingualism, none had been raised in a bilingual home, and none had models close at hand for creating an optimal environment for ensuring bilingualism in their children. Nevertheless, they assessed the factors outside of their immediate home life which impacted their language environment, making adaptations that would favor the path which each had chosen for their children.

The Bilingual Edge

When asked directly if they wanted their children to be bilingual, all of the parents except one responded affirmatively. One noted that she wants her children to be trilingual, so that they can communicate with even more people. The one differing voice noted "it's their choice," still stating that she does want her children to be able to understand Spanish; it will be up to the children if they want to use it or speak it.

These mothers recognized that they (and their children) were surrounded by English, in their work, in the stores, parks, at the clinic, through the media, and in the schools. Their language choices in these settings were driven pragmatically, mostly by identifying whom they were speaking to. If a person could speak Spanish, most reported speaking Spanish to them; otherwise they would use English. One reported making accommodations based on who is nearby, stating that she usually speaks Spanish with her children in the community, but "sometimes, if say like there's white

people…I don't want them to feel uncomfortable so I speak English. You know what I mean?"

Another described getting mixed up with a laugh, "Sometimes when I talk to people that don't speak Spanish, I kind of forget, and I talk to them in Spanish, or I talk to my parents in English, and then I'm like, 'what am I doing?'." Some used English on the job, because they had to, or half English and half Spanish, depending on whom they worked with. A bilingual receptionist reported with a smile, "sometimes I get someone that is not Spanish who comes to me after I have just helped someone that speaks Spanish and I say something (in Spanish) and I say 'oh, I take that back' because sometimes, you know, I switch it around."

Why Bilingual?

Each of the women wants her children to be bilingual, at least in some sense, and each is of the first generation of her family to become bilingual. It is evident that these mothers view bilingualism positively. When asked what they saw as the advantages of bilingualism, the answers ranged from career advantages to ability to communicate with others.

Five of the mothers specifically expressed that being bilingual would provide their children with more career opportunities in the future. One noted, "like they say, 'a bilingual person counts as two'." She recounted a job situation where, although she was not paid more, she had a much easier job than the others, spending much of her time translating instead of "on the line." Others noted that jobs can pay more if you are bilingual, or, if not paying more, "it can get them a better job, or they can do

the same company but they can… do more things. They may not have to work as hard as we do, or as my folks did."

Other mothers thought that it would help the children be more outgoing throughout their lives, which would help in their careers. They expressed the advantage of being able to communicate with more people, "both Hispanics and Anglos," and being able to help others along the way. Several noted the importance of their children being able to speak Spanish to continue to communicate with their grandparents, and on trips to Mexico, so they "wouldn't be, like, lost." One wanted the children "to be able to say anything they want" to her parents.

Perhaps because the ability to speak with grandparents was of concern to a number of these mothers, most reported that their own parents did not say much about the language choices that they were making with their children. Since most of the children had maintained some knowledge of Spanish, and it was obvious that the children would learn English, there was less reason for the grandparents to voice opinions or concerns. One mother did report that when her daughter was speaking only English, her parents would say "'speak to them in Spanish, so they will learn our language', and I thought it came in handy, so they could communicate with other people…That's the only thing that they said about teaching them Spanish."

Two mothers spoke of the value of maintaining the Spanish language as an aspect of their own identity. "I just do it, not because it's comfortable, because it's of benefit to her. She starts talking only English, and pretty soon she won't speak Spanish, and…My mom speaks only Spanish…We're Hispanic. We can't lose it."

"Every time we go to Mexico, I don't want to say, 'oh, I speak English', 'cause we speak Spanish, I feel I have to speak Spanish. I think that's one of my ethics (values)...you know, we have to be who we are, not pretend to be someone else."

Experiences with the Local Schools

The mothers in the study had chosen a variety of preschool and early elementary experiences for their children. Their choices were affected by factors such as Head Start eligibility, which for at least two families changed with different children as their income or family size changed, and their perceptions of the various programs available.

Three had participated in the Family Literacy program, which is a bilingual program for families with children ages 2 to 5. One mother chose "the English ECFE" instead of the "Spanish" (Family Literacy) because she wanted to "force him by learning (English)" and because she herself wanted to "get to know the Anglo community; I want to be able to have two" and relate to the general population. Four had had at least one child in Head Start. Three had enrolled at least one child in the English School Readiness program, located in the elementary school, the year before kindergarten.

Another mother had brought her oldest child to the regular ECFE program, but when she enrolled him in School Readiness, she reported that she had "a really bad experience...once I tried to put him in preschool, they didn't know him anymore. They needed a translator for him, even though he only speaks English." She indicated how disconcerting it had been for the same teachers to communicate with her children

in English in one setting, but to automatically assign him a translator in another. This experience led her to pull him out of the program. Since this time, her children have attended the local parochial school. She prefers the church school because "they (her children) speak English, they treat them like everyone else. If they see you don't need it (extra language help) they don't bug you with it. They respect that." Another chose the parochial school for her first child, stating, "as a mom, you know your kids, and I said, if I sent him to the public schools, he's gonna be with my nephews, and he's gonna think it's time for friends and time for talk and he might not focus…Right now, the reason he's there is just to build his English skills."

When asked whether and how the children's school experiences had affected their language use, the mothers gave two sets of answers. Four answered no, but in a way that I began to recognize some negative connotation to the word "affected" which may have skewed the answers to this particular question. The last person I interviewed said clearly "Oh, no, I think they helped...it isn't that it's affected it, it's that...." If others share this negative association with the concept, it may help account for the strength of the three other " no" answers. The four mothers who answered that their children's schooling had affected their children's language experience all mentioned more exposure to English, one noting sadly that the children then just forget and have a hard time with the Spanish.

Although I had reserved my own question about language and discrimination for the end of the interview, when the subject of school came up, a number of the mothers brought up issues of discrimination based on looks or language in connection

with their own school experiences as well as that of their children. One mother summed up the situation this way:

> It's not about school, it's about everybody. They stereotype children. Ok, if they see a Hispanic looking kid, they automatically think he doesn't speak any English, and this happens in school, at the store, everywhere. Just because he looks different, they say "oh, well, he doesn't speak any Spanish, I mean any English," so they treat him like he don't know. Until they listen to us speak English, then they realize they're bilingual.

Another's school experience affected her language planning for her daughter:

> I have an example when the teacher he call me "stupid" and other bad words and he think I no understand because I have two years after coming from Mexico. In Mexico, "stupid" is very, like bad word. And I talked to the counselor, to talk to her, she speak a little bit Spanish, and I had my sister, so she interpret for me, and he got, like, suspended, because he can't use that language for us… he think like I'm so dumb to learn English. So that's why I say like my daughter, I don't want she have an experience like me.

Three of the mothers were perturbed that the school sent home papers in Spanish, even though their families were clearly bilingual. They strongly expressed feeling that they were not being respected for understanding English:

> I think a lot of times, with the school, if they think that you are Spanish, they automatically send everything in Spanish…I said, "from now on, I know it's the same paper, send it in English!" …I think, we come here, we struggle to learn the language, and I want the same, you know, I want him to be treated just like the rest of the kids. I don't want 'cause you're Spanish, your papers should go in Spanish.

One mother noted that even her older child was given papers in Spanish, although he had had little opportunity to learn to read Spanish: "he's in public school, in the seventh grade, he gets a letter, like his mission for the day, he gets it in Spanish in his backpack. He doesn't even read Spanish. Just because of his color. That's just sad!"

A separate concern voiced by three of the mothers was the quality of the Spanish used in the Spanish translations of letters sent home from the public schools. One mother reported

> I told them several times, I don't want papers in Spanish, because I don't know how to read your Spanish, I know how to read my Spanish…You know what I think they do? I think they get a dictionary, and they write every single word that's in a sentence, and they translate every single word to Spanish…there's terms they write in Spanish that we don't usually use. My sister feels the same way…It might sound rude, but we can't read their Spanish, it's not the same terms we use.

Another mother was even more to the point:

> Like I told the school, if you're gonna send me a letter in Spanish, you better be fluent in Spanish, because I know good Spanish. And when they sent me these letters with these words, it doesn't even make sense. Oh, come on!... They keep saying, "Learn English, learn the language, we're in America" and then they do that!

Even though these women had had no difficulty expressing their concerns about stereotyping and mistranslations of their mother tongue to the schools, it appears that their voices may not have been heard, as the situation reportedly has continued. The women's own school experiences obviously have a strong influence on their perception of their children's experiences as well.

"You're in America. Speak English!"

The mothers in this study expressed much emotion when asked their thoughts on the belief that people who live in the United States should only speak English and whether they had encountered this in their personal lives. Five described situations that were deeply etched in their memories of being confronted by individuals, usually whom they did not know, who demanded that they speak English in various settings.

In a high school setting, where a fellow student asked why they had come to the United States not knowing the language, a counselor intervened and the girl apologized. In a restaurant, the owner intervened, and the man who had come to their table to demand English was asked to leave. In a store, one mother directly replied to the person, "You know what? I'm speaking Spanish because I come from Mexico. I speak Spanish, my sister speaks Spanish, she doesn't speak English. And we're Hispanics! That's our primary language." In the workplace, this attitude was interpreted as the discomfort of not knowing what was being said, but the two women who reported this noted that just kept on talking Spanish.

I asked the question dispassionately. The mothers described the individuals confronting them as being angry or close-minded. Although the mothers did not hesitate to ask for intervention from individuals in charge in the particular setting, or even to speak back directly to the individuals involved, the mothers reflected strong emotions as they recounted their stories. Most also asserted in some way, again, that it is positive to know both languages, two noting that they were encouraging other family members to learn English for the positive communication factors already noted.

The very idea of "only English" brought out strong sentiments, best expressed by the mothers themselves:

> I've heard people say that if you're going to live here, you should understand and speak English so that you could be able to communicate. I understand that, and I think that's good, but not "only". Because there's a lot of people who are, people who only speak Spanish that are legal here, like grandparents, and, I mean, just in general there's other people. They're here legally, not illegally, they have the right to be here...

> I have heard that many times, but I just think we have to be proud of our language, and we have to be proud of everything, and just by speaking Spanish is not going to change who we are. 'Cause we still have the look!... And I think that keeping the language is a way to tell the people who we are and what we do.
>
> And I don't think that's fair, and I don't think it's right. Because, OK, we live in the United States, we live by your rules, but then we have our own culture too. So, I mean, all the people in the United States most of them come from different places, we all come from different places. So, if you don't want me to speak my language just because we're in the United States... if you're willing to do the same thing that you're preaching, then I'll do it. Which I don't agree with. I don't think it's right for other people to try to, you know, like rip us off from our culture.

Without exception, the women strongly disagreed that the attitude of "You're in America! Only speak English" which had been expressed to them on many occasions had influenced the choices that they had made about language. Two cited freedom of speech as their permission to ignore it: "What I told him was, we're in a free country, aren't we?" "We have freedom of speech. If I decide to speak English, if I decide to speak Spanish, it's my choice." Two women cited the perceived ignorance of the speakers, one stating, "It makes me angry because, how can they believe they can control the whole world? If they're not happy, they can stay with their sadness, and live with it, and don't try to make another people like them."

In trying to make sense of the emotionality behind language that has been expressed to them, these mothers reflected a range of anger, sadness, and disbelief in encountering these strong sentiments.

It is clear that the language environment in the schools, workplaces, and businesses of central Minnesota has impacted these women's lives significantly. They report that input from their own parents and in-laws and the wider community have

not significantly impacted their actual language choices. However, it is evident that the negative encounters in response to their use of Spanish that they have experienced in schools and businesses have impacted them greatly emotionally. These factors provide a contextual background for the choices that the women make in the more intimate setting of their family lives at home.

LANGUAGE CHOICES WITHIN THE HOME

As in any aspect of family life, the differing temperaments, strengths, and life circumstances of individual members, as well as the relationships between these members, significantly influenced the choices that were made about language in the homes of these bilingual mothers.

The Father Factor

The language of the adults in the home is a primary factor in determining the language environment which the children experience. One of the most profound factors impacting the language choice of the six or seven families where the father was in the home (one was working out of state) was his own facility in English, as well as any decisions that he made with his partner concerning language.

Table 2 details the languages spoken by the fathers, as well as the wider language environment experienced by the children.

Table 2

Children's Home Language Environment

Family: Father bilingual?		Parents speak together?	Mother speaks with children:
#1	Understands English	Spanish	Mix, more Spanish
#2	Yes	Spanish (mostly)	Both, more English
#3	N/A	N/A	50/50 mix
#4	Understands English	Spanish	Both, more Spanish
#5	A little English	Spanish	Spanish
#6	No; he tries	Spanish	Mix, mostly Spanish
#7	No, he tries	Spanish	Mostly Spanish
#8	Yes	Spanish (mostly)	Spanish /English mix

Only two of the fathers were reported to be bilingual by their partners, and even in these two families, the parents spoke Spanish or mostly Spanish with each other (in one, with some fun English words thrown in). Therefore, from the earliest days in their mother's wombs, and continuing through their preschool years, the children in each of these families in the study were bathed mainly in the sounds and rhythms of the Spanish language.

When asked if they had discussed the issue of what language to use with the children with the children's fathers, the mother's answers were varied. Two commented, "not really"; another said "one time, I just talked to him that, you know, we should talk more to her in Spanish." Two said that they just naturally speak Spanish with the children; no discussion was warranted here. The mother who prioritized English for her children said "we kind of agree on teaching them English first." Two mothers mentioned that their husbands were trying to learn and use more English, but neither woman was comfortable speaking English with her spouse. One

of these women noted, "Every place we go, we're always together, so he doesn't need to (speak English)."

English First!

Only one of the mothers in the study prioritized English over Spanish. As her views diverged from those of the other women, I have chosen to discuss her report of language choice and usage separately. The distinct choices that she and her husband are making can assist in our understanding of the processes taking place in the other families as well.

The father in this family is one of the two bilingual fathers in the study; thus, this is one of the only families where the choice to prioritize English for their children could have taken place without compromising the children's communication with one of the parents. Indeed, the parents still mostly speak Spanish with each other, and spoke more Spanish with their first child, who is now bilingual, even though the younger two are not reported to be.

The second child was born around the time that the School Readiness program treated this mother's first child in a way that she experienced as discriminatory, when he was given a translator and papers in English which were not requested. It is not clear how much this school experience had affected the definitive choice the parents made together (at least reportedly) to teach the other two children English first. Helping her children to avoid discrimination is an evident factor in her decision-making.

A major concern for this mother is the accent that the children might develop in speaking either language. She came here at 18, and was the only mother who had studied English in Mexico, before coming to the United States. She found the pronunciation to be difficult, reflecting "once you learn Spanish first, your tongue is kind of tight." She believes "if you learn Spanish first, you always have the accent, and we don't want them to have the accent…I'd rather have them have the accent on speaking Spanish, then have the accent on speaking English."

She was the only mother that indicated that she had read anything about language acquisition, stating that she did not believe the studies (when asked what studies, she mentioned papers, books, and TV, but did not give any specifics) which said that you could learn two languages the same. "You probably can get it, but the pronunciation! Like I told you, once you learn the Spanish words, once you get the r's and know that stuff, you don't get English, that pronunciation part." She firmly believes that you can only learn one language "one hundred percent," stating that she has come to this conclusion from her own experience, and reports that that her children are able to speak with their grandparents, but "with the accent that usually white people get when they speak Spanish," since they are learning English as a first language and Spanish as a second.

This mother cares passionately that her children learn to speak English without an accent. A main motivation is her desire to spare them from discrimination. "I want them to have the same chance as white people, as everybody else. Once you learn Spanish…you always feel different. And I don't want them to feel different, I want

them to feel just like people." She notes that students who learn some of each language often drop out of high school, or if they make it to college, dropping out of this as well, and reasons that they are struggling with the language. She wants her children to be able to succeed, and reasons that unaccented English is a step in this direction.

Another concern that this mother expressed several times was the quality of the Spanish that is spoken in the local area. She said that many of the people there are from small towns, and they speak "really, really basic"; she is from another state, and says "I had to cut back on some of my words, there are some words that I don't get the use of". Even if she had chosen to access Spanish books with her children, they, too, often don't have the best Spanish "in my opinion". Her advice to other bilingual parents is: "if you are going to teach them Spanish, teach them the good stuff!"

When asked about the difference in language between her older child and younger ones she noted that they had spoken more to him in Spanish, they had taken him to Mexico more when he was younger, and ultimately, that he is more interested. She feels all of the children learn more Spanish when they go to Mexico, and they have made the effort to bring the children to places like the pyramids to learn the real Mexican culture. She says that the older son has been more interested in Spanish (not surprisingly, since he has been immersed in a language environment which prioritized the languages differently during his earliest years), and concludes that the other two aren't interested "yet." She believes that ultimately, it is their choice if they become bilingual or not, and does report that they understand some Spanish.

A Mixed Language Environment

Only one of the mothers had only one child, and she was younger than preschool age. This young 2-year-old child is in perhaps the most mixed language environment of all the families interviewed, having aunts that speak mostly English with her, and a grandmother that speaks only Spanish, all in the same household. The mother herself says that she speaks both languages with the child, but mostly Spanish, and when the dad is present, he speaks in Spanish with her.

In describing how her child alternately used the languages, it becomes clear that the mother adapts some of her language choice to her child's own language use, perhaps without being aware of it: "I think we're more in Spanish but sometimes she, like, if she wants an apple, you say 'apple, eat'. You know, she's using both languages." "She don't know in Spanish the words like apple, I say *manzana* and she says 'no, apple'." "When she's still with my sisters, she talks in English, and when she talks to me, she's in Spanish, or in English, depending on what she needs."

During the short 2 years of her child's life, this mother has made a shift in the language she has prioritized with her child: "When I say to have a baby, I want she to speak English first. But you know…she's two years old, but she's learning the both languages… I decided my baby should speak both languages because it's good…" She notes that her daughter does well in the bilingual Family Literacy program because she can understand the children's teacher more than some of the children with little English experience. She herself reads to her child daily in Spanish, but also has books in both languages that she shares with her.

At two, this child is always with her mother or another member of her family, having not yet entered the arena of schooling or her own relationships in the wider community. Her mother seems happy with the command of both languages which are emerging in this child. She expressed no concerns about the need to maintain either language as her child develops.

"Speak Spanish! " "No, I can't!"

Once they had attained kindergarten or even preschool age, most of the children in the remaining families, even though they were exposed mostly to Spanish during their earliest years, had begun to exhibit in some way a decided preference for using English. Each child manifested his or her own style in manifesting this preference; temperamental differences could help account for the force of this preference in some of the children.

The most striking example was that of the daughter in family five. The only person in the family who spoke English to this 4-year-old child was her 8-year-old aunt. The child also went to a School Readiness program 5 hours a week and played with English-speaking children in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, she exhibited a strong preference for English. The mother of the child reported that her 8-year-old sister, the child's aunt, had learned English before she went to school from TV, as she herself had done as a teen when she came to the United States. She describes her child's language use:

> If she's talking to somebody, she uses more English than Spanish. And I told her they use just Spanish, and she says, 'No, I can't!' She'll speak English

everywhere!.. She thinks it's easy to speak Spanish than English, but I don't think so...I speak to her in Spanish, and she answer me in English, so…

When asked what the child speaks to her grandmother, who only speaks Spanish, the mother reported that she sometimes even speaks English to her as well. The child, who was in earshot, came up and informed me, "I talk to my grandma *'hola'*". There was no doubt that she was able to follow the conversation and discriminate between the languages.

This mother reported that she has always talked Spanish with her child because "I don't know, I just like to talk to her in Spanish…I speak to her in Spanish always. I wish she'd speak more Spanish than she does." When asked if she was afraid that her child might lose her Spanish, especially when entering school, the young mother seemed taken aback, noting "I don't know, maybe, I don't know, I think so."

This child exhibited strong will and spirit in a family that seemed to come by languages relatively easily. Her mother seemed at a loss as to what to do to help her child maintain Spanish beyond asking her to speak more Spanish, as reflected in her trailing off after describing what she did to encourage Spanish with her child. She had no evidence at this point that these efforts were having any result.

Children's Language Use

By the time that I had the opportunity to interview the other five mothers for this study, each had at least one child who spent a significant amount of his or her time away from the immediate family, at school and with friends or cousins, and each mother was making conscious efforts to keep Spanish alive in her children's lives. It

became clear that the decision to maintain Spanish, and how to execute this decision, was not a unilateral one, unchanging over time or regardless of family circumstance. Instead, the mothers adapted their choices to changes they perceived in each child's language use, and often to the concerns that these changes aroused in them. Their children in turn adapted to the changes that their mothers made to their language environment.

These mothers' descriptions of how their children used language were enlightening. Although they all had expressed concerns about their children losing Spanish, when asked to describe how their children actually used the language, most described a pattern of mixing the language, at least some of the time. In speaking of different children who attended elementary school, they said things like "there's times when she'll start talking English, and then once in a while, put in some Spanish words, and vice versa." "She's always speaking more English. She's like that. But once in a while, she'll put some words in Spanish, but most of the time, English." "Sometimes, they mix it. Most of the time, they mix it." "Because they are in school, they are more worrying about the English...When they're, like, talking to themselves, they use more English... When they talk to me, they talk kind of both." "My son switches back and forth, and when we have company and nephews that come, it's all English."

The descriptions of preschool age children were similar. "She'll be saying something and then she'll say something in Spanish...If you talk to her, you ask her something in Spanish or English, she'll answer you. She'll most likely understand it,

both languages...Maybe because she hears it from the other two?" "He does half and half. He does sentences in English, he'll say another in Spanish."

Two noted that their children knew different concepts in different languages: "I was thinking, maybe when he goes for his (preschool) screening, they're gonna have a hard time... because he knows his numbers, his shapes, his letters (in English), but if we say "we need a number on the floor" he might say it in Spanish." "Like the colors and counting, she's counting in English. In Spanish, I don't think she knows the colors in Spanish." I have observed mothers in the local Family Literacy program who had presented themselves as monolingual Spanish-speakers teaching what might be considered school readiness language to their children in English. The mothers interviewed did not state that they had done so, but as their children were not enrolled in preschool, it seems likely that they had chosen to do the same.

The mother in family one, with perhaps the most concern about her second child losing Spanish ability, reported, "I don't know if she does it on purpose, but most of the time, I say something in Spanish, and she's like, 'Mom, what's that in English?...'You don't know that?' 'No!' I mean, really easy words!" She also describes the interplay between siblings that affect their language usage as more of them enter school:

> (Child one) brings in the English, and then, they're kids, they speak English at school all the time, they come home, and she didn't have...nobody to talk to in English, so she had to communicate in Spanish. Now (child one and child two) they're always talking in English, speaking English, and even though I talk to her in Spanish, but they're always communicating in English. And visa versa with her (child three), they're always talking in English, even though I tell her to speak in Spanish. I think that's where

> everything starts. Now (child two) communicates with (child one) and they speak English.

The mother in family three described some distinctive language use in her family:

> I believe when they are outside, like at the store or something, they will speak more English than Spanish. They do speak both, but I would say that they will speak more English than Spanish if we're outside. When we are inside, we speak both, like 50/50. I don't think it affects the way they play, or.. They just choose it. Why? I don't know. Their choices.

At another point in the interview, she said that her daughter is more fluent in English, to the point that when she went to Head Start, where most of the children spoke Spanish as their first language, "the other little kids used to make fun of her, 'cause they used to say she spoke funny." Her preschool son is now more fluent in Spanish. This mother notes, laughingly, "my daughter, when she complains, she complains in English. And my son, when he tells on his sister, he tells in Spanish. That's our life, our everyday life!"

Two mothers described an interesting strategy that their 7-year-old sons had devised to use the languages separately. One, whose mother had described him as most fluent in English, used Spanish as a secret language, speaking to his mother in Spanish when they were by or with an English-speaking person:

> It's interesting, because anything he says, he says in Spanish to me…so that person doesn't know what he is saying. I think he doesn't want them to know what he says, even though there's nothing bad…And I talked to him, I told him, why don't you say that in English, and he said "I don't know how to say it". But I know he knows how to say it!"

Another described the same strategy, from the other side of the linguistic fence:

> When we go back home, too, in Mexico…they know it's different. And my son will come to me and say something in English…He's kind of embarrassed, like I know he's saying something he doesn't want anyone else to hear.

This same child attends the parochial school, which attracts fewer Hispanic children than the public school. When his mother suggested that he bring pictures of a trip to Mexico for a school project, he told his mother that he did not want any of the kids to know that he was Mexican. When she reminded him that he was born here,

> he says if he brings pictures in, the kids are gonna come back to him and say "you speak Spanish." And he doesn't want anyone to know, 'cause sometimes they'll ask, and say "Oh, he doesn't understand, because he speaks Spanish." He wants to feel that he fits in with his classroom, and with his friends.

This child has evidently reflected on language use in both countries, reflecting the contextual expectations for his language choice. His mother noted that one child in his class speaks to him in Spanish, but that he will not talk to her in Spanish:

> And then he'll come and say 'She doesn't know a lot of English, mom.' And I say, 'well, why don't you talk to her?' 'I don't have to talk to her in Spanish; she's going to have to learn'.. Yet still, he comes home and asks about 'school words', 'how do I say this in Spanish?' and he's coming more and more. He seems to be interested in the language!

Parental Adjustments to Children's Language Use

When the children were infants and toddlers, the parents in these first generation bilingual families could not look ahead to see what languages choices the children would be making, and how this would impact their own choices. Their own fluency in both English and Spanish may have changed during the time that they have been in the United States, and even in response to the language use that their

children's changing circumstances required. Parents and children each adapted to the others' changes in language use that had occurred in response to the language environment detailed earlier in this analysis.

Comments like "because they are in school, they are more worrying about the English, so that's why I'm still, like, talking to them in Spanish. They don't forget that we're still speaking the language" surfaced. When one mother noted that her early elementary school children are both more fluent in English now, it was said quite sadly:

> Before school, I spoke a lot of English with them, because I wanted them to be prepared for school. I always talked to them in English, because I wanted them to be prepared. I wanted them to be ready for school; I didn't want them to be, like, they didn't understand the teacher, or…But then, like probably from one year to now, I've been talking more Spanish, because I noticed they had some trouble in Spanish. English, I'm not worried, because they learn it in school. And I help them a lot, you know, like we read a lot… But Spanish, they need more. They know English now, I got to worry about Spanish.

Another mother described changing her strategy, in response to her three children's differing language use:

> I thought, like, I could teach my kids the same way, Spanish not losing our culture and English being necessary to communicate with everybody else. My oldest, we didn't speak any English to him, just Spanish. He always spoke like Spanish, and then English, you know, and it worked pretty good for him. And then my daughter, I don't know how, why she picked up English better than Spanish. At some point, she would understand everything that we told to her in Spanish, but she wouldn't speak it. Not a drop of Spanish. And then I thought, if I teach my little one, my last little boy, to just English, then he's gonna have the same problem. So I thought I'd teach him Spanish, and then he's gonna learn the English in school. That was, you know, one of my choices. I didn't think that I'd have to make that choice, because I didn't have the problem with my oldest, but then my daughter, she just learned English.

Interestingly, when asked at other points in the interview which language she used most with her children, this mother mentioned a half English, half Spanish mix, and I observed such a mix in her interacting with the two younger children. She also reported that her daughter's lack of Spanish when she went to Head Start, where most of the children are Spanish speaking, left her coming home crying because she had no friends. Because of this, "we started speaking more her in Spanish, and she started practicing, so she learned how to speak Spanish, and now it's been, like, Spanish and English like we do."

The mother who is especially concerned about the loss of Spanish use in her second child, age 8, states at first that she did the same things with each child, but then describes how she has shifted more to Spanish because of her concern:

> See, (child 1) was the only one, so I would talk to her in Spanish. At home, I try to speak more Spanish now because of the girls, especially my second daughter. They get the English outside, at school. So if I (were to) stop talking to her in Spanish…I think I'm going to have to work with her (on Spanish).

Strategies for Language Maintenance

These mothers, sharing a common concern that their children not lose their Spanish, have few models for bilingual language maintenance. Indeed, access to such models in the wider United States population is also lacking. What strategies have they developed to keep Spanish alive in their families when their children, especially the younger ones in the family, begin to shift into a more pronounced use of English?

The most widely used method is to initiate more communication in Spanish. Most of the seven families concerned with bilingual language maintenance reported

doing this. Some also try to reason with, or even direct, their children towards more Spanish: "I don't want you to be like that. Or people are gonna talk to you, and you're gonna be like 'I don't speak Spanish'. I don't like that". "I keep forcing them and telling them they are Spanish, and have to keep the language." "When my son comes and says, 'mom, I don't know any Spanish' I go, 'how are you going to be able to talk with your grandparents?' 'Oh, OK!' So they have to."

Others talk about sometimes needing to translate: "sometimes, they don't know what the specific words, the ones I'm telling them in Spanish, and I try to explain that specific word in English, so they can understand." Another mentioned the reverse, translating words used in school into Spanish for her child when he asked.

Four of the mothers mentioned their role in being sure that their children did well in school. Three of them added that they would like to work with or more with their children on learning to read and write in Spanish, since they do not get this assistance in school: "I'm teaching her, little by little, without distracting her learning in English, so I think it will be helpful if she learns to read Spanish."

One mother described showing empathy for her child's situation, a quality which has obviously enhanced the lines of communication between this parent and child, and is helping the child to step out into the wider community:

> When they (classmates) come and ask 'how do you say this in Spanish?' he'll say, 'I don't know'. And sometimes I say, 'well, you tell them (that you do)' but sometimes too I realize that...they see you, they know you're different...I don't want him to feel, he doesn't want to feel that he's rejected...Here, our neighborhood didn't have anybody that speaks Spanish, so this little boy comes 'can (the son) come and play?' 'Oh, sure', so they play all day and I think I can see that more coming and more the kids

> getting involved in things. I think my worries are the same ones as my son. He knows the language and he wants to say yes, I know…

When asked what advice they would give other bilingual parents, these mothers were not specific about how to maintain bilingualism. They obviously were developing their own strategies by trial and error. Nonetheless, their conviction in what they were doing rang out in their answers. Two immediately responded not to let their children lose their Spanish, three more stating in different ways to continue to be "who we are" by teaching their children both languages.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

I entered into the language choice study with a deep respect for the qualities that walking a bicultural, bilingual path demands, and an even deeper care and liking for the mothers I have come to know who were endeavoring to walk this path.

From young adulthood, when I had the opportunity to live in various settings outside the United States proper, I developed a dilettante's passion for language, learning functional skills in the appropriate language surrounding children's health in Vietnam, food on a Dakota reservation, and marketing and money in China. When one of the mothers I interviewed discovered that I had lived in China for 2 years when my children were teenagers, she immediately responded, "Oh, so you know what it would have been like if someone had put their finger in your face and told you to speak only Chinese!" My own experience in settings where another language was prominent was time-limited, and I never had the bilingual ability to challenge myself to make such a choice. Knowing the struggles I still faced in these settings, where I never encountered any measure of cultural resistance or bias to my reliance on English, only deepened my respect for these mothers as I heard and analyzed their stories.

By its very nature, language connects us with others. We cannot reflect upon the choices that each mother has made without taking into account her

interconnectedness with the other members of her family. The communication patterns which develop in both families of origin and families created through marriage and parenthood influence how these families function in the more formal settings of school, the workplace, and the community. These settings in turn can and do influence how family members communicate within the home.

Outside Factors Affecting Home Language Use

I sought in this study to determine what factors outside of the home influenced the language choice that these mothers had made. Their reluctance to identify any such factors when directly asked was striking. "Do your parents have an influence? " "Do the schools?" "Do the folks out there who wish you would only speak English?" In one way or another, most of these questions were answered with a "no."

The actions the women described taking give a different picture. Most of these mothers considered it crucial that the children be able to communicate with the grandparents. This was already their own decision; there was little need to ponder the grandparents' opinions. Some stated that school had not affected their children's language use, some stated succinctly that it had brought in more English, yet most of those with school aged children described making adaptations as their children began to bring more English home. None stated in any way that the confrontations that they had had with United States citizens demanding that they speak English had influenced their choices, but with the emotional force that these encounters had entered their lives, how could they not be affected?

All of these women had come to the United States during a formative time in their lives, most in their teens, each by age 21, and all before they had become parents themselves. They could not help but be influenced by the individualistic nature of American culture, where thinking for oneself is valued quite positively. An individualistic identity is also characteristic of the *ranchero* culture prevalent in the rural region most of these women had emigrated from (Farr & Barajas, 2005); perhaps they had brought this value with them from their country of origin as well. In any event, it was clear that these women wished to be seen as decision-makers and as true to themselves, at least in affairs that affected themselves and their children.

It was clear that there were outside factors that did affect them. All of the mothers had spent their formative years in Mexico. Memories of their own parenting experiences were embedded in the context of the Spanish language. None had models for how bilingual families would operate at home or in the community, although almost all strongly believed that the effort they made would be of value to them and to their children. Several expressed that their own experiences of discrimination at school and in the community had contributed to their resolve to find ways to help their children avoid similar experiences. Most believed that maintaining Spanish while acquiring English would assist their children to succeed both vocationally and academically.

Factors in the Home Language Environment

Fathers were present and actively involved with their children in most of these homes. It was striking how little discussion was reported concerning language use

between the two parents. Does this reflect the mothers' taking a greater responsibility for childrearing, more specifically for language itself, as only two of the fathers were bilingual? Or does it represent an approach to parenting that both parents could be taking, where decisions are made in response to what is occurring at any given time in the family in contrast to pragmatic planning and strategizing? In either case, a more detailed examination of these factors than falls in the scope of this study could prove enlightening.

That only two of the fathers were considered bilingual, and that even in these homes, the parents spoke mostly Spanish with each other, was a major determinant of the language environment which the children experienced prenatally and beyond. Except in one family, the fathers mostly or exclusively spoke Spanish with their children, and the mothers spoke either Spanish or a mix, with priority given to Spanish. Spanish is clearly the mother tongue of these children, even of those who began to prioritize English during their preschool and school years.

The mothers initiated differential language use in some key areas. They may have chosen to introduce concepts useful for school such as numbers, colors, and shapes to their children in English to help prepare their children for the school experience, although only one mother specifically stated doing so. The literature suggests that the mother tongue would be more likely to be used in emotional or disciplinary settings by the mothers, but I did not probe deeply for this, and no mother reported this distinction. Further study of the relationship between emotion, culture, and language could be illuminating.

The mothers who valued bilingualism did not need to develop a concern for the maintenance of Spanish until their children entered school and began to use less Spanish in their everyday worlds. When parents described in detail how their children pushed the issue of preferring English, like the daughter in family four and the son in family seven, I suspected that a child's (and perhaps parent's as well) strong or spirited temperament was keeping the issue at the forefront. The interplay between siblings and language use and its effect on the family which was described by several mothers was also intriguing, and perhaps an overlooked factor in the research literature. As an older child brought in more English, the younger children began using this language more. The mother or parents became concerned that Spanish was being lost, and began emphasizing Spanish with the younger children.

The mother who prioritized English, though still valuing bilingualism enough to want her children to understand Spanish, expressed unique concerns about the accent that her children might develop and about language learning in one language interfering with the other. These concerns are not supported by the literature on bilingual acquisition. Her concerns are in large part motivated by the desire to spare her children from discrimination and to help them succeed in school. So far, she seems to have experienced success in this endeavor.

A continued adaptive interplay between language use of parent and child was the most striking finding of this study. The mothers recognized the influence of outside factors when they described children employing both English and Spanish as a secret language between parent and child, or when explaining a son's struggle with

letting his classmates know that he speaks Spanish. The mothers became homework helpers because they could understand the school language, as well as offering the equivalent Spanish terms when the children were interested. Over time, they adapted which language they emphasized, initially to prepare the children for school and later in reaction to the school. Some needed to balance particular children who were perceived as favoring one language too much, usually English. They would then emphasize Spanish with that child until they perceived an adjustment in the child's language use. The children in turn adapted to the changes which their mothers had introduced in the sheltering environment of the family home.

The picture of an ongoing dance between parent and child emerged. The parents lead this dance in the protected years before the children enter preschool. During the preschool and early elementary years which we have been examining, the parents appear to still be subtly leading the dance. As the children grow older, they will introduce new moves and the choreography of the dance will again be altered.

Implications in the Community

A dance between factors inside and outside the family also seemed evident. The decisions that these women make on the home-front and in the outside community are ones that have implications for the wider society. By their ability to communicate in both languages, they become cultural brokers without perhaps realizing it. They know other parents in both the English and Spanish linguistic communities. Some deliberately seek to have more contact with the wider local community. Some have jobs where they interpret for both populations, including the receptionist at the local

clinic who reported sometimes getting mixed up in what language she was speaking. Schools and other institutions serving families could use these women as resources in this role, especially those women who deliberately live their lives straddling both the Mexican and wider local communities, consulting with them on how the institutions' efforts are being experienced.

The women's strong reactions to the schools sending home all papers in Spanish, as well as the quality of the translations, begs to be addressed. Having worked in this particular school system, I know that many efforts are made to support the Spanish-speaking population, including providing interpreters at parent conferences and community events and offering translations of important papers. The strong response of the bilingual community to these practices when detailing how they had made them feel totally overlooked invites a closer look at the efficacy of these efforts, both with the bilingual community and the wider Spanish-speaking community.

More than one parent who has married into the Mexican community has had papers sent home in Spanish because of the Spanish surname. In a community this small, surely the school could develop a system to recognize each parent individually beyond his or her name. If the translations themselves are not easily understood by bilingual individuals, how are they experienced by those parents who only speak Spanish and whose avenues for communicating this are limited? This issue invites exploration and further communication, as well as an abandonment of the use of computer translator programs.

Some of the concern about the quality of the Spanish language handouts and the language spoken in the community most likely reflects a wider class issue. Farr and Barajas (2005) note that the *ranchero* linguistic features common to Michoacan and other western states, where most of the families originally are from, are not regarded as standard Spanish. This rural dialect is denigrated not only in the United States but in Mexico, with nonstandard Spanish being tied to inferior social status. Identity is closely tied to language. What is the perception these women have of the Spanish that they use in their everyday discourse?

The women may not be able to have much influence on the close-minded individuals who promote the mantra of "English Only" as what could be seen as the latest variety of racism in the United States. Much of this Official English movement is directed at the use of Spanish and not other languages. We can hope that the assertive actions in the face of the incidents that they described provoked some change in the hearts or minds of these intruding individuals. We ourselves as citizens can take more proactive stances in support of mother tongue and bilingual maintenance in our communities.

Recommendations for Educators

Maintaining Spanish is not only a core value for most of the bilingual mothers in this study, but, as noted in the review of literature, can be a strong factor in building academic success for their children. Even though the women in this study did not seem to be unduly influenced by negative attitudes towards Spanish use in the wider community, schools would do well to encourage home language use in their contact

with parents. Ideally, children would have the opportunity to attend bilingual programs where the primary language is used along with English, but when this is not possible, as is most often the case in the United States, "parents and teachers can work together to find other ways to support children's development and retention of their primary languages" (Fillmore, 2000).

Close communication between parent and school is crucial, and besides giving insights into their own families' circumstances, as noted before, bilingual parents often act as cultural brokers to give insight into the needs of the wider Spanish speaking community. In the language handout issue already discussed, the school could easily begin its efforts by having each teacher consult with the families with Spanish surnames about the language of choice for papers sent home, and make efforts to ensure that the Spanish translations are accurate ones.

Teacher education programs should assist their students to develop an understanding of bilingualism and second language acquisition. They can encourage them to examine current policies concerning language use in the schools. Educators can take community action in support of home language use, and create classrooms with a multilingual, international perspective. An educator does not need bilingual skills to support and encourage both the languages that the children bring to the classroom and those encountered in the wider community. A guiding principle of unity in diversity can be reflected in the design of the classroom and the approach of the teachers themselves.

Recommendations for Further Research

I interviewed eight mothers at different points in the assimilation process and in their own parenting journeys. Which of the decisions they have now made will change at different transitions and stages in their family lives? At another cross-section in time, when the children have become teens or beyond, and have become more closely assimilated into American society (or by choice have pulled away from this direction), we could expect these women to create further adjustments in their home and community language use, or even to rethink the importance of bilingualism itself and how it will continue to function in their families.

A longitudinal study, perhaps revisiting these families in 5 and 10 years, would be fascinating. As already mentioned, the literature available on family language choice is limited. Such a study would add a dimension that has not previously been available, as well as capturing the "dance" and influence of other factors over time.

I chose to limit the population sample to Spanish-English bilingual mothers, because there were ready participants available and much of the research I had accessed was specific to this population. Concerns about Mexican immigration also push the issue of language use to the forefront in this population, as witnessed by the force of the "English only" encounters reported earlier. A cross-cultural study, comparing and contrasting the data from this study with responses to similar questions by members of other immigrant populations, would be enlightening as well.

By conducting my interviews in English, clearly the second language of each of the participants, I had determined the language of the entire interview, even though

I had expressed a comfort level in the mothers speaking Spanish during the interview process. Most of the mothers clarified during the interviews that the language that others spoke with them determined what language they would continue to speak in, and none shared detailed memories of their border crossings, an intense emotional event which would have been experienced when they were still monolingual Spanish speakers. It is possible that using a bilingual interviewer might have yielded richer data, and given more insight into the emotional language being expressed, which, as noted earlier, is another significant area for further study.

Conclusions

In a speech on July 8, 2008, President-elect Barack Obama recognized that there is no need to worry about whether immigrants would learn English, as they will do so. Instead, parents "should be thinking about how can your child become bilingual. We should have every child speaking more than one language" (Obama, 2008). With this encouragement from the renewed top leadership of our nation, how best can informed educators and ordinary citizens influence a deeper support for the development of bilingualism in the United States?

I began the study of the factors which contribute to the language choice of bilingual mothers in order to more deeply examine how parenting using two languages worked in families whom I already valued and respected. The study brought forth some important insights in the ways that parents and children adapt to each other in their language use, and the manner in which outside and inside factors impact the family in its developing language environment. These insights will hopefully be of

assistance to those who serve these families in the community, as well as to the families themselves as they continue to engage in this trail-blazing endeavor.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Factors Contributing to the Language Choice of Bilingual Mothers

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study of the language choices bilingual mothers make with their young children. You were selected as a possible participant because you are bilingual and have young children.

This research study is being conducted by Karen Jentz to satisfy the requirements of a Master's Degree in Child and Family Studies at St. Cloud State University.

This study is designed to look at what factors contribute to the choices that bilingual mothers like you make in communicating with their children. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to have an interview with Karen in your home about your experiences. This interview will take about an hour, and be recorded on a digital tape recorder. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview for accuracy.

Every effort will be taken to make the interview process as comfortable as possible. You may develop increased understanding of and confidence in your choices as you think about them during the interview process.

The taped information will be stored in a secure location, and destroyed when the study is complete. The names of individuals will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be used in the writing of the study.

Upon completion, my thesis will be placed on file at St. Cloud State University's Child and Family Studies Department.

If you have questions right now, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at 320-230-8589/jentz19@aol.com or my advisor, Glen Palm, 320-308-2129/gpalm@stcloudstate.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences, even after the interview has taken place. This would not affect your relationship with me or St. Cloud State University.

****

***Your signature indicates that you have read the information above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw from this study at any time after signing this form.

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX B

Demographic Form

Family Information

- How many adults live in your home?_____

  Relationship to you of any others:_____

  _____ _____

- How many children are in your home? _____

  What are their ages? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

- What is your age?

- What is the highest grade of school you have completed?_____

- Are you working outside the home? _____yes _____no

  _____Hours/week _____position

  Is your husband (if applicable) working outside the home? _____yes
  _____no

  _____Hours/week _____position

- Family income in 2007:

  _____Under $20,000

  _____$20,000-40,000

  _____$40,000-60,000

  _____Above $60,000

  _____I don't know

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Interview Introduction/Family Background:

To begin with, I'd like you to tell me the story of how and when you came to the United States, unless you were born here, and how you have learned English along the way. I'll be recording on this digital tape recorder; if at any time, you would like to me to stop it for any reason, just tell me or raise your hand.

Family Background:

Now I'd like to start asking you some questions, but I want to remind you that you are free to choose not to respond to any of these questions. We'll start with some questions about you and your family: (Researcher asks the questions that were not already answered in the narrative):

- What country are you originally from? How often are you able to go back there?
- How old were you when you came to the United States?
- Have you lived in other states besides Minnesota? Where, and for how long?
- How many years of school did you finish in Mexico (or other identified country of origin)?
- Did you also go to school in the United States? If so, for which grades?
- Do any of the children's grandparents live in America? In (town)?
- Do you have other family in the United States? Where?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have? Do they also live in the United States? In (town)?

Parent's Language Experience:

- Where and how did you learn to speak English? (If not answered fully during narrative and demographic questions)
- In what settings (where and when) do you use each language?
- Is the child(ren)'s *papi* also bilingual? If so, what language do you usually speak together?

Language choice with children:

- What do you believe or know about how children learn language? What do you see as your role in your child's language learning?
- What language do you usually use with your child(ren) inside the home? What about outside the home? Is this any different from when they were younger?
- How did you decide on which language to use inside your home? How about outside the home? Where did you get information which helped you make these choices?
- Did you do different things with different children (if more than one is in the home)? If so, how did you make this choice?
- Have you discussed what language to use with the child(ren)'s *papi*? Does he say what language he prefers to use or prefers that you use?
- (If child(ren)'s father is bilingual) what language does the child(ren's) *papi* use with the child(ren)?
- What do the child(ren)'s grandparents say about which language to use?
- Do you want your children to be bilingual? If yes, what advantages do you see for this? If not, what are your concerns?
- How has your being bilingual affected communication with your children?

Children's language experience:

- How do your children use each language? Did any of this surprise you? (if children have familiarity with both languages)
- How do your children use language differently in different settings? (if children have familiarity with both languages)
- Do you consider your children to be bilingual? If so, which language is each of them most fluent in?
- What school or preschool experiences have your children had? How has this affected their language use? What are your feelings about this?
- Has the children's school experiences affected any of the language choices that you have made with your children?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about anything that we've talked about today?

Concluding questions:

- What are your thoughts about the idea that people who live in the United States should only speak English? Have you experienced this attitude directly? Has this attitude affected what language you speak in the home or the community?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about anything that we've talked about today?
- Do you have any advice you would like to offer other parents?

Off the recorder concluding comments include:

Do you know any other mothers in the area with young children who are bilingual who might like to be contacted for this study?

After I write up what is on the recorder, would you like to check it for accuracy or have it available to read?

Thanks again for your time. Here's a little gift for your family; would you like it in Spanish or English?