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Special Issue Reprint

Language Policy and Practice in Multilingual Families

Edited by
Anastassia Zabrodskaja and Natalia Ringblom

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Guest Editors

Anastassia Zabrodskaja
Natalia Ringblom

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About the Editors

Anastassia Zabrodskaja

Anastassia Zabrodskaja is Professor of Intercultural Communication and Head of the Communication Management Master's programme at Tallinn University Baltic Film, Media and Arts School (Tallinn, Estonia). She is Executive Director of the European Masters in Intercultural Communication programme. Her primary research interests are identity, language contacts and linguistic landscapes. She teaches courses focusing on intercultural communication. Professor Anastassia Zabrodskaja serves as the Regional Representative for Europe on the Executive Committee of the International Association of Language and Social Psychology (IALSP). She is also the President Elect of IALSP. Professor Zabrodskaja serves as chair in the International and Intercultural Communication section of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Anastassia Zabrodskaja is an expert in the social psychology of language. She has been involved in research projects on the development of the Estonian linguistic environment, bilingual speech and aspects of ethnolinguistic vitality, where her roles as a (main) project investigator have included scientific research to analyse language dynamics and change in Estonia. Her research has focused on identity dynamics and declared language behaviour and language ideologies among both ethnolinguistically mixed and ethnolinguistically monolingual families in Estonia in order to understand intergenerational language transmission processes. She explores the acculturation experience of international students in Estonia. She is experienced in using qualitative methods in the field of sociolinguistics and intercultural communication.

Natalia Ringblom

Natalia Ringblom is an Associate Professor at the Department of Language Studies at Umeå University. Her primary research focuses on bilingualism, heritage language acquisition and maintenance, with particular attention to language development and immigrant discourse within families. Based on these research fields, she has been particularly interested in language development and immigrant discourse within the family and language contact. She has also expanded these research areas with a cultural-historical perspective. As a member of various research networks—including the AILA, ASLA, EuroSLA, LILD—she contributes to the discourse on the role of language in social integration and identity among transnational families. Dr Ringblom has actively participated in several COST research projects, including "New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe" and "Transnational family dynamics in Europe". Her current projects investigate family language policies and effective strategies for heritage language maintenance and transmission.

Preface

This Reprint explores the evolving field of Family Language Policy (FLP) and its critical role in the maintenance of heritage languages. Situated within the broader domains of sociolinguistics and multilingualism studies, it brings together a rich, interdisciplinary collection of empirical studies that investigate how multilingual families around the world manage home language development and intergenerational language transmission.

The subject matter addresses urgent questions concerning language transmission, identity, emotional well-being, and cultural belonging in diverse sociopolitical and linguistic settings. From Cyprus to Namibia, and from Kazakhstan to the United Arab Emirates, the studies presented here showcase family experiences in managing bilingualism, heritage language sustainability, and the impact of institutional language ideologies. Drawing from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the contributors explore a wide range of themes, including bilingual socialization, translanguaging, digital literacies, and the evolving roles of parents and educators in fostering linguistic diversity. These studies reveal how parental strategies, ideologies, and practices influence children's language development and identity formation within and beyond the home. The aim of this Reprint is twofold: to advance theoretical frameworks in FLP and to offer practical insights that inform language education policies, community programs, and pedagogical approaches. It also seeks to inspire future research directions that emphasize children's agency, the increasing importance of digital media, and the need for culturally responsive, context-sensitive approaches to multilingual upbringing. This Reprint emerged from the intellectual momentum of the #HOLM2023 conference—*Research on Social and Affective Factors in Home Language Maintenance and Development*—held at Tallinn University. Motivated by a collective commitment to preserving linguistic diversity in an era of globalization and migration, it reflects the shared belief that family language practices are central to sustaining heritage languages and building resilient, multilingual identities. The motivation for compiling this Reprint also stems from the growing linguistic diversity observed globally and the persistent challenges immigrant communities face in maintaining their native languages across generations. The author's personal experience as a heritage language speaker further underscores the emotional and scholarly investment in this work. This volume is intended for academics in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, education, and migration studies, as well as for policymakers, educators, and multilingual families. By bridging rigorous research with practical relevance, this Reprint offers a compelling resource for anyone interested in how languages are lived, negotiated, and passed on—across generations, across contexts, and across borders.

Anastassia Zabrodskaja and Natalia Ringblom
Guest Editors

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Editorial

Across Languages and Borders: Empirical Advances in Family Language Policy Research

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This Special Issue is closely linked to the international conference Research on Social and Affective Factors in Home Language Maintenance and Development (#HOLM2023), which was held at Tallinn University, Estonia, from 14 to 16 December 2023. Organized by the AILA Research Network (ReN) on Social and Affective Factors in Home Language Maintenance and Development, HOLM 2023 served as an interdisciplinary forum for scholars investigating the multilayered dynamics of multilingualism within family settings. The conference emphasized the social and emotional dimensions of home language practices, encompassing themes such as Family Language Policy (FLP), digital literacies, translanguaging, bilingual socialization, and the roles of educators and parents in language development. Many contributions from #HOLM2023 have been developed into scholarly articles featured in the current Special Issue, as well as in two additional Special Issues (see Zabrodskaja et al., 2025; Zabrodskaja, forthcoming). These publications collectively advance the field by providing empirical insights and theoretical frameworks that illuminate the complex interplay between language practices, identity formation, and emotional well-being in multilingual families. By bridging conference discussions with peer-reviewed scholarship, this Special Issue not only disseminates cutting-edge research but also fosters ongoing dialogue among academics, educators, and policymakers dedicated to supporting linguistic diversity and heritage language maintenance in an increasingly globalized world.

This Special Issue makes a significant contribution to the fields of (family) language policy and multilingualism. It addresses the complex dynamics of language maintenance, transmission, and identity construction within multilingual families—an area of growing importance in today's globalized and migratory world. Its strength lies in a timely, theoretically grounded, and empirically robust examination of FLP, exploring both explicit policies and implicit practices shaping language use in the home. By illuminating how families manage intergenerational language choices and cultural affiliations, the Special Issue advances current debates on language shift and retention. Its interdisciplinary approach—drawing from sociolinguistics, anthropology, education, psychology, and migration studies—offers a nuanced understanding of how micro-level language decisions intersect with broader ideologies and institutional frameworks. The inclusion of studies from diverse sociocultural and linguistic contexts—including Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Namibia, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, and diasporic communities speaking Albanian, Arabic, English, Hebrew, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian—highlights both the universality and diversity of multilingual family experiences. This wide scope enhances the empirical foundation of FLP research and provides comparative insights essential for theory-building and policy development. Ultimately, the Special Issue contributes meaningfully to scholarly conversations on minority language sustainability, identity negotiation, and the complex links between family, language, and belonging.

The contributions in this Special Issue deepen both empirical insight into and theoretical understanding of FLP. Drawing on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the studies offer detailed accounts of how multilingual families negotiate language practices, allocate linguistic resources, and handle intergenerational transmission in varied sociocultural settings. These findings enhance our evidence-based understanding of FLP by revealing the situated, everyday decision-making processes within families—moving beyond abstract models to highlight real-life complexities. The articles also challenge and extend existing theoretical frameworks by introducing innovative concepts that capture the fluid, hybrid, and evolving nature of family language practices. Importantly, the research has practical relevance: it informs language education policies and community-based initiatives that support multilingual families. By advocating for culturally responsive, context-sensitive, and flexible approaches to language policy, this Special Issue offers valuable guidance for inclusive and effective planning. It stands as a vital resource for scholars, educators, and policymakers alike, enriching our grasp of the dynamic relationship between family language practices, identity formation, and language maintenance.

The practical implications of this Special Issue are far-reaching and directly relevant to both policy and practice. The findings inform the development of language policies that not only support bilingual education but also promote the intergenerational transmission and preservation of home languages. They offer concrete guidance for the training of parents, educators, and community workers in fostering supportive environments for bilingual and multilingual development. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of targeted services for multilingual families to address challenges related to language maintenance, integration, and educational equity. In the sphere of education, these insights can inform culturally responsive curricula that recognize and valorize linguistic diversity, while also supporting heritage language retention. The role of community networks—both formal and informal—in sustaining minority languages and promoting intercultural understanding emerges as another key area for policy innovation and support. Finally, this Special Issue lays important groundwork for future research, especially with regard to the long-term cognitive, socio-emotional, and identity-related impacts of bilingual upbringing across diverse cultural and migratory contexts.

The articles in this Special Issue are organized thematically—progressing from education and language policy in schools, to early childhood multilingual practices, to FLP and heritage language maintenance, and finally to youth identity and sociolinguistic dynamics—creating a coherent structure that reflects the complex and interconnected dimensions of multilingualism. The articles in the education and language policy in schools section examine how educators and early learning initiatives respond to the challenges of monolingual education policies in multilingual contexts, highlighting the use of heteroglossic and inclusive practices—from classroom translanguaging in Namibia and Finland to family literacy programs in Abu Dhabi—to promote equitable learning and linguistic diversity.

Set explores how Namibia's English-only education policy clashes with the country's multilingual classroom realities. Through a case study of a bilingual teacher, she shows how educators use heteroglossic practices—blending multiple languages—to support student learning. Her study highlights the limitations of monolingual policies and calls for more inclusive approaches that reflect linguistic diversity and promote educational equity. It reveals that despite the official policy enforcing English as the sole medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards, teachers often resort to heteroglossic practices—such as code-switching and translanguaging—to bridge linguistic gaps and facilitate comprehension in science education. These practices not only aid in meaning-making but also challenge the monoglossic ideology embedded in the Namibian Language in Education Policy, highlighting the need for more inclusive language policies that recognize and utilize the

multilingual realities of classrooms. By documenting these classroom interactions, the research underscores the importance of flexible pedagogical approaches that leverage students' linguistic repertoires, advocating for systemic changes to support linguistic justice in education.

Protassova and Silkin look at how early childhood educators support families who speak multiple languages. They focus on the ways teachers handle the challenges and opportunities that come with linguistic diversity in preschool settings. Their study explores the various methods teachers use to create welcoming and inclusive classrooms that value and encourage the use of different languages. It also considers the role of school policies and teacher training in meeting the needs of multilingual children and their families. The results emphasize how crucial it is for educators to be knowledgeable and prepared to work effectively in diverse linguistic environments. Their study also reveals that educators employ translanguaging strategies to facilitate communication and language development among children and parents, fostering an environment where both Finnish and Russian languages are valued. Additionally, it highlights that play without a common language enables children to engage and communicate with peers across linguistic boundaries, promoting social integration and mutual understanding in multilingual settings.

Gallagher, Dillon, Habak, Saqr, and AlRamamneh investigate an initiative aimed at promoting early literacy and enhancing father–child relationships in Abu Dhabi. Recognizing that shared reading between adults and children is not a widespread practice in the UAE, the project encouraged Emirati fathers to engage in interactive reading sessions with their kindergarten-aged children at home. Eighty fathers participated in workshops where they received guidance on interactive reading techniques and were provided with culturally appropriate books in both Arabic and English. The study utilized surveys, focus groups, and field notes to assess the program's effectiveness, identifying both the benefits and challenges of implementing such initiatives in multilingual settings. The authors recommend strategies for similar programs, emphasizing the importance of accessible information for parents, modeling interactive reading practices, and supplying linguistically and culturally relevant reading materials.

The Multilingual Practices in Early Childhood and Institutional Settings section examines how families and communities negotiate bilingualism and language ideologies across diverse sociocultural contexts. It explores parental efforts to implement English immersion in monolingual Spanish-speaking households, the fluid blending of Albanian and Italian among immigrant speakers, and the complex language attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. Together, these studies highlight the interplay between identity, practicality, and linguistic inclusion.

Relaño-Pastor investigates how monolingual Spanish families in Castilla-La Mancha implement English immersion strategies within their homes. It explores the interplay between English language ideologies, language socialization practices, and emotional investments in shaping FLPs. The research highlights the agency of parents, particularly mothers, in creating English-rich environments at home, encompassing both practical aspects and emotional labor. The findings underscore the significance of parental involvement and emotional commitment in fostering bilingualism and language maintenance. The study also reveals that families' English immersion efforts are deeply influenced by their own language-learning histories and aspirations for professional advancement, which shape their emotional investments in their children's bilingual development. Additionally, it highlights the tensions and dilemmas parents face as they grapple with the challenges of implementing English immersion in monolingual households, often balancing their desires for linguistic capital with the practical realities of daily life.

Cocchi and Pierantozzi explore how members of the Albanian immigrant community in Italy use their heritage language, particularly focusing on how they mix Albanian and Italian within noun phrases (known as Determiner Phrases or DPs). The researchers used both sociolinguistic and grammatical approaches to understand when and why people switch between the two languages, how fluent they are in each, and how they feel about mixing languages. A key part of the study looked at whether it is socially and grammatically acceptable to combine an Italian article with an Albanian noun or vice versa. The study offers valuable insights into how bilingual individuals shift between two languages and how these practices reflect their evolving linguistic identities, thereby contributing to broader discussions on language use within immigrant communities.

Abdelsayed and Bellinzona examine the language attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy, focusing on their perceptions of Italian, Standard Arabic (SA), and Arabic Dialects (DAs). The research reveals that while Italian is valued for its utility in social integration and daily communication, DA holds cultural significance within families and communities. SA, despite being less commonly used in everyday life, is respected for its role in formal and religious contexts. The findings highlight the complex interplay of these languages in shaping the identities and experiences of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. The study also highlights that Arabic dialects, while central to familial and cultural identity, often face marginalization in formal education settings and encounter social stigma. Furthermore, the authors advocate for educational reforms that treat Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects equitably, supporting their role in fostering inclusive and comprehensive linguistic–cultural integration.

The FLP and Heritage Language Maintenance section brings together studies that examine how immigrant and diaspora families actively negotiate the transmission of heritage languages across generations—highlighting the roles of parents (especially mothers), children's agency, cultural engagement, digital communication, and the complex emotional and practical challenges involved in sustaining linguistic ties in diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Zabrodskaja, Meir, Karpava, Ritter, and Ringblom examine how the pandemic affected language use in Russian-speaking families across Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden. Based on 50 interviews, their study shows that both parents and children played active roles in maintaining heritage and societal languages. Their study highlights how family language practices adapt during crises, emphasizing social and emotional factors in language transmission. Their study further reveals that the pandemic conditions provided children with new opportunities to exercise agency in their language and literacy choices, including increased communication with extended family members. This shift facilitated new sources of linguistic input, highlighting the active role of children as agents in shaping FLPs. Additionally, their research underscores the influence of extended family and social networks in maintaining heritage language practices during the pandemic.

Ramonienė and Ramonaitė explore how mothers influence the preservation of the Lithuanian language among families living outside Lithuania. They apply theories about family language practices to analyze data gathered between 2011 and 2017. Their research shows that children with Lithuanian mothers are more likely to identify with Lithuanian culture, learn the language as their first, speak it more often at home, and develop better language skills. These children also tend to have more favorable views about the Lithuanian language. However, when it comes to emotional attachment to the language, the ethnic background of the parents does not seem to make a big difference. Overall, the study highlights the significant role mothers play in maintaining a heritage language in immigrant families and points out the challenges they face in relation to this important responsibility.

Bloch investigates how Generation 1.5 parents—individuals who immigrated during their childhood or adolescence—manage multilingualism within their families in Finland.

Focusing on Russian–Hebrew bilingual households, the research explores the strategies these parents employ to maintain their heritage languages while integrating into Finnish society. Through semi-structured interviews, the study examines aspects such as parental involvement, home environments, future planning, and the challenges faced in preserving Hebrew and Russian languages. The findings highlight the dynamic nature of language management in transnational families and the agency of Generation 1.5 parents in shaping their children's linguistic identities. The study also reveals that Generation 1.5 parents often grapple with personal challenges, such as time constraints and retrospective regrets about not initiating heritage language instruction earlier, which impact their ability to maintain Russian and Hebrew language skills within the family.

Jakubek-Głąb investigates how Polish families in Finland maintain and transmit their heritage language across generation and examines the role of family dynamics, cultural practices, and societal factors in shaping language use within these households. The study highlights the strategies employed by Polish parents to foster Polish language proficiency in their children, despite the dominance of Finnish and Swedish in the broader societal context. The findings underscore the importance of family-centered language policies and cultural engagement in sustaining heritage languages in diaspora communities. The study also emphasizes the pivotal role of shared cultural practices—such as traditions, values, and identities—in reinforcing Polish language use within families, thereby enhancing its sustainability in the diaspora context. Moreover, it identifies effective strategies and interventions that can bolster the long-term vitality of the Polish language among diaspora communities.

Martena and Burr examine the challenges Latvian diaspora families face in maintaining Latvian as a heritage language. They highlight how parents use different strategies to encourage their children to speak Latvian, but strict enforcement can lead to conflict, while lack of rules risks language loss. The study shows that Latvian holds strong emotional and identity value for parents, but less so for children, who often prefer the dominant societal languages around them. Digital communication tools help maintain family connections but also present challenges, especially between children and grandparents. Their research emphasizes that language transmission is closely tied to family identity and cultural belonging, and that changes in family dynamics and social environment impact language use. Lastly, it contrasts with the older Baltic diaspora's collective commitment to language preservation with the newer diaspora's more individual focus on identity rather than proficiency.

The Identity, Language, and Sociolinguistic Dynamics in Youth section features a study which investigates how young people in multilingual Kazakhstan negotiate hybrid ethno-linguistic identities amid the tension between state-promoted Kazakh and the continued dominance of Russian in urban and academic spheres, shaped by family language practices and broader sociopolitical influences.

Using sociolinguistic methods and empirical data, Zharkynbekova, Ayupova, Galiyeva, Shakhputova, and Zabrodskaja look at how language skills, cultural heritage, and social factors influence young people's sense of identity. Their research sheds light on the complex relationships between language, ethnicity, and identity, showing how these elements interact and evolve among youth in a multilingual environment. Their study also reveals that despite state-led efforts to elevate the status of the Kazakh language, many young people continue to cope with a complex linguistic landscape where Russian remains dominant in urban and academic settings. This duality fosters a hybrid ethno-linguistic identity among students, shaped by both official language policies and the practical realities of daily communication. Furthermore, their research highlights that family language practices and educational environments play pivotal roles in influencing language preferences and identity formation among Kazakhstani youth.

While this Special Issue provides a rich and multifaceted exploration of FLP and multilingualism across diverse contexts, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, despite the broad scope of geographic representation, key global regions—such as the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa (beyond Namibia), and large parts of Asia—remain underrepresented. This limits the universality and comparative potential of the findings. Second, although the contributions are interdisciplinary, there is a relative predominance of qualitative approaches, which may constrain the generalizability of results. Quantitative and longitudinal studies, which are essential for tracking long-term outcomes in language maintenance and identity development, are notably scarce. Moreover, the focus on parental and educator perspectives, while valuable, often eclipses the voices and agency of children and adolescents—actors whose role in shaping family language practices deserves closer examination. Methodologically, reliance on self-reported data and case studies introduces potential subjectivity and selection biases, underscoring the need for triangulated and diversified approaches. Finally, while digital practices are briefly addressed, the rapidly evolving digital landscape and its influence on home language use remain insufficiently explored. These limitations not only highlight current gaps but also point to promising avenues for future research.

Building on the insights and findings presented in this Special Issue, future research on FLP and multilingualism should move in several critical directions. First, there is an urgent need for more longitudinal and mixed-methods studies to capture the dynamic, evolving nature of language practices, intergenerational transmission, and identity formation. Such approaches can better reflect the complex trajectories of multilingual families as they respond to shifting sociopolitical, educational, and technological contexts. Second, greater emphasis should be placed on the perspectives and agency of children and adolescents. Investigating how young multilinguals negotiate their linguistic environments—particularly in transnational and digitally mediated settings—would enrich our understanding of how language practices are shaped from within families rather than imposed upon them. Third, to broaden the global relevance of the field, research must expand to include currently underrepresented regions and languages, especially from the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. Comparative studies across diverse political, migratory, and educational landscapes would strengthen theory-building and enhance policy applicability. Fourth, the role of digital technologies and media ecologies in home language practices should be examined more systematically. As families increasingly rely on digital platforms to maintain linguistic and familial ties—especially across borders—understanding how these tools mediate language use, learning, and identity becomes essential. Fifth, interdisciplinary collaboration should be further encouraged. Connecting FLP research with fields such as public health, mental health, and digital humanities can illuminate the broader socio-emotional and well-being impacts of multilingual family life, contributing to more integrated and responsive policy frameworks. Finally, future research should focus more explicitly on evaluating the impact of interventions and policy implementations. Studies that assess the effectiveness of community programs, educator training, and institutional planning in real-world contexts can translate theoretical insights into actionable strategies that support multilingual families and heritage language sustainability. By addressing these areas, the field can evolve in ways that are empirically robust, socially inclusive, and globally relevant—ensuring that FLP research continues to inform and empower families, educators, and policymakers in our increasingly interconnected and multilingual world.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Article

The Constraints of Monolingual Language Policy and Heteroglossic Practices as a Vehicle for Linguistic Justice

Beatha Set

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Abstract: This paper draws on conceptualisations of language as heteroglossic practices to examine how the experienced bilingual science teacher navigates between the monoglossic ideology that is embodied in the official Namibian Language in Education Policy (LiEP) within a linguistically constrained Namibian bilingual context. This paper aims to support recent research that challenges monolingual and monoglossic language practices, which tend to ignore the linguistic resources that children bring to the classroom. Data were collected from a classroom including video and audio recordings of lessons, field notes and photographs. The data were analysed through socio-cultural discourse and fine-grained multimodal analytical methods. The data findings illustrate the moment where the science teacher was constrained by English monolingual policy to mediate learners' access to science learning, and harnessed all linguistic resources that the learners bring to the classroom. Subsidiary to that, there were moments where the teacher worked flexibly across languages, discourses and modes to interrupt the monoglossic ideology that is embodied in the official Namibian Language in Education Policy (LiEP). The use of rich heteroglossic practices is a clear testimony to enhanced science meaning-making regardless of learners' 'limited proficiency in English. The findings highlight the need to support learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds through a deliberate inclusive language policy that harnesses the heteroglossic nature of communicative practices and prepares teachers for a multilingual reality.

Keywords: heteroglossic; meaning making; monolingual; multilingualism; bilingual

1. Introduction

Namibia is typically a multilingual and multicultural nation comprising approximately thirty languages spoken, but the most widely spoken languages are Oshiwambo (49%), Khoekhoegowab (11%), Afrikaans (10%), Otjiherero (9%) and Kavango (9%). Oshiwambo is a language cluster that includes eight languages, namely Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama, Oshikwambi, Oshimbaanhu, Oshigandjera, Oshikolonkadi, Oshikwaludhi, and Oshiunda. Although the Namibian Constitution recognises all Namibian indigenous languages, it appears that almost all of these languages are still marginalised by monolingual education language policy and practices that still view languages as differentiated and capable of being placed in boxes (Makalela 2015). Ironically, despite the small percentage of Namibians who are English first-language speakers, English was chosen as the sole official language of the country, used in all of its formal domains. Prior to Namibian independence, only 0.8% of the Namibian population were English native speakers and merely 4% of people used English as a second language (Frydman 2011). Ideally, the impetus to choose English as the sole official language over other local Namibian languages was informed chiefly by the country's sociopolitical situation and the linguistic diversity at a time of the drafting of the constitution and during the formulation of the Language Policy (Frydman 2011). The choice of a Namibian local language was seen to cause ethnic conflicts and divisions, thus preventing social cohesion among Namibian ethnicities and polity groups (Frydman 2011; Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir 2004). To date, the status of English as the sole official

language does not reflect the diversity of the Namibian population, which is primarily multilingual (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2014).

The Namibian education system is found to be deeply rooted in a monolingual ideology that enforces a unitary language policy aimed at homogenising a linguistically diverse population. For instance, the Namibian post-apartheid Language in Education Policy (LiEP) prescribed, "named languages as unitary, stable objects, clearly differentiated from one another" (McKinney and Tyler 2019, p. 5). Following Namibian independence in 1990, the Namibian Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC 2003) adopted a language policy that specifies how language should be used and implemented in schools. For instance, the Language Policy for schools in Namibia (MBESC 2003, pp. 1–4) stipulates:

> "The use of mother tongue or a predominant local language as medium of instruction in Grades 1–3 throughout formal education and English should be a compulsory subject starting in 1 Grade up to Grade 12. The wish by a school, school board and parents to offer English as medium of instruction from Grade 1 must receive ministerial approval with well-grounded, convincing motivation. Grade 4 will be a transitional year when the change to English as medium of instruction must take place in which mother tongue should be taught as a subject. National examinations from Grades 4–12 will be taken through the medium of English only, except for the mother tongue that is taken as a subject" . . . "English will therefore be used in its official capacity as a medium of instruction and assessment throughout the education system in public schools as from Grade 4 onwards". (MBESC 2003, pp. 3–4)

As is evident from the extract above, the Namibian LiEP draws sharp distinctions between the named languages. This policy emphasises the use of one named official standardised language as the sole medium of instruction (MOI), officially labelled such as 'English or mother tongue instruction' (Shohamy 2006, p. 77). This binary narrative of the 'mother tongue instruction' versus the 'English medium of instruction' within the LiEP continues to uphold the notion of the 'single standard language', and in doing so ignores the multiple varieties of linguistic resources and semiotic modes that are not being recognised in classroom discourse, learning materials, or in assessment (McKinney and Tyler 2019). Again, The LiEP continues its promotion of a monolingual language ideology, by stating that "only English should be used as medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards, and examinations from Grades 4–12 will be taken solely in the medium of English" (MBESC 2003, p. 4).

The monolingual ideology that underpins Namibian official LIEP, has come under scrutiny from scholars who view it as instrumental in silencing the voices of learners in the classroom, and thereby constraining their voices from being heard (see Blommaert 2005) while promoting 'epistemic injustice' (see Fricker 2007) in which learners are positioned as monolingual beings, often labelled as deficient "English monolinguals" (Fricker 2007; McKinney and Tyler 2019). This very same positioning is also evident in the case of neighbouring South Africa, and is reflected in the "curricula, textbooks and assessments that are available in English only, and through official education department communications to schools that ask teachers to refrain from 'code-21 switching' in classrooms" (McKinney and Tyler 2019, p. 6). Thus, Namibia has an official monolingual language policy that continues to promote the notion of the 'single standard language' at the same time ignoring the multiple varieties of linguistic resources as well as the varieties of modes during the classroom discourse and also in materials development (McKinney and Tyler 2019). Therefore, the Namibian education system can be said to be failing to meet the needs and demands of learners who are not learning through their mother tongue in early grades and beyond.

The concern regarding the under-performance of bilingual learners in math and science subjects is very alarming in Namibia, as elsewhere in post-colonial African contexts. Specifically, the specifications on the role of the language varieties for learning is not being recognised in the school language policies nor in the teachers' education training programs (Probyn 2015). Given the multilingual character of Namibian society, a sensitive, sustainable

approach to the linguistic situation in Namibian schooling is the highest priority for this study. This study investigates, through Bakhtin's heteroglossic perspective, multilingual language practices and language deployment within a Namibian grade 4 science bilingual classroom and their impacts on learners' conceptual understanding and meaning-making of science. The main goal of this study is to contribute to the paradigm shift from the current debates on what single named language, or which language, should be used as a medium of instruction in post-colonial contexts and to move towards heteroglossic practices which consider the multiple linguistic resources that the learners brought to the classroom as valuable resources for science teaching and learning. This study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic challenges for emergent bilingual learners who are learning science in an unfamiliar language and how this problem might be mitigated by moving towards flexible innovate pedagogies that would enable them to access science learning.

2. Conceptual Framework: Heteroglossia and Translanguaging

While monoglossic ideologies position languages as separate codes, a heteroglossic view of language emphasises the plurality and diversity of languages, both within individuals and within communities. The idea that people draw from multiple linguistic features, voices and registers for meaning-making was developed from Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia'. Bakhtin's theory focuses on the cultural dimensions of languages and discourses that are formed by multiple voices. His notions of 'heteroglossia' and 'multivoicedness' have more recently been associated with linguistic diversity (Busch 2011). Heteroglossia is a concept used to explain the coexistence of multiple discourses within a single linguistic code. According to the heteroglossic perspective, languages do not coexist peacefully, but in a constant state of competition. To address this dilemma and the tensions, and to unify the "verbal-ideological world", heteroglossia serves as a remedy to challenge the 'authoritarian word' and bring it back to dialogue (Bakhtin 1981, p. 270). Bakhtin defines heteroglossia in terms of the socio-ideological nature of language(s) and the variety of registers present in any social context or situation:

> "At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word…but also—and for us this is the essential point—into languages that are socio-ideological: Languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations, and so forth". (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 271–72)

For Bakhtin, the hybrid text, or utterances ("double-voicedness") challenge the tension that exists among the use of varieties of languages and/or registers. Bakhtin's (1981, p. 345) view that "every utterance is half-ours and half- someone else's" describes language as heterogenous. The dynamic of heteroglossia addresses the many-voicedness of language within the discourse and a variety of ways of speaking in a social environment (Cohen et al. 2007). This includes the use of multiple registers, voices, and named languages or codes, and deals with the possibility of conflict between the various registers and voices (Bailey 2007). For instance, this tension and conflict can be found between the "national" languages and the "unofficial" language resources that can be from the different languages or within the same language. In the education context, and using Bakhtin's heteroglossia concept, McKinney (2017) argues that the heterogeneity of the use of language is not confined to the use of named languages, for example, a language officially labelled, such as English or Afrikaans, or mixing resources from different codes, but embraces a variety of voices, or registers, that can be used in and out of school, can be urban/rural hybrids, as well as spoken and written languages. This means that the use of heteroglossic practices deals with the movement across different languages, and across different registers or voices in one named language. This movement is referred to in sociolinguistics as code switching, defined as "the juxtaposition of elements from two or more languages or dialects" (McCormick 2001, p. 447), or the alternating use of two or more than one linguistic code in the same utterances (Lin 2007).

Moreover, Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia challenges the dominance of one language in the context of multilingualism. Bakhtin was skeptical of the Saussurean structuralist separation of language into a langue that is concerned with a system of rules and the specification of each individual utterance, and parole, referring to language in use. He posits that language should be envisioned in the messiness of social interaction. Bakhtin used the analogy of centrifugal and centripetal forces to illustrate how language functions, equating monologic language with the former in referring to any language that functions as a sole unified language, and the latter, as resonating with heteroglossia, when language pulls in different directions. In other words, there are multiple ways of speaking in a social context. Bakhtin argues that social and linguistic communities are the avenues that are obstructed by these centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces try to unite and establish one common language, seeing the speaker attempting to put all the language varieties into one single form or utterance. Monologic language functions according to the centripetal forces, where the emphasis is on one official and standardised language to be spoken by everyone. This suggests the "ways in which different resources are not equally valued or distributed, i.e., the stratification of linguistic resources as well as value in indexicality" (McKinney et al. 2015, p. 110). On the other hand, centripetal forces are the product of social and linguistic diversity and serve as the unifier of two or more languages to establish common understanding between speaker(s) and listener(s). These are the social languages that we speak: heteroglossia in Bakhtin's terms. In other words, centripetal forces pull towards a unified standardised variety while centrifugal forces pull towards diversity and variation; however, both forces are at work in social language.

2.1. Monolingualism and Heteroglossic Practices in Multilingual Classrooms

Critiquing the positioning of children from non-dominant groups as well as bilingual non-English native speakers as linguistically deficient, empirical studies call for the radical shift from the monolingual paradigm to that of heteroglossic practices (see Jørgensen 2005; García 2009; Canagarajah 2011, 2015; Wei 2011; McKinney 2017; McKinney and Tyler 2019) which is commonly referred to as the 'multilingual turn' (May 2013). Heteroglossia language policies enable teachers and learners to leverage and draw from their linguistic repertoires at their disposal as opposed to sticking to one language code (McKinney and Tyler 2019). Thus, the heteroglossic approach is particularly relevant to post-colonial Africa, where in the past native/indigenous languages were marginalised and oppressed, in favour of the European language of the minority (see García 2009). Despite the body of contemporary studies that advocate for recognition of the heteroglossic nature of language, the Namibian LiEP, assessment methods as well as teaching materials and textbooks are purely monolingual, treating languages as bounded entities. This phenomenon of the monoglossic approach can have a profound effect on deterring learners from active classroom participation and eventually denying them access to quality education (McKinney et al. 2015).

2.2. Translanguaging

The critique of a monolingual language policy for schooling, that entails the relegation of native languages in favour of one language policy, along with the negative effect it has on learners' perception of themselves as "knowers" due to being silenced, has given rise to recent studies that push for innovative multilingual approaches to learning (see Blackledge and Creese 2010). These innovations are being pushed so as to question the strict separation of languages in classrooms where learners and teachers are bilingual, instead calling for the practice of 'translanguaging' and to includes other semiotic modes, e.g., (García and Wei 2014; Canagarajah 2015; Tyler 2016; Wei and Lin 2019). A common orientation within this innovative body of research is to embrace and use multiple languages and modes productively, and not as barriers to learning, and to challenge the deficit perspectives that regards bi/multilingual learners as less capable of learning the subject-specific content. For this reason, the concept of translanguaging has become more prominent in the field of

applied linguistics. The translanguaging concept has been taken up and extended further by many scholars to explain the use of language, not as discrete skills or a system defined by boundaries or codes, but as dynamic and fluid linguistic repertoires (see Canagarajah 2011; García and Wei 2014; Blackledge and Creese 2017; Wei and Lin 2019).

Furthermore, the alternative translanguaging pedagogy approach in the multilingual context for language or subject teaching and learning was developed to explain the linguistic practices that are leveraged by bilingual speakers for different purposes in the education context (see Blackledge and Creese 2010; Canagarajah 2011; García 2011; Probyn 2015; Kleyn and García 2019). Classroom translanguaging has been widely studied as new flexible pedagogical practice that can be restructured in the bilingual classrooms for inclusivity of the emergent bilingual students' language practices, while at the same time supporting them to acquire competencies in the English language. From translanguaging perspectives, "the meaning of the message is not clear without both (ALL) languages" (Blackledge and Creese 2010, p. 108). Probyn (2015) also writes about "pedagogical translanguaging" emphasising how multiple language resources are deliberately used to mediate learning. According to Probyn, pedagogic translanguaging is especially useful to researchers to examine how classroom practices might be structured to afford learners with opportunities to learn effectively. Creating spaces for such translanguaging to support learning is therefore an act of transformative education in which the teachers "challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society" (García 2009, p. 318) in order to apply more equitable education practices for all learners. In the same vein, the use of translanguaging practices in the context of multilingual education, has yielded positive results in terms of academic achievements (Rabbidge 2020).

3. Methodology

This study is an exploratory, qualitative investigation of English-only policy and its consequences for mediating meaningful engagement and understanding of science content in a Grade 4 bilingual classroom. Qualitative case study methods were considered to be suitable for this study to investigate the phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context and relies on multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2009, p. 18). This methodology would, I hoped, give me a detailed insight to describing phenomena of heteroglossic and translanguaging practices which occurred in English medium bilingual science classes and assessing the affordances and/or constraints for learning science. I chose to study one class bilingual Grade 4 science class and its natural science teacher. This provided me with a bounded contemporary phenomenon, which defines a case study (Knobel and Lankshear 1999).

3.1. Context of the Study

The study takes place in a bilingual township primary school (Grades 0–7) that I will refer to as 'Grace Primary School' (pseudonym) where English is used officially as a medium of instruction from Grade 4–7 while Oshiwambo is used as a medium of instruction from Grade 0–3. This school is in a 'disadvantaged' historically poor background in a predominantly Oshiwambo-speaking township community with few other speakers of different Namibian languages. The disadvantaged schools in the Namibian context refer to black schools that were severely under-funded during the colonial era. The school is situated in the Northern part of Namibia, in the Oshana Region, about 750 km away from the capital city of Windhoek, and teachers and learners in this school share a common home language of Oshiwambo. The school was selected as a subject of this study because it has been extensively reported by previous scholars (see Hardman 2005; Fleisch 2008) that schools that are located in impoverished disadvantaged areas are prone to poor performance in math and science subjects As reflected in regional standardised test scores, the school under investigation was ranked as 31 out of 35 schools in the regional schools performance report, compared to other local schools in 4 December 2014 and yet it did not improve in 2017 (Oshana Region School performances Statistics reports, 2014–2017).

3.2. The Research Participants

The participants for this study were the natural science teacher, Mr. Shilumba (pseudonym), and his fourth-grade learners. The pseudonyms chosen are ethnically and culturally distinctive.

3.2.1. The Science Teacher

Mr. Shilumba was 49 years old at the time of data collection. He holds the degree of Bachelor of Education, specialising in math and science teaching. He also has 16 years' experience teaching science at primary school level, of which eight years are at Grace Primary School. He speaks four languages, of which Oshiwambo is his native tongue. Mr. Shilumba was recommended to me by the science subject advisor, who described him as a passionate and excellent teacher in the junior primary phase.

3.2.2. The Fourth-Grade Leaners

The Grade 4b entire bilingual class, the subject of this study, consisted of 38 emerging bilingual learners—23 girls and 15 boys—all of whom are native Oshiwambo speakers with limited proficiency in English language. All learners agreed to participate in this study. I chose to observe a Grade 4 science class because it is a critical year linguistically. In Grade 4, learners switch from Oshiwambo as the MOI to English as their MOI for the remainder of their primary schooling. In Namibia, like elsewhere in Africa, Grade 4 is a critical phase in which learners are transitioned abruptly from more concrete thinking into a more abstract thinking.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by the author over a consecutive period of four weeks in 2021 observing the classroom discourse five days per week. I joined the Grade 4b Natural Science class as a non-participant observer taking field notes and video- and audio-recording, and I sought to avoid interfering directly with the learners' and teachers' actions. For this study, the classroom observations were the main source of data collection. To facilitate the correct interpretation of the data collection, the author was present in the classroom during the recordings, observing learners' actions at large and taking notes of what occurred. As this study takes a multi-modal approach to meaning-making in science teaching and learning, the data collection methods required a focus to be paid on all modes used in the classroom. The data collection has addressed the ethical considerations and the permissions required to film learners in classroom situations. The teacher, the learners and their parents/guardians were all informed about the study and about participation being voluntary. Initial contact with parents was established by sending a consent form that informed them about the research project, the nature of their children's participation, how confidentiality would be ensured, and the risks and benefits of their participation. This consent form also established that participation in the project was voluntary, and that they or their children could decide to stop participating in the project at any time. Learners', whose parents authorised them to participate, were asked to sign an assent form that provided the same information that parents received in a child-friendly manner.

The videos recorded lessons were analyzed drawing on conversation analysis (CA) and multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) for classroom data to ensure a fine-grained analysis (Tang et al. 2014). MMDA is a perspective that encompasses a diverse range of approaches to analyse how participants produce meaning through the use of different semiotic modes in the course of teaching and learning (Bezemer and Kress 2016). In Set's (2021) view, the identifications of each specific mode in the transcript were useful to see the affordances of each mode for science meaning-making. On one hand, CA was used as an analytic lens to unveil how heteroglossic and translanguaging practices were used as an interactional tool to accomplish particular purposes such as performing their bilingualism and engaging in meaningful talk about the science content being taught.

4. Findings

4.1. The Constraints of English Monolingual Policy on Heteroglossic Practices

In the following examples, I illustrate the contradictions of heteroglossic, multimodal classroom discourses and monolingual language and their consequences for mediating meaningful engagement and understanding of science ideas in a Grade 4 Namibian bilingual Oshiwambo/English classroom. Data analysis focuses on the classroom discourse relating to the conceptually demanding science topic of the process of photosynthesis in the natural science classroom.

Table 1 below is from a whole class question and answer session during the review stage of a continuing lesson about the structure of plants. Learners were required to present the knowledge they have learned from the current and previous lesson presentations. Mr. Shilumba (pseudonyms) began the lesson by recapping the lesson contents of the previous day, conducting this review within the framework of 'Triadic Dialogue' (Lemke 1990).

Table 1. The classroom discourse representation of English as MoI inhibiting bilingual learners from learning new science content.

Turns	Actor/Action	Speech	Moves	Act
1	Mr. S	The vertebrates are animals that have a ba…?	I	Initiation CQ
2	Ss: Prolonged silence			
3	Mr. S	The vertebrates are animals that have got what?	I	Initiation CQ
4	Ss: Silent			
5	Mr. S	The vertebrates are animals that that have the backbone. All animals that have the backbone are called vertebrates	F	Provided an answer
6	Mr. S	And the invertebrate animals; are animals that do not have what?	I	Initiation CQ
7	Ss: Silent			
8	Mr. S	That do not have bones.	F	Provided an answer.
9	SS: Not paying attention; some are lying on their tables			
10	Mr. S	T: *Opena oinamwenyo imwe ina ekipa lokombuda; opena imwe kaina shike* [There are animals with backbones and there are also animals without what]?	I	Initiation CQ
11	SS: Shouting	*ekipa lombuda* [a backbone]	R	One-word answer
12	Mr. S	Okay, that do not have the backbones	F	Teacher restates
13	Mr. S	Can you mention any animals that do not have the backbones	I	Initiation CQ
14	SS: Silent; and some learners are looking away			
15	Mr. S	Animal you can remember with a backbone.	I	Initiation CQ
16	S: shouting	Goats!	R	One-word answer
17	Mr. S	Goat, yes	F	restates and evaluate
18	Mr. S: Nominating another learner	What else, yes?	I	Initiation CQ
19	S	Dog	R	One-word answer

Table 1. *Cont.*

Turns	Actor/Action	Speech	Moves	Act
20	Mr. S	Dog, yes!	F	restates and evaluate
21	Mr. S	Give me an example of animals without the backbones?	I	Initiation CQ
22	SS: Silent			
23	Mr. S	*Popya oinamwenyo kaina ekipa lopombuda* [mention any animals without the backbones?]	I	Initiation CQ
24	S: Shouting	Snake!	R	One-word answer
25	Mr. S	Does the snake have a backbone or not?	I	Ignore and Initiate
26	SS: Shouting	Yes/No!	R	One-word answer
27	Mr. S	*Kali nasha* [does it have]?	I	Initiation CQ
28	SS: Shouting	*Aaye; olina; kali na* [yes it has, no it does not have]!	R	One-word answers
29	Mr. S	When we say, hit the snake on its back; why do you hit it there?	I	Ignore and initiate
30	Ss: Prolonged silence			

Key codes used: I = Initiation; R = Response; F: Feedback; CQ = Closed question.

The discourse patterns in this teaching episode demonstrate the teacher-fronted talk, combined with the dominant patterns of IRF interactions. We can see the teacher's preferences of asking questions that are not meant to probe learners' understanding or to elaborate on their ideas (CQ). For instance, the questions in turns 1, 3, 6. 10, 15, 18 and 20 are designed to elicit a quick one-word response or correct phrases in order to cover the science topics within the given time. We can see how learners' responses were generally limited to brief or one- or two-word answers, or chorused (equally brief), formulaic responses. For example, Mr. Shilumba asked learners the closed question (in turn 1), "the vertebrates are animals that have a…". This question offered learners only one option where they are expected to reply with a specific word immediately without being able to justify their answers. The fact that the content is new to these learners and, possibly, their limited English language proficiency, may explain why they did not raise their hands to respond. Instead, learners remained silent for a while. Mr. Shilumba then repeated the same question (in turn 3), yet none of the learners volunteered a response. In some instances, the teacher responded to his own questions (turns 5 and 8). Though the exposition of the lessons appeared to be in the form of initiation, response and feedback (IRF) moves, in fact the teacher occupied both I and R moves. There is a clear representation of English as a MoI inhibiting learners to respond to the English questions.

It is important to note here that the use of English to formulate the elicitation in most of the turns resulted in learners' prolonged silence. For instance, in turn 29, he asked a question; "when they say; hit the snake on its back; why do you hit there"; this question was followed by prolonged silence (turn 30); an indication of their inability to reply in English. These factors might explain why the teacher resorted to monologues, and to the learners' inability to produce extended talk during the lessons. It is clear that the learners' responses were far from those that would possibly communicate science meaning as occurs in turns 11, 16, 19, 24 and 26. Although the teacher poses some questions in Oshiwambo, learners still resort to one-word answers or sometimes to prolonged silence. Due to the constraints of monolingual policy, in this episode learners had little or no opportunity to initiate their own idea and they have no control over the direction of the classroom discussion or counter on the teacher's prerogatives 'Triadic dialogue' (Lemke 1990). In this respect, the teacher is not creating a dialogic ethos in the classroom to enhance learners' classroom participations (Littleton and Mercer 2013).

4.2. Resisting and Transform Monolingual Policies by Means of Heteroglossic Practices

The second episode (Table 2) exemplifies how the science teacher resisted and transformed monolingual policy by engaging in heteroglossic practices to mediate learners' access to science knowledge, hence, supporting the content learning and language development of the emerging bilingual learners. This was achieved chiefly by integrating the mediational tools such as: multiple linguistic repertoires complemented by semiotic resources (e.g., gestures, and actions, physical movement artefacts demonstrations, written discourse) as well switching between every day and science register, and oral reflections on what was learned. Data analysis focuses on the classroom discourse relating to the conceptually demanding science unit on the nervous system.

Table 2. The classroom discourse exmplify how the teacher resisted and transformed monolingual policy by engaging in heteroglossic and translanguaging practices.

Turns	Actor/Action	Speech	Translation and Images
1	Mr. S	Can you guys show me where your backbone is?	
2	Ss: Prolonged silence		
3	Mr. S: Using his hand gesture to point to his backbone	*Obackbone oyeyi ngaha apa*, That line on the back is very important, because it is there to send SMS to the brain. *Okaline kokombunda, okohakalongo* of sending messages	This is the backbone here. That line on the back it's the one that serves functions
4	Ss: Paying no attention, while the teacher is busy explaining		
5	Mr. S	*Omuuditeko*	Do you understand?
6	Ss: shouting	*Eee/aaye*	Yes/No!
7	Mr. S: demonstrating by holding a learner's hand Pulling the learner's hand backward	*Paife ngee onda kufa onyala yoye ndee handii tula momundilo, ngaha* Your hand moves away quickly before you even feel the pain	If I take your hand now like this and I put it on the fire
8	Ss: Learners looking at the teacher while doing the action, and listen attentively		
9	Mr. S	You will see that the spinal cord will send the message and to alert your brain that you are burning. *Ospinal cord yoye otai tumu etumwalaka didvadiva ukufemo onyala yoye momundilo*	your spinal cord will send a message to remove your hand from the fire]
10	Ss: Listening very attentively and looking straight to the teacher while he is using the gesturers to show how the spinal cord works		
11	Mr. S Speaking in a very slow voice while emphasising the ideas and writing the key ideas as he speaks on the black board.	This the nervous system I'm talking about, the central nervous system consists of the brain and spinal. *Onervous system ohailongo nokutuma omwatumwalaka, yoo oina nee oitukulwa ngaashi ouluvi nospinal cord, spinal oyo haitumu omwatumwalaka molutu yaukifa kouluvi, omega ouluvo owo hau kwatele komesho omainyengo olutu, okufuda, okupoya, okukudilaadila nomaliudo aeshe.* In other words, (. . .), the nervous system is a system in the body which deals with the transmissions or sending the signals around the body.	The nervous system works with sending the messages around the body, and it consists of the main organs such as brain and the spinal cord. We have the spinal cord that carry messages from the body to the brain. While the brain controls everything you do, movements, speech, breathing, feelings and thought.

Mr. Shilumba tries to support his learners to understand how the function of the nervous system works, as this concept is particularly challenging to be explained in abstract terms (interview field notes data, 22 June 2018). In this instance, Mr. Shilumba's verbal explanations of the nervous system was supplemented with the representational action gestures to demonstrate how the central nervous system works (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. The Teacher's demonstration of how the central nervous system works.

The representational mode of the action gestures was used here for the act of modelling, to see how the central nervous system (the spinal cord and the brain) cooperates (turn 29). For instance, Mr. Shilumba first moves toward a learner, and he holds the learner's right hand and starts moving it down as an action of pretending to place the hand on the fire. Conversely, when Mr. Shilumba holds a learner's hand, it might give the learner a sense of belonging and to feel appreciated as well. Then, Mr. Shilumba pulls back a learner's hand extremely fast to demonstrate how the nerves simultaneously send the signals of pain; thereby, alerting the hand to move away from the danger. Of significance here, the teacher embedded a physical action and the body movement involving a physical action of demonstrating how the process of sending the pain signals occurs so fast before the message reaches the brain. While using the representations of this gestural action, the teacher simultaneously narrates how the whole process works using both English and Oshiwambo (turn 7). From learners' facial expressions and their body language, this demonstration appeared to impact positively on the learners' conceptual understanding. The inclusion of the action gestures in the demonstration might have facilitated learners' understandings of the scientific idea of the central nervous system. Without an inclusion of this series of movements, coupled with the example of the heat of the fire and the use of Oshiwambo in Mr. Shilumba's explanations, it would be more difficult for these learners to know exactly how the nervous system works. From Figure 1, we can see clearly how Mr. Shilumba tries to include all of the learners in his lesson presentation. As we can see from his body position, his actions are directed toward the learners and he is not trying to individualise his explanation with the child he is demonstrating with. In return, one can see from the learners' physical reaction through eye gaze (see Figure 1), which suggests that the teacher's demonstrations and explanations were successful. This is also an indication that Mr. Shilumba's clarifications of how the nervous system works has captured his learners' attention and possibly increased their understanding of the scientific ideas of the nervous system.

Mr. Shilumba modelled the bridging discourses between Oshiwambo and English language, and he also used register-switching between science and everyday vocabularies while discussing the science concepts and the terminologies that are part of the nervous system. For instance, in turn 11, he started his statement in English to highlight how the nervous system works. He then switched to an everyday register while using Oshiwambo and explains that; "*Onervous system ohailongo nokutuma omwatumwalaka, yoo oina nee oitukulwa ngaashi ouluvi nospinal cord, spinal oyo haitumu omwatumwalaka molutu yaukifa kouluvi, omega ouluvo owo hau kwatele komesho omainyengo olutu, okufuda, okupoya, okukudilaadila nomaliudo aeshe*" [The nervous system works with transmission of the messages around the body, and it consists of the main organs such as the brain and the spinal cord. We have the spinal cord that carries messages from the body to the brain and we have the brain that controls everything you do, movements, speech, breathing, feelings and thought]. Here again, Mr. Shilumba highlights the key ideas of the nervous system by uttering his words at a slow pace, adding emphasis through an appropriate intonation to ensure that all learners hear and understand what he is emphasising.

Mr. Shilumba continues by using the specific scientific registers in English when he says, "in other words, the nervous system is a system in the body which deals with the transmissions or sending the signals around the body" (turn 11). This explanation can be identified as a register for science and hence it embodied the features of the technical vocabularies as well as the use of nominalisations (i.e., transmissions). What is striking here is that learners needed to know the registers of science in English which they would eventually use to solve the problem in future, particularly in their science written assessments. There is a remarkable switching back and forth between everyday register and the science register, as well as switching between English language and Oshiwambo, whilst also using longer phrases in both languages. Learners are being exposed to how to bridge from their familiar everyday knowledge and language into their unfamiliar science knowledge and language and thereby, having a greater chance of learning how 'to talk science' (Lemke 1990). Gibbons calls this kind of pedagogy practice as "seamless shifting between discourses register-meshing '' Gibbons 2006, p. 131). She stresses that that this type of shifting impacts positively on learners to comprehend the new science language and terminologies.

The teacher further consolidated his scientific explanation through writing key ideas on the board, so as to make the written representations available to all learners (turn 11). Additionally, after the lesson presentations learners were given the opportunity to copy the board notes into their summary books. Here, the discourse of the written mode of science is added to the classroom repertoire. In this respect, the teacher gradually moves the classroom discourse toward a 'more subject-specific discourse' (Gibbons 2006). This kind of shifting might create a path for learners' ability "to move from personal, everyday ways of making meanings toward the socially shared and more written like discourses of specific disciplines" (Gibbons 2003, p. 253). Mr. Shilumba has demonstrated the skill of 'bridging discourse' across modes, discourses, and languages though he was constrained by monoglossic policy that authorised one language to be used at a time. The shifting between English and Oshiwambo enabled him to support his learners to gain deeper understanding of the scientific ideas that would have been impossible, had he used English only.

4.3. Findings

This analysis demonstrated that the classroom interactions varied because of the different forms of instruction the teacher employed to support the construction of science knowledge during the science lessons. The analysis revealed both moments where learners seemed to engage in meaning-making and develop their understanding as well as those moments where meaning-making was unsuccessful.

As the analysis unfolded, it became evident that the Namibian curricular and instructional design did not necessarily address the linguistic challenges that the emergent bilingual learners encounter daily in the course of their learning. The data presented here also revealed that the classroom discourse dominated teacher's long monologues

following the patterns of initiation–response–feedback (IRF, e.g., Mehan 1979) made up of teacher explanation and question-and-answer sequences in which the teachers maintained tight control to ensure curriculum coverage in given time. However, the discourse rules being imposed by the teacher, as indicated in the data, might not allow learners sufficient opportunities to engage in discourse that could be considered as the result of scientific thinking. It is the English MoI that proved challenging for the learners to engage in science learning, turning them into passive recipients of the science knowledge. This implies that the struggle to break away from rote learning towards conceptual understanding through exploratory talk remains elusive for emergent bilingual learners.

At other times, however, the data show that Mr. Shilumba creatively leveraged his instructional practices to support his learners in developing their understandings of the scientific process of the nervous system with its attendant concepts. This was achieved chiefly by integrating the mediational tools such as: multiple linguistic repertoires complemented by semiotic resources (e.g., gestures, and actions, physical movement artefacts demonstrations, written discourse) as well switching between every day and science register and oral reflections on what was learned. This deployment negotiated and contested a monolingual language ideology. This may have pedagogical implications for primary school science teachers in striving to diversify their instructions when mediating the scientific concepts to their emergent bilingual learners in the linguistically constrained educational settings. This is because successful science teaching requires considerations of learners' developmental levels as well as a well-planned heteroglossic practices that should be used deliberately to reinforce conceptual understandings. The data presented here resonates with the study of Tyler (2016), who made a similar observation of teachers shifting between the discourses and the modes to support learners accessing mathematics knowledge in the South African rural bilingual secondary school context.

The fact that the teacher comes from the same cultural and linguistic background as his learners enabled him to bridge between Oshiwambo and English language back and forth with ease. This shifting demonstrates a 'journey' between Oshiwambo and English, and between everyday language and the science discourse, as termed by Setati et al. (2002), and consequently, brings the notion of 'pedagogic translanguaging' (Probyn 2015) into play. The complementary use of a range of modes, registers and languages in this episode might reinforce learners' possibilities to construct the scientific meaning of the nervous system. At this stage, the switching might be an ideal time for the learners to appropriate the written science discourse, as opposed to waiting until the whole unit is being covered. Also, notable here is how meanings are made and distributed by the teacher through the 'repertoires of linguistic resources' not merely accomplished by the spoken language, but rather through the broader use of a repertoire of semiotic resources (Canagarajah 2013).

5. Conclusions

The overarching aim of this study was to develop a better understanding of the discourse strategies employed by a natural science teacher and his grade 4 learners as they engaged in various science activities within the constraints of the monolingual English-only policy. The results of this study highlighted how the English-only policy can be detrimental to science content learning in a bilingual science class. It is the English MoI that proved challenging for the learners to engage in science learning, turning them into passive recipients of the science knowledge. At other times however, the data show how the teacher creatively leveraged his instructional practices to support his learners in developing their understandings the subject matter by using heteroglossic and translanguaging practices. In general, the science teacher resisted the monoglossic language approach sanctioned by the school's language policy by integrating multiple linguistic repertoires complemented by semiotic resources as well switching between every day and science register. This practice implies that heteroglossic and translanguaing practices have a potential to address the current challenges of teaching science content through the English medium in Namibia's multilingual schools. To this end, this study suggests for a deliberate use of heteroglossic

multilingual education that harness all linguistic recourses that bilingual learners bring to school, which according to García (2009, p. 8) needs to be "adaptive, able to expand and contract, as the communicative situations shift and as the terrain changes". Further research is required to come up with deliberate interventions in research to elicit further the efficacies of multilingual and multimodal approaches to science teaching in the multiple-grade levels and in multiple settings where English is used as the MOI.

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Article

Preschool Teachers for Multilingual Families

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Abstract: Successful interaction between family and preschool is crucial in the early stages of bilingual development. Traditionally, a Finnish–Russian preschool brings together children from Finnish-speaking, Russian-speaking, and bilingual families. Educators communicate with children and parents in different languages, using specific translanguaging strategies to develop both languages. The study explores how educators interact with parents and how children interact with each other without a common language. Reflective interviews with teachers explore various aspects of their professional activities, emphasizing the expert use of different languages to expand children's language skills and foster appreciation. Teachers' attitudes can shift upon reflection, underscoring the need for partnerships with parents. Additionally, the study analyzes educators' opinions about play without a common language among children with diverse languages. The longitudinal case study within a bilingual Finnish–Russian preschool thematically groups answers from 18 interviews, focusing on the dynamic relationship between teachers and parents, crucial for creating a supportive learning environment for children's holistic development. The results show that educators, when reflecting on their role in bilingual education, emphasize a wide range of positive examples of interactions with parents, from constructive professional relationships to long-lasting friendships. They believe that while they cannot replace family interactions, they can develop the child's abilities within their group of peers. Specifically, play without a common language allows children to communicate with peers in different languages.

Keywords: bilingual interactions; communication forms in a bilingual daycare center; partnership with parents; reflective interview with bilingual teachers; early Finnish–Russian bilingualism; pedagogical achievement

1. Introduction

Many preschool teachers recognize the benefits of bilingual education in promoting cognitive and linguistic development in young children. They see it as a way to enhance students' ability to understand and use multiple languages effectively. Teachers are personally and emotionally involved and invested in this process (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2018). They appreciate the role of bilingual education in fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity and see it as a tool for helping children appreciate and respect different cultures, which is increasingly important in diverse societies (e.g., Karpava & Ringblom, 2023).

Some teachers have expressed concerns about the practical aspects of implementing bilingual education and exhibited differing views on how bilingual education impacts academic achievement (Kleyn & Reyes, 2011). They worry about resources, the financial situation, and receiving enough support to effectively teach in a bilingual setting. Some

believe it enhances learning by building on students' existing language skills, while others underline potential challenges in meeting academic standards (Brown & Hao, 2022).

Teachers need to know more about language acquisition theories, bilingual teaching methods, and cultural competency, all of which would equip them with skills and strategies relevant to effective teaching in bilingual classrooms (Little et al., 2013). Teachers' own experiences with language learning and their personal attitudes toward bilingualism significantly influence their perspectives. Those with positive experiences and beliefs about the value of bilingualism are typically more supportive of bilingual education programs. While public policy goals clearly promote bilingualism as a beneficial resource for student success and economic competitiveness, the personal motivations of educators in such programs remain less well known. Their motivations are driven by advocacy and personal connections to the ethnolinguistic experiences of bilingual students. A study by Sawyer and Almaguer (2021) highlights the implications for public policy, candidate recruitment, and program design when supporting and utilizing candidate experiences.

Researchers recognize the importance of involving parents and the community in bilingual education (Schalley & Eisenchlas, 2020). They see value in fostering strong partnerships to support children's language development and cultural learning at home and in the community. The relationships between teachers and parents in a bilingual preschool institution are crucial for the success of the program and the development of the children (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Porter, 2008; Ward, 2013). The educational partnerships between parents and teachers should include a mutual understanding of the objectives of a bilingual program. When establishing shared educational goals and working together to achieve them, adults create a strong partnership collaboration for ensuring the well-being of the children (Boult, 2016; Epstein & Sheldon, 2022).

Children, especially at a young age, have an amazing ability to find common ground and achieve mutual understanding, even if they do not share a formal language, because they have an intuitive ability for social adaptation and communication. When children play together, they usually find common interests and activities that unite them regardless of cultural and linguistic diversity. They may choose the language based on the child who initiated the game, the teacher who organized it, or the place where it occurs. They can use gestures, facial expressions, sounds, and other non-verbal cues to convey their ideas and emotions. Simple phrases and gestures are often repeated. This style of non-verbal or easy verbal communication is significant in establishing connections between children (Protassova, 1992).

Peterson et al. (2018) evaluated five different classrooms, finding that dramatic play and construction/materials play allowed children to engage in meaningful conversations and practical communication. This type of play extended beyond typical classroom discussions, providing a comfortable environment for Indigenous children, who are often seen as silent in schools, to use and explore language. Unlike standardized assessments, which reveal language disparities, the study found that Indigenous children used language for a wide range of purposes similar to non-Indigenous children. In their study, play contexts enabled children to enhance their understanding of language and literacy, using it to provide information, explain, and elaborate, which are key to literacy practices. The children also demonstrated phonological awareness and abstract thinking, essential for understanding written language. Children's talk during play accompanied their actions, aiding in problem-solving and learning. Observing children in such authentic contexts provided teachers with valuable insights into their language use, social interactions, cultural knowledge, and thinking processes. This information can be used for immediate teaching interventions or for future instructional planning, making play a valuable tool for language development and education.

The rise of transnationalism has led to increased international mobility and the formation of multilingual, multicultural families, raising concerns among policymakers about the language development and academic performance of children from immigrant backgrounds. Family language policy research, which focuses on language planning within homes, emphasizes understanding the bilingual experiences of children and the well-being of transnational families rather than solely optimizing heritage language proficiency (Ivanova & Zabrodskaja, 2021; Wilson, 2020). In the introduction to a special issue of the journal Sociolinguistic Studies, Curdt-Christiansen (2024) examines the maintenance of home languages and the development of minoritized languages, together with the interactions between families and broader society. It specifically explores the challenges of sustaining and developing heritage and minoritized languages in multilingual contexts and underscores the continuous interaction of families with broader sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical contexts, highlighting the active role of family members in either accommodating or resisting language change. Wright and Higgins (2022) have investigated the explicit planning of language use within homes and among family members based on a wide range of research perspectives, including innovative methodologies and exploring language practices and ideologies in under-researched families, highlighting the dynamic nature of family and kinship and the role of multilingualism in power, agency, and identity construction.

Our research questions are as follows:

- How do preschool teachers reflect on their partnerships with parents in a bilingual daycare center?
- What forms of collaboration do they view as most effective?
- Can children with different languages really communicate when playing together?

2. Background of the Study

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for effective bilingual education, we emphasize the importance of continuous self-evaluation and professional growth for educators, ensuring they can adapt and improve their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of bilingual students. Moreover, we explore the benefits and challenges of integrating translanguaging practices in the classroom, highlighting the need for well-prepared teachers and appropriate assessment methods to support multilingual learning. Together, these sections underscore the significance of reflective practice and innovative pedagogical approaches in fostering an inclusive and effective bilingual education environment. By examining these concepts, educators can better understand how to implement and sustain successful bilingual programs that respect and leverage students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

2.1. Pedagogical Reflection

Pedagogical reflection is vital for the development of bilingual preschool teachers, regardless of their experience (Bradbury et al., 2009; Forde et al., 2006; Klehr, 2015). It involves critically analyzing activities, evaluating successes and shortcomings, and applying insights to improve future practices. Teachers assess their competencies, stay positive about outcomes, and actively evaluate contributions to enhance planning and gain a broader perspective on their professional activities (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Vaish, 2020).

Research highlights the importance of teachers understanding their knowledge while addressing beliefs and stereotypes (Jakeman et al., 2017; Slembrouck & Rosiers, 2018). This includes evaluating the credibility of facts, interpreting information, and forming well-founded opinions. Constructing social knowledge requires accepting ambiguity and starting with self-evaluation. Effective self-assessment involves comparing teaching

outcomes and recognizing the context-dependent nature of knowledge (Csorba, 2015; Mathew et al., 2017; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Reflection promotes professional growth during and after classroom activities while upholding moral and ethical standards (Dewey, 1933; Pultorak, 2010; Schön, 1983). Teachers must consider goals, content, methods, and student characteristics to ensure material comprehension for all students (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Adapting teaching methods to students' abilities and aiming for social equity in achievements are essential. Reflective practice increases awareness, encourages self-control, and fosters transformative professionalism (Marshall, 2019; Hickson, 2011; Loughran, 2008).

Collaboration with colleagues, involvement in curriculum planning, and innovation are key to addressing challenges. Techniques such as journals, portfolios, case studies, and peer feedback can structure reflection and help teachers reassess approaches (Jolliffe & Waugh, 2017; Paige et al., 2017; Yang, 2009).

Effective reflection includes understanding student needs, connecting past and future knowledge, and clarifying teaching outcomes (Lewis et al., 2012). It involves making decisions about students' performance and addressing political and moral considerations. Empathetic teachers foster meaningful learning by connecting with students' minds and emotions through small group discussions. Pedagogical reflection is crucial for bilingual teachers, enabling them to assess and improve their practices to meet diverse student needs and foster effective multilingual learning.

2.2. Pedagogical Translanguaging

Pedagogical translanguaging is an educational approach that leverages students' multiple language practices to enhance learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Juvonen & Källkvist, 2021; Poza, 2017). This method recognizes and utilizes the full linguistic repertoire of bilingual or multilingual students, rather than enforcing strict separation between languages (Leung & Valdés, 2019). Pedagogical translanguaging promotes inclusivity by validating students' home languages and cultural backgrounds (MacSwan, 2017). This can boost students' self-esteem and engagement in the learning process, as they feel their identities are respected and valued in the classroom (Li, 2018). Research suggests that translanguaging in the classroom can enhance cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and metalinguistic awareness (Mary & Young, 2017; Otheguy et al., 2015; Vogel & García, 2017). By shifting between languages, communication participants may develop a deeper understanding of linguistic structures and concepts (Salem et al., 2020).

In practice, translanguaging in education can be implemented through various strategies such as code-switching, translation activities, and the use of multilingual resources (Alamillo et al., 2017; García, 2011). Teachers can create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment by allowing students to express themselves in multiple languages (García & Li, 2014; García & Otheguy, 2020). The effective implementation of translanguaging requires teachers to be well-prepared and knowledgeable about multilingual pedagogy. Professional development and training are essential to equip teachers with the skills to manage and support translanguaging in the classroom.

Despite its benefits, translanguaging can face resistance from educators, parents, and policymakers who favor monolingual approaches (Jaspers, 2018). Concerns about language proficiency and academic standards may arise, necessitating clear communication and evidence-based advocacy for translanguaging practices (Heugh et al., 2019). Assessing students' progress in a translanguaging environment can be complex. Traditional assessment methods may not fully capture the linguistic and cognitive gains of students (Gort & Sembiante, 2014). Developing appropriate assessment tools that reflect the holistic nature of translanguaging is crucial (Kirsch et al., 2020; Panagiotopoulou et al., 2020). It can

address educational inequities by providing multilingual children with equitable access to the curriculum. However, it also requires careful consideration of resource allocation and support to ensure all students benefit equally.

3. Materials and Methods

Reflective interviews with teachers cover various aspects of their professional activities (Clandinin & Husu, 2017). Palojärvi et al. (2021) have demonstrated that practical theory in pedagogy guides teachers' actions, focusing on the expert approach to using different languages and emphasizing equality, mutual learning, and supporting language identities to expand children's language resources and foster language appreciation. Fránquiz et al. (2011) have shown that teachers' stereotypes can change when they reflect and narrate about themselves, highlighting the importance of providing opportunities for reflection. Therefore, we sought to elicit teachers' opinions on their partnerships with parents. We also gathered reflections on play as a common age-appropriate method for engaging children with diverse languages to interact with each other, even in the absence of a shared language.

Action research in pedagogy is a reflective, systematic inquiry conducted by educators with the aim of improving their teaching practices, understanding educational processes, and enhancing student learning outcomes (McNiff, 2017; Mertler, 2016; Mills, 2017). This form of research involves a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, allowing teachers to identify areas of concern, implement interventions, collect data on the effectiveness of these interventions, and make informed adjustments based on their findings (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). In our case, the research was directly related to the educational practices, addressing the concrete challenges faced by teachers due to the changing political situation in the world.

All the studied educators work in the same bilingual Finnish–Russian preschool, thus making it a longitudinal case study (Yin, 2009). The relationship between teachers and parents is a dynamic and integral part of the educational process at the bilingual preschool (Moin et al., 2013; Palviainen et al., 2016; Protassova, 2024; Protassova et al., 2022; Viimaranta et al., 2019). Strong, positive relationships foster a supportive learning environment where children can thrive in both languages. This collaborative approach ensures that both teachers and parents work together towards the common goal of supporting the child's holistic development.

The site of research is a bilingual preschool institution focused on education in Finnish and Russian, which has been operating for over 30 years in the Helsinki metropolitan area of Finland. From its inception, the kindergarten has aimed to utilize and reinterpret various innovative pedagogical methods, adapting them to the process of fostering bilingualism. Most children transition from the preschool to a Finnish–Russian school, where the bilingual education process continues.

Questions in the semi-structured interviews with educators included the following topics: When and where were you born? What is your educational background? Where have you worked previously? Why did you choose to work at this preschool? What goals do you set for yourself in your work? How do you achieve these goals? What types of childhood bilingualism are present in your group? In your opinion, how should bilingualism be developed? When do you speak Finnish/Russian? How do the children respond to you? What is your relationship with the children's parents? What events should be held for the entire preschool, and in which languages? Are there situations where children with different languages interact with each other? What is difficult and what is easy in your profession?

All respondents work in different roles in this bilingual preschool. All have Finnish professional education, and some had previously obtained vocational education in the

Soviet Union, Russia, or Estonia. The majority of Russophone speakers come from Karelia. Their work experience at this kindergarten ranges from at least two years to a maximum of 33 years. All participants are proficient in both Finnish and Russian to varying degrees and are able to switch between the two languages. When the institution leaders and administrators select educators for each group, they consider which language is stronger, the length of experience in bilingual education, and the level of education attained. This ensures that each group includes a fluent Russian speaker, a fluent Finnish speaker, and a bilingual adult. Another issue is the mutual understanding within the educators' team.

A total of 18 interviews with preschool teachers were conducted in 2023 in Finnish and Russian (or a mix of languages), each lasting 15–60 min. The audio recordings were transcribed and coded (as reflected in the subtitles). No specific software was used. Classroom observations and discussions with parents and grandparents were also conducted. All the responses served as material for a series of publications and actions. The identities of the educators have been anonymized by using only initials. We obtained written permission from the participants to analyze their reflections in anonymized form. We use thematic analysis to summarize the thoughts shared by participants on certain subjects (Esteve, 2020; Gorr, 2024; Schad et al., 2022).

4. Results

4.1. Attitudes Toward Family Language Policy

Experienced educators have their own views about family language policy. According to them, bilingualism starts within the family. If parents want to support it, they should take action, like enrolling their child in a bilingual preschool. If parents do not want it, then the preschool cannot fully support it, although some amount of exposure occurs anyway. Parents ignore teachers' recommendations if the parents have their own opinions. Russian-speaking families who only socialize within the Russian-speaking community are advised to engage more outside the home because staying at home makes no sense; they can enroll their children in Finnish clubs or preschools and maintain Russian at home through other means, like through the types of lessons available in every school. Combining this strategy with learning Finnish is essential; otherwise, they will not learn it. To maintain the home language, Russian clubs and activities are sufficient. Conversely, if a Finnish-speaking family wants to learn Russian, then they should choose a Russian preschool and a school where Russian is taught as a foreign language. The family decides how they view bilingualism and their desire to develop two languages; the school and preschool can only help to a limited extent. However, in Finland, children should attend a regular school and preserve their home language while also learning Finnish, as it will be prioritized in their lives. Two teachers offered the following observations.

> DJ: Attitudes toward bilingualism come from the family, and bilingualism should be supported through all possible means: reading books, showing different films, bilingual educational institutions, games—anything aimed at mastering both languages. Relationships with parents are normal, good, and professional. Everyone comes to meetings. There are no negative reviews or demands.

> CU: One family that I've been observing for quite a long time has two children. In this family, the development of both languages is going well. The older child, when he came to our preschool, predominantly used Finnish as his main language. As he interacted with me, he started to use Russian more actively, and now, with the support of his father, Russian has become much more common in his communication with his younger sister. I consider this partly my achievement because I interacted with him a lot and actively. Of course, this is primarily the

> family's achievement, but still, for the active use of the language in preschool, I had close emotional contact with this child, and I understood that this increased his interest in developing his Russian language skills. He was interested when I read fairy tales, for example. He listened very attentively, and his father also continues to support this by playing modern songs. For example, he knows that his father listens to music like Boris Grebenshchikov, and he knew Akvarium at the age of 3–4. I played it, and he said, "I know this music from my dad". Now, his younger sister comes in and says, "Yes, this is my dad and older brother's favorite song". So, there is a flow and transformation of language skills from one child to the next. The younger child sees how closely I communicated with the older one, and this connection is transferred to the younger one. She also discusses her emotional states and connections actively in the language when communicating with me. This example is very illustrative for me in terms of bilingual development. The mother, who has very basic Russian knowledge, actively uses her children for help when talking with me.

When choosing a school for their child, parents should visit the site and listen to the voices of the other children in the preschool. They should decide themselves whether they prefer more Russian or more Finnish. Finnish is now quite frequently spoken among the children. Many Russian-speaking parents who visit are interested in how much Finnish is taught, as they want their child to learn Finnish. When this happens, they go into the corridor to listen to the children's speech, and Finish predominates. Once an intriguing encounter with parents unfolded, revealing the diverse cultural tapestry woven within the school's community. It all began when a family approached one of the educators with a curious inquiry: Who visits the children during Christmas, Ded Moroz or Joulupukkin? Responding with warmth and candor, the educator shared that Joulupukki would be the festive visitor that year. However, to the surprise of the educator, this revelation led the family to opt out of enrolling their child, as they had hoped Ded Moroz would pay a visit instead. In contrast, another family, fluent in Finnish, asked a different set of questions. Curious about the intertwining of Finnish and Russian cultures within the school, they sought insights into the extent to which both cultural elements were celebrated. Seizing the opportunity to illuminate the rich cultural mosaic, the educator elaborated on the school's Christmas festivities. Amidst the joyous melodies of Finnish Christmas carols and the merry arrival of Joulupukki, echoes of Russian greetings and songs reverberated, seamlessly intermixing the essence of both cultures. Through these encounters, the preschool emerged not just as a classroom site but as a vibrant place of multicultural encounters, where traditions from different corners of the world harmoniously coalesced, enriching the experiences of all who walked through its doors.

4.2. Attitudes Toward Multilingual Education

The language policy within a preschool is implemented at various levels. It depends on the composition of the students. Educators divide the children into subgroups to engage intensively in one or another language, sometimes developing it as a native language, sometimes teaching it as a foreign language, while individually addressing the needs of each child. The language policy also depends on the type of activity: when reading a book, the child's understanding of the text depends on their readiness to perceive it; the presentation techniques thus change accordingly (see below). The preschool's language policy effectively incorporates translanguaging approach to foster bilingualism among children. At the level of the entire preschool, bilingualism is always emphasized, and parents participate in numerous activities in both languages. Music plays a strong role in both languages, with a Finnish component and a Russian component. After COVID, it was

difficult to get back on track, with everyone at first staying home. Yet now everything is working smoothly.

VF advocates for maintaining a balance between administrative tasks and children's play, ensuring a peaceful and nurturing environment remains a priority. Preschool teachers have so much paperwork that they are now away from the group for certain amounts of time. While such tasks need to be taken care of, how they do the work matters. As VF notes: "If they rush around wildly, arranging all sorts of programs for the children, which I don't think is right, it's good to read and have occasional theatrical performances, to participate in play, but if there's something constantly happening, I can't keep up". Children's main task is to play and practice their social skills, while educators provide some organized activities, but not necessarily every day. VF further suggests: "It's about understanding how the children are in the morning, and if there is too much activity, then it needs to be calmed down. But if everything seems fine, if they are playing, have friends, and everyone is doing something, then there's no need to interrupt because I have something planned. I'll do it later, even if it was scheduled for today. I don't plan to exhaust myself with this job. I believe we have a calm group because our children can play peacefully. I might be wrong, but that's my experience".

Educators strategically use both Finnish and Russian during various activities, ensuring that children can draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to enhance comprehension and communication. The teachers differentiated between the needs of Russian-speaking and Finnish-speaking children with respect to the goal of fostering bilingualism. They try to create an environment where Russian can be used with Finnish children, and vice versa. The planning is systematic: In a given week, children learn specific words and their meanings in particular contexts, ensuring their use in designated games, followed by a new set of words the next week. This methodology supports learning in both languages. Finnish children acquire language skills not only at home from their parents but also from interactions with their peers in preschool.

By creating an environment where both languages are seamlessly integrated, children naturally develop skills in both languages, benefiting from contextual learning and peer interactions. For Finnish children, books are read in Finnish. For instance, the Finnish-speaking teacher reads a Finnish book to the entire group. Although Russian-speaking newcomers may not fully comprehend the text, they can infer the context from the illustrations. Some children may become distracted and not listen attentively, but they are allowed to sit quietly. Subsequently, educators divide the children into subgroups, reading solely to the Finnish children who can respond and further develop their native language proficiency. The same book is read to Russian children in a simplified manner, with explanations in Russian to ensure comprehension, translating when necessary. Immediate translation proves less effective. Later, the same book is discussed in depth with small groups of 2–3 children in Russian. Afterwards, the children listen to it being read in Finnish again. Listening to the stories is crucial for understanding phonetics and intonation, and eventually, the entire content becomes clearer, and a new vocabulary is acquired. Reading alone, without comprehension, is unproductive. The systematic repetition of key phrases and the use of visual aids further support language acquisition, making the learning process engaging and effective.

Following the initial reading, Finnish children can quickly answer questions about the content, particularly those with well-developed linguistic abilities. While they cannot discuss the topics in Russian, they receive linguistic tools from the Russian-speaking teacher, such as new words and phrases related to the pictures. Teachers provide Russian language constructions, explaining how to articulate certain concepts. This knowledge can be used in communication with Russian children and adults. Russian-speaking teachers must

strategically plan and sequence their lessons, making notes on the modules comprising the lesson. When communicating with Russian children, significant words are integrated into a broader context, whereas with Finnish children the approach is more straightforward.

In their work with children, educators utilize translanguaging techniques. Typically, Russian-speaking children exhibit weaker proficiency in Finnish when interacting with Finnish-speaking educators. However, in the presence of bilingual educators, they are more likely to use Finnish, possibly due to a reduction in shyness and the encouragement and explanations provided by the educators. During transitional times, such as waiting for morning circle or meals, children engage in various activities, including games, singing songs, and reciting poems. Russian-speaking teachers consistently strive to conduct the activities in Russian, occasionally repeating phrases softly in Finnish to facilitate the learning of the second language. Through these practices, the preschool successfully prepares children for future academic endeavors in a bilingual context, while also respecting and nurturing their native language abilities.

Russian-speaking children receive focused Finnish language instruction, while Finnish-speaking children gain contextual understanding during mixed activities involving tasks like gluing, assembling, and cutting. Although the children may not demonstrate significant progress in spoken practice initially, their comprehension improves markedly. By the second year, they begin to repeat phrases independently without being prompted. For instance, during breakfast, when asked in Russian, "Do you want some milk or some water?" they may echo, "Milk, milk", and vice versa.

Educators systematically repeat the days of the week and common phrases in both languages, integrating them into daily routines to enhance language acquisition. This approach ensures that Russian-speaking children gradually become familiar with Finnish terminology, facilitating a deeper understanding and eventual use of the language.

Knowledge of English, Estonian, Spanish, or Ukrainian is sometimes a precious asset, because such children are often trilingual. Interviewed teachers offered the following examples:

> JE: To develop bilingualism, we provide more opportunities to play, using games to avoid rote learning, employing flashcards for visual and auditory memory . . . without pressure, through songs and games. We read more fairy tales, organize theatrical performances. If I see a child didn't understand, I repeat it in Finnish; if there's still no reaction, I then repeat it in Russian or Estonian. If the child responds, I explain what the word meant in Finnish, translating it into their native language. It's important to explain its meaning. This was crucial for me when I was learning Finnish, understanding what the word meant and how it is connected [to other words].

Even very small children naturally participate in activities conducted in both languages as part of their everyday routines:

> DJ: We can sit with five children, organize activities with them, consider what they like, and talk more. We support them by saying they can do it, giving them more time to dress themselves. They should try on their own, and if they can't do it, I'll help. They don't whine, "Help me, please, do it for me, please", but they try first, and if they succeed, they shout, "I did it!" We wait patiently, giving them time to learn on their own, and then we praise them. They shouldn't just sit and wait if they don't have a fork, but say they need one and ask for it, meaning they should be open to life.

At general events, educators usually use two languages, either in part or with translation, but Finnish is prioritized since they live in Finland, and Russian-speaking parents expect their children to start speaking Finnish. Often, parents are quite aware of a lack

of adequate Finnish knowledge, expecting the child to start speaking it immediately. In such a preschool, perhaps too much Russian is spoken with a child who does not get enough Finnish at home. Yet, the results show that every child is prepared to study in the Finnish school. Children choose the language they find easier; they understand that educators know both Finnish and Russian. Russian-speaking children will more likely speak in Russian, but it can change if the teacher involves them in different activities in Finnish and shows how they can profit from this language.

> HS: We have a tradition of conducting all festivities and events for parents and children in both languages. I think this should continue, with both languages being equally present here. There's no official directive, but there's a desire, a need, and a goal to ensure both languages are equally heard. We used to have theatrical performances once a month: sometimes in Finnish, sometimes in Russian, sometimes in both languages. All options were good. The children found it interesting.

The involvement of bilingual educators who can fluidly switch between languages helps to reduce the children's shyness and encourages active participation, promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The use of translanguaging during transitional times, such as waiting for meals or morning circles, ensures that language learning is embedded in everyday activities, making it a natural part of the children's routine. This holistic approach not only aids in language development but also enhances the children's social skills and their ability to cope with a multilingual world. By valuing and incorporating the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the children, the preschool sets a strong foundation for lifelong bilingualism and multicultural understanding.

4.3. Communication with Parents

FV, a Finnish-speaking teacher, strives to establish meaningful connections with parents, recognizing the importance of building a rapport with them during the four-year journey that the children undertake beginning in preschool. She wants to be a meaningful person for them. With a touch of humor, FV fosters positive relationships, albeit acknowledging that the current educational framework has shifted some responsibilities away from parent–educator collaborations. Despite such changes, FV values having insight into the families' backgrounds, believing it enhances understanding and facilitates effective support for children: "Not everything is my business, of course, but I need to know a bit about what the family is like. I still have relationships with families whose children were here long ago, and I keep in touch with some of them. There have been parents I didn't get along with at all, but it was a matter of personal chemistry. I always try to handle it professionally and appropriately".

Several of the interviewed educators had worked in the Soviet preschool system and are able to compare it to the Finnish system:

> LD: Today, parents have gotten involved with the educational process. In the Soviet system, this role was filled by "educators", who were responsible for both imparting knowledge and upbringing. Here, it is more about exploring the environment, research, and having more free time so that they learn to play together, observe others, interact among themselves, and become more prepared for life and more independent. There is no societal content, but it is important for them to socialize with each other. I want children to be brave, independent, unafraid to ask questions, and learn new things.

Educators generally do not encounter significant issues with parents, who are typically receptive to their guidance. While some teachers prefer to maintain a professional distance

from families, the nature of the relationship largely depends on the parents. When teachers know the parents and the parents have demonstrated reliability, the relationship tends to be warmer and more intimate. In other cases, communication remains neutral and professional. Most interactions revolve around the children's behavior and well-being, such as inquiries about their daily activities, eating habits, and hydration.

Daily updates are provided to parents via Facebook, detailing the children's activities, such as music lessons, and including developmental outcomes and participation levels. This proactive type of communication reduces the number of questions parents have about daily activities. The updates are conveyed in Finnish, as all parents understand the language. Relationships with parents are characterized by mutual trust and respect.

Some educators who have been teaching at the school for a long time recall that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, interactions with parents were more frequent, and Russian cultural activities were more prominent. Currently, parents have shown diminished interest in joint activities and primarily focus on routine matters like their children's eating and drinking habits. Their demands for the preschool are mostly practical, as they prefer not to be burdened with additional concerns due to their work commitments.

Conversations with parents often reveal important insights into the family, allowing educators to provide better support. While casual evening chats about the day are valuable, educators emphasize the need to understand the child's interests, such as their preferred toys, books, games, and activities, to better engage with them in the preschool setting. Parents, in turn, wish to discuss their children's language development, participation in activities, and overall understanding of both languages. Educators are attentive to parental preferences, including specific requests about clothing, and tend to accommodate them without issue.

Educators routinely update parents on the day's events and report significant incidents, such as recurring interpersonal issues among children, while minor accidents may not be communicated. Parental reactions vary; some appreciate the updates, while others may become anxious. The role of educators involves significant psychological acumen, requiring them to listen attentively to both children and parents, which can be challenging yet essential for fostering a supportive educational environment.

> DE: My relationships with the children's parents are excellent, and good communication channels have been established. Not every day, of course, as sometimes there is only time to discuss the basics, but generally, communication works well. I try to be available, for example by reading Facebook messages, even if I don't respond during the weekends. Usually, we can discuss all matters sensitively, and information is conveyed even if I'm on the morning shift and don't see the parents picking up their children. Hidden problems can cause shame, and we have only one child whose parents experienced something like this during the preschool transfer, but we were able to discuss it here.

The interviewed educators emphasized their efforts to deepen collaboration with parents through maintaining good relationships with them and easily finding a common language. They are naturally skilled in establishing contact, though some parents can be challenging and frequently dissatisfied. Such difficulties are inherent to the profession; however, even with difficult parents, educators can find common ground by remaining empathetically calm and avoiding emotional provocation.

Language choice is particularly significant. Most educators are proficient in at least three languages and select the appropriate language based on the situation. With Finnish-speaking parents, they typically speak Finnish; with Russian-speaking parents, they use Russian. When interacting with Finnish-speaking parents who also speak Russian, edu-

cators inquire about their preferred language for the conversation, thus ensuring comfort and clarity in communication.

> LD: Relationships with parents are professional . . . normal relationships, as they should be—business-like. I speak Finnish with Finnish parents, Russian with Russian parents. With bilingual parents, I sometimes switch. If their Russian is good and they want to speak Russian with me, I respond in the same language. If I see it's hard for them, I switch to Finnish.

Some parents prefer to use English as a lingua franca, especially if they come from a third country, like Bangladesh, Canada, or China.

4.4. Collaboration Among Parents and Staff

Establishing positive relationships with parents is of paramount importance. Parents frequently express their gratitude to teachers, which is gratifying. However, parents sometimes approach educators in various moods and with different complaints, necessitating that teachers employ strategies to defuse tensions, listen attentively, and provide reassurance. These efforts are occasionally successful, though not always.

The staff organize coffee evenings with parents, allowing them to participate with their children since childcare is provided. The events are well attended because many parents cannot leave their children at home and find it challenging to return to the school once again after having picked their child up in the late afternoon. Typically, the evenings feature discussion tables led by facilitators on predetermined themes. Teachers may or may not announce the topic in advance; they simply invite parents to join them for evening coffee or tea to converse and become better acquainted for an hour or two after work, while presenting a topic for discussion.

Prior to such events, educators solicit input from parents regarding topics of interest. Parents are encouraged to invite friends if a particular theme holds significance for them. This engagement strategy not only fosters a sense of community but also serves as a promotional tool for the preschool, potentially attracting new clients.

The preschool also celebrates various communal holidays, such as Harvest Day, Grandparents' Day, Christmas, Spring Festival, and Maslenitsa. Parents are sometimes invited to participate in activities with their children, such as sports events held in the yard. Additionally, cleanup days are organized, where children and parents engage in joint activities, facilitating important interactions and fostering a collaborative community spirit.

> SV: We have a grandfather who comes to read fairy tales in Finnish twice a week; the children are already waiting for him. He reads for half an hour, and everyone listens in the bedroom while lying on their beds. He has a special jacket and hat that he wears. He doesn't show pictures, only reads. He reads with expression and might add some of his own comments to the text. He doesn't ask questions but talks a bit afterward without discussing the books. We also have a mother who is a music teacher, and she conducts music lessons for the two older groups once every two weeks.

Educators take great pleasure in interacting with parents. When relationships with parents are positive, kind, open, and friendly, teachers are enthusiastic about sharing details of the day, starting with the positives but also addressing any significant negative incidents. Educators strive to praise children whenever possible. If a child receives multiple or significant comments on a particular matter, whether positive or negative, then teachers make it a point to inform the parents. They aim to build trusting relationships where parents are well-informed but do not feel that their children are constantly being criticized.

Collaboratively, teachers and parents plan numerous events with the parent committee. For instance, they organize introductory evenings for newcomers, allowing parents to get to know one another and become acquainted with the educators and the preschool environment. These events might take the form of a simple tea party or a master class, such as making dumplings, thus ensuring that they are engaging and enjoyable. Another initiative is to open the preschool to neighborhood residents, reflecting the institution's bilingual nature and its stance on current geopolitical events.

Parents typically organize master classes, flea markets, children's discos, and outdoor activities like grilling sausages. They may also invite performers. The events are open to local residents and to friends of the preschool, fostering a sense of community.

According to the headmaster, working with parents, as evidenced by both their communication with educators and by personal experience, is a particularly challenging aspect of their duties. On the one hand, educators are interested in and dependent on parents as clients, since the preschool operates on funds provided by them. On the other, they must be advocates for the children, implementing their work smoothly, gently, competently, and correctly. Generally speaking, educators do not face significant difficulties working with parents. Communication is open, and most issues are resolved at the group level.

The parent committee performs exemplary work, with active parents having supported the preschool for many years. They organize events, excursions, theater performances, and gifts for teachers during Christmas and at the end of the school year. Occasionally, staff must step aside to allow parents to implement their ideas. Parents have numerous creative ideas but may not always know how to realize them, requiring the support of teachers to bring the ideas to fruition.

4.5. Play Without a Common Language as Seen by Bilingual Teachers

Children can use play activities as a means of understanding and cooperation. For example, when playing together with blocks, in a sandbox, or in role-playing games, they express their ideas and scenarios through play actions. This helps them understand how to interact with each other, while considering the interests and preferences of their play partners. The experience collected through such interactions leads them to initiate a new game to play in their turn. Another factor that contributes to children's understanding is the openness and impartiality that are usually inherent in a child's nature. Children are not burdened with prejudices, like adults, and often accept each other unconditionally. At first, such relationships are difficult to establish. When the language is no longer an obstacle, openness to new contacts contributes to a speedy increase in the number of friends.

> LD: Situations where children with different languages interact occur constantly. How they understand each other is a mystery. They play. They either speak in their own languages or show something or engage in some joint activity. Two-year-olds interact with each other without any language. We have many pairs of friends, one who talks and the other who doesn't, or from Finnish and Russian families. They find each other probably not by language but by character. If children come to preschool after three years of age, they already look for friends by language because they know how to speak. But the little ones, they look for friends "by spirit". You like cars, I like cars, or let's build together; and if there's a conflict, then I intervene. Otherwise, our boys who love cars play together. We have several children who don't speak at all yet, but they still play with others and somehow find a common language. It's paradoxical. I look at this and think, imagine if adults could do that.

Play is a natural way for children to learn about different cultures and languages. When children play with peers from other cultures, they may become interested in how

those children play and what they do differently, leading to an exchange of gestures, words, rituals, emotions, and assessments, broadening their horizons. According to the educators, play is a powerful tool that helps children overcome language and cultural barriers, establish mutual understanding, and create positive interpersonal connections.

> YV: Practically all children play together; it's amazing how well they can play and find a common language. One word, but you watch them, and they are really communicating. If I look at my children, they speak Russian and Finnish, and guests come from Estonia who don't speak Finnish, and my children don't speak Estonian, but they communicate, laugh, talk, and somehow understand each other. I ask: "Did you understand what Mare said?" And they answer: "Not quite, but I think it was this". Similar words, and they think: "Oh, we understand each other". If they set up a game, they seem to think logically: "It was probably about this". And they play quite well. And in preschool, it's the same. If their friend who they usually play with is not there, they switch and play with Finnish-speaking children and find a common language quite well. There's no "I won't play with you because you speak a different language", no alienation like that, at least in this preschool.

In play, bilingual children typically interact with one another in scenarios overseen by an adult. Such interactions are seldom initiated independently by the children, yet when they do occur, they are quite beneficial, reflected EZ. For instance, during spontaneous play, a Finnish-speaking child may become intrigued by a toy belonging to a Russian-speaking child. This shared interest can prompt communication, with the Finnish-speaking child attempting to recall and use some Russian words to engage. While not a frequent occurrence, it does happen. Generally, children tend to form friendships based on a common language. A Russian-speaking child may also attempt to use Finnish words to obtain something from another child, often with adult encouragement.

Frequently, children seek an adult's assistance to communicate or persuade another child. The adult encourages them to try speaking on their own: "Try to say it!"—"I can't!"—"Let's try together? How do you think it should be said?" This prompts the child to formulate the phrase, which they typically know how to express. However, a fear or stereotype about their inability to articulate their thoughts often hinders free communication. Over time, this apprehension diminishes. Despite the prevalence of Russian-speaking educators in the group, it is noteworthy that many Russian-speaking children demonstrate a good command and understanding of Finnish.

> HZ: It happens, but very rarely, that children with different languages interact with each other . . . in play . . . well, naturally, if an adult is involved. Otherwise, they look for friends based on language, just like we do. We seek out our own kind. Just yesterday, out of necessity, a Finnish boy, whose mother speaks Russian but doesn't speak it with him—she's Estonian and speaks Russian with us, I haven't heard her speak Russian with him—he was left alone when his friend, who was sick, didn't come. He ended up playing with two Russian boys. They were playing with cars.

RI posited that children with different linguistic backgrounds interact effectively when they share a common interest or toy, indicating that communication can occur without a shared language. For example, one boy, who initially lacked communicative means and seemed absorbed in his own world despite understanding the languages, gradually began to show interest in other children and their activities. The other children, accustomed to his introspective nature, were initially uncertain about how to engage with him, as they had not yet developed strategies for such interactions. This scenario is typical. When a

common interest is present, language becomes less essential for communication. Finnish children frequently use the word "look" to attract attention, both when interacting with their peers and adults.

> CD: Even non-speaking children play with those who speak. Even in free play, an adult is usually nearby supervising and guiding them. Often, an adult initiates the play. A new toy can start a game where some [children] play using speech and others play the same but do not speak. Communication is also non-verbal, for example a dinosaur attacks and another runs away. Gestures are also used, but they need to be explained without making the child feel embarrassed, like "you should know what that means". It's important to explain what is meant.

A Finnish-speaking boy and a Russian-speaking boy were observed collaborating on a puzzle, primarily conversing in Finnish. Although they occasionally play together, bilingual children often communicate in Russian with their Russian-speaking peers. One notable case involved a boy from a Finnish family who frequently speaks and understands Russian, sometimes even forming complete sentences in Russian. His mother, who graduated from a Finnish–Russian school, and his older brother, who currently attends the same school, foster his interest in Russian at home. His mother has mentioned that they occasionally respond to him in Russian to support his language development, though his father sometimes prompts the family to revert to Finnish. Consequently, the boy is accustomed to switching languages at home and recognizes that his environment is multilingual, with everyone being at least bilingual (and typically aware of English as well). However, younger children often confuse different languages, such as Finnish, Russian, English, and French.

DS also observed that when regular playmates are absent, children tend to seek out other play partners. The extent to which children segregate into language groups often depends on the pedagogical skills of the educator. In older age groups, children have typically developed sufficient language skills to actively use words, particularly during activities such as outdoor play, building, or puzzle-solving. One child might speak Finnish while another speaks Russian, yet they still manage to understand each other. The Russian-speaking child may attempt to incorporate some Finnish words into their speech. For instance, one child might say, "Oh, I can help", and then assist in finding puzzle pieces. This dynamic is especially evident in active outdoor games. Although the Russian-speaking boy may not fully understand Finnish, he observes and participates in the game, gradually learning through engagement.

> SH: When the children were younger, they played together until about three years of age. Now it's very rare. As their role-playing games developed, they mostly started to play in [separate] language groups, while bilingual children play in both. They don't care who they play with. We organize directed play, where we mix the children, but we don't force them to play with someone we choose. If a child is alone and doesn't have a group to play with, we can include them in a group, but we ask the child who they would like to play with or who they think they would fit best with.

DY recalled a Russophone boy from the previous year who initially struggled to find playmates, primarily engaging with children from other groups during outdoor activities. In solitary play, he found it challenging to integrate with Finnish-speaking peers unless facilitated by teachers. However, whenever collaborative activities were organized, he consistently participated. Presently, he has formed friendships with Russian-speaking peers within the group and now engages with Finnish children as well. He has progressed to articulating simple words during repetitive play involving cars and blocks.

FU affirmed that children interact within the group, yet each child tends to gravitate toward peers who share their language. Occasionally, situations arise where two or three Russian-speaking children are joined by a Finnish-speaking peer, resulting in harmonious play and even mutual language acquisition. However, such occurrences are infrequent, as children typically seek out companions with whom they can communicate effortlessly. Nevertheless, in bilingual settings children demonstrate the capacity to fluidly utilize both languages.

Some educators employ code-switching techniques, while others deliberately adhere to the language of instruction. Children respond in their respective languages. In certain instances, such as during group play at a table, the prevailing language of the activity determines the children's linguistic responses, irrespective of their native tongue. If the game is conducted in Finnish, then children respond in Finnish, and educators communicate with them accordingly.

5. Discussion

Preschool teachers' perspectives on bilingual education are multifaceted, encompassing support for its educational and cultural merits, apprehensions regarding practical hurdles, a desire for adequate recognition of their efforts, and resource constraints. In their interviews, educators highlighted various challenges, including facilitating language development and cultural appreciation, while addressing implementation concerns, gauging its impact on academic performance, identifying professional development needs, examining personal attitudes and experiences, and fostering community and parental engagement (cf. Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Bowles & Gallavan, 2012).

Participants emphasized the pivotal role of effective and consistent communication between staff members and parents. Both parties must exchange information regarding the child's progress, obstacles, and accomplishments in both languages utilized within the educational setting (Lange & Burroughs-Lange, 2017; Ortlipp, 2008). This reciprocal dialogue fosters inclusivity and respect, irrespective of the primary language of the parents. Educators also exhibited great respect for the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families, actively celebrating cultural events and encouraging parental contributions in support of traditions and practices (Weiss & Weiss, 2001). Collaborating on classroom activities, events, and meetings that celebrate all cultures cultivates trust and a sense of community between teachers and parents. Encouraging parental involvement during special occasions strengthens partnerships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) and enriches the educational experience for children, illustrating the significance of such relationships.

Experienced teachers play a crucial role in guiding parents on supporting bilingual language development at home, offering suggestions for beneficial reading materials, educational games, and bilingual activities. Providing workshops or resources on bilingual education and language development empowers parents to better assist their children. Actively soliciting and valuing parental feedback and input on the bilingual program enhances its efficacy and engenders parental investment in educational success. Hence, thematic lectures, meetings, and professional development opportunities remain integral.

Participants stressed the importance of maintaining an open dialogue where parents feel comfortable expressing concerns. Teachers aspire to be approachable and receptive, addressing conflicts or concerns promptly and collaboratively, prioritizing the child's welfare. Consistency and reliability in interactions are pivotal for nurturing positive teacher–parent relationships, notwithstanding the challenges posed by teacher turnover. Reliability and adherence to commitments are paramount.

Preschool teachers reflected on their partnerships with parents in a bilingual preschool, acknowledging a wide array of interactions ranging from transactional to enduring friend-

ships (cf. Farrell, 2022; Peleman et al., 2023). They recognized their role in supporting a child's development within the collective environment of the classroom while still acknowledging the irreplaceable role of the family. Effective collaboration entails fostering open communication, mutual support, and shared objectives between parents and teachers through regular meetings, joint activities, and consistent updates on the child's progress. Children with varying linguistic backgrounds adeptly communicate during play, leveraging natural, age-appropriate interactions that transcend language barriers, facilitated by non-verbal cues and shared activities.

6. Conclusions

In a bilingual kindergarten, each staff member simultaneously serves as an educator, teaching their first language or both languages. Depending on their understanding of how languages are structured and how communication works, which are components of culture, they make decisions about how exactly to communicate and with whom. They choose appropriate situations and tools and use them according to their knowledge. Knowledge about the structure of language and the patterns of communication is clearly insufficient, and such training should be provided to everyone living in a modern multilingual society.

Pedagogical translanguaging offers a progressive and inclusive approach to education that aligns with the realities of a multilingual world. While it presents certain challenges, the potential benefits for children's engagement, cognitive development, and cultural validation make it a valuable strategy for contemporary classrooms. Effective implementation and ongoing support are key to maximizing its impact. However, it needs some amendments.

Establishing personal connections with parents by demonstrating genuine interest in the child's well-being and educational journey strengthens the overall relationship. Moreover, every staff member must uphold responsibility for the children under their care at the preschool, which requires a high level of professional accountability, attention to detail, fulfillment of commitments, robust horizontal connections among teaching staff, and familiarity with typical and atypical child and parental behavior.

Action research in pedagogy empowers educators to take an active role in their professional development, fostering a culture of inquiry and innovation within educational settings. Educators critically reflect on their own practices, assumptions, and the impact of their interventions. Additionally, a series of professional training sessions were offered to the staff, concentrating on language practices and conscious language use. This evidently promoted professional growth and development.

Nevertheless, more should be done to promote collaboration among educators, students, and other stakeholders, fostering a community of practice and shared learning. Further systematic data collection and analysis of translingual interactions are aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies and interventions, ensuring that decisions are evidence-based.

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The Affordances and Constraints of Supporting Father-Child Shared Reading in the Multilingual Emirates

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Abstract: This paper reports on the affordances and constraints encountered in the case of an innovative project designed to support early literacy development in Arabic and English while enhancing father-child wellbeing in Abu Dhabi. The project sought to encourage Emirati fathers to engage in interactive shared book reading at home with their young children. In a context where adult–child home reading is not a traditional practice and where children's reading proficiency in public schools is often below international standards, the project sought to support families with their children's early literacy development and to develop positive dispositions towards reading. Fathers (N = 80) of kindergarten children (4–5 years) in state schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were invited to participate in interactive workshops about shared parent–child reading. Fathers were provided with selected, high-quality books in both Arabic and English to read aloud with their children at home and were given guidance on ways to read interactively. In this paper, which draws upon survey results, focus group recordings, and researcher field notes from the workshop sites, the affordances and constraints encountered in supporting early home reading and parent–child wellbeing are explored. Recommendations are made for similar reading and wellbeing programs in multilingual contexts. These include providing accessible information to both fathers and mothers on the importance of reading with their children at home, sharing tips and modelling parent–child interactive reading, and the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate books for families.

Keywords: home language and literacy; early reading; parent–child reading; father-child reading; fathers' engagement; fathers' wellbeing; multilingual

1. Introduction

As the traditional role of fathers in Arab families evolves to encompass more expanded versions of parenting, this paper reports on a project that sought to increase fathers' involvement in their children's literacy development while building parent–child wellbeing by supporting fathers in engaging in interactive shared reading with their young children at home. In the United Arab Emirates, a progressive young nation in the Middle East's Lower Arabian Gulf, a key aspiration of the Early Childhood Authority (a recently formed agency to promote early childhood care and education) is for every parent to feel confident, competent, and capable to support and promote the optimal development of their children. This agency's strategy also highlights, as a key aim, the enhancement of fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority, 2022).

At the same time, there is national concern about the relative underachievement in reading of many children in the UAE in comparison with both national and international

peers, as evidenced by the results of international standardized tests of reading achievement (Taha Thomure, 2019). While students in the UAE have achieved the highest scores amongst all the Arab countries in the international standardized reading test, PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), overall reading proficiency is below the international mean (Marquez et al., 2022). Multiple governmental initiatives have been launched to address this issue in the UAE (Opoku et al., 2024), such as the Arabic Reading Challenge and a Reading Law which removed tax on all reading and reading-related products (Taha Thomure, 2019). However, the ongoing gap between the actual reading proficiency of many children and national aspirations for advanced achievement (Marquez et al., 2022) has been connected not only to educational factors such as the reading curriculum, resources, teachers, and pedagogy in schools (Gregory et al., 2021), but also to limited parental engagement with children's learning at home (Alramamneh et al., 2023).

In the UAE, national expectations for parental involvement in their children's education have increased in recent years, and there is "growing recognition . . . that the education of the young is the key to future economic growth and prosperity" (Hefnawi & Jeynes, 2022, p. 127). It has been argued that home-based parental engagement with children's learning is more effective than school-based parental involvement (Hefnawi & Jeynes, 2022). In their review of the limited number of parental engagement studies in the UAE, Hefnawi and Jeynes (2022, p. 145) conclude that "parental involvement studies consistently recommend that Emirati parents be provided with training on how to engage positively with their children's learning".

For the Emirati participants in this study, Arabic is their first language and is the official language of the UAE. A regional variety of Arabic known as Emirati Arabic is spoken in the homes of UAE nationals. As Arabic is a diglossic language, the standard form (known as Modern Standard Arabic) is used in formal and written settings and is acquired through schooling. Emiratis also use English widely as a lingua franca within the multinational environment of the UAE for daily transactional purposes, and for education and work (Gallagher, 2024). Emirati national children primarily attend public schools which are funded by the government, while fee-paying private schools primarily cater for expatriate children, although some Emirati children do also attend private schools (Alhosani, 2022). Emirati children are exposed to English at school from kindergarten onward, and in many schools, it is a language of instruction also so that the children of participating fathers are emerging multilinguals. Other languages are also often heard in Emirati homes, including Tagalog and Urdu, as domestic workers from Asia are frequently employed by Emirati families for their often-large households.

In light of the foregoing, this project aimed to support fathers' interactive shared book reading skills with their children in order to enhance the development of early reading, develop a culture of reading in the home, and support father-child wellbeing. To achieve these aims, fathers of children in public schools were invited by the project team to join interactive workshops wherein simple techniques for reading together for pleasure at home with children were modeled and discussed. During the workshops, fathers were provided with selected high-quality books in both Arabic and English to read with their children.

In this paper, the affordances and constraints encountered during this project are examined as the first reported father-child home reading initiative in the Gulf region, and recommendations are made for similar projects in multilingual contexts. Taking a sociocultural and ecological view of learning and language, as developed for example by Van Lier (2000), affordances are opportunities for interaction and learning that emerge from the relationship between the learner and the environment, while constraints are the limitations that are encountered. To identify the affordances and constraints, the paper

draws upon the results of a survey of participating fathers, focus group recordings, and research team members' field notes from the workshop sites.

1.1. Father-Child Shared Reading

In early childhood, shared reading provides an interactive experience of reading for meaning within in a dyad where an adult reads a text aloud and guides the child with questions to promote understanding (Hoyne & Egan, 2019). Research studies internationally show that parent–child shared reading time at home correlates positively with the development of child literacy (Hall et al., 2018). Early shared reading, as well as the availability of books at home, has been found to predict reading attainment in middle childhood, thus supporting reading interventions that provide books and foster shared reading opportunities in early childhood (Stone & Erickson, 2023).

From a broader perspective, a metanalysis of the international research on parental involvement by Jeynes (2022) found that home-based parental reading with children is a statistically significant indicator of parental commitment. Across the board, it appears that children who are good readers start early and are supported in developing literacy at home (PIRLS, 2017). The impact of early home reading on future literacy has been confirmed for the UAE by Al-Jefri and Areepattamannil (2019), who report that early home literacy activities are positively related to reading engagement among fourth-grade students.

Some studies have reported that mothers read with their children at home more so than fathers (see, for example, Duursma (2016) in the USA, and Swain et al. (2017) in the UK). It has been suggested that Emirati fathers, although highly competent in providing for their families, may have lower levels of engagement with their children's learning compared with other Arab fathers in the region (Ridge et al., 2017). However, it is recognized that fathers *do* read with their children and that interventions must acknowledge that fathers are involved at home, disavowing a potential assumption that fathers are not interested in reading with their children (Swain et al., 2017). It has been noted that fathers are "vastly underrepresented in research related to parenting, family processes, and child development" (Yaremych & Persky, 2023, p. 2), yet fathers' involvement in early literacy development has been found across multiple studies to be positively correlated with children's development as readers (Cutler & Palkovitz, 2020; McWayne et al., 2013; Varghese & Wachen, 2016). It has also been suggested that fathers tend to use more conversationally challenging language than mothers with their young children, leading to greater linguistic complexity of input and therefore more complex interactions with young children (Cutler & Palkovitz, 2020). This includes, for example, asking more high-order "wh" questions and more specific information in comparison with mothers.

1.2. Early Shared Home Reading Practices

There are many dimensions to the concept of literacy, but for the purposes of this study, we take literacy to simply mean "reading". Focusing on the emergent literacy phase in early childhood, we understand shared home reading in the context of this project as the development of familiarity with books by reading together with an adult at home in a pleasurable, informative way that promotes mutual wellbeing. Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002, 2014) note that there are two types of parent–child home literacy activities: print-focused activities and meaning-focused activities. In print-focused reading activities, parents teach children to read letter names or whole words. In meaning-related reading activities, on the other hand, parents read for the child and discuss the contents of the book without necessarily focusing on decoding the print. For this project, parent–child interactive shared reading is primarily conceived as a meaning-related activity which indirectly influences young children's reading acquisition by enhancing language development (Šilinskas et al.,

2020) and by fostering positive learning dispositions toward language and literacy (Zhang et al., 2024).

This experience may later lead to higher reading skills among children. Both early shared reading and the availability of books at home have been found to predict reading attainment in middle childhood (McNally et al., 2023). Moreover, picture story books act as a springboard for oral language development (Wang et al., 2023) through informal conversations which may be prompted by the book, but are not confined to the book. These conversations may take place in any of the languages within the readers' repertoires, and not necessarily in the language in which the book is printed (Dillon et al., 2024). In addition to enhancing language and literacy development, early parent–child home reading develops conceptual frameworks that foster continuing reading development at school (Raban, 2022). Furthermore, oral storytelling has been linked to the development of children's narrative competence and comprehension skills (Al-Janaideh et al., 2022). Such research findings support reading interventions that provide books and shared reading opportunities in early childhood.

The importance of involving parents in the UAE in promoting children's early reading development has been made clear in recent literature. For example, a study into the outcomes of the 2016 PIRLS literacy assessment amongst Arabic-speaking children in the UAE found that positive parental attitudes toward reading are a predictor of children's reading attainment in Arabic, and that participation in literacy activities before primary school, including shared reading, results in improved reading literacy in Arabic (Alramamneh et al., 2023).

There have been very few studies of parent–child reading in the UAE, or indeed in the wider Gulf region. A study by Barza and von Suchodoletz (2016) found that Muslim parents in the UAE believed there are three reasons for reading with their children, which are to teach reading skills and vocabulary, to gain factual knowledge, and to teach morals. Parents also reported that they lack culturally relevant books for their children, that is, books depicting culturally familiar characters and settings (Barza & von Suchodoletz, 2016). None of the parents in their study expressed pleasure or enjoyment related to reading with their children. In fact, a survey of parents in Abu Dhabi found that only 23% read to their children under the age of eight every day (Ashwani, 2022).

1.3. Father-Child Literacy Activities and Fathers' Wellbeing

Much of the work on father-child reading has focused on the benefits for children's literacy and development, but some have addressed the potential impact on fathers (Cutler & Palkovitz, 2020) and on their own wellbeing. In this paper, fathers' wellbeing is associated with emotions, feeling connected, and feeling competent and confident (Ortiz, 2000), and fits within larger conceptualizations of subjective wellbeing. Fathers reading with their children display positive emotions such as enjoyment (Ortiz, 2004; Swain et al., 2017) and actions such as fun (Ortiz, 2000). In addition, fathers value the father-child bond gained through shared reading (Palm, 2013), as they express appreciation for building a closer relationship with their child (Nichols, 2000; Stile & Ortiz, 1999; Swain et al., 2017), and thus feeling more connected. When engaging in reading activities with their children, there is a positive impact on fathers' self-esteem (Stile & Ortiz, 1999) and confidence (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), including confidence in their own reading literacy skills (Potter et al., 2012). Providing fathers with specific training can contribute not only to the family's and child's development (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004), but to the key elements of fathers' own wellbeing (Ortiz, 2000). Interestingly, these elements of wellbeing not only carry benefits inherent to fathers, but also increase the likelihood of

fathers' involvement with their children (Lamb, 2010). However, fathers report that finding time to read with their children is a challenge for them (Swain et al., 2017).

1.4. Parental Engagement

It has been suggested that guidance should be offered to fathers on how to read with their young children, including modeling reading strategies for them (Swain et al., 2017), as well as providing explicit support to families overall in supporting children's literacy skills (Steiner, 2014). In fact, intervention approaches to provide fathers with strategies to support children's emerging reading in the home have long been found to be effective (Saracho, 2008).

A study from Finland (Šilinskas et al., 2020) found that parental engagement in reading with kindergarten-age children is related to growth in reading skills from kindergarten to Grade 1, and is also related to children's independent reading later. More generally, a meta-analysis of studies on parental involvement internationally found that intervention projects that target parents of children from 3 to 8 years have a positive impact on children's academic as well as nonacademic development (Cosso et al., 2022). Moreover, a meta-analysis of the international research on parental involvement (Jeynes, 2022) found that home-based parental reading with children is a statistically significant indicator of parental commitment.

Internationally, there has been a recent surge in the number of projects to promote parent–child reading at home, including, for example, in South Africa (Salley et al., 2022), Spain (Romero-González et al., 2023), and the United States (Steiner et al., 2022). Regarding parental engagement with their children's learning in the UAE, there are a handful of studies that focus on parents in general, but none focusing on fathers in particular. Al-Sumaiti's policy brief related to Dubai (Al-Sumaiti, 2012), for example, suggests that higher levels of interaction between community stakeholders can lead to better educational outcomes for children, while a study by Moussa-Inaty and de la Vega (2013) suggested that having a deeper understanding of parental beliefs regarding education would improve partnerships between stakeholders. A study by Saeed et al. (2024) recommended that training programs should be organized for parents to learn more about balancing their work and finding time to support their children's learning. Overall, parental involvement projects in early childhood have been characterized as "sporadic and uncoordinated in emerging economies, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE)" (Saeed et al., 2024, p. 1).

1.5. Conceptual Framework

This project is broadly informed by sociocultural and ecological systems perspectives on human activity and language and literacy development. Sociocultural perspectives, originating from the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), assert that learning occurs through interaction with others within a particular social and cultural environment. In this vein, Rogoff (1990), for example, views linguistic and cognitive development as occurring through guided participation in cultural activity. Such a sociocultural perspective is manifested in the project's efforts to gather interested fathers together with an Emirati mother as workshop facilitator to share the experience of participating in interactive reading for pleasure, to discuss aspects of home reading, and provide fathers with selected culturally and linguistically appropriate books for home reading.

The project is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems framework, which posits that development occurs through interactions within a complex set of systems envisaged as concentric circles of relationships, broadly referred to as the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the macrosystem. Within this framework, the project sought to influence early reading development and parent–child wellbeing within the first layer, the

microsystem, that is, the child's immediate environment which includes the family, the local community, and educational settings by enabling parent–child reading for pleasure at home. Working at the next level, the mesosystem, conceived by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the network of relationships between the various microsystems, the research team contacted school principals to invite the fathers of children in kindergarten classes to attend a workshop at the school and receive selected books to read with their children at home. At the level of the macrosystem, the third level which encompasses social and cultural values and traditions, the project team was cognizant of the fact that participants in this project inherit a strong and rich oral culture, where home reading for pleasure with children is not a traditional practice (Al-Hameli, 2014), but where young parents may be interested in starting to incorporate such practices, alongside oral story telling.

However, Bronfenbrenner's theory has been criticized for placing culture merely at the macro level, as if culture were somehow unrelated to the microsystem of the child's immediate home and educational environment. Again, drawing upon the work of Rogoff (1990) and also Weisner (2002), we follow Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) in emphasizing that culture forms a core part of daily routines and practices within the microsystem of families, childcare, and school settings. As such, the project sought to be culturally responsive through strategies, including inviting a team of bilingual Arabic–English experts in children's literature to recommend age-appropriate and culturally appropriate books in Arabic and in English for Emirati families, hiring a workshop facilitator who is an Emirati parent and who speaks the same Emirati Arabic dialect as the participants, and liaising with kindergarten school principals to provide a welcoming environment in familiar surroundings for the workshops.

In light of the foregoing considerations, this paper addresses the following two research questions:

1. What are the affordances and constraints encountered in a project to support early home reading and paternal wellbeing in the multilingual context of the UAE?
2. What recommendations can be made for similar reading and wellbeing programs in multilingual contexts?

2. Materials and Methods

This project was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki for work involving human participants and was approved by the research team's Institutional Review Board, and by the local school authority. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. In this section, the process for the selection of books is described, the recruitment of workshop participants is explained, the features of the workshop are outlined, and the use of a questionnaire, focus group recordings, and field notes as data collection tools are outlined. In addition, fathers' experiences of engaging in shared reading at home were elicited through voice messaging after participating in the workshops; however, the findings from that dataset are not included here, but are reported in Dillon et al. (2024).

2.1. Selection of Books

The selection of books for the project was an important first consideration. Experts who teach and publish in the field of children's literature and literacy education in the UAE were invited to recommend high-quality children's books in a variety of genres in both Arabic and English, and suitable for Emirati parent–child interactive reading with girls and boys between 4–6 years. The expert panel members were selected for their familiarity with contemporary children's literature and for their support for recent advances in the writing and production of picture story books for children in Arabic, as discussed, for example,

by Dillon et al. (2018) and Taha Thomure et al. (2020). The research team members then collaboratively selected the final list of books from among the provided recommendations, according to the following quality criteria: textual and linguistic suitability for four- and five-year-old Emirati children, relevance and variety of themes covered, visual appeal of illustrations to the target age group, and relevance to Emirati culture. The availability of books was also a consideration.

Animal fiction was the most frequently recommended genre by the expert panel members, and books that featured the natural environment were also popular. Examples are Fanteer the Fluffy Flamingo (in Arabic), about a flamingo who lives in a mangrove plantation in the UAE, and I Spy a Desert (in English), about a little girl who enjoys spotting desert animals and plants while camping with her family, a popular activity during the cooler months in the UAE. At the conclusion of the workshop, fathers were given a mixed bag of ten books in both languages to take home and share with their children.

2.2. Participants

Fathers who participated in this project were recruited through public kindergarten school principals in Abu Dhabi. A key transition point in Emirati family life occurs when children commence pre-school or kindergarten, a time when parents are receptive to involvement in their young children's education. Because enrolment rates in public kindergartens are very high in the UAE (Gallagher, 2020), holding the workshops in kindergarten schools (primarily serving national Emirati children aged 4–5 years) enabled access to several hundreds of potential participants. Although specifically aimed at fathers of children in this age group, it was hoped that younger and/or older children in the home could also benefit from the project, as would spouses who might also wish to read the provided books with their children.

The project team set modest targets of 50 fathers at five school sites due to the novelty of the project in the region and uncertainty as to the number of likely participants. In fact, these targets were exceeded, with 80 fathers participating from 8 schools, with an average of 11 fathers attending one of seven workshops (two schools combined for one of the workshops). A pilot workshop was first conducted with five fathers at the Early Childhood Authority's offices in Abu Dhabi, the funding body for this project, and while these pilot participants are not included in the results reported in this paper, the workshop materials and activities were modified based on the pilot session.

2.3. Survey of Participating Fathers

Before the workshop commenced, participating fathers were invited to complete a questionnaire administered and analyzed in Qualtrics. The questionnaire for the fathers was created by the research team in alignment with the aims of the research project and drew upon pre-existing validated instruments: a survey of parent–child reading practices and attitudes (Cutler, 2020), a fathering self-efficacy scale (Sevigny et al., 2016), and an unpublished validated parental wellbeing survey developed previously by a member of the research team. The draft instrument was reviewed and revised iteratively and collaboratively in English, before being translated into Arabic by bilingual research team members. The questionnaire was then piloted with a group of five Emirati fathers and was further revised, before being deployed. Offered in both Arabic and English, it included questions about demographics, father-child activities, the languages used at home, and attitudes to reading. The survey data reported in this paper pertain only to participants' self-reported demographics, languages used, father-child activities, and attitudes to reading.

2.4. Workshops and Focus Groups

Drawing upon sociocultural approaches to learning and development (Rogoff, 1990), the project facilitator modeled interactive shared reading by reading a picture story book aloud for fathers, and then guiding them in a discussion about the observed interactive reading techniques. Simple but effective read-aloud techniques were modeled during a 90 min workshop, including, for example, pre-reading engagement techniques such as predicting the story from the title; while-reading techniques such as occasionally pointing to some words or pictures in the text and using physically performative behavior such as gestures and facial expressions (Cutler, 2023); and post-reading techniques including asking open-ended questions and oral discussions about the book. The importance of finding a suitable time and a comfortable space for home reading was also discussed. As noted above, the project facilitator was an Emirati national who speaks the Emirati Arabic dialect and is passionate about reading. She read the books aloud for fathers in modern standard Arabic, as written, and switched to the local dialect to discuss the strategies she had used. After the book reading, fathers were encouraged to try reading with their children at home and they received a bag of selected children's books to take home.

Fathers were also invited to attend a follow-up focus group held approximately one week after the workshop, with the intention of further discussing the benefits of reading with them and eliciting post-workshop home reading experiences in a community of practice setting. Attendance proved problematic for the focus group discussions however, and even when moved online, uptake remained low, with only 10% of workshop participants joining a focus group.

2.5. Transcription and Analysis of Focus Groups

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed into English using the *Translingua* translation app, which can handle Modern Standard Arabic, Emirati Arabic, and English, as the main languages used by participants in the project. Each transcription was then checked for meaning, and fathers' turns were highlighted before being thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2019) steps for the reflexive thematic analysis of qualitative data. The first stage was to become familiar with the data by individually reading and re-reading the transcripts. Then, two members of the research team met together to generate open codes from the focus group data, in response to the questions posed during the focus groups, which were as follows:

1. Do you normally read to your children or is this a new experience? What types of books did you enjoy reading during the project?
2. What types of books did your child enjoy reading?
3. Were there any challenges to reading with your child?
4. Were there any benefits to reading with your child?
5. Do you plan to continue with reading stories with your child?
6. What is needed to make that happen?

Having generated the initial codes, themes or patterns were then extracted by the two team members. These themes were then reviewed, revised, and finalized, before being interpreted as affordances and/or constraints, as seen in Table 1 in the following section, where a sample of the thematic data analysis process is provided.

2.6. Field Notes

The members of the research team recorded or wrote field notes at three stages in the project: immediately after the first explanatory visit with school principals to seek their support in recruiting fathers and hosting the workshops; immediately upon the completion of the school-based workshops; and upon returning to each workshop site after

the completion of the project to thank the principals for their support. Field notes related to the school principals' and school staff's reactions to the project are highlighted in this paper, because, as Emirati nationals, they provided important insights into the affordances and constraints of parent–child shared home reading for this population of fathers and children within the multilingual context of the UAE.

3. Results

The findings reported in this paper draw upon the three sources of data described above: a survey of participating fathers conducted at the beginning of each workshop with a focus on their reasons for reading and for not reading, the audio recordings of fathers' remarks during the workshops and during follow-up focus group discussions, and the field notes recorded by project team members chronicling the insights of school principals and school staff.

3.1. Results from Fathers' Survey

In this section, descriptive results from the survey completed by 75 out of the 80 (94% completion rate) fathers during the workshops are first presented, starting with a brief demographic overview, which includes a summary of fathers' reported spoken languages at home. Then, survey data on fathers' reported reasons for reading are presented, followed by their reported enjoyment of reading, followed by their reasons for engaging in parental reading with children. Finally, barriers to parent–child reading faced by fathers are presented.

The survey revealed that the fathers who participated in the workshops ranged widely in age from 26 to 64 years, with a mean age of 38.9 $\pm$ 7 years. All had completed high school, while 28% had also completed a bachelor's degree, and 15% had completed a postgraduate degree. Most fathers (81%) were employed at the time of the study, mainly with fulltime jobs (77%). Occupations consisted of professionals across various fields (engineering, business, management, law, IT, and education), the military and police, and technical work.

In terms of family languages used at home, most fathers (73%) reported that two or more languages were spoken. The most common languages spoken were Emirati Arabic and English (51%), while 24% of participants reported using Arabic (both Modern Standard Arabic and Emirati Arabic[1]). The use of Modern Standard Arabic, Emirati Arabic, and English was reported by 18% of fathers, while 6% reported that another language was used in addition to Arabic and English. Most fathers who said that only Arabic was spoken at home reported using Emirati Arabic (77%), with a smaller number reporting the use of Modern Standard Arabic (23%). This is indicative of the multilingual nature of the contemporary Emirati society, where both Arabic and English are widely used, and where speakers of Arabic switch between the local dialect and the standard form, depending on the situation. This multilingual reality was factored into the project design by the provision of children's books in both Modern Standard Arabic and English, and by the use of Emirati Arabic during the workshops by the facilitator, as mentioned previously.

3.2. Reasons for Reading

Regarding participants' selected reasons for parent–child reading, three motives were prominent: most fathers (72%) believed that reading presents an opportunity to impart moral lessons to children. A similar proportion (71%) believed that reading helps build a closer relationship with the child, and the same number of fathers believed that it helps their child to learn to read (71%). Other reasons for parent–child reading identified by fathers included two from the cognitive domain, including learning new knowledge (68%) and

helping the child to do well in school (63%), while reasons related to the socio-emotional domain included fostering the child's enjoyment of reading (61%) and supporting the child's socio-emotional development (60%). The full range of reasons is seen in Figure 1 below and is shown in rank order according to the frequency of selection. Reasons categorized as cognitive are depicted with blue-dotted bars, socio-emotional with pink-hatched bars, and other reasons with solid gray bars.

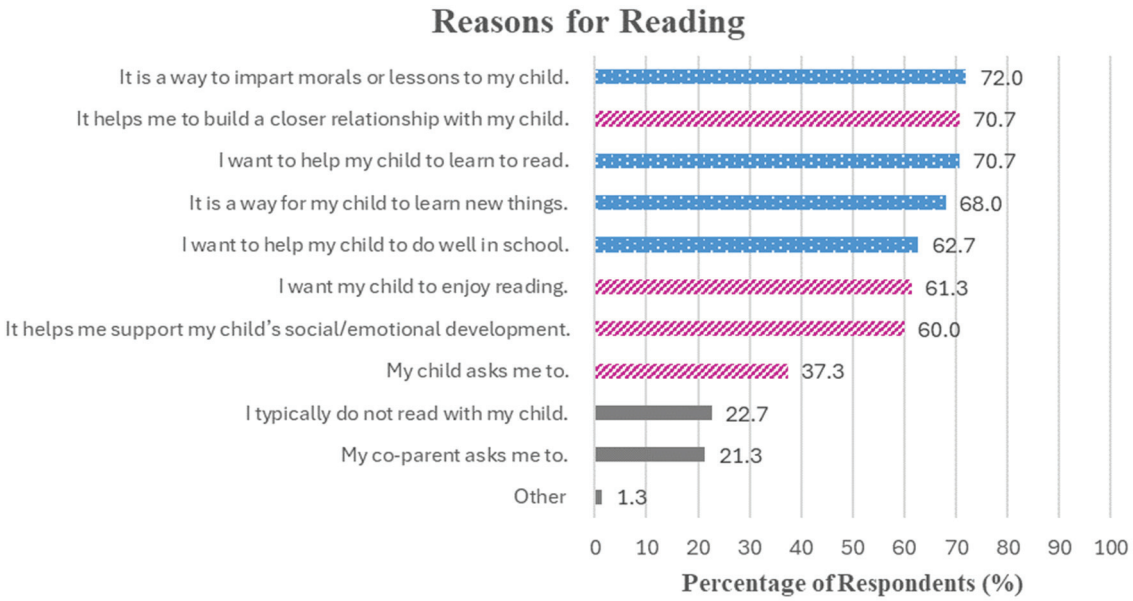

Figure 1. Reasons for reading.

3.3. Enjoyment of Shared Reading

Before the workshop, when fathers were asked if they liked reading with their children at home, only 34.5% reported that they either enjoyed it or enjoyed it very much. Indeed, when asked to list the types of activities that they typically engage in with their kindergarten-age children, only five of the participating fathers listed language and literacy-related activities. On the other hand, very few fathers reported not enjoying or avoiding parent–child reading (9%). When asked about their children's enjoyment of reading with them, a much higher proportion of fathers indicated that their children enjoyed it or enjoyed it very much (52.3%). Despite this, only 37% of fathers reported that their child asks them to read.

3.4. Barriers to Father-Child Reading

The biggest obstacle to father-child reading in Emirati homes, as reported by the participants in this study, is fathers' lack of time for reading due to busy work schedules. Almost half of fathers cited the demands of working life as a factor in not reading with their children (43%). Related to this, almost one in four fathers (23%) reported that they do not see their children often enough to read with them, while 4% of fathers said they felt too tired to read with their children. These work and lifestyle-related factors apart, almost one-third of fathers reported book-related barriers to reading. Overall, one in three fathers were either unsure about what books to read with their children or else indicated that there were few books or unsuitable books for parent–child reading available at home. Other book-related issues reported by fathers were a lack of knowledge of how to read with their children (8%) and a dislike of reading aloud (7%), as well as the lack of a suitable space for parent–child reading (3%). All barriers to home reading, as identified by fathers, are

shown in Figure 2 below, where reasons are shown in rank order according to the frequency of selection.

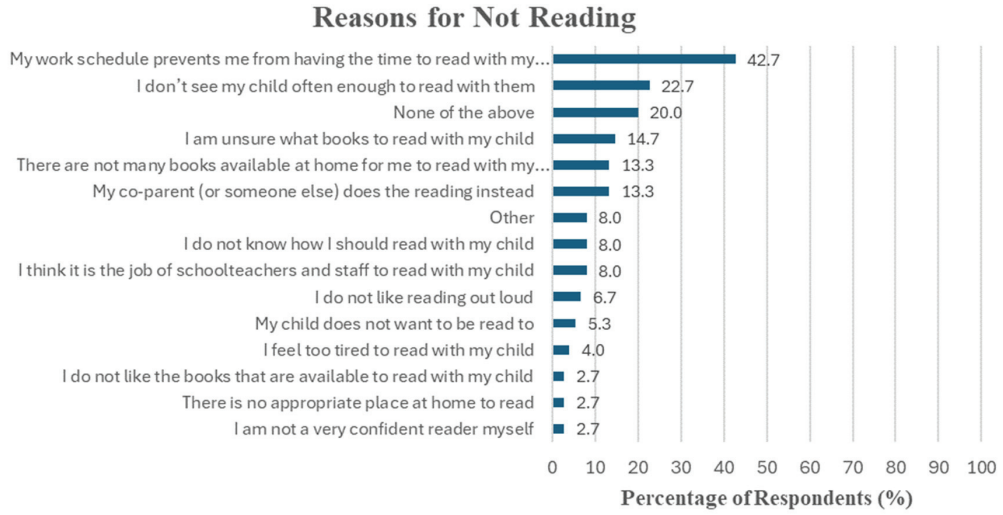

Figure 2. Reasons for not reading.

3.5. Workshop and Focus Group Data

Workshops (WS) and focus group (FG) sessions were recorded as a source of fathers' "in-the-moment" responses to the project. The workshop recordings primarily comprised explanations to participants about the project, explanations of the methods of data collection, the completion of consent forms and surveys, book distribution, and also included a modeled read-aloud session with explanations for the strategies used. While there were relatively few non-procedural comments made by fathers while participating in the workshops, the remarks made were revelatory. For example, one father observed that he had opted to attend the workshop because "workshops like these are important to raise fathers' awareness of parenting" (WS3).

The focus group held after the workshop, on the other hand, sought to elicit fathers' post-workshop experiences of reading with their children. However, the first two focus groups resulted in low participation, and, in an effort to better accommodate fathers' busy schedules, the remaining focus group meetings were switched from in-person meetings at school to online sessions, but this did not result in an increase in the number of participants, which remained low.

In this section, themes from the remarks made during the focus groups by participating fathers are reported. These include their experiences of shared reading prior to the project, their experiences after reading the books at home with their children, their reported sense of wellbeing after shared reading, and their perceptions of shared reading as a means of reducing screen time, are reported.

The first salient theme from the focus groups relates to fathers' previous habits of reading with children. Most fathers said that they had never read to their children. One father (FG1) said that he sometimes tells made-up stories during long car journeys—a nod to the oral traditions of the society—but this was "the first time I read for them". He said that shared reading built "more of a connection" with his two children, aged four and five years. Similarly, another father shared that he tells his children stories "daily from my imagination" before bedtime, but "this was the first time to read from the book. They enjoyed it more" (FG4). In contrast, another father commented that "We are used to reading at home . . . we read five days a week, [and] at the weekend it's going out to places. They are used to this routine" (FG2). The steps in the generation of this theme are shown in

Table 1 below as an example of how thematic analysis was conducted in response to the questions posed (the final column interprets the themes in light of the implied affordances and constraints for father-child shared reading, and which will be further addressed in Section 4 that follows Section 3).

Table 1. Sample of Thematic Data Analysis.

Focus Group Guiding Question	Response	Code	Theme	Affordances and/or Constraints
Do you normally read to your children or is this a new experience?	"Very rarely. When we are driving to Dubai, long ways, sometimes I try to tell him a story from my mind, from my experience. Like that. From the book, this is my first time. Yeah, first time to read for them."	Reading is rare. Father sometimes tells his own made-up stories on car journeys. First experience of reading for his children.	Oral story telling. Habit of storytelling/habit of reading. Time/place for stories.	***Affordances:*** *Oral story telling* Oral story telling is common and may be seen as an *affordance* as it occurs along one end of the continuum from oracy to literacy; it can develop comprehension and narrative competence which are essential for reading texts, especially narrative texts. *Time/place for stories* Bedtime and car time are good times for engaging with children through stories. *Children's enjoyment* Children like being read to. ***Constraints:*** *Oral story telling* Habit of storytelling versus habit of reading. Oral storytelling may however be seen equally as a *constraint*, insofar as it excludes text. *Reading habits* Few fathers ever read to their children. *Busyness* Busyness of fathers precludes reading together.
	"We are used to reading at home. 7:45 p.m. an alarm goes, they get dressed for sleep. We read five days a week. At the weekend, it's going out to places. They are used to the routine".	Shared reading is a normal practice. Bedtime stories. Every weekday, not weekends.	Regular home reading. Time/place for stories.	
	"For us, before bedtime, daily from my imagination to tell them stories, but this was the first time to read from the book. They enjoyed it more".	Oral storytelling at bedtime.	Frequent oral story telling. Children's enjoyment of being read to. Time/place for stories.	
	"I used to rely on fables and stuff I created from my imagination; it wasn't official stories with all elements. I tell them sometimes at night, before bedtime".	Telling traditional stories. Telling made-up stories. Bedtime.	Oral storytelling. Time/place for stories.	
	"My son would always ask me to read, but I'm busy, I'm travelling, or need to go somewhere. Or they're going somewhere at the weekend. After coming back from school they are exhausted. I hardly have time to sit and do other stuff, I even forgot about this meeting and joined late.".	Child wanted father to read. Lack of time. Father busy with travel. Children tired after school.	Children want to be read to. Busy father. Tired children. Lack of time to read.	

A second theme from the discussions with participants is that of emotional closeness to their children when reading, which impacts upon wellbeing. This was expressed most completely by a father in FG4 who explained that,

> As a father I never thought about being close to my kids; my concern was only to provide for them. So, when I started reading with them, and they became engaged, we discussed things, and they started asking questions. I now know what they need and want; they felt more comfortable and at ease. (FG4)

Another father expressed a poignant wish to learn how to build a stronger relationship with his children in the context of shared reading, as follows:

> So, I'd like to start from the beginning to understand how to bond and strengthen the relationship between you and your kid and you try to direct him in the right direction where he will be a good asset to his country in the future. (FG4)

A third salient theme was concern about their children's excessive screen time, which distracts from reading. One father said, "Before I read . . . for him, he was playing with the iPad. I took the iPad from him, please stop, now I have something better than the iPad. I will read a story for you" (FG1). Another parent in the same group remarked that "it's better than the phone" (FG1), while a father in FG 4 observed that he "noticed that kids are mostly shy and introverted since they remain on the devices for long". Similarly, in FG5, a father explained that "I give them half an hour to 40 min of screen time; I control the Smart TV, and once the timing is off, the TV shuts down immediately, and they become in the mood for reading".

Fourthly, fathers discussed the languages that they used to read the storybooks for their children. Most reported reading in Arabic, and some reported that their children, in turn, took the opportunity to read in English for them, as seen in FG3, for example, when a father mentioned that "I read the story in Arabic for them and tried to be funny with them. And they started to do the same with me in English". Another father in FG2 remarked about reading with his trilingual child that "It's nice that he can switch between languages at the same time". One father saw bilingualism as problematic, however, remarking that "the problem at home is that we speak two languages. I am married to a foreign mother. I try to speak to her in Arabic, but she speaks English" (WS4). Overall, fathers said that they mostly preferred to use Arabic for reading with their children, but they also accommodated English, as seen in the comment from a father in FG2 who noted that "for a child you need to have a story in Arabic, sometimes an English story".

3.6. Field Note Data

Data informing this paper also came from field notes made by project team members before, during, or immediately after each school-based workshop. These field notes tended to focus on the reactions of the school principals and school staff who hosted the workshop in their schools, and, as Emirati nationals, these personnel proved to be key informants for the project.

Principals warmly welcomed the project and made suitable facilities available to hold the workshops at their schools. At some schools, they joined with the research team and facilitator to welcome the fathers in person to the workshops. Some principals emphasized the importance of early reading development during the kindergarten years. The principals of School 1, School 2, and School 3b (two of the principals wanted to host a joint workshop, and these are referred to here as schools 3a and 3b) enthusiastically examined samples of the project's selected children's books during the research team's introductory visit. The principal of School 1 expressed a wish for more English books for father-child home reading. The reason for this became clear during a post-workshop visit to her school when it was mentioned that there was sufficient access to Arabic books for children, but the provision

of more books in English had been a recommendation in a recent school inspection report, and thus the project was viewed in part as potentially helping meet key literacy support performance indicators for her school.

In School 7, the principal spoke about the need to get fathers more involved in everyday support for their children's education because, she said, fathers tend to show up at school only for big events. This principal added that she believes that fathers' lack of involvement in their children's development is not because it is not a traditional part of Emirati family culture, but just due to a "lack of habit". She suggested that if fathers are encouraged and invited, and even expected to participate in their children's development, it will become a normal part of an Emirati father's role. She also observed that many mothers work nowadays, as well as fathers, and that the key to parental involvement in her experience is giving parents different timing options for participating in activities related to their children's development.

Another theme emerging from the field notes is the keenness of principals and their staff to involve mothers in the reading literacy project also. Although they welcomed the project wholeheartedly and made concerted efforts to invite fathers to the workshops, all the principals expressed interest in involving mothers as well as—or, in some cases, instead of—fathers. On the other hand, an Emirati teacher who had helped with the workshop arrangements at School 5 commented that even though she was disappointed that few fathers in her school actually attended the workshop, she was confident that participants would talk about the workshop with their brothers and friends, suggesting that there would be a male-to-male ripple effect from the project.

Regarding the availability of books for parent–child home reading, a field note from School 4 noted that a member of staff observed that the school does not have any suitable books in the library for children and parents to read at home. The staff member contrasted this with her experience as a parent of children in a private school where children are provided with a new book to read at home with their parents every week. She said that she would like to see this practice introduced in state schools and kindergartens, to ensure more uptake of parent–child shared reading at home amongst children in state schools. This point was corroborated by the response of fathers in the survey, with one in three fathers either unsure about what books to read or having few suitable books at home.

A final notable theme that emerged from the field notes was the prevalence reported by principals of separation and divorce amongst their parent body, suggesting that many fathers may spend very limited time with their children. At schools 3a and 3b, this factor was explained as an impediment to recruiting fathers for the workshops. At school 4, the principal indicated that as many as 30% of families in her city school's catchment area are divorced, and she linked children's weak emergent literacy in Arabic, as well as general academic and behavioral issues, to the relatively high number of non-Arabic speaking, foreign-born spouses of Emirati fathers of kindergarten children. In fact, this observation by school principals was corroborated by some fathers during the workshops, such as the father at School 3b who mentioned that he does not see his son regularly, and cannot read with him as he lives in another city.

4. Discussion

In this section, the project findings are drawn together in response to the aim of this paper: to examine the affordances and constraints of the project in developing shared reading between fathers and children in a multilingual context where home reading is not commonly practiced.

4.1. Affordances

In terms of affordances, overall, this project contributes to building family capital (Leithwood, 2022) related to literacy for a multilingual population, through the provision of workshops on shared reading for fathers with books provided in Arabic and English. The project is both reactionary (in responding to the literacy needs of the local community) and visionary (approaching literacy development in a novel way, in its context). As the first reported study of father-child interactive reading and wellbeing in the Middle East, overall, it had positive outcomes for stakeholders which point towards the value of extending such projects. From the fathers' perspectives, they reported that reading with their children brought them enjoyment and closeness, with some reporting enhanced wellbeing through reading with their young children for the first time. Parental enjoyment may lead to positive effects on their children's reading, as indicated by international research findings across several countries which show that children of parents who read for pleasure are better readers (Clavel & Mediavilla, 2020).

Notably, fathers who participated in the workshops were enthusiastic about shared reading and afterward reported enjoyment in engaging in reading with their children at home, whether they were in the habit of doing so or were new to parent–child reading. Moreover, fathers reported different ways of engaging their children in stories, including oral storytelling, as well as reading of the text. While this could be construed as a constraint, and although oral story telling is not a print-related activity, it can be seen as an affordance insofar as it contributes to the development of literacy-related skills such as narrative competence and comprehension (Al-Janaideh et al., 2022), as well as being an important part of Emirati cultural inheritance. Thus, when shared reading is viewed as a meaning-focused activity, story books are seen to act as a springboard for oral language development (Wang et al., 2023) which can support future literacy development. At the same time, the workshops sought to convey to fathers the many cognitive and linguistic advantages of reading texts for pleasure with their children.

An additional aspect of this project was its dual focus on shared reading for father-child wellbeing. The socio-emotional benefits of shared adult-child reading are becoming increasingly apparent in the literature (for example, Schapira & Aram, 2020; Sun et al., 2024). Indeed, in the survey, fathers expressed a belief that reading helps build a closer relationship with their children. Furthermore, they believed that parent-child reading could support their children's socio-emotional development, while helping their child to learn to read, to acquire new knowledge, and to succeed academically. Nevertheless, only one in three fathers in the pre-workshop survey said that they actually enjoy reading with their children, perhaps because the idea of reading as a pleasurable activity is a novel one for many of the participants in this Gulf context and will take time to become an embedded practice, although most fathers recognized that their children enjoyed being read to.

Within multilingual Emirati homes where Emirati Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and English are used to varying degrees, with Emirati Arabic reported by fathers as being most widely used, the books provided by the project afforded opportunities to develop all the languages of their children. The gradual transition from the spoken dialect of the home (Emirati Arabic) to the formal Arabic of schooling (Modern Standard Arabic) is a key feature of early childhood education in the Arab world (Ribeiro Daquila, 2020), and home reading can support this, as well as supporting Arabic language development in general. One aspect of this was that the fathers of children who lived with mothers who did not speak Arabic especially enjoyed the opportunity to read with their children in Arabic. With English being taught from kindergarten onwards, and in some such schools being an additional language of teaching, translanguaging opportunities across Arabic and English

also arose in the project, for example, when fathers reported that they read in Arabic and their children responded in English.

4.2. Constraints

In terms of constraints, father-child reading is still quite a rare occurrence among this population of fathers, however. Fathers acknowledged a number of barriers to reading, the most common being a lack of time for parent–child reading at home. In common with research conducted elsewhere, most fathers reported that finding time to read with their children is a challenge for them, just as it is for fathers in the UK, for example (Swain et al., 2017). More child-friendly workplace policies in the UAE might help address this (Dickson et al., 2024). In addition, fathers reported a lack of children's books, and a lack of knowledge of how to read with their children, two constraints which the project sought to address through the selection and provision of books and the modeling of adult–child shared reading in the workshops.

Another challenge faced in the implementation of the project lay in the low number of fathers who turned up for the post-workshop focus group sessions; yet, on the other hand, the number of fathers who opted to participate in the project exceeded the research team's expectations. In addition, while kindergarten principals were very welcoming and supportive of the project, there was an insistence in some schools that home reading with children was something for mothers to undertake, not fathers.

5. Conclusions

To conclude this paper, and to address the second research question, recommendations arising from the project are considered, while recognizing that the findings constitute a starting point for initially exploring the field. For similar emerging biliteracy and wellbeing intervention programs in multilingual societies where home reading is not a common practice and where few children's books may be available, the first recommendation is to provide families and schools with access to multiple children's books in their preferred languages for shared parent–child home reading for pleasure. These can be provided directly through nurseries, kindergartens, schools, or community centers, or as digital books on customized websites. For populations such as the Emirati population, books that focus on moral development and that contain culturally congruent settings and content are important, as are books in both Arabic and English for a bilingual society. There is also a need for books for this population and age group written wholly or partially in the Emirati Gulf Arabic dialect, or in standard Arabic that is easily rendered into Emirati Arabic by adult readers. Contemporary books that focus on aspects of children's socio-emotional development are also important, with principals expressing concern about the negative emotional impact of divorce on children and fathers too, recognizing the importance of books for socio-emotional development. In a culture with strong oral traditions, storytelling by parents, with or without books as prompts or stimuli, should also be encouraged as it can contribute to literacy development.

Secondly, the inclusion of both fathers and mothers in home reading programs is recommended, explicitly providing a variety of timings for such meetings, and perhaps different times for mothers and fathers if this is in line with gender-segregation norms. As one school principal pointed out, the more fathers are expected and encouraged to attend workshops and information sessions in kindergartens, the more it will become a normal part of fathers' role; and the more fathers participate in reading-related awareness raising, the more they can be supported in engaging in father-child reading for their own benefit and that of their children.

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Note

[1] Arabic is a diglossic language, meaning that there is one standard form of Arabic that is used primarily for reading and writing (known as Modern Standard Arabic), and very different everyday spoken forms (or dialects) that vary from place to place. In the UAE, this dialect is known as Emirati Arabic.

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English Immersion as Family Language Policy in Spanish Households: Agentive Practices and Emotional Investments

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Abstract: This article explores English immersion as a type of family language policy in the Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha. Although the field of family language policy (FLP) has exponentially grown in the last decade to include a range of multilingual contexts across the world, the policies regarding the use of English in monolingual Spanish households have received little attention. Due to the global spread of English, Spanish families invest in their children's language education by maximizing opportunities for exposure to English inside and outside the home. This sociolinguistic ethnography of a group of 15 monolingual Spanish families with no to advanced English proficiency explores the interplay of English language ideologies, language socialization practices, and emotional investments in narratives of language experiences. This article discusses the enactment of agency among these families to sustain English immersion, which is driven by families' English learning trajectories, professional development identities, and affective stances shaping lived experiences with English. Two main research questions organize this article: (1) How do Spanish families envision, manage, and implement English immersion practices? (2) How do these English immersion policies shape the sociolinguistic order at home and beyond for their children? Based on the findings provided by narratives of language experiences among these families, this study addresses the tensions and dilemmas related to English immersion in the field of family language policy.

Keywords: English immersion; family language policy; narrative; agency; emotional investments

1. Introduction

In recent years, the fervent pursuit of English language proficiency has swept across Spain, captivating families from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This surge, often referred to as "English frenzy", denotes a widespread enthusiasm and dedication to mastering the English language beyond mere educational requirements. One of the most obvious examples of Spaniards' investments in English has been the extensive implementation of CLIL-type Spanish/English bilingual education programs in the 17 autonomous regions of the Spanish state. This model of bilingual education has been approached by Spanish and international researchers from different educational and applied linguistic perspectives, using a variety of research methodologies and involving crucial stakeholders that form a growing community of bilingual education experts and practitioners. For example, since 2017, the Spanish Association of Bilingual Education (EBSpain) has garnered growing interest among foreign language researchers, teachers, and lay citizens in each of its annual meetings. This burgeoning interest among Spanish families in English language acquisition from early childhood, even extending to prenatal stages, has also been commercially capitalized upon by certain English language schools or academies throughout Spain. Similar to other international contexts, the pervasive English frenzy, sustained by the ideology of the "promise of English" (Park 2010, 2011), has propelled these families to adopt various family language policies (Curdt-Christiansen 2018; King et al. 2008), fostering and sustaining English immersion spaces for their children.

This article explores the multifaceted phenomenon of the English frenzy in Spain by analyzing English immersion as a type of family language policy sustained by desires,

anxieties, and future investments related to the omnipresent role of English in Spanish families. Drawing from narrative data collected as part of an international project on English immersion practices among middle and upper-middle-class families from the south-central (Castilla-La Mancha) and north-east (Catalonia) autonomous communities of Spain, as well as transnational families residing in Southampton and Bristol, U.K., this article discusses two main research questions. RQ1: How do Spanish families envision, manage, and implement English immersion practices? RQ2: How do these English immersion policies shape the sociolinguistic order at home and beyond for their children? By understanding narratives of language experiences as key discursive sites for the enactment of agency and the deployment of affective stances related to the role of English in the families under study, this study contributes to the well-established field of family language policy in underexplored monolingual contexts, where English has become the default aspirational language organizing family life.

This article is structured as follows. First, it provides an overview of the literature concerning English immersion as a family language policy, the English frenzy phenomenon, and bilingual parenting. Then, it contextualizes the data set from the Spanish region of Castilla-La Mancha. Following this, it introduces the data collection methods with a focus on how narratives were elicited in ethnographic interviews. Finally, our results highlight the agentive role of families in providing English immersion spaces for their children, as well as the emotional stances related to these decisions. The conclusions underscore the importance of further examining the role of English as a global language within the context of family life, both locally and in transnational settings.

2. English Immersion as Family Language Policy

The field of family language policy (FLP) has exponentially increased since the seminal article by King et al. (2008) defined this concept for the first time to refer to the systematic and intentional nature of language choices within the family context. Inspired by the Spolsky (2009) tripartite model that considers language policy as involving language ideologies, management, and practices, family language policy has now been consolidated and expanded to include critical perspectives, different epistemologies, and research methods against the backdrop of neoliberalism (Curdt-Christiansen and Palviainen 2023; Srhir and Poveda 2022; Lanza and Lomeu Gomes 2020). Family language policy addresses the intentional decisions and practices that families implement regarding the languages spoken and used within their household, as well as language planning and management decisions related to the use of languages outside the home (Schwartz et al. 2011). One of the key research areas of FLP is how language ideologies (Kroskrity 2004) inform language socialization practices (Ochs and Schieffelin 2011) in multilingual contexts. The set of values, beliefs, and ideas about the use of language, or simply "thoughts about language" (Kroskrity 2004, p. 496), regulates individuals' management and language socialization practices when it comes to fostering language maintenance in and outside the home. The field, as Srhir and Poveda (2022, p. 181) agree, needs to include the multiple arrays of "linguistic ecologies" (Mirvahedi 2021) in which families are immersed globally.

Much of the research on family language policy has focused on ideologies, management, and socialization practices in transnational, multilingual, heritage, and minority language contexts, with English often being one of the dominant societal languages under study. However, much less attention has been paid to the role of English as a global and aspirational language in monolingual families, as in the case of the Spanish families discussed in this article. English immersion as a type of family language policy has recently become a focus of research in the Spanish context (Codó and Sunyol 2024; McDaid 2020). These researchers agree that the linguistic regimentation of English in Spanish families is part of the intensifying desire and future aspirations of their children. This leads to the development of multiple strategies to fully expose to and immerse Spanish children and youth in English. In fact, non-formal English learning decisions such as enrolling children in extra-curricular English language classes, investing in stays abroad, English summer

camps, or hiring au pairs to help families recreate immersion experiences at home are part of the desire for achieving "a breathtaking English" (Sunyol 2021) that can ameliorate future job opportunities in the neoliberal market.

English immersion policies among Spanish families can, therefore, following Lanza and Wei (2016), be addressed as "formed and implemented in interaction with wider political, social, and economic forces" (p. 653). Similarly, as Curdt-Christiansen (2018) agrees, "FLP goes beyond parenting at home to encompass different domains related to family decisions, such as education, religion, and public linguistic space, as well as many different aspects of individual family members' everyday life, including emotions, identity, and cultural and political allegiances" (p. 423). In the case of English immersion, this article discusses how family decisions on maximizing opportunities for exposure to English among middle and upper-middle-class Spanish families need to be understood in relation to wider social processes of late modernity, such as the commodification of English in the market of neoliberal education, mobility aspirations, and flexible adaptations in an increasingly competitive labor market (Codó and Sunyol 2024).

3. "English Frenzy" as Ideology and Practice

"English frenzy" or *yeongeo yeolpung* in Korean (Park 2009) refers to the widespread ideology and practice of promoting or facilitating English language proficiency, often to the point of fervent enthusiasm, "desire" (Piller and Takahashi 2006) or obsession, even, for interactions with native speakers in monolingual settings (Relaño-Pastor and Fernández-Barrera 2019). The "English frenzy" ideology and practice convey, as Park (2009) explains, different language ideologies associated with the position of English in South Korean society and the Korean speaker as an English language learner, namely "self-deprecation, necessity, and externalization" (p. 3). The perception among South Koreans as lacking enough competence in English, together with the high regard for English as a necessary language to get ahead in the job market and the pervasive belief that English is the language of the 'other' and is better learned abroad, shape the position that English occupies in Korean society in general (p. 27).

Similarly, the collective aspirations related to the perceived benefits and opportunities associated with English proficiency have also been analyzed in other international contexts, such as the case of Japanese women in Australia. Piller and Takahashi (2006) analyze how the desire or "akogare" to learn English among Japanese women in Sydney, Australia, is also shaped by complex ideologies related to the "West, western men, and ELL (English Language Learning)" (p. 60). Studies on why and how people around the world wish to learn English, following renowned research on linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992, 2010), are still scarce to date, according to Piller and Takahashi (2006).

In this article, the exploration of English immersion as a family language policy can be situated within the framework of the English frenzy ideology and desire for the best English proficiency for Spanish children and teenagers, aiming at "the naturalization of English as a skill for the future (Patiño-Santos and Poveda 2022, p. 167). In fact, previous sociolinguistic ethnography research on Spanish–English bilingual education in Castilla-La Mancha (Relaño-Pastor 2018a) and Catalonia (Codó and Patiño-Santos 2018) analyzed dominant language ideologies surrounding English language learning in state-run and semi-private secondary schools in these regions. They found that Spanish families perceived bilingual programs in these regions as falling short of meeting their expectations regarding the acquisition of English. Therefore, dominant discourses about "bilingualism at school is not enough" or "children do not learn English nor subject content in English well" were commonplace in these two ethnographic contexts. In addition, the perception that bilingual programs in these regions could not warrant the desired English proficiency among Spanish families resulted in a variety of family policies to invest in English inside and outside their homes. English language proficiency was perceived not only as a practical skill but also as a symbolic gift, a testament to good parenting, and a forward-thinking solution for ensuring enhanced job opportunities for Spanish children and youth.

Along similar lines, the English frenzy ideology is also related to the construct of investment in second language learning, first put forward by Norton in the 1990s and later expanded by Darvin and Norton (2015) to include "the demands of a more mobile and digital world, in which language learners move in and out of online and offline contexts" (Darvin and Norton 2015, p. 379). This model of investment "locates [investment] at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology, in order to provide a window on the ways in which structures of power work, while finding opportunities for language learners to exercise agency" (p. 379). English investments will be analyzed in this paper as they intersect with English language ideologies and foster a variety of practices to maximize exposure to English among the Spanish families in our study. The English frenzy ideology not only manifests in a variety of practices but also prompts desired investments—financial, emotional, transcultural, and linguistic, among others—to fulfill what Park (2010, 2011, 2016) refers to as "the promise of English". The collective aspiration among Spanish families is to realize the perceived benefits and opportunities associated with English proficiency, as shall be discussed in the narratives analyzed in this article.

4. Bilingual Parenting as Family Language Policy

Bilingual parenting as a family language policy has become popular across different international contexts, fostered by the rapid proliferation of websites, blogs, and social media platforms that provide advice and parental support on how to better raise bilingual children around the globe. Researchers like Piller and Gerber (2021) agree on how bilingual parenting has become mainstreamed and "constitutes a feature of the general parenting advice and self-help literature", being "incorporated into broader discourses of what it means to be a 'good' parent" (p. 622). According to Schalley and Eisenchlas (2020), bilingual parenting in English-dominant societies is considered a key policy for language maintenance and the prevention of minority language loss. In terms of gender, recent work by Torsh (2022) highlights that heritage language maintenance (HLM) is often an invisible, demanding task predominantly shouldered by mothers, driven by intensive mothering expectations, and pertinent to both migrant and non-migrant mothers in diverse linguistic families in Australia. Additionally, bilingual parenting has been addressed in various other communities, highlighting its importance in maintaining linguistic diversity globally. In the context of Spanish in the U.S., a study by King and Fogle (2006) discusses parental anxiety about promoting additive Spanish–English bilingualism for their children using and by teaching Spanish when it is not the language of the home or the dominant language in society. They conclude that families in their study positioned themselves positively to additive bilingualism, as linked to the identity of "good parents". In contrast, in contexts where English is learned as a foreign language, bilingual parenting research as a family language policy is still scarce. Li et al. (2022) examined bilingual parenting in monolingual Beijing, where Putonghua as the lingua franca was challenged by the increasing visibility of English, motivated by the Chinese government as a gateway to "international trade, globalization, and economic development" (p. 3376). Their survey data show how the "belief–practice gap" (p. 3385) is more accentuated than expected, and parental beliefs about the promotion of bilingualism at home did not necessarily translate into bilingual parental practices. Similarly, bilingual parenting has also been researched from ethnographic perspectives in the Korean context. Seo (2021) studied one Korean family longitudinally for 2.5 years in Seoul and analyzed the language ideologies and practices involved in the recreation of "artificially created English-rich home environments" (p. 111). In this case, having both parents as Korean English teachers fostered aspirations for English proficiency in their children, socializing them into the ideology of English as a facilitator of upward mobility and self-efficacy (p. 119).

In Spain, bilingual parenting, particularly as an English immersion practice within predominantly monolingual Spanish-speaking households, is a recent area of research with scarce international visibility. This article aims to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon through a (socio)linguistic ethnographic lens, focusing on the agency

of parents and the emotional and moral dimensions that underpin their commitment to English language policies at home. Previous research on discourses surrounding Spanish–English bilingualism in the Castilla-La Mancha region has highlighted the proactive role of primarily middle-class families in the promotion of English learning spaces for their children (Relaño-Pastor 2018a). Motivated by their dissatisfaction with existing bilingual programs, these families have implemented various home-based practices aimed at fostering their children's English language proficiency (p. 586). In the region of Catalonia, Codó and Sunyol (2024) have analyzed the emerging discourses of Catalan families about Spanish youth mobility abroad. Furthermore, Patiño-Santos and Mansfield (forthcoming) have explored how Spanish–Catalan-speaking mothers who have previously lived in the U.K. provide English immersion spaces for their children upon return to Catalonia. In other international contexts, English immersion has been addressed ethnographically by attending to the role of dual-language programs in multilingual schools in Switzerland (Garrido and Codó 2024). Similarly, the use of English as a third language has been studied in multilingual Russian-speaking families across Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden (Karpava et al. 2024). The results of this study indicate that English usage is increasing among children in all these countries, and parents recognize English as a lingua franca across all five countries. The following section describes the methods and data collection procedure used in this study.

5. Methodology

This study was designed as a critical sociolinguistic ethnography (CSE) of English immersion policies among middle-/upper-middle-class Spanish families in the regions of Castilla-La Mancha (CLM) and Catalonia, including a set of Spanish transnational families in the U.K. (Bristol and Southampton) who had moved to these locations as part of the intense desire for immersion experiences abroad. CSE (Copland and Creese 2015; Heller 2011; Martín Rojo 2010) addresses linguistic practices, including narratives of English immersion experiences under discussion, in relation to wider social processes and circulating discourses that play a key role in ethnography (Patiño-Santos 2019; Relaño-Pastor 2018b). The results presented in this article come from data collected from in-depth sociolinguistic interviews with a group of 15 families from the CLM region.

5.1. Participants

The families in this study were recruited as part of the international project ENI-FALPO[1]. These families were initially reached out to through personal contacts established by members of the research team. Some of them, mothers in particular, had previously participated in a sociolinguistic ethnography of different types of bilingual programs in the region, and they were contacted once more to participate in this current project. Our aim was to include families who were implementing English immersion practices inside and outside the home to understand the language ideologies informing English language socialization processes. Table 1 below includes the sociolinguistic profiles of the participating families and their FLP practices in/out of the home. The identities of all family members have been anonymized using pseudonyms.

Table 1. Sociolinguistic profile and FLP practices.

Family Participant	Education/ Profession	Children	Home Languages	English Certificates	FLP Practices (In/Out)	
1. Alma (Mo) *	University/ English Teacher	Manuel (11)	Spanish/ English	C1	-English lunches -English Homework -TV shows -Digital devices (cooking, dancing, singing)	-English academy -Bilingual school
2. Marga (Mo)	University/ Surgeon	Nika (14) Alfonso (11)	Spanish	B2	-TV shows	-English academy -Bilingual school -Immersion summer camps Ireland (2 weeks) -Immersion school program (6 weeks)
3. Laura (Mo)	University/ English Teacher	María (9) Alba (6)	Spanish/ English	C2	-TV shows -Digital devices (games, songs, homework, cooking, crafts) -Drama -Reading	-Family travel (Ireland, England, France, Portugal)
4. Pilar (Mo) Single Mom	University/ English Teacher	Luis (5)	Spanish/ English	C1	-TV shows -Au-pair -English helper -Crafts and games	-Family travel (England)
5. Teresa (Mo)	University/ English–French Teacher	Alina (9)	Spanish/ English	C1	-TV shows -Lunch, dinner -Digital devices (games, songs, crafts)	-Family travel (United States) -English academy -Bilingual school
6. Fátima (Mo)	University/ English Teacher	Pedro (3) Antonio (1)	Spanish/ English	C1	-Speaking (OPOL) -Digital (Games, songs) -TV shows -Picture books	-English playgroups
7. Álvaro (Fa) *	University/ Surgeon	Paco (15)	Spanish		-None	-Bilingual school -Immersion school program Ireland (4 weeks) -Immersion school year abroad (United States) -Family travel (U.K.)

Table 1. *Cont.*

Family Participant	Education/ Profession	Children	Home Languages	English Certificates	FLP Practices (In/Out)	
8. Tania (Mo)	University/ Social worker	Gabriela (12) Fede (7)	Spanish	None	-Digital devices (Duolingo, songs, shows, homework)	-English academy
9. Marta (Mo)	University/ Math Teacher	Sofía (12) Ricardo (9) Lidia (6)	Spanish/ English	C2	-TV shows -Digital devices (reading, songs, games, crafts, homework) -Conversation with English speakers	-Family travel (U.K., U.S.) -English academy
10. Amparo (Mo)	University/ Translator	Jimena (15 Javi (13) Marco (11)	Spanish/ English/ Dutch Self-identified as multilingual.	C2 C2 (Dutch/German)	-Digital (games, shows, homework) -TV shows	-Immersion summer programs U.K. (4 weeks) -Immersion school year abroad Ireland -Family travel (U.K., France, Germany, Nerthelands)
11. Juan Luis (Fa)	University/ Architect	Elsa (10)	Spanish	None	-Digital (songs, games, homework)	-English academy
12. Nerea (Mo)	University/ Doctor	Manuela (16) Alma (14)	Spanish	None	-TV shows -Digital (books, songs, games, homework)	-Bilingual school -Immersion summer camps (U.K.)
13. Celinda (Mo)	University/ Nurse	Juana (14) Antonia (12)	Spanish	B1	-Digital (games, shows, homework) -TV shows -Babysitter with a C2	- Bilingual school -English academy -International camping trips in Spain -Family travel abroad (U.K, France, Norway)
14. Lola (Mo)	University/ English Teacher	Lorena (7)	Spanish/ English	C1	-Only English -Digital (games, songs, books) -Picture books	-Bilingual school -English playgroups
15. Rosa (Mo)	University/ Translator	María (10) Adriana (8)	Spanish/ English Self-identified as bilingual.	C2	-Cooking -Digital (games, songs, books) -English only picture books	-Bilingual family (contact with grandparents in Ireland) -Family trips (Ireland, U.K.) -Friends in New Zealand

* Mo: Mother; * Fa: Father.

5.2. Materials and Procedure

The interviews were conducted in Spanish using the video conferencing application Microsoft Teams between February and December 2021. They lasted from thirty minutes to one hour in most cases. Given the restrictions imposed by the pandemic in 2021, we resorted to online interviewing to gather the corpus of the narrative this article is based on. All interviews were transcribed from October 2021 to March 2022, following transcription conventions proposed by Sacks et al. (1974) in Appendix A. They were first analyzed thematically to identify the main topics related to English immersion ideologies and language socialization practices as reported by the families involved in this study. Following established methodologies for the situated and interactional analysis of narratives elicited in sociolinguistic interviews (Ochs and Capps 2001; De Fina 2003; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011; Relaño-Pastor 2014, 2018a; Patiño-Santos 2018), after the main themes related to English immersion were analyzed, a subset of narratives focusing on language socialization practices and beliefs regarding English language learning was selected. To better understand the interrelationship between language ideology and the practice of English immersion within Spanish families, narrative analysis was conducted through the lens of the "dimensional perspective" suggested by Ochs and Capps (2001), with particular attention paid to the moral stance or "narrators' perspectives on events and the moral meanings associated with them" (p. 18). Drawing upon the concept of "stance-taking" proposed by Jaffe (2009), the narrative analysis uncovered parents' attitudes towards the incorporation of English into daily routines, as well as their perceptions of future challenges, aspirations, and desires for their children.

The subsequent section presents the findings that address the two primary research questions guiding this study: (1) How do Spanish families envision, manage, and implement English immersion practices? (2) How do these English immersion policies shape the sociolinguistic order at home and beyond for their children?

6. Results

6.1. Enacting Agency for English Immersion Language Socialization Practices in Narrative

The analysis of the narratives of English immersion experiences among Spanish families (Table 1) displayed a wide range of practices inside and outside the home. The sociolinguistic profile of these families included monolingual parents who declared no to advanced English proficiency (C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)). Only two families in our corpus self-identified as bi-/multilingual in Spanish–English and Spanish–English–Dutch–German, respectively. All of them shared the language ideology of English being "the most important language to learn in the world", together with the firm belief that the best way to learn English requires authentic exposure to English by means of immersion experiences. In order to achieve the English-language goal, these families enacted their agency in the narrative. Agency, following linguistic anthropologist Ahearn (2010), is defined as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act". In narrative research, the agency is co-constructed through interaction between researchers and participants (Relaño-Pastor 2014, 2018b; Patiño-Santos 2018). In narrative research, agency is key to understanding individuals' positioning towards the narrated events, as well as emotional and moral stance-taking, which will be discussed in the next section.

The following narrative excerpts reveal how these families, mothers except for two fathers, displayed their agency by choosing English immersion activities inside and outside their homes.

6.1.1. Enhancing English Immersion through Digital Media

Spanish families agreed on the importance of digital media for immersing their children in English. They agreed on how lucky they were to have access to so many different resources online. Despite their self-assessed English proficiency, all families emphasized their proactive roles in enabling their children's access to digital English learning. The

spectrum of activities they engaged in encompassed English literacy activities, songs, games, cooking recipes, watching TV sitcoms and movies, reading digital picture books, participating in arts and crafts, engaging in dramatic performances, and using homework websites, among others. The following two narrative excerpts exemplify this agentive role among parents:

Narrative excerpt (1)

Teresa: la televisión apoyó mucho:: esos primeros años porque intentaba pues eso que la televisión la viese lo poco que veía lo lo hiciese siempre en inglés eh jugaba conmigo en inglés/e::h juegos a través de bueno usando el idioma/y y siempre intenté que esos primeros cinco años fuesen como bastante:: bien estructurados y que ella e::h lo entendiera como algo que hacía a parte del ambiente de su casa.	Teresa: TV helped a lot during those early years because I tried to ensure that she watched it, the little she watched, always in English. She played with me in English and played games using the language. I always tried to make those first five years fairly well-structured and for her to understand it as something apart from the environment of her home.

Narrative excerpt (2)

Rosa: cuando tuvimos a las niñas quizá de forma un poquito artificial decidimos pues hablarles en inglés hablarles en inglés y desde que nació la mayor pues lo hemos hecho así más al principio de sus vidas/que quizá ahora que ya pues tenemos más mezcla pero al principio sí que fue algo más pues de hablar puramente en inglés en casa e::hm y bueno pues nos hemos servido de muchas ayudas que hemos encontrado a nuestro alcance/creo que vivimos en una época privilegiada en cuanto a medios/de audiovisuales/y sobre todo pues en casa nos hemos servido muchísimo de la literatura infantil y también de pues de juegos/de canciones/canciones muchísimas ha sido un medio muy muy natural en casa de adquisición del inglés pues las canciones a los dos nos ha gustado mucho cantarles/y pues al final hemos buscado medios pues muy naturales pues si había que cocinar pues cocinar/pues si había que pues cualquier actividades que hacíamos pues eh se convertía en vehículo de comunicación entre todos/normalmente era la lengua habitual.	Rosa: when we had the girls, perhaps a bit artificially, we decided to speak to them in English, to speak to them in English, and since the oldest was born, we have done it more at the beginning of their lives, which perhaps now that we have more of a mix, but at the beginning, it was something more purely speaking in English at home, and well, we have used many aids that we have found within our reach. I think we live in a privileged era in terms of audiovisual media, and especially at home, we have relied heavily on children's literature and also on games, songs—many songs have been a very natural means of acquiring English in our home because we both enjoyed singing to them a lot. And in the end, we looked for very natural means, so if we had to cook, we cooked, if there were any activities we did, they became a means of communication among all of us—usually it was the usual language.

The narratives provided by Teresa and Rosa show how the use of digital devices was central to providing English immersion spaces at home. Drawing from their own biographies as English language learners, these mothers self-reflected on the importance of providing their children with early English exposure by taking advantage of the digital era. The following subsection includes vivid narratives that exemplify the agentive role of a cohort of seven mothers who worked as English language educators.

6.1.2. English Teachers for English Only at Home

Among the mothers we interviewed, a group of seven mothers taught English in primary (five of them) and higher education (two of them). The professional identities and language learning trajectories of each one of them shaped the language policies and practices regarding the use of English in their lives. All of them agreed on the importance of creating immersion spaces at early ages, some even before their babies were born. Four of them narrated how they had informed themselves about the benefits of early bilingualism and had made conscious decisions about implementing English-only policies at home, including OPOL strategies, even though English was an additional language for all of them. Given their professional backgrounds, they all felt very confident in providing language socialization spaces at home. In the following narrative excerpt, Lola positions herself as being actively involved in her 7-year-old daughter's English language education:

Narrative excerpt (3)

Lola: sí pues nada en mi caso pues (.) e:::h decidí hablarles a mis hijos en en inglés desde que:: nacieron/incluso antes/desde que estaban en la tripita/y más que nada pues e::h lo primero por por mi pasión hacia la lengua inglesa/por ofrecerles a ellos una oportunidad a nivel cognitivo y social/porque sé que tiene muchos beneficios/en todos esos ámbitos/(.) y::: elegimos la opción one parent one language one person one language porque::: había leído mucho sobre ello y en mi caso pues en casa solamente yo conozco:: la lengua inglesa entonces esto a nivel familiar pues creó algún conflicto sobretodo al principio aunque:: mínusculo pero sí que es verdad que hay momentos de comunicación donde las personas que no comprenden la lengua inglesa pues me han pedido que por favor que hablásemos en español porque no entendían qué estaba pasando.	Lola: Well, in my case e:::h I decided to speak to my children in English from the moment:: they were born /even before, from when they were in the womb/primarily it was because of e:::h my passion for the English language/to offer them a cognitive and social opportunity/because I know it has many benefits in all those areas/8.) and::: we chose the one parent one language approach because::: I had read a lot about it, and in my case I'm the only one in the family who knows English. This caused some conflict within the family, especially at the beginning, although minimal. However, there are indeed moments of communication where people who don't understand English have asked me to please speak Spanish because they didn't understand what was happening.

The fostering of this bilingual parenting policy and practice was also reinforced by additional digital and non-digital literacy practices in English at home. In the case of the English teachers who participated in our study, these practices were highly valued as they additionally provided the development of positive affective stances towards the English language and culture. Lola continues her narrative by talking about how she successfully managed to develop a positive connection with her daughter:

Narrative excerpt (4)

Lola: intento::: e::h rentabilizar los recursos al máximo y siempre que están conmigo/incluso cuando no están conmigo yo le digo al papá:: y a la familia que les pongan los dibujos en inglés/que intenten poner canciones en inglés (.) y lo que hemos hecho en casa pues es una inmersión lingüística total (.) cantamos en inglés leemos a diario porque la lectura sí que es verdad que hace muchísimo juega un papel muy importante/en el desarrollo de la gramática el vocabulario la adquisición de estructuras/y luego además en mi caso nos ha venido muy bien porque además del gusto:: de mi hija por las películas y las historias pues nos sirve luego para la comunicación/hemos creado un vínculo muy bonito porque nos gusta mucho representar historias/entonces ella ha sacado su lado muy muy creativo/entonces cuando estamos sin hacer nada pues ella misma me dice vamos a jugar a blancanieves venga yo soy la bruja yo soy blancanieves y la verdad es que a nivel comunicativo y emocional ha nos ha unido mucho (.)	Lola: I try::: to maximize resources to the fullest, always whenever they are with me/or even when they are not, I ask her dad::: and the family to put on cartoons in English/to try to play English songs (.) what we've done at home is total language immersion (.) we sing in English we read daily because reading plays a very important role in grammar development, vocabulary, and acquiring structures/additionally, in my case, it has been very beneficial because apart from my daughter's interest:: in movies and stories, it helps us in communication/we've created a beautiful bond because we love to act out stories so she has become very creative/when we have nothing to do, she herself says, "Let's play Snow White. I'll be the witch, I'll be Snow White". And truthfully, it has brought us together a lot in terms of communication and emotions (.)

These language socialization practices not only facilitated English language acquisition but also fostered a deep emotional connection to the English language and its cultural manifestations (Kramsch and Zhu 2016). In addition to the aforementioned strategies, some of these educators recounted their involvement in bilingual dramatizations, bringing cultural stories from English-speaking countries to life at home. This is the case of Laura, whose biography as an English language learner was marked by her humble family background

and her realization that learning English was a way to connect with "the world out there". In her daily professional practice teaching English to adults in the local Center for Adult Education, Laura believes that the socializing effect through games, songs, dramatized readings, and cultural experiences in English is far more important than language socialization to English grammar and vocabulary. Her own language ideologies about how one can acquire a second language were crucial in the implementation of her own practices as an English teacher and a mother at home. In addition, Laura believed in creating anxiety-free learning spaces to facilitate the acquisition of English. She narrates it as follows:

Narrative excerpt (5)

Laura: =entonces yo por mi experiencia como profesora he visto que el mayor problema el el mayor bloqueo emocional que tiene la gente y el mayor choque con el inglés/es que tienes como una especie de rechazo frontal y que además emocionalmente te produce estrés/te produce ansiedad/te produce no/porque es una cosa que has tenido que estudiar/obligado sin entender y sin disfrutar Author: =ya Laura: =y mi concepción de los idiomas es totalmente distinta o sea no puedes como imponer o aprende esto y estudia y haz no se cuantos ejercicios y tal entonces es verdad que mis niñas para nada son bilingües para nada hablan inglés estupendamente pero es verdad que no tienen ese miedo/ni ese rechazo/tienen ese cariño/y una cosa que me gusta mucho por ejemplo que yo lo he visto con Laurita con mi niña pequeña que acaba de cumplir seis años es que ella está jugando en español y de vez en cuando alguna palabrita alguna cosita lo dice en inglés con una pronunciación estupenda que yo digo de donde la ha sacado esta niña esta pronunciación que realmente yo no paso horas con ella enseñando el inglés pero yo veo que tiene en ese inglés inventado/la melodía/la entonación/las plosivas/típicas del inglés porque hay ciertos sonidos que se vinculan al inglés aunque ella esté hablando en español con acento ((risa)) lo que yo hago con mis niñas sobre todo que sientan la vinculación entre recuerdos positivos de alegría y de amabilidad porque yo quiero que vinculen el aprendizaje de un idioma en este caso del inglés o del francés con emociones positivas y con algo positivo para su vida y no como una imposición.	Laura: So, from my experience as a teacher, I've noticed that the biggest issue, the biggest emotional barrier people face, and the biggest clash with English, is this sort of frontal rejection. It emotionally stresses you out, causes anxiety because it's something you've had to study, obliged to without understanding or enjoying it. Author: I see. Laura: My conception of languages is completely different. You can't just impose or say "learn this", "study", and do so many exercises. It's true that my girls are not bilingual at all; they don't speak English wonderfully, but it's true that they don't have that fear or rejection. They have affection. One thing I really like, for example, that I've noticed with Laurita, my little girl who just turned six, is that she's playing in Spanish and occasionally, she says a word or something in English with excellent pronunciation. I wonder where she got this pronunciation from because I don't spend hours teaching her English, but I see that in that made-up English, she has the melody, the intonation, the plosives typical of English because there are certain sounds linked to English even though she's speaking in Spanish with an accent (laughter). What I do with my girls, especially, is to make them feel the connection between positive memories of joy and kindness because I want them to associate learning a language, in this case, English or French, with positive emotions and something positive for their lives, not as an imposition.

6.1.3. English Immersion Experiences Abroad

In addition to the digitalization processes and English-only policies that mothers narrated as central to fostering English immersion at home, the narratives related to stay-abroad experiences revealed a stronger connection between English language ideologies and agentive practices. All the interviewed families agreed that the best way to learn "good English" involved spending time abroad. McDaid (2020) analyzed how driven by the ideology of 'English frenzy', Spanish families had decided to "take the English problem into their own hands" (p. 1), contemplating Rugby English summer camps (summer camps where participants engage in activities related to both learning English and playing rugby)

in Ireland as one of the many different stay-abroad experiences for their children. In our interviews, summer camps in the U.K., Ireland, and the U.S. were among the most desired immersion experiences. The language ideologies linked to these immersion decisions stem from imaginaries related to the best financial investment and future-proofing strategies for their children. Beliefs about how "English is best learned abroad", "one needs to go abroad to learn the best English", or "learning English abroad benefits personal growth and professional opportunities" were the most pervasive narrative triggers in our interviews.

Two of the most affluent families in our data shared similar views on the opportunities granted by these English immersion experiences abroad. Marga, who worked as a cardiologist in the local hospital, and Álvaro, one of the two fathers we interviewed, were colleagues and agreed to be interviewed as well:

Narrative excerpt (6)

Álvaro: =vale/e:::h tanto mi mujer como yo lo teníamos muy claro (.) desde siempre hemos pensado que era importante salir fuera Author: aha Álvaro: =vale/sobre todo e:::h no tanto::: a ver que también eh fundamentalmente porque le abres una opción de formación laboral y cultural Author: =aha Álvaro: =y entre otras cosas por eso po:::r (.) porque le abres mucho el mundo (.) vale/desde::: siempre nos ha gustado tanto a mi mujer como a mi mucho viajar/ Author: uhm Álvaro =vale/y evidentemente pues es una de las opciones que te permite también el tema de seguridad en ti mismo a la hora de conocer a otra gente/otras culturas y otros países y bueno (.) Author: uhm Álvaro: eso por un lado y luego por el tema::: (.) e::h laboral de estudios eh pues las posibilidades de apertura al exterior que te brinda el inglés	Álvaro: =Okay/so:: both my wife and I were very clear about this (.) we've always thought it was important to venture out. Author: I see. Álvaro: =Okay/especially eh::: not so much::: well, partly because it fundamentally opens up vocational and cultural training opportunities. Author: =I see. Álvaro: =and among other things, that's why...(.) because it really broadens their horizons (.) okay/Both my wife and I have always::. liked traveling so much/ Author: Uhm Álvaro: Okay/and obviously, it's one of the options that also allows you to feel secure about yourself when meeting other people, other cultures, and other countries. And well (.) Author: uhm. Álvaro: On one hand, that, and then on the topic::: e:::h of education and jobs, well, the opportunities for international exposure that English offers

Narrative excerpt (7)

Marga: claro nosotros creemos que el inglés es algo más que una asignatura que es fundamental que los niños lo aprenda:::n (.) bien Author: y aprenderlo bien que::: que significaría? Marga: bueno aprenderlo bien significaría que los niños fueran bilingües que no lo son Author: y entonces ¿os planteasteis intervenir o actuar de alguna forma en concreto cuando nacieron los niños? Marga: =pues que el inglés era fundamental pero yo creo que los dos lo teníamos muy claro Author: por vuestra propia experiencia Marga: sí = claro Author: =y entonces Marga: =a mí me falta (.) yo he estado en Inglaterra pero aun así por más que he ido y ha sido de::: pequeña (.) y mi marido igual (.) dice que a él le falta = el vocabulario sabe muchísimo pero le falta hablar Author: le falta hablar Marga: =no somos capaces de habla::::r Author: fluidamente= Marga: =fluidamente Author: y qué cosas os plateasteis hacer con ellos de pequeños/ Marga: pue::s la tele Author: aha Marga: e:::h la tele y luego viajar con ellos ir a paíse:::s de habla inglesa Author: aha (.) y eso es un esfuerzo me imagino de tiempo/económico también Marga: e:::h bueno un esfuerzo de tiempo porque gastamos nuestras vacaciones en eso pero bueno realmente también son vacaciones a ver tampoco es que nos importe por ejemplo irnos tres semanas a Irlanda en vez de tres semanas a la playa=los niños van a los campamentos y nosotros hacemos turismo o descansamos Author: =aha (.) sí Marga: y bueno es un esfuerzo::: hombre económico es un esfuerzo claro Author: =sí Marga: =porque es caro	Marga: Of course, we believe that English is more than just a subject it's crucial for children to learn:: it (.) well. Author: And learning it well would mean? Marga: Well, learning it well would mean that children become bilingual, which they are not. Author: So, did you consider intervening or acting in any specific way when the children were born? Marga: =Well, that English was essential, but I think we both were very clear about it. Author: Based on your own experience. Marga: =Yes, of course. Author: And then? Marga: =Well, for me, I lack... I've been to England, but even so, as much as I've been there since I was young, and my husband too, he says he lacks... he knows a lot of vocabulary, but he lacks speaking Author: He lacks speaking? Marga: We are not able to speak fluently Author: Fluently Marga: Fluently Author: And what did you consider doing with them when they were little? Marga: Well, TV Author: I see Marga: And then traveling with them, going to English-speaking countries Author: I see. And that's an effort, I imagine, in terms of time and also economically. Marga: Well, it's a time effort because we spend our vacations on that, but well, they are really vacations; it's not like we mind going to Ireland for three weeks instead of three weeks at the beach. The children go to camps, and we do sightseeing or rest. Author: I see. Yes. Marga: And well, it's an economic effort, of course, because it's expensive

These narratives are situated within broader discussions surrounding the commonly recognized Spanish tendency toward self-deprecation, particularly when describing English proficiency, as highlighted by McDaid (2020). To challenge this prevalent belief among Spanish families, one effective approach is investing in immersion experiences abroad. Alvaro and Marga's accounts illustrate how such investments can help counteract self-deprecating attitudes by providing confidence-boosting, firsthand experiences in English-speaking environments.

6.2. Engaging in Future-Proofing in Narrative: Emotional Investments and Moral Stance-Taking

Following previous research on narrative analysis (Relaño-Pastor 2014, 2018b; Patiño-Santos 2018; De Fina 2003; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2011), which focuses on how emotional events trigger the narrator's moral positioning towards the events being narrated, this section discusses how families "do" future-proofing strategies related to English immersion in narratives. This includes dominant ideologies of "English as the language of a better future" and "aspirational family language policies" (Seals and Beliaeva 2023)

that guarantee an imagined future where English capital will open doors in the job market. The Spanish families we interviewed shared the belief that acquiring good English capital required not only financial investments but also emotional ones that are integral to good parenting.

The next long co-constructed narrative illustrates the case of Nerea, an anesthesiologist in the local hospital whose daughters Manuela and Alba (16 and 14, respectively, at the time of the interview) were part of a shared English immersion family project to raise them bilingually in English and Spanish. English, as Nerea explains, became a common project that involved private bilingual schools, preparation for English Certificates, English summer camps, the American Dual Baccalaureate program, and the use of English in digital media at home:

Narrative excerpt (8)

Author: en qué momento se convirtió::: el inglés central en vuestras vidas/ Nerea: e:::h en nuestro caso/sí que fue u:::n un proyecto común de familia porque desde::: que nacen las niñas prácticamente/a::: los tres años las empezamos a llevar los veranos de campamento que era totalmente en inglés [y bueno pues eso se fue haciendo hábito Author: [sí Nerea: pensábamos que abrirse::: a un mundo de bilingüismo e:::h en España es complicado e:::h porque no no se favorece/las televisiones pues doblan las películas/y que era como más complicado/y que la escuela todavía estamos por detrás de Europa y ambos sabíamos teniendo ciertas experiencias en Europa con los idiomas y bueno queríamos un poco esa::: esa mentalidad aperturista en cuanto al bilingüismo Author: claro y entonces buscabais la inmersión en inglés= Nerea: =sí para nosotros la buena inmersión pues es aquella en la que nadas como el pez en el agua en la que te encuentres tan a gusto como para que todo lo que huele a anglo te guste pues yo creo que ya has hecho una inmersión completa e:::h Author: =claro Nerea: =inmersión agua pez ((risa)) Author: ¿y os ha merecido la pena entonces? Nerea: =sí porque la verdad se han hecho muy independientes yo las veo::: (.) sí=por ejemplo es un pensamiento que tengo::: un poco si me pasara algo hoy es como que ya no estoy tan intranquila de que hay que seguir dándoles para mejorar /es la mejor herencia para su formación porque yo creo que ya se encontrarían más sueltas en la vida Author: ¿y qué sacrificios os ha conllevado? Nerea: = bueno el emocional y el económico también claro porque son cursos caros y por dos niñas se te puede ir un pico eh entre seis siete mil euros en un verano=para fomentar el inglés/pero merece la pena les ha dado::: pues otra madurez/otra independencia/no sé y son niñas que están valorando mucho el sobreesfuerzo que nos está suponiendo /somos padres trabajadores al fin y al cabo y yo no te voy a engañar/yo a veces tengo que comprar alguna guardia y a veces dices y cómo::: cómo las llevo yo este verano/entonces a lo mejor tengo que hacer esa labor de hormiguita desde septiembre porque no puedo::: [de golpe Author: claro Nerea: pero bueno ellas se dan cuenta de que hay desvelos=hay preocupaciones por nuestra parte y que esto para ellas es un premio que no lo pueden desaprovechar/que no se mezclen con españoles/que por favor es una cosa para ellas/yo lo que tenía que hacer ya lo he hecho Author: claro= Nerea: =y las herramientas que quieran aprovechar de lo que les damos que no lo malgasten es lo único que les digo por favor	Author: at what point did English become central in your lives? Nerea: Well::: in our case/it was indeed a common family project because practically from the moment::: the girls were born at around three years old we started taking them to summer camps that were entirely in English [and well, that became a habit. Author: Yes. Nerea: We thought that embracing a world of bilingualism in Spain e:::h is challenging because it is not encouraged/television channels dub movies/making it more complicated and schools are still lagging behind Europe. Both of us, having certain experiences with languages in Europe, wanted to adopt a more open-minded approach towards bilingualism. Author: I see so you sought immersion in English?= Nerea: =Yes, for us, good immersion is when you feel as comfortable as a fish in water, where you enjoy everything Anglo, I believe that's when you've done a full immersion= Author: of course Nerea: =immersion water fish ((laughs)) Author: and has it been worth it then? Nerea: Yes, because they have become very independent/that's how I see them:: yes, for example, it's a thought I have, if something were to happen to me today, I'm not as worried about having to keep pushing them to improve/it's the best legacy for their education because I think they would navigate life more confidently. Author: and what sacrifices has it entailed for you?= Nerea: =well, emotional and financial, of course, because the courses are expensive, especially for two girls. It can add up to quite a sum, between six to seven thousand euros in one summer to promote English. But it's worth it; it has given them:: well, another maturity, another independence. I don't know, and they are girls who value the extra effort it's taking us. We are working parents after all, and I won't lie to you/sometimes I have to cover an extra shift, and sometimes I wonder how I'll manage this summer. So maybe I have to start planning diligently from September because I can't manage it all at once. Author: =of course Nerea: But they realize that there are worries=there are concerns on our part and that this is a reward they shouldn't miss out on/that they shouldn't mix with Spanish kids, please/it's something for them/I've done what I had to do Author: of course= Nerea: =and the only thing I tell them is to make the most of the tools we provide them, not to waste them, please

In this narrative, Nerea provides an account of the ideologies, emotions, and sacrifices the family went through to foster English immersion experiences for their two girls since they were three years old. She positions herself and her husband as good parents who embarked on a common family bilingual project, with English as the central language shaping their lives. Nerea's investment in English is narrated as part of the "imagined future identities" or "the identities that people consider to be desirable identities for themselves and others when they imagine the future" (Seals and Beliaeva 2023, p. 502). The emotional investments (e.g., worries and concerns about organizing English immersion summer courses) as well as the financial ones (e.g., having to work extra hours and saving money ahead) are narrated as worthwhile future-proofing strategies that shape Nerea's daughters' identities. Despite all the sacrifices Nerea reports, she morally positions herself as a good parent who is satisfied with the best educational legacy she can provide for her daughters' education-that of English immersion experiences that will help, as she says, navigate their lives more confidently.

7. Concluding Discussion

The main goal of this study was to analyze English immersion as a family language policy among a group of fifteen middle-class Spanish families whose life projects included the presence of English. The narratives emerging from the sociolinguistic interviews, conducted as part of a collaborative critical sociolinguistic ethnography in three different contexts in Spain and the U.K., reveal how these families articulate language ideologies, management, and practices to integrate English in their home linguistic repertoires. As family language policy research has now prolifically demonstrated in other contexts, parental agency (Nandi 2018) is crucial for sustaining immersion experiences in both monolingual and multilingual settings.

In reference to our first research question, the narratives analyzed here depict Spanish families' decisions regarding their children's English education as a collective enterprise subjected to future-proofing strategies involving emotional and financial investments. The role of emotions and emotional stance-taking in narrating experiences of English immersion is central to implementing English immersion practices in the Spanish households examined in this article. As researched in the Australian context (Wang et al. 2023), language emotionality plays a crucial role in maintaining heritage languages at home among Chinese and African migrant families. When learners, especially children, are immersed in an emotionally supportive environment, they are more likely to feel secure and motivated to learn the language. Positive emotions such as joy, curiosity, and a sense of achievement can enhance cognitive processes, making language learning more enjoyable and less stressful. Conversely, negative emotions like anxiety or frustration can hinder progress, creating barriers to effective communication and comprehension.

This article has highlighted the gendered role of mothers in fostering English immersion, a critical yet often under-researched area in family language policy. In contexts such as the Australian one described by Torsh (2022), intensive mothering expectations are linked to normative, middle-class discourses of motherhood as the main agents of heritage language maintenance. In our study, mothers frequently assume primary responsibility for creating and maintaining English-rich environments at home. This role encompasses not only the practical aspects of providing educational resources and activities but also the emotional labor of offering encouragement and support to their children. By modeling language use, initiating conversations, and correcting mistakes with patience and care, mothers significantly contribute to their children's linguistic and cognitive development. Recognizing and valuing this gendered contribution is essential for understanding the dynamics of English immersion at home and for developing strategies that support and empower all caregivers in this pivotal educational role.

Similar to other sociolinguistic contexts where English is perceived as an aspirational language commodified to ensure future economic benefits, these families emphasized the central role of English in their lives. As Park and Wee (2012) agree, "English functions as a

sign in all aspects of social life in which people either use or talk about English" (p. 124). The families in our study narrated "the indexicality of English" immersion experiences at the intersection of emotional stances, the moral imperative of good parenting, and imaginaries of the potential benefits of life in a future English-speaking environment (Park and Wee 2012). The different types of investments in crafting their children's bilingual identities were displayed in the narratives as involving personal sacrifices that eventually will make a difference in their children's future.

Furthermore, regarding our second research question, the inclusion of English language socialization practices at home and the encouragement of socialization spaces outside the home changed the sociolinguistic order of these families as Spanish monolingual speakers. Even though they shared different sociolinguistic profiles as English speakers—based on their own experiences as English learners, the use of English in their profession, or the attempted recreation of English-only spaces at home—the incorporation of English as a global lingua franca produced similar tensions and dilemmas to those described in other transnational contexts (Lanza 2021; Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017).

Overall, the narratives of English immersion discussed here illuminate the multifaceted role that English plays in the lives of Spanish families within an increasingly digitalized society.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This article has provided valuable insights into how these immersion experiences articulate the daily lives and aspirations of these families. The narratives presented illustrate various ideologies and practices related to English immersion in this context. Moving forward, future research could benefit from daily observations, recordings, and detailed analysis of how these immersion practices manifest in other domestic settings. Ethnographic approaches offer invaluable opportunities to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities, illuminating their beliefs, practices, and interactions as they engage with these immersion strategies.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Given the absence of a social science ethical review board during the data collection phase at U, approval was sought from the Social Science Ethical Clearance Committee of U one of the collaborating universities in this project.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement: Due to privacy and ethical restrictions, no new data were created. The author cannot provide data directly to the journal unless clearance from the University of Castilla-La Mancha is granted.

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Appendix A. Transcription Conventions (Adapted from Sacks et al. 1974)

↑ rising intonation

↓ falling intonation

CAPS louder than the surrounding talk

. at the end of words marks falling intonation

, at the end of words marks slight rising intonation

– abrupt cutoff, stammering quality when hyphenating syllables of a word

! animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation

>< speech faster than normal
____ emphasis
::: elongated sounds
• hh inhalations
ha ha indicates laughter
uhm uh shows continuing listenership
°° soft talk
(0.3) time elapsed in tenths of seconds
(.) micropause
[ ] overlapping speech
(( )) nonverbal behavior
( ) non-audible segment
= no interval between adjacent utterances

Notes

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Albanian as a Heritage Language in Italy: A Case Study on Code-Switching within DP

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Abstract: In this pilot work, we are going to discuss several aspects concerning the Albanian language spoken in the Italian territory by immigrants of different generations. After an excursus on heritage languages in general, and Albanian as a heritage language in particular, we present the results of both a sociolinguistic and a linguistic survey conducted among some Albanian immigrants in Italy. The former aims at investigating the contexts of use of Albanian and Italian languages, the participants' competence in both of them and their attitude towards code-switching. The latter is focused on the participants' judgments of the acceptability of different types of mixed Italian–Albanian DPs, i.e., DPs where D and N are expressed in different languages, and the theoretical implications that emerge.

Keywords: heritage languages; Albanian; Italian; code-switching; mixed DPs

1. Introduction[1]

Italy and Albania are two countries that have a common history: they are divided only by a narrow strip of sea of approx. 75 miles and have a solid relationship. The contact between Italian and Albanian languages is ancient and well established, on both sides of the Adriatic sea. In ancient times, seven migratory flows led to the settlement of Albanian populations on the Italian territory, between the 15th and the 18th centuries (Mastroberti 2008). In current times, after the massive migration of the 1990s, many Albanian speakers live in Italy and are well integrated into the Italian social fabric; as a consequence, they have become more and more accustomed to the Italian language, sometimes to the detriment of Albanian, especially in regard to second-generation immigrants.

Hence, the present research aims at investigating, on the one hand, the sociolinguistic situation of the Albanian language spoken in Italy, as well as its relationship with Italian and the emergence of code-switching within the bilingual community; on the other hand, we will concentrate on some linguistic phenomena characterizing code-switching contexts, and in particular the acceptability of mixed DPs in bilingual discourse.

The first part of this work is devoted to sociolinguistic analysis. In particular, in Section 2 we will discuss the concepts of a heritage language and heritage speakers according to the most common definitions we find in the literature. In Section 3, we will summarize the history of the contacts between Albanian and Italian languages, while in Section 4 we will review some studies on Albanian as a heritage language. In Section 5, we will present our sociolinguistic survey, a questionnaire administered to 27 Albanian–Italian speakers, whose results will be outlined in Section 6.

The second part of this work is instead dedicated to linguistic analysis. First of all, in Section 7 we will discuss the concept and typologies of code-switching, as well as the main theories on this phenomenon. In Section 8, we will present the syntax of Italian and Albanian DPs, so that, in Section 9, we can introduce the phenomenon of mixed DPs and the possible D-N combinations which may emerge. In Section 10, we will outline our linguistic survey, an Acceptability Judgment Task administered to eight bilingual speakers, whose results will be presented in Section 11. Finally, in Section 12 we will discuss the results

obtained by the two surveys and the interesting interplay of sociolinguistic and linguistic factors that has emerged from our research.

2. An Overview of Heritage Languages

In the literature, we find different definitions of heritage languages (HLs), each of which focuses on different aspects of the acquisition process, as well as different definitions of heritage speakers (HSs).[2]

One of the most comprehensive descriptions is given by Rothman (2009, p. 156), who defines a heritage language as a language spoken at home, or however is readily available to young children, which is not the dominant language of the society in which they live. According to the author, a heritage language is acquired through the interaction with naturalistic input, like monolingual L1 acquisition; unlike the latter, however, there may be quantitative and qualitative differences in the heritage language input, which, together with the influence of the dominant language of the society (also in formal education), may result in an arrested development of the HL in children and in cases of attrition in adult speakers.

The difficulty in defining a heritage speaker also relates to the great variability observed, which depends on different sociolinguistic sources of variation (Aalberse and Muysken 2013), among which are the age of acquisition of the two languages and, even more important, the domains of language use: whether the HL is used only at home or, rather, in a larger linguistic community (i.e., in the street, in shops, at work or even at school).

It is worthwhile underlining that the quantity of input of the HL is not the sole potential reason for what has been labeled "incomplete acquisition". As Kupisch and Rothman (2018) point out, the opportunity to receive a formal education in the HL clearly leads to a different outcome of linguistic development. Crucially, bilingual children do not often have the possibility to benefit from schooling in their HL, due to the linguistic and educational policy of the host country, as well as to the prestige of the HL. As a consequence, their HL mastery in adulthood is incomplete or, to some extent, different from the baseline.[3]

The poor quality of the input and the lack of literacy training in the HL is also the main cause of one of the distinctive features of HSs reported in the literature (Benmamoun et al. 2013, p. 8), namely a discrepancy between receptive and productive command of the HL. The data reported by Carreira and Kagan (2011) are particularly relevant to this point: in self-assessment tasks, HSs rate their listening and speaking skills as stronger than reading and writing skills.

Furthermore, the families' attitudes towards the HL may vary.; On the one hand, there are parents who always use it in interactions with their children, in order to preserve it for the future generations; on the other hand there are others who want to raise their children in the dominant language of the country because they aim at a better integration of them in the hosting country and, in the latter case, the HL will be easily understood but not fully mastered by the youngest generation.

Last but not least, we have to consider the prestige of the two languages involved; there are indeed situations where the HL is considered less prestigious and less important than the language of the hosting country, and this leads to so-called subtractive bilingualism (Lambert 1981), which may end up in the progressive loss of the HL over time. This is indeed what often happens to the Albanian language spoken in Italy, a country where the Albanian immigrant community is very large, due to the long-standing contacts between the two populations, and hence between the two languages, as we will see in the next section.

3. The Historical Relationship between Italian and Albanian

The first contacts of the Albanian language with Italian can be dated around the 12th century, when Venice founded commercial establishments in the ports on the Albanian territory (Di Giovine n.d.).The first Italianisms (or better, Venetianisms) in Albanian date back to this era, and to the immediately following centuries. For example, the word *rrugë*,

which in Albanian means 'road/street', is taken from *ruga* in the Venetian dialect of the 15th century (Devole 2022).

Around the first half of the 15th century, large groups of Albanians left their country, because of the advance of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, and arrived in Southern Italy. These groups gathered in communities and founded many villages in the hilly areas of various southern regions (Mandalà 2007; Dajko 2022). The isolation of these areas contributed to the preservation of the Albanian language and traditions in the Italian territory.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, after the Counter-Reformation, the widespread diffusion of Catholicism in Albania, especially in the northern area, led to the translation into Albanian of liturgical texts written in Latin or Italian. In the following two centuries, particularly in the 19th century, we observe borrowings belonging to an upper-bourgeois register, introduced through journalism or literature (Di Giovine n.d.).

In the twentieth century, the relations between the two countries became more intense, especially during the Italian occupation of Albania in the 1930s. The Albanian lexicon borrowed a lot of Italianisms of ideological origin, as well as referring to institutions and artifacts imported from Italy, like *automobil(ë)* 'car'.[4]

The anti-Italian reaction coinciding with the end of the Second World War and the affirmation of a particularly rigid communist regime led to a slowdown in the loans from Italian, but only at an official level. Indeed, Italian was very widespread during the totalitarian Albanian regime, and a large part of the population spoke the Italian language, a custom influenced by tradition, historical ties and, since 1985, by Italian TV, which was illegally received in Albania. Italy was seen as a model of modernity; hence, it was considered very attractive (Devole 2022). This is the reason why larger and larger groups of people started moving towards Italy right after the fall of the communist government and the consequent opening of the borders in 1991.[5]

Hence, nowadays we may observe different instances of linguistic contact between Italian and Albanian. The old Albanian language—nowadays known as Arbëresh—which arrived in Southern Italy in the 15th century is still spoken as L1 in around 50 communities (Altimari 1986). The modern Albanian language is instead spoken by the approx. 420,000 Albanian citizens currently living in Italy (ISTAT 2022); they represent one of the largest immigrant communities which have fully integrated into Italian society, as confirmed by the high number of families and children, many of which were born in Italy (Pittau et al. 2009).

4. Albanian as a Heritage Language

With regard to Albanian as an HL, most of the existing research concentrates on Albanian immigrants in Greece (Gkaintartzi et al. 2014). For what concerns the speakers' attitude towards the HL, a quantitative large-scale survey conducted nationwide recorded a higher competence in Greek in comparison to Albanian and a preference for the hosting country's language among second-generation speakers of Albanian origin, especially when communicating among siblings and peers (Gkaintartzi et al. 2016).

Unfortunately, despite the widespread presence of Albanian communities, as said above, there is a lack of research on Albanian as an HL in Italy. Among the few studies, Dzeka (2023) conducted a sociolinguistic survey on 20 first- and second-generation Albanian speakers living in Italy, aimed at investigating, among other things, their ability in the two languages, their usage of them and their feelings towards their mother tongue and culture. Interestingly, only 20% of the participants were assumed to speak only Albanian at home, while the remaining 80% used a mixture of the two languages.[6] All (100%) declared speaking Albanian with the family, 50% of them with friends and much lower percentages were recorded for the usage of Albanian at school or with colleagues. However, second-generation speakers self-evaluated as more proficient in Italian in comparison to Albanian in all of the four linguistic skills.

Mucaj (2018) conducted an online survey on 120 people of Albanian origin living in Italy, aged between 4 and 54. Interestingly, 78.3% deemed Albanian as their L1, but only 52.9% considered Albanian as the language in which they were most fluent; moreover,

Italian was preferred for written communication and Albanian for oral, informal conversations. Finally, almost all (97.5%) admitted the frequent use of code-switching, with different functions: to fill lexical gaps, to be better understood, to express group identity and, last but not least, to speak of certain topics.

To sum up, the speakers' attitudes appear to be rather variegated. The process of the integration of Albanians in the Italian territory, and the long-standing contact between the two languages discussed above, slowly led to the fact that people started mixing Albanian and Italian in informal speech; the progressive loss of competence in the mother tongue of second-/third-generation Albanians and the progressive fluency reached in Italian—also due to formal education—resulted in more and more frequent instances of code-switching in the daily speech of Albanian immigrants.[7]

5. The Sociolinguistic Survey: Research Questions

In order to gather more data on the situation of Albanian as an HL in Italy, we administered a sociolinguistic survey to some Albanian–Italian bilingual speakers. It was delivered online via the Limes Survey platform and was filled in autonomously by the participants.

The sociolinguistic survey contains 37 questions divided into two main sections. The first section collects information about the bio-data of the speakers (age, profession, the age of acquisition of both languages and the time of permanence in Italy) while the second section contains questions about the contexts of use of the two languages and the practice of code-switching. The second section also contains a self-assessment task for the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) scored on a Likert scale from 1 (insufficient) to 10 (excellent).

The sociolinguistic survey was filled in by 27 bilingual speakers; they are of different ages and have been subdivided according to the Age of Onset (AoO), that is, the age at which they first came into contact with each of the two languages, as can be observed in Table 1:

Table 1. Participants of the sociolinguistic survey.

Number	27	
Age range	18–66	
Mean Age	41	
Age of Onset (AoO)	Italian	Albanian
Since birth	2	26
From 3 to 5	1	0
From 6 to 10	8	1
From 11 to 15	4	0
After 16	12	0

For this sociolinguistic inquiry, we opened the following research questions:

- RQ1: which are the main contexts of use of Albanian and Italian?
- RQ2: what are the participants' self-assessments of their own competence in the two languages?
- RQ3: what are the participants' opinions on code-switching and do they frequently resort to it in informal conversations?

6. Results of the Sociolinguistic Survey

In this section, we will present the results that we have provisionally obtained in this pilot work with the sociolinguistic survey, and answer our research questions in turn. Since some of these results intermingle with those obtained with the linguistic survey, we will postpone the discussion to the end of the paper.

6.1. RQ1: Which Are the Main Contexts of Use of Albanian and Italian?

As can be seen in Figure 1 below, both languages are widely used in everyday practice; however, we may underline a significant difference among formal and informal contexts, as expected. Since all of our participants presently live in Italy, it comes as no surprise that Italian is the sole language spoken at school or university. Italian is also predominantly spoken at work; however, since many Albanians work together with family or people from the same origin, the Albanian language is also used in this context.

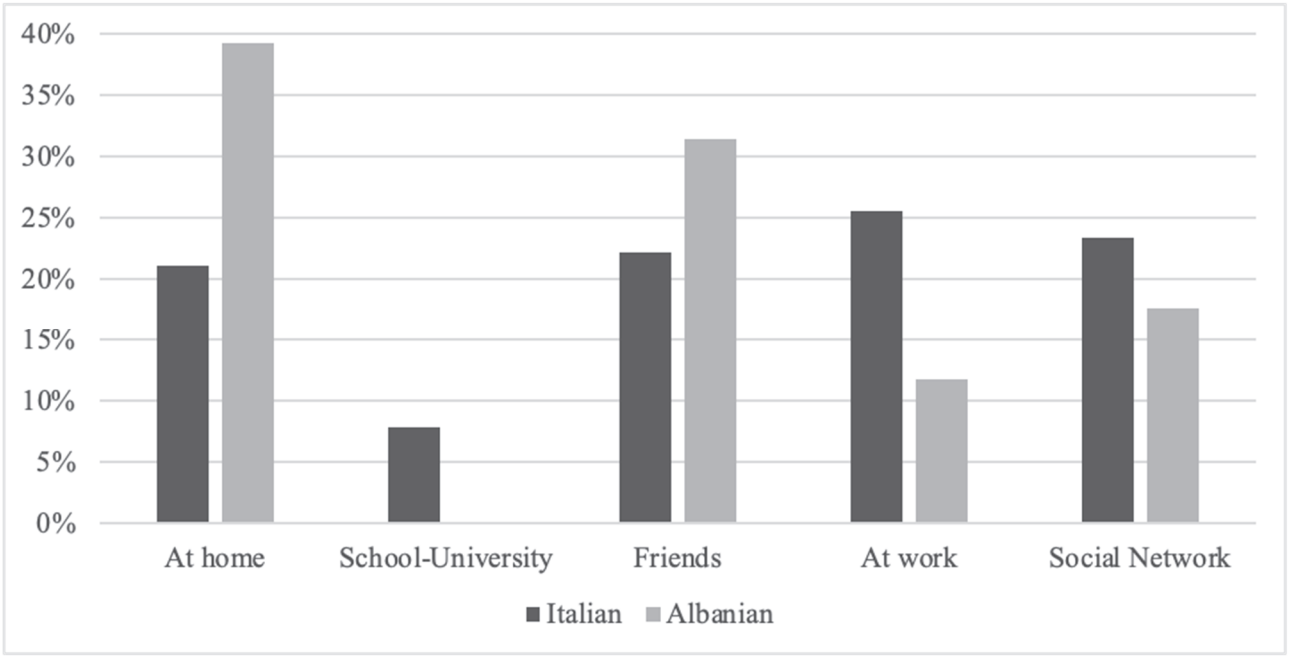


Figure 1. Contexts of use of the two languages.

Conversely, Albanian is predominantly used in informal contexts, in particular at home or with friends. These results are in line with what is assumed by Dzeka (2023). Interestingly, we also see a significant contrast between these contexts, which typically involve spoken language and social networks; though the latter is a far more informal context in comparison to school/university or work, the fact that it requires written language explains the higher percentage of the use of Italian.

6.2. RQ2: What Are the Participants' Self-Assessments of Their Own Competence in the Two Languages?

If we look at Figure 2 below, the most important result which emerges is that, on average, all participants deem that they have a good competence in the two languages at all levels, with the highest rate for listening and the lowest rate for the writing skill (however, it is still above 8.40), independently of the language used. These data confirm Carreira and Kagan's (2011) data, where receptive skills (listening and reading) were assessed as higher than productive ones (speaking and writing).

Furthermore, there are no significant differences in the speakers' self-assessment of their own competence in the two languages, except for what concerns the speaking skill, for which they rate definitely higher their competence in Italian, which is the language they use most in everyday life.

However, far more interesting data emerge if we split the participants into four groups on the basis of the age of onset for the Italian language (Figure 3).

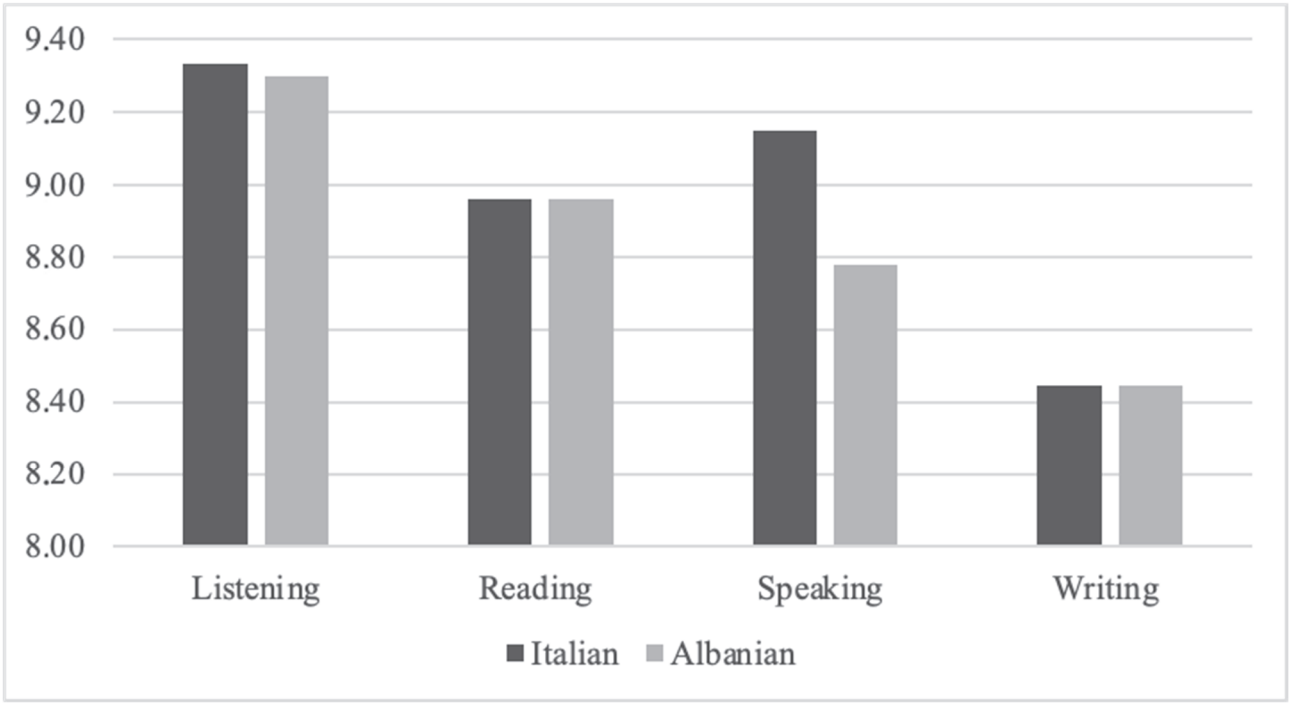


Figure 2. Self-assessment.

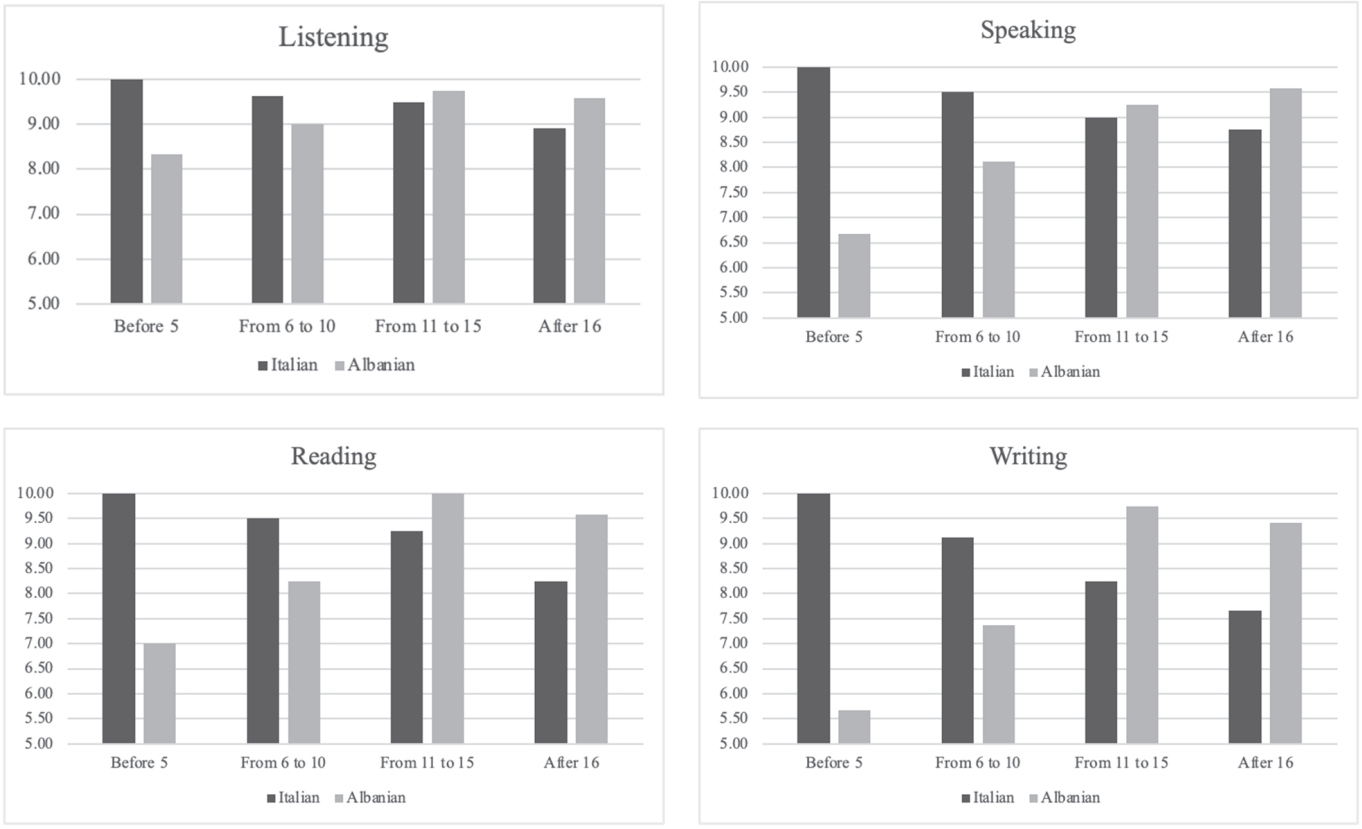


Figure 3. Self-assessment with respect to age of onset (Italian).

Those who came into contact with Italian before the age of 5—presumably most of them were born in Italy—deem their competence in Italian perfect (with a score of 10.00 in all of the four abilities); conversely, their competence in Albanian is rather good in receptive skills (8.00 for listening and 7.00 for reading), but not so good in productive

ones, especially writing (5.50). These data, which confirm again what was assumed by Carreira and Kagan (2011), are a consequence of the fact that they use the Albanian language only orally, at home or with friends, and they have never received formal education in this language, but only in Italian. As discussed in Section 2 above, the importance of receiving formal education in a language is crucial for its complete development, as pointed out by Kupisch and Rothman (2018), and this will be confirmed by the data relating to the following groups.

Participants who came into contact with Italian from the age of 6 to the age of 10 had not lived in a bilingual environment in the first years of their life, which are fundamental for linguistic development. This is the reason why they judge high, but not perfect, their competence in Italian (from 9.00 to 9.50 in all skills). At the same time, their competence in Albanian is much higher in comparison to the previous group in all skills, especially in writing. This comes as a consequence of the fact that they presumably attended some school years in Albania before moving to Italy. Still, in all skills they deem their competence in Italian higher than in Albanian.

The situation is reversed in the third group (participants who came into contact with Italian from the age of 11 to the age of 15). Their competence in the two languages is quite balanced but, crucially, these speakers deem their competence in Albanian as higher in all of the four skills, though there is no significant difference except in the case of writing. This can be explained by the fact that they received at least their basic education (primary school) in the Albanian language and they have come into contact with Italian after the so-called sensible period for linguistic acquisition (Lenneberg 1967, and more recently; Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2009).

Finally, participants of the fourth group, who came into contact with Italian after the age of 16, definitely feel they are more competent in Albanian than in Italian at all levels; however, they do not judge their competence in Albanian as perfect in any of the four skills, speaking included, and this can be viewed as a result of the attrition process (Brehmer and Treffers-Daller 2020), due to the fact that they have been living in Italy for many years. Concerning their competence in Italian, it is considered very good for what concerns the oral skills, listening and speaking, but they assign a lower score to reading and especially to writing, as a consequence of the fact that they (mostly) completed their education in Albania.

6.3. RQ3: What Are the Participants' Opinions on Code-Switching and Do They Frequently Resort to It in Informal Conversations?

As can be seen in Figure 4 below, CS emerges as a normal everyday practice among bilingual speakers in informal contexts. Almost all of our participants admit they frequently hear and use mixed sentences, with very few exceptions. The majority of them declare they hear CS often or very often (21 out of 27) and use it often or very often (20 out of 27).

Concerning their personal judgment of the practice of CS (Figure 5 below),[8] most of our participants regard it positively, i.e., as a fun or useful language practice, and even as a linguistic skill. This is in line with much recent literature on Translanguaging,[9] which considers the languages known by bilingual/multilingual speakers as a unique repertoire, from which they can select the linguistic items that are most appropriate to each context. Hence, the knowledge of more languages, as well as the possibility of mixing them in the same discourse, is viewed as an extra skill which characterizes the bilingual speaker.

At the same time, some negative judgments are also reported: some participants, and in particular those who came into contact with Italian at a later age, judge it as a sign of weakness, a practice speakers resort to when they do not master (one of) the languages perfectly, i.e., when they lack a lexical item. Indeed, also in Section 4 above we have mentioned the fact that one of the main functions of CS is to fill lexical gaps.

This is the reason why we have decided to investigate in greater detail the phenomenon of CS within the Albanian–Italian bilingual community, and its directionality, i.e., if speakers prefer to insert Italian words into Albanian discourse, or vice versa. But before illustrating

our linguistic survey, we will briefly summarize the main theories on CS that we adopt in our analysis.

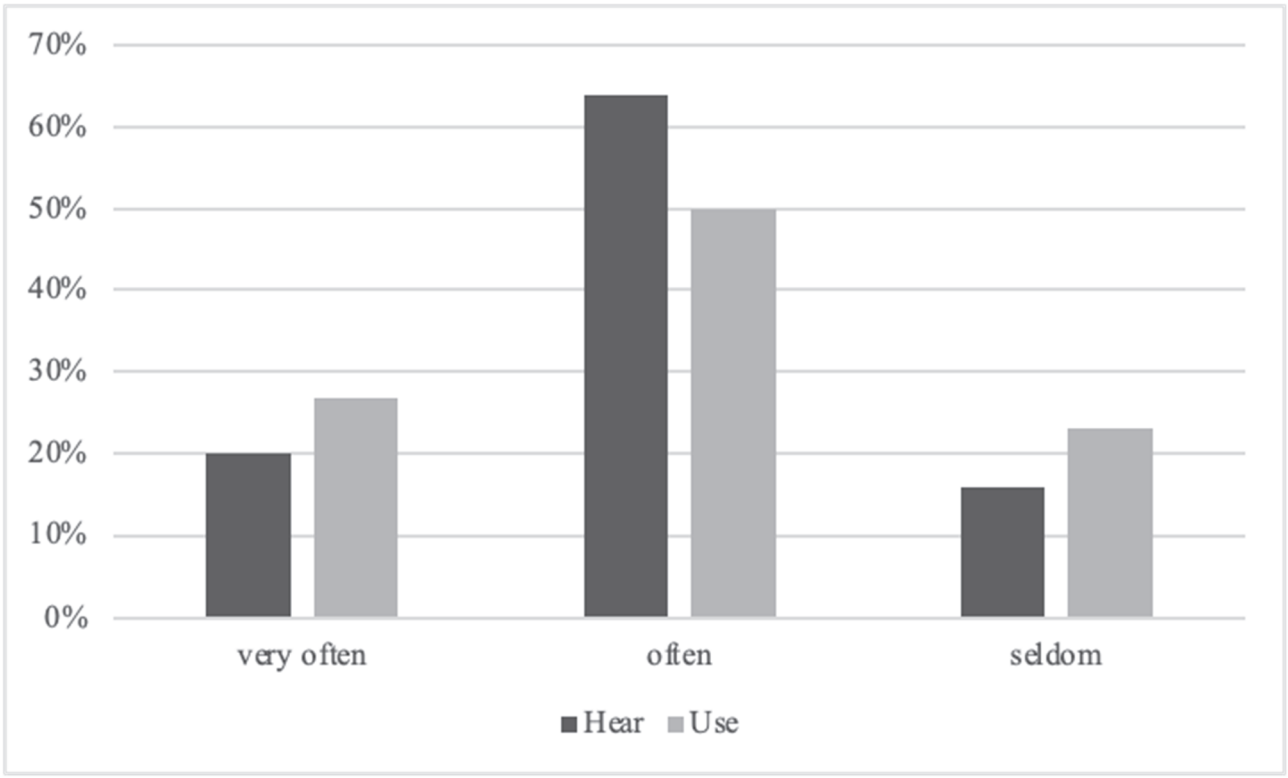


Figure 4. CS practice frequency.

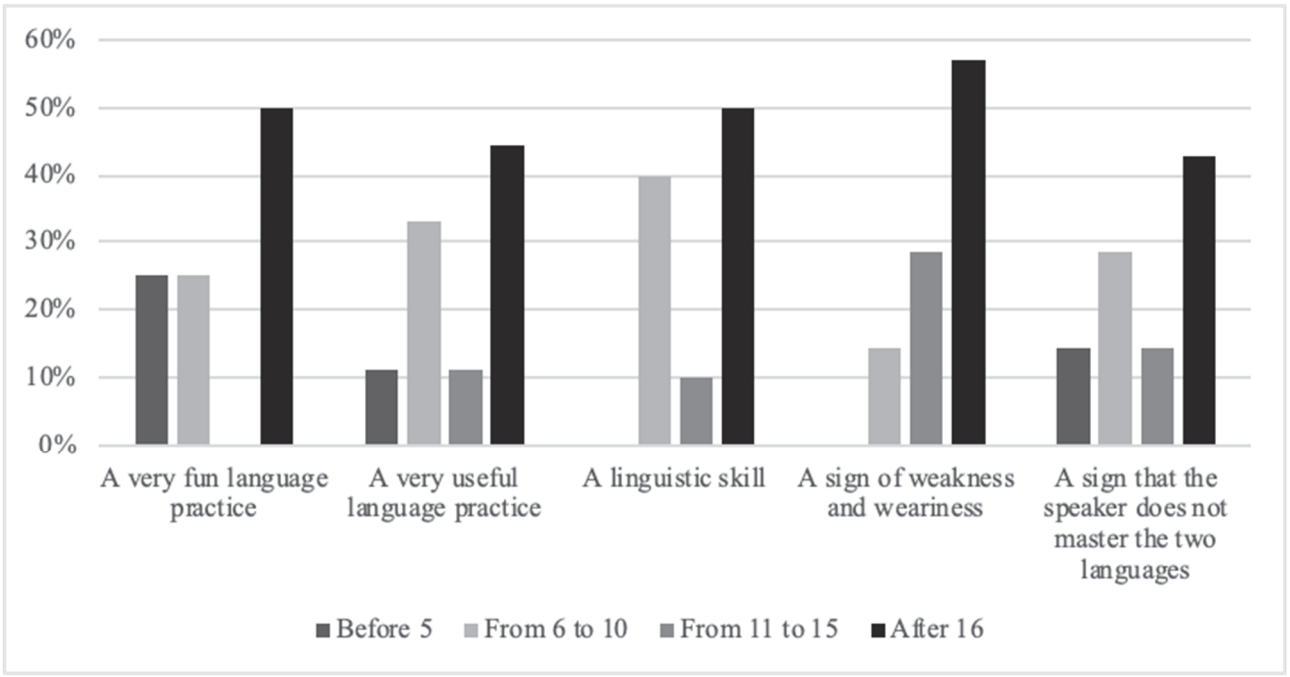


Figure 5. CS practice evaluation.

7. Typologies of Code-Switching

Mixing languages is a common practice in bilingual communities, though it is often stigmatized and considered as a sign of poor proficiency in (one of) the languages involved.

However, nowadays bilingualism studies have largely moved away from this simplistic and reductive analysis; the monolingual bias has been largely replaced by a more dynamic and holistic view of bilingualism and its typical linguistic phenomena. Code-switching (CS) is no longer considered a sign of weakness, but a sophisticated and rule-governed language practice, both pragmatically (Auer 1995) and grammatically (Poplack 1980; Myers-Scotton 2002; MacSwan 1999; López 2020 among the many).

When talking about CS, the first issue that emerges is which grammar is in use in mixed productions. The main CS theories diverge on this point. According to the Matrix Language Frame model (MLF),[10] in CS contexts one of the two languages—the so-called Matrix language—is dominant; as a consequence, mixed productions should follow the sole grammatical rules of the Matrix language, which also establishes the linear order of constituents. In addition, functional words should be expressed in the Matrix language, while the other language—called the Embedded language—should only provide lexical material and its grammar is not active.

Conversely, in the Borrowing Hypothesis (BH),[11] the grammars of both languages are considered active. In this regard, the Equivalence Constraint (EC) states that "code-switches will tend to occur at points in discourse where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements does not violate a syntactic rule of either language, i.e., at points around which the surface structures of the two languages map onto each other" (Poplack 1980, p. 586). Any violations of the EC will then result in the syntactic integration of the single word as if it were a loanword. In addition, if the EC imposes restrictions at the syntactic level, the second constraint, the Free Morpheme Constraint (FMC), defines the extent of the morphological integration of the two languages. In particular, the FMC forbids the switch of bound morphemes, below the word level, as in the Spanish–English example **eat-iendo* 'eating' reported by Poplack (1980, p. 586).

The two core constraints of the Borrowing Hypothesis have been translated into Minimalist terms in the Bilexical Model advanced by MacSwan (1999 and subsequent work).[12] In this model, any switch is admitted as far as no rule of the two languages in question is violated.

From a descriptive point of view, CS can be classified into three distinct typologies (Muysken 2000, 2013): Insertion, Alternation and Congruent Lexicalization. Each type of CS varies according to both the structural properties of the languages in contact and the sociolinguistic factors defining the bilingual setting. If the Insertion type is more frequent in the speech of first-generation immigrants, who are less proficient in the language of the hosting country, Alternation and Congruent Lexicalization require a higher fluency in both languages, hence we expect these types to be more present in second-generation immigrants.

In Insertion, one single lexical item/phrase is inserted within the structure of another language, i.e., the Matrix language in Myers-Scotton's (1993) terminology, as in (1):

1. na'iish-*crash* lá
   1:SG:pass out-crash EMPH
   I am about to pass out
   (Navajo/English; Muysken 2000, p. 5)

In (1), the English verb *crash* is inserted into a Navajo sentence. The switch occurs at a point where the two languages do not share a morphosynatctic structure; as a consequence, the inserted lexical item can be considered as a fully integrated loanword.[13]

However, if in (1) it is possible to identify the Matrix language of the clause (Navajo), in (2) below, which exemplifies Alternation, the contribution of one of the two languages is not limited to lexical material, since both languages provide the functional skeleton of the clause. Crucially, the switch occurs at a neutral point, i.e., at the main clause boundary. Consequently, no potential conflict arises between the grammars of the two languages.

2. Je telephone à Chantal, he, *meestal voor commiskes te doen en eten*.
   'I call Chantal, hm, mostly to go shopping and eat.'
   (French/Dutch, from Treffers-Daller 1994, p. 213)

The absence of a potential conflict at the switch point also characterizes Congruent Lexicalization, exemplified in (3):

3. Weet jij waar Jenny *is*?
   Do you know where Jenny is?
   (Dutch/English, Muysken 2000, p. 5)

In (3), a single item is inserted, as in (1). However, in (3) the English item is not a lexical but a functional word, which is not integrated into the morphosyntactic structure of Dutch, since it retains its inflection. Thus, both grammars are considered to be active. In addition, unlike Insertion, Congruent Lexicalization is also characterized by the number of possible switches within the sentence. In (4), the speaker frequently switches, going back and forth between the two languages even across the clause border:

4. Bueno, *in other words*, el *flight* que sale de Chicago *around three o'clock*.
   Good, in other words, the flight that leaves Chicago around three o'clock.
   (Spanish/English, Pfaff 1979)

Among the several constraints proposed in the CS literature, the two core constraints assumed by Poplack's Borrowing Hypothesis, i.e., the EC and the FMC discussed above, are particularly suitable to distinguish Insertion from Alternation and Congruent Lexicalization.

As we will see in the next section, Italian and Albanian present structural properties in the DP domain which are particularly suitable for testing the validity of the mentioned constraints.

8. The Syntax of Italian and Albanian DP: A Contrastive Analysis

As clearly emerges from the literature on code-switching, one of the most widely observed and studied switch points involves mixed DPs. This is a very interesting topic to investigate in Italian–Albanian CS contexts, since the two languages present many differences concerning the determiner system, which we will briefly present in what follows.

All Italian nouns exhibit a grammatical gender, masculine or feminine, which reflects the natural gender in (most) animate nouns and is assigned arbitrarily to inanimate/abstract nouns. The same grammatical gender is also assigned to the determiner or any other modifier which accompanies the noun.

The Italian language features six definite articles, which encode gender and number information; for masculine (singular or plural) nouns, two allomorphic forms co-occur, which are selected according to the initial sound of the nouns they precede. In addition, there are three indefinite, singular articles (again, two allomorphic forms for masculine); for plural indefinite nouns, partitive articles are employed, which are formed out of the preposition *di* + definite article forms, with regular morphological adjustments. Italian articles, as well as nouns, do not exhibit any morphological Case distinction.

Table 2 shows the complete scheme of Italian articles:[14]

Table 2. Italian articles.

Italian articles	masc.sing.	fem.sing.	masc.pl.	fem.pl
definite	il, lo (l')	la (l')	i, gli	le
indefinite	un, uno	una (un')	dei, degli	delle

The syntax of Italian articles is quite simple: both definite and indefinite articles are free morphemes, which always precede the nouns they accompany and agree with them in gender and number:

5. a. il ragazzo/un ragazzo (masc.sing)
'the boy/a boy'
b. la ragazza/una ragazza (fem.sing)
'the girl/a girl'

In Albanian, nouns are arbitrarily distributed into three gender classes (except for some animate nouns, which follow natural gender). However, there are few neuter nouns and they are generally derived from past participles or adjectives, always preceded by the free morpheme *të*. All noun modifiers receive the same gender as the noun they accompany; indeed, in many cases it is the article employed which reveals the gender of a noun, as the morphological form of the latter is often ambiguous (Turano 2004, p. 25), unlike what is observed in Italian, where gender can generally be inferred by the final inflection of the noun.

The situation of Albanian articles is rather complex. Like Italian, this language also features two series of articles, definite and indefinite ones. Indefinite articles are free morphemes: there is only one form, *një*, which is used for all singular nouns and precedes them. Definite articles, instead, are bound morphemes which appear post-nominally, as a sort of inflection. Singular definite articles show a gender and number distinction, as in Italian, and there are allomorphic forms as well, depending on the final sound of the word to which the article affixes.

Plural definite articles do not show a gender distinction; the same forms are used for all genders. There are no plural indefinite articles.[15]

In Table 3 below, we find the scheme of Albanian articles (Turano 2004):

Table 3. Albanian articles.

Albanian articles	masc.sing	fem.sing.	neut.sing	masc.pl.	fem.pl	neut.pl
definite	-i, -u	-a, -ja	të+-t/-it/-të	-t, -të	-t, -të	të+-t/-të
indefinite	një	një	një të			të + -a

Unlike Italian, Albanian definite and indefinite articles do not occupy the same position: the former are enclitic bound morphemes, while the latter are pre-nominal free morphemes:

6. a. një djalë / djal-i (masc.sing.)
a boy the boy
b. një vajzë / vajz-a (fem.sing.)
a girl the girl

To complicate the picture even more, Albanian nouns, pronouns and adjectives are inflected according to five morphological Cases: nominative, accusative, dative, genitive and ablative. Cases are encoded into different morphological endings; hence, with definite nouns, Case inflections intermingle with definite articles.

9. Deriving Mixed DPs

Given the mentioned structural differences in the DP domain, the main focus of our linguistic investigation is, on the one side, the acceptability of Italian–Albanian mixed DPs, namely DPs where D and N are expressed in different languages, and, on the other, the directionality of CS, i.e., if participants prefer to insert Italian material within an Albanian sentence, or vice versa.

Most of the existing research on mixed DPs deals with languages which exhibit the same linear order, with D preceding N, in line with Poplack's (1980) Equivalence Constraint discussed above. This is indeed the problem which arises in Italian–Albanian mixed DPs, which challenge the mentioned constraint, as D and N do not often exhibit the same linear order in the two languages (cf. (5) and (6)).

Hence, in deriving Italian–Albanian mixed DPs, we distinguish two main contexts according to the position of the determiner: the Post-N context (definite article) and the Pre-N context (indefinite article). The sentence pairs in (7)–(8) exemplify the two contexts, featuring a DP in the subject position in Albanian (7a–8a) and in Italian (7b–8b):[16]

7. a. Tenxher-ja është brenda furr-it
   Pot-DEF.F.SG is inside oven-DEF.M.SG
   'the pot is inside the oven'
   b. La pentola è dentro al forno
   DEF.F.SG pot-F.SG is inside to-DEF.M.SG oven
   'the pot is inside the oven'
8. a. Një shishe u thye
   INDEF bottle(F.SG) REFL is broken
   'a bottle has broken'
   b. Una bottiglia si è rotta
   INDEF.F.SG bottle-F.SG REFL is broken
   'a bottle has broken'

If we manipulate the sentences in (7a–b) by switching the nouns, we obtain the Insertion types in (9a–b) below. In these sentences, only one language provides all the functional categories of the clause and the other language simply provides a lexical element, in line with the MLF. Crucially, there is only one D in each DPsubject: the enclitic Albanian D (*-ja*) in (9a) and the proclitic Italian D (*la*) in (9b).

9. a. *Pentol*-ja është brenda furr-it
   Pot-DEF.F.SG is inside oven-DEF.M.SG
   'the pot is inside the oven'
   b. La *tenxhere* è dentro al forno
   DEF.F.SG pot-F.SG is inside to-DEF.M.SG oven-M.SG
   'the pot is inside the oven'

The two patterns in (9) would both be problematic for the EC; according to this constraint, this type of switch would not be acceptable, since the relative position of definite D and N is different in Italian and Albanian. However, only (9a) violates the FMC, as it features a switch between a root and a bound morpheme (the enclitic article *-ja*); conversely, (9b) does not violate the FMC since the Italian article is a free morpheme and we have used the basic form of the Albanian N, that is, the form used with indefinite articles.

However, if we inserted into (9a–b) the inflected forms of N (i.e., N + enclitic article) we would obtain two other possible outputs, with the co-occurrence of two Ds, as in (10). In this case, both the EC and FMC would be violated; moreover, these sentences do not conform to the requirements imposed by the MLF, i.e., that functional words should all be expressed in the Matrix language:

10. a. La *tenxher-ja* è dentro al forno
    DEF.F.SG pot-F.SG is inside to-DEF.M.SG oven-M.SG
    'the pot is inside the oven'
    b. La *pentol*-ja është brenda furrit
    DEF.F.SG pot-F.SG is inside DEF.M.SG
    'the pot is inside the oven'

With indefinite DPs, instead, the syntactic order of D and N is the same in both of the languages involved. Therefore, no conflicts arise if we exchange the nouns in sentences like (8a–b) above; neither the EC nor the FMC are violated.[17] In (11), we exemplify the mixed patterns available with indefinite articles:

11. a. Një *bottiglia* u thye
INDEF bottle-F.SG REFL is broken
'a bottle has broken'
b. Una *shishe* si è rotta
INDEF.F.SG bottle(F.SG) REFL is broken
'a bottle has broken'

The same type of mixed patterns is also derivable by the manipulation of DPs in the object position. This case is more complex than the preceding one, as the Albanian article presents accusative Case morphology. In (12) and (13), we report the four combinations of the Post-N context (definite Ds), while in (14) we report the two combinations of the Pre-N context (indefinite Ds). Notice that the Albanian enclitic article in (12a), as well as in the cases of article reduplication in (13a–b), is inflected in the accusative:

12. a. Derdha gjithë *olio*n mbi tavolinë.
I-poured all oil-DEF.M.SG.ACC on table-DEF.F.SG.
'I poured all the oil on the table'
b. Ho versato tutto il *vaj* sul tavolo.
I-have poured all-M.SG DEF.M.SG oil-M.SG on-DEF.M.SG table-M.SG
'I poured all the oil on the table'
13. a. Ho versato tutto il *vajin* sul tavolo.
I-have poured all-M.SG DEF.M.SG oil-DEF.M.SG.ACC on-DEF.M.SG table-M.SG
'I poured all the oil on the table'
b. Derdha gjith *l'olio*n mbi tavolinë.
I-have poured all DEF.M.SG oil-DEF.M.SG.ACC on table-DEF.F.SG.
'I poured all the oil on the table'
14. a. Ndoshta nëse shkon tani gjen akoma ndonjë *negozio* të hapur.
Maybe if you go now you will still find some-M.SG shop-M.SG open
'Maybe, if you go now, you will still find some shops open'
b. Forse se vai adesso trovi ancora qualche *dyqan* aperto.
Maybe if you go now you will still find some-SG shop-M.SG open
'Maybe, if you go now, you will still find some shops open'

Table 4 summarizes the different predictions made by the patterns described above with respect to the BH and MLF constraints.

Table 4. Violations of CS constraints.

	Equivalence Constraint	**Free Morpheme Constraint**	**Matrix Language Frame Model**
Post-N Context (definite article)			
One D	9a–b 12a–b	9a 12a	none
Double D	13a–b 14a–b	13a–b 14a–b	13a–b 14a–b
Pre-N Context (indefinite article)			
One D	none	none	none

10. The Linguistic Survey: Research Questions

In order to investigate the acceptability of the different types of mixed DPs among Italian–Albanian heritage speakers, we administered an Acceptability Judgment Task, scored on a 6-point Likert scale,[18] to 8 of the 27 Albanian–Italian bilingual participants who had participated to the sociolinguistic survey.[19] The AJT was delivered online via the Limes Survey platform, but it was filled in in person with the support of an Italian–Albanian bilingual speaker who pronounced the sentences to the participants.

In Table 5, we can find information on the participants of the AJT:

Table 5. Participants of the Acceptability Judgment Task.

Number	8	
Age range	23–62	
Mean Age	40	
Age of Onset (AoO)	Italian	Albanian
Since birth	0	8
From 3 to 5	0	0
From 6 to 10	5	0
From 11 to 15	0	0
After 16	3	0

The AJT contains 218 sentences, encompassing a range of different linguistic aspects, as can be observed from Table 6 below: 48 sentences with a mixed DP in the subject or in the object position, 28 monolingual controllers (14 grammatical sentences and 14 ungrammatical sentences), 63 mixed sentences with genitive constructions, and 64 sentences with mixed words (compounds and mixed verbal forms). In this study, we will focus our attention only on the 48 test sentences (TSs) with a mixed DP in the subject and object position, leaving the discussion of other aspects to future research.

Table 6. Structure of the AJT.

AJT		
Post-N context: N-Insertion	Italian	Albanian
Subject position	4	4
Object position	4	4
Post-N context: Double D	Italian	Albanian
Subject position	4	4
Object position	4	4
Pre-N context: N-Insertion		
Subject position	4	4
Object position	4	4
TOT	24	24
Other type of sentences		
Insertion of Monolingual DP	8	8
Monolingual Sentences	14	14
Mixed Words	31	32
Genitives	28	35
TOT	105	113

The 48 test sentences are derived from 15 nouns with the same gender in the two languages: 8 are masculine and 7 feminine; 24 are singular and 24 plural. The 218 sentences were distributed across four tests of approximately 60 sentences each and administered separately.

For the linguistic survey, we opened the following research questions:

- RQ4: In Italian–Albanian CS contexts, is it possible to have mixed DPs? If so, will speakers prefer combinations of Albanian D + Italian N, or vice versa?

- RQ5: Will mixed DPs be accepted only with indefinite articles, which are pre-nominal in both languages?
- RQ6: With definite articles, would it be possible to have a noun accompanied by two determiners, one pre-nominal and one post-nominal?
- RQ7: Will there be differences in the acceptability of mixed DPs according to their syntactic role (subject vs. object)?

11. Results of the Linguistic Survey

Since our participants assigned a score to the acceptability of mixed sentences, we calculated the frequency percentage of the assigned scores.

First of all, participants were divided into two groups according to their AoO of the Italian language: group A contains five speakers who acquired Italian from age 6 to 10, and group B contains three speakers who acquired Italian after the age of 16. The two groups exhibit a disparity in the number of participants; in particular, there are only three participants who acquired Italian after 16, a fact which consequently diminishes their impact on the calculated acceptance rates. Nevertheless, the distributions of ratings demonstrate the presence of distinct behaviors among the two groups. In order to confirm this tendency, we also conducted a second analysis by comparing the mean of the percentages of acceptance of each group.

In Figure 6 below, we report the frequency percentages of the scores provided by the eight Italian–Albanian bilinguals for the 16 test sentences containing mixed DPs with a definite article, i.e., the CS type reported in (9) above. As we can observe, there is a clear preference for the insertion of an Italian N into an Albanian sentence rather than the other way around. The insertion of an Italian N reaches 44% acceptability in sentences with the mixed DP in the subject position, and 47% in sentences with the mixed DP in the object position. In contrast, the acceptance rate of the eight test sentences where an Albanian N is inserted into an Italian sentence does not exceed 20%, either for the subject or the object position.

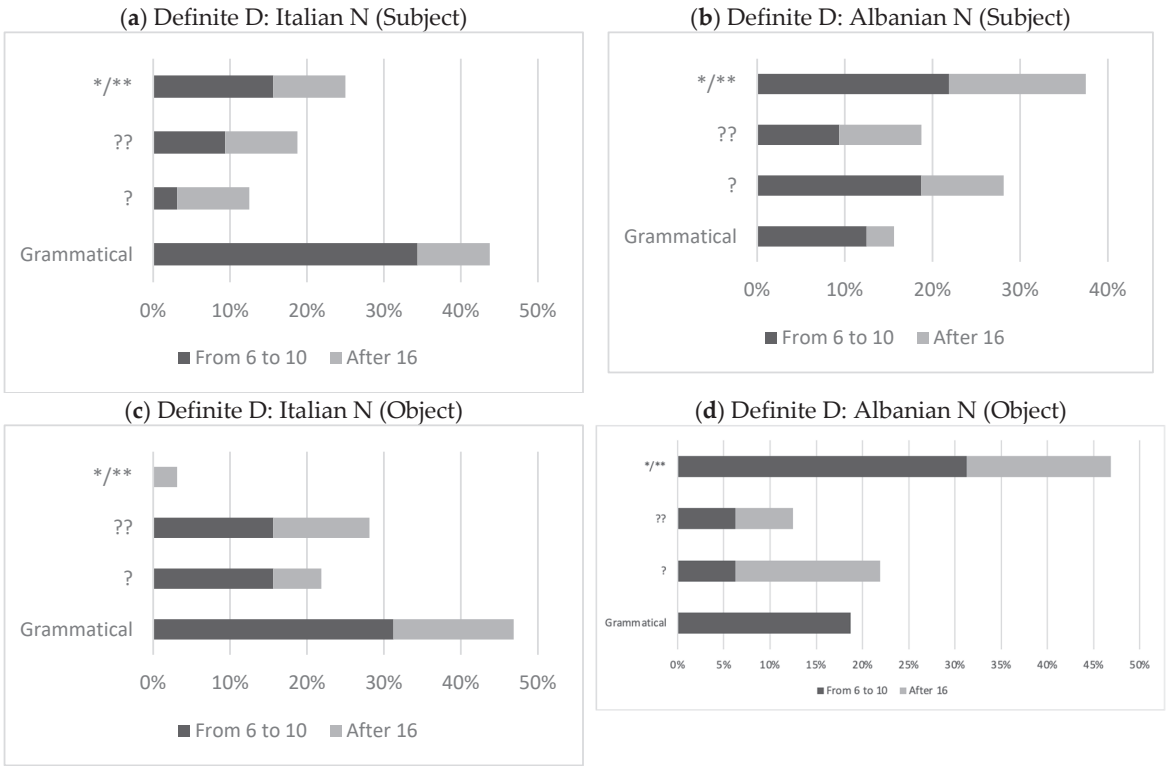


Figure 6. Mixed DPs with a definite article. ? means 'acceptable but not natural', ?? means 'degraded', */** mean 'unacceptable/completely unacceptable'.

Interestingly enough, the four TSs with a mixed DP with an Albanian N in the object position were not accepted by all of the three speakers who acquired Italian after 16. Two of them judged only the sentences in (15) below more or less acceptable, but not completely grammatical:

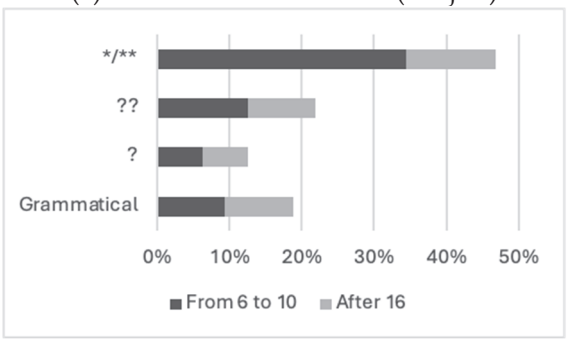
15. ?Passami la *fshesë*
pass-me DEF.F.SG bottle-F.SG
'pass me the bottle'

In (15), the inserted Albanian N has the basic form (indefinite) that does not match the definite interpretation of the DP. It is worthwhile noticing that the insertion of the inflected form of the Albanian N in the accusative Case (16) causes an increase in the acceptance rate:

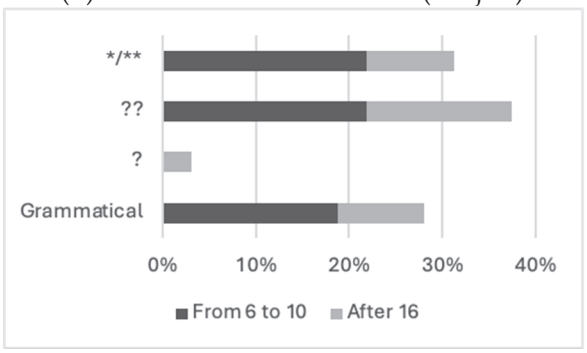
16. Passami la *fshesën*
pass-me DEF.F.SG bottle-DEF.F.SG.ACC
'pass me the bottle'

Something similar takes place in the sentence with a masculine Albanian N in the subject position (28%). Also in this case, the double D pattern is preferred by group B, as can be seen in Figure 7, where we report the results of the 16 TSs with a double D.

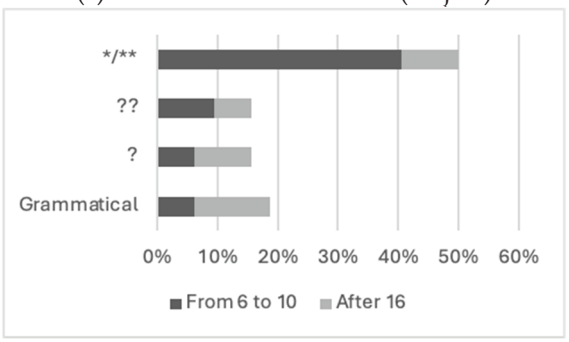
(**a**) Double Def.D: Italian N (Subject)



(**b**) Double Def.D: Albanian N (Subject)



(**c**) Double Def.D: Italian N (Object)



(**d**) Double Def.D: Albanian N (Object)

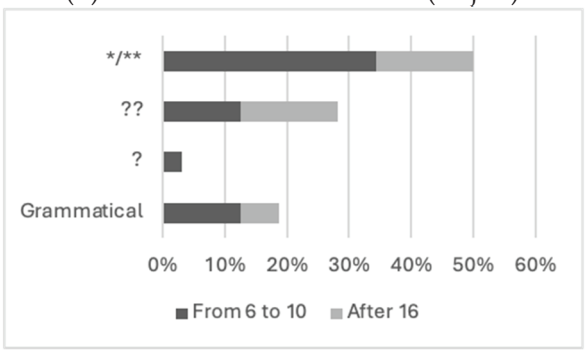


Figure 7. Mixed DPs with a double definite determiner. ? means 'acceptable but not natural', ?? means 'degraded', */** mean 'unacceptable/completely unacceptable'.

In all of the other cases of doubleD, expectedly, the acceptance rate decreases. In particular, the combinations featuring an Italian N are almost always rejected, especially by group A participants.

In Figure 8 below, we report instead the results of the 16 TSs with indefinite articles. As can be observed, this pattern obtains positive scores.

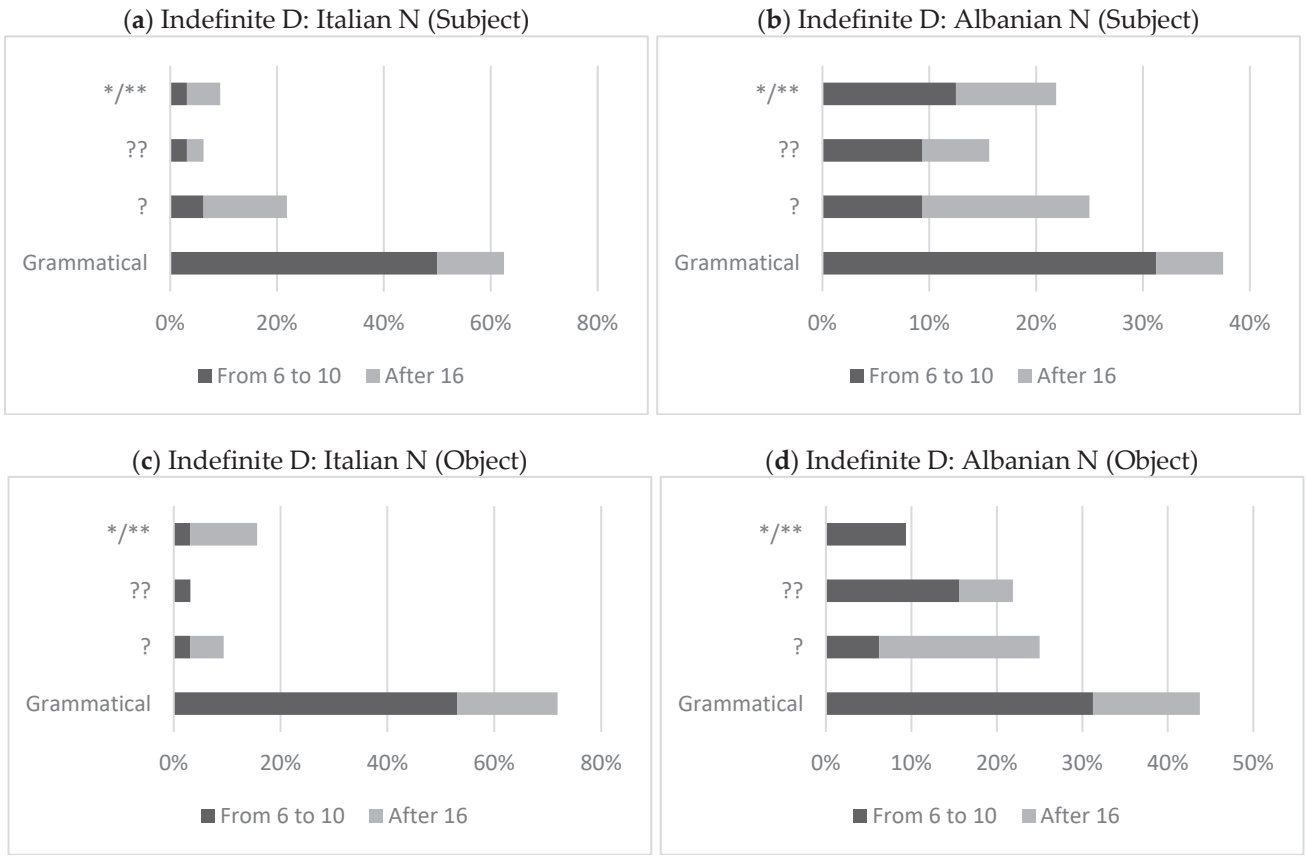


Figure 8. Mixed DPs with an indefinite article. ? means 'acceptable but not natural', ?? means 'degraded', */** mean 'unacceptable/completely unacceptable'.

In sentences with a mixed DP in the subject position, the acceptance rates reach 63% with an Italian N (17a), and 38% with an Albanian N (17b):

17. a. Disa *domande* ishin shumë të vështira
some-PL questions-F.PL were too difficult
'some questions were too difficult'
b. Alcune *pyetje* erano troppo difficili
some-F.PL questions-F.PL were too difficult
'some questions were too difficult'

We also recorded a high acceptance rate (72%) for the insertion of an Italian N in the object position (18a). Conversely, the acceptability of sentences with an Italian indefinite D + Albanian N (18b) reached only 44%, which is, however, a positive score in comparison to what was observed for definite DPs.

18 a. Do më tregosh ndonjë *borsa* në Zalando.
Show me some-INDEF bag-F.SG on Zalando
'show mw some bag on Zalando'
b. Mi fai vedere qualche *çanta* su Zalando
Show me some-INDEF bag-F.SG on Zalando
'show mw some bag on Zalando'

Finally, in Figures 9 and 10 below we report the acceptability rates of the various types of mixed DPs placed in, respectively, the subject and the object position. Crucially, an interesting difference emerges between the two syntactic contexts, especially for what concerns group A participants:

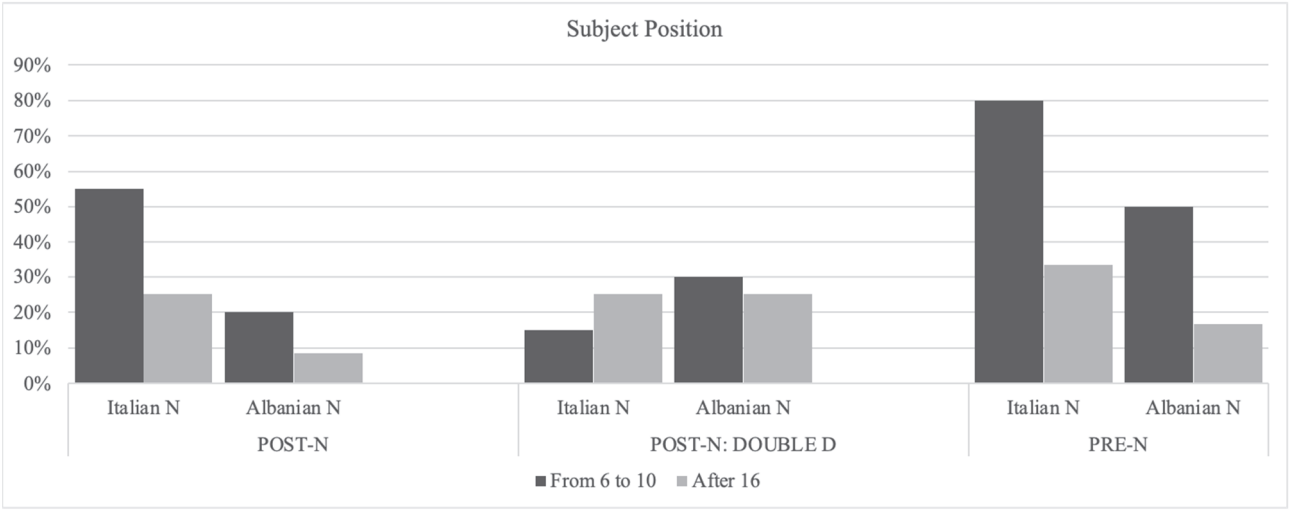


Figure 9. Mixed DPs in the subject position.

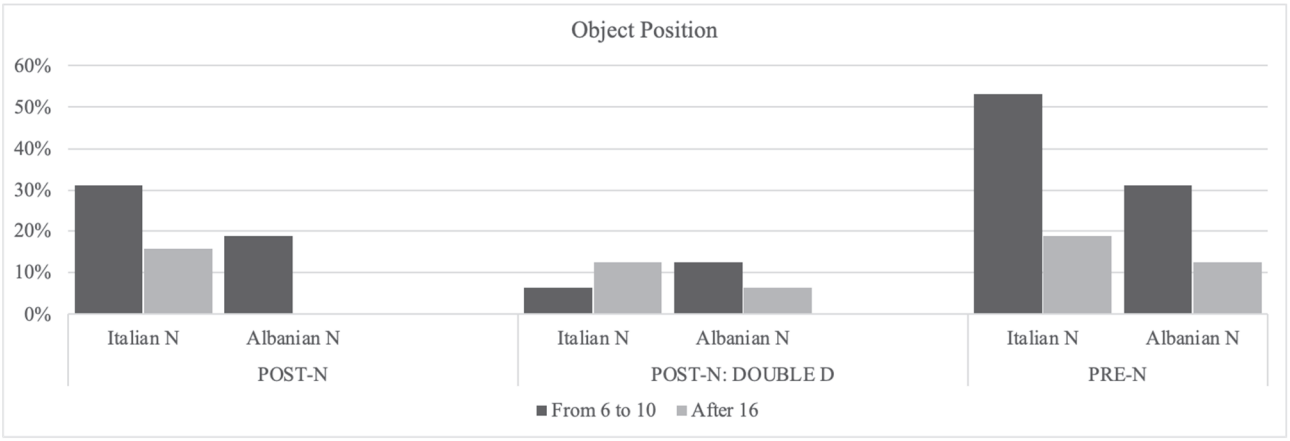


Figure 10. Mixed DPs in the object position.

After this long presentation of the data, we are now able to provide an answer to the research questions set above.

11.1. RQ4: In Italian–Albanian CS Contexts, Is It Possible to Have Mixed DPs? If So, Will Speakers Prefer Combinations of Albanian D + Italian N, or Vice Versa?

The data presented above confirm that it is certainly possible to have mixed Italian–Albanian DPs, and the acceptance rates are altogether positive, though not all available D-N combinations obtain the same scores. Overall, we have recorded a clear preference for the insertion of an Italian N into an Albanian matrix clause rather than the other way around: ca. 45% (29/64) vs. 17% (11/64) with definite determiners, and 67% (43/64) vs. 25% (25/64) with indefinite determiners.[20]

11.2. RQ5: Will Mixed DPs Be Accepted Only with Indefinite Articles, Which Are Pre-Nominal in Both Languages?

Mixed DPs are not accepted only with indefinite articles; however, the latter is by far the most widely accepted option: 53% (68/128) vs. 31% (40/128) for definite DPs.

Indeed, in the case of indefinite DPs, Albanian and Italian share the same linear order (D-N), and hence the switch causes no violation of the EC; moreover, the FMC is not violated either, as indefinite articles are free morphemes in both languages (see Table 4 above). In addition, in line with Myers-Scotton (1993, 2002), the language in which D—i.e., the

functional head—is expressed represents the matrix language, and the other language provides only lexical material.

With definite DPs, the combination of an Albanian N and an Italian D causes a violation of the sole EC, the Italian D being a free morpheme, while the combination of an Italian N and an Albanian D violates both constraints, the Albanian D being a bound morpheme (see Table 4 again). Nonetheless, the latter option obtains higher acceptance rates, by virtue of the fact that participants prefer the insertion of an Italian N into an Albanian clause, as seen in 11.1 above.

11.3. RQ6: With Definite Articles, Would It Be Possible to Have a Noun Accompanied by Two Determiners, One Pre-Nominal and One Post-Nominal?

The acceptance rate of nouns accompanied by two Ds (one Italian, pre-nominal, and one Albanian, post-nominal) is expectedly quite low, in line with Myers-Scotton's assumption that functional heads should be provided only by one language (the Matrix language).

However, unlike what was attested for definite and indefinite articles, the lowest scores were reported for Italian nouns inserted into Albanian clauses (acceptance rate below 14%, 9/64). There were slightly more positive scores for (some) Albanian nouns inserted into Italian clauses (19%, 12/64). This can be explained by the fact that, in definite contexts, an Albanian noun should never appear in the basic form, but always inflected by means of an enclitic morpheme which signals not only definiteness but also Case; vice versa, an Italian noun is never inflected for Case and always shows up in the basic form.

11.4. RQ7: Will There Be Differences in the Acceptability of Mixed DPs According to Their Syntactic Role (Subject vs. Object)?

Finally, if we compare the acceptance rates of mixed DPs in the subject and object positions, we notice an interesting difference. With definite Ds, the acceptance rate of mixed DPs in the subject position is overall higher than in the object position; specifically, the insertion of an Italian N in the subject position reaches 55% for group A and 25% for group B, and, respectively, 31% and 16% in the object position. The asymmetry is even more evident in sentences where an Albanian N is inserted in an Italian clause. In this case, the acceptance rate of mixed DPs in the subject position is 20% for group A and 8% for group B. Interestingly enough, only the first group accepted an Albanian N in the object position (19%).

An analogous asymmetry is also available in indefinite contexts, where the percentages of grammatical mixed DPs in the object position is systematically lower than those recorded for sentences with a mixed DP in the subject position, regardless of the language of N.

12. Discussion

Though we are aware that much more data would be necessary to draw more definitive conclusions, the results of the two surveys carried out in this pilot work have outlined some interesting tendencies.

From the answers to RQ1, we infer that our participants mainly use Albanian in oral, informal contexts. This is confirmed also by the answers to RQ2: participants' self-assessed fluency in Albanian decreases in the skills relating to written language (reading and especially writing). Moreover, people of the youngest generations feel they are 100% competent only in Italian, but, crucially, even people who came into contact with Italian at a later stage do not assess as perfect their competence in Albanian. This comes as a consequence of the attrition process undergone by the Albanian language, caused by the daily use of Italian, or even of a mixed language. Indeed, the practice of code-switching is deemed frequent and is generally well regarded (RQ3).

Our linguistic survey confirms these judgments. Indeed, from the answers to RQ4 we infer that not only are mixed DPs generally deemed acceptable—a fact which endorses that the CS practice is far from stigmatized and mixed DPs naturally emerge in informal conversations—but the majority of speakers prefer the insertion of an Italian N into an Albanian sentence rather than vice versa. In short, the data show a definite directionality

in the switching process. The heritage Albanian language seems to be more prone to be permeated by Italian lexical items than the other way around; this means that HSs, when speaking Albanian, tend to 'forget' some words and replace them with the Italian equivalents, which are more commonly heard in everyday conversations. Conversely, in contexts where they speak Italian, they do not feel the urge to insert Albanian words as much.

Regarding the answers to RQ5, i.e., the acceptability of different patterns of mixed DPs, it comes as no surprise that participants score mixed DPs with indefinite articles the highest. Indeed, these combinations do not violate either the Equivalence Constraint or the Free Morpheme Constraint, since indefinite articles are pre-nominal free morphemes in both languages. These combinations are also in line with the restrictions imposed by the Matrix Language Frame model, as the functional words (the determiners) are always expressed in the dominant language of the clause, while the other language only provides lexical items.

Though they are acceptable for the MLF, like the previous combinations, mixed DPs with definite articles represent a violation of the EC, since the relative order of D and N is different in the two languages; furthermore, in case of Albanian D + Italian N, we also observe a violation of the FMC, since the Albanian D is a bound morpheme. These violations explain the lower acceptance rates of these combinations in comparison to those with indefinite Ds.

We also tried to test mixed DPs with two Ds (RQ6), one pre- and one post-nominal. Expectedly, this combination is not highly accepted. Moreover, it represents a strong violation of the MLF, since there is a functional word (one of the two Ds) which is not expressed in the Matrix language of the clause.

The last element which emerges from our data is the higher acceptance of mixed DPs in the subject rather than in the object position (RQ7). This is a very interesting result that would certainly deserve a more detailed investigation. A partial explanation of this asymmetry might be found in the fact that Albanian enclitic articles do not only signal definiteness, but also Case, as discussed above. Hence, since the accusative is morphologically marked in comparison to the nominative, this would explain the higher acceptance of less marked forms, i.e., those in the subject position, with definite DPs (or double Ds). Unfortunately, this explanation cannot be extended to indefinite DPs, since indefinite Ds do not carry Case distinction. Hence, we leave this question open for future research.

To conclude, it is worthwhile pointing out that we recorded different behaviors among the two groups of participants to the AJT, i.e., people who have a different level of fluency in the two languages provided different judgments. This becomes more evident if we take into consideration the percentages of acceptability of the different types of mixed DPs recorded within the two groups: see again Figures 9 and 10 above.

The five participants of group A generally exhibit higher degrees of acceptability in all types of switching. This means that these people, who acquired Italian at an early age (from 6 to 10), consider the two languages as part of a unique repertoire, from which they can freely select items and combine them, in line with the mentioned recent hypotheses of Translanguaging (Vogel and Garcia 2017 among others). Nonetheless, their preferred type of switch involves the insertion of an Italian N; this confirms once more the attrition undergone by the Albanian language among second-generation bilinguals, also evidenced by their answers to RQ2, illustrated in Figure 3.

Conversely, the three Albanian bilinguals of group B, who acquired Italian as adults, generally accept less mixed DPs in comparison to group A; the sole context where their judgments rate higher is the combination of an Italian N and a double D, either in the subject or in the object position. This can tentatively be explained by assuming that these people, whose competence in Albanian is higher (see again Figure 3 above), feel the need to add to N—even to an inserted Italian N—an inflection which signals definiteness and Case,

in accordance with the grammatical requirements of their dominant language, Albanian, in line with the MLF.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 This work is the result of the collaboration of the two authors in all respects. Nevertheless, Gloria Cocchi takes responsibility for Sections 1, 3–5, 8 and 11, and Cristina Pierantozzi for Sections 2, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 12.

2 See the overviews offered by Polinsky (2018) and Aalberse et al. (2019) for greater detail.

3 See in this regard Kupisch and Rothman's (2018) epistemological paper and the debate around the keynote paper of Benmamoun et al. (2013) for a detailed discussion.

4 Ibidem.

5 We can divide the migration into three main stages: 1991, 1997 and 1999, during the Kosovo war (Dajko 2022).

6 50% had Albanian as the dominant language, and 30% had Italian. Nobody declared to speak only Italian.

7 We wish to thank our many Albanian students at Urbino University who have personally provided us with information on this subject.

8 Participants could give more than one answer to this question.

9 See among the many Garcia (2009), Garcia and Wei (2014), Vogel and Garcia (2017).

10 See Myers-Scotton (1993, 2002) and related work.

11 See Poplack (1980), Sankoff and Poplack (1981), Poplack and Meechan (1995).

12 However, see López (2020) for a different position.

13 However, see Myers-Scotton (2002 and related work) for a radically different analysis.

14 When definite articles *lo* and *la*, and the indefinite feminine *una*, precede a noun starting with a vowel (or semi-vowel) sound, the elided forms *l'* and *un'* are employed.

15 However, for the few neuter nouns which can be inflected in the plural, there is also an indefinite form with a final inflection, in addition to the pre-nominal particle *të.*

16 For the Albanian examples see also Dajko (2022).

17 Remember that indefinite Ds are pre-nominal free morphemes in both languages.

18 The judgment scale goes from 1—totally unacceptable, to 6—totally acceptable and natural.

19 Unfortunately for this pilot work we have not been able to collect linguistic data from more participants until now (including the remaining 19 who filled the sociolinguistic survey). It is our intention to proceed with data collection in order to be able to draw more definitive conclusions in future work.

20 Here and in what follows, percentages are calculated with respect to the total number of sentences of the relevant type (see Table 6 above) multiplied by the number of participants (8).

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Language Attitudes among Second-Generation Arabic Speakers in Italy

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Abstract: This research explores the language attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy, examining their perspectives on both Italian and Arabic. The study assesses these attitudes within the complex sociolinguistic environment of Arabic, which is heavily influenced by a diglossic view between Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects. The findings highlight nuanced attitudes toward Italian, Standard Arabic, and Arabic dialects, influenced by factors such as social integration, communicative utility, and cultural identity. Italian is perceived as a tool for social advancement and integration. In contrast, Arabic dialects are essential for maintaining cultural and familial ties, yet they often face marginalization in formal education settings and encounter social stigma. Conversely, Standard Arabic is esteemed in formal and religious settings despite its limited everyday use. This analysis reveals a dynamic interplay of attitudinal responses to these languages, illustrating a rich mosaic of multilingual and multicultural identities. The results call for policies that acknowledge and promote linguistic diversity in Italy, aiming to enhance social integration and protect linguistic rights. These policies should include educational reforms that treat Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects equitably, supporting their role in fostering inclusive and comprehensive linguistic-cultural integration.

Keywords: language ideologies; language attitudes; family language policy; second-generation immigrants; Arabic; home language; Italy

1. Introduction

The objective of this study is to examine the language attitudes of the second-generation Arab population in Italy towards the languages in their repertoire. The presence of Arabic-speaking communities in Italy is significant in quantitative terms. According to data provided by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2022,[1] there are 711,309 individuals (equivalent to 14.1% of the foreign population) with citizenship of an Arab country. Despite this, and even though it has been a stable presence for decades, there is a significant gap in scientific research regarding the diffusion and vitality of the Arabic language in the country, the strategies for intergenerational language transmission and, above all, the attitudes of the speakers themselves towards their own languages (but see D'Anna 2017). Language attitudes, understood as a set of emotional orientations, prejudices, and stereotypes that individuals acquire through direct or indirect experiences with the attitudinal object (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby 2021; Dragojevic 2017; Li and Wei 2022), are a multifaceted, nuanced, and unstable construct. They are closely connected with ideological systems (prevailing in a community as well as in the individual). In migratory settings, attitudes assume a central importance. For instance, positive attitudes towards the Home Language (HL) can be the driving force behind its maintenance. Conversely, negative attitudes can lead to a shift of the language out of the repertoire (Garrett 2010; Pauwels 2016), with severe consequences in terms of valuing societal multilingualism and, especially, protecting individual plurilingualism (Council of Europe 2018, 2022).

To gain an understanding of language attitudes, it is essential to consider the sociolinguistic situation. This is particularly pertinent when examining the Arabic language,

which exhibits a remarkable degree of internal variation (Abdelsayed 2021; Al-Wer and Horesh 2019). Typically, a distinction is made between *fuṣḥā* (from *faṣāḥa* 'purity of language', 'clarity', and 'eloquence') and *ʿāmmiyya* (from the adjective *ʿāmmiyy* 'popular') or *dāriğa* (from the adjective *dāriğ* 'circulating' and 'current'). In this paper, we will refer to *fuṣḥā* (encompassing both so-called Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic) as Standard Arabic (SA), and *ʿāmmiyya*/*dāriğa* as Dialectal Arabic (DA). Generally, DA refers to the language of daily oral communication, which is characterized by strong internal variation. Not only has each Arab country developed its own variety of DA, but each DA also assumes different configurations, for example, based on geographical space (diatopic variation), social strata (diastratic variation), and depending on the context and situation (diafasic variation) (Haeri 1996).

In this paper, as mentioned above, our aim is to explore the attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy towards the languages in their repertoire. In particular, we focus on attitudes towards Italian (IT), DA, and SA. To achieve these goals, we draw on data collected within the AHLI project (acronym for Arabic as Home Language in Italy), an interdisciplinary and multi-method initiative aimed at exploring family language policies for the maintenance of Arabic as HL in Italy (for further details, see Abdelsayed and Bellinzona 2024).

The article is structured as follows: We will start by outlining the theoretical framework on ideologies and language attitudes (Section 2.1), followed review of the literature on attitudes towards the Arabic language(s) (Section 2.2). Next, we will provide an overview of the AHLI project (Section 3), with specific focus on the research context (Section 3.1), design (Section 3.2), and methodology (Section 3.3). We will then introduce the research participants (Section 4). Subsequently (Section 5), we will present the results from various analyses—quantitative, qualitative, and lexical—and discuss these findings in relation to the literature review (Section 6). Finally, the conclusions (Section 7) will address the implications and future perspectives of the project.

2. Language Attitudes and Ideologies

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The AHLI project is grounded in the theoretical framework proposed by Spolsky (2004) regarding language policies, including family language policies (Curdt-Christiansen 2018). Within this perspective, interpreting language policies requires an examination of management, practices, and ideologies. According to Spolsky, '[l]anguage ideology or beliefs designate a speech community's consensus on what value to apply to each of the language variables or named language varieties that make up its repertoire' (2004: 14). These ideologies not only stem from language practices, but also have the capacity to influence them in turn, forming the basis of managerial choices within the family (King et al. 2008; Schwartz 2008; Spolsky 2004; Spolsky and Shohamy 2000).

While the terms 'beliefs' and 'ideologies' may appear interchangeable based on the citation, Spolsky recently delineated a subtle distinction between the two: '[t]he second component of my model is either beliefs (a looser term) or ideology (suggesting a more organized system supported by a movement)' (Spolsky 2021, p. 202).

McGroarty (2010), building on the pioneering work of Silverstein (1979), underscores the social intricacies and the multifaceted nature of language ideologies, defining them as 'the abstract (and often implicit) belief systems related to language and linguistic behavior that affect speakers' choices and interpretations of communicative interaction' (McGroarty 2010, p. 3).

Recognizing the intricacies of investigating language ideologies is paramount, as it is not a straightforward task, but rather a multifaceted, challenging, and thorny one. The complexity of this task arises from the fact that these ideologies often 'operate at a subconscious level and that people may not be aware of their existence' (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby 2021, p. 106). However, despite this subtlety, 'ideologies can become apparent through people's attitudes towards a given language or language variety. Language attitudes are

the explicit evaluations of particular languages and language varieties' (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby 2021, p. 106). These attitudes serve as crucial entry points for exploring language ideologies. By scrutinizing them, we gain insights into the underlying beliefs and social constructs that shape perceptions and ideologies about languages.

From this perspective, as Albury argues, '[l]anguage ideologies are a socially-constructed reference point for how things ought to function in society, whereas language attitudes are subjective evaluations of whether, in what way, and to what extent, a specific language, language practice, or other language matter, is favorable' (Albury 2020, p. 369). Therefore, analyzing language attitudes offers a lens through which to understand the broader framework of language ideologies and their implications for social dynamics.

The study of language attitudes within multilingual contexts is deeply rooted in social psychology. A key framework for examining language attitudes is the tripartite model, initially conceptualized in social psychology and later adapted to sociolinguistics (Allport 1935). This model includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Dragojevic 2017; Garrett 2010). Li and Wei (2022, p. 17) explain that the cognitive aspect of language attitudes involves beliefs and judgments concerning languages. The affective component reflects feelings and emotions towards languages, influencing how favorable or unfavorable certain language features are perceived. The behavioral aspect pertains to the predisposition to act in certain ways, aligning with cognitive and affective evaluations.

Building on the theoretical framework outlined previously, this study conceptualizes language ideologies as predominantly subconscious, with their explicit expressions observed through language attitudes. These attitudes reflect individual evaluations and distinguish them from the broader societal norms encapsulated within ideologies. The research will focus on the cognitive component of language attitudes to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in language maintenance and shift, while acknowledging the close connections this component has with the affective and behavioral components.

2.2. Language Attitudes towards Arabic(s)

Extensive research within the Arab world has explored language attitudes, revealing their complexity influenced by historical, cultural, and social dynamics. There is generally a positive attitude towards SA, often attributed to its close association with the Quran, its historical importance, and its symbolic significance across Arab societies. Furthermore, perceptions of SA are shaped by its deep ties to tradition, rich literary heritage, articulate expression, and role in fostering a unified pan-Arab identity. Consequently, SA enjoys high esteem and admiration among Arabs, transcending religious affiliations (Albirini 2016; El-Dash and Tucker 1975; Suleiman 2004).

Albirini's (2016) study surveyed 639 university students across Arab regions, exploring attitudes towards SA, colloquial varieties (QAs), and other languages. The study employed a mix of methodologies, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations, revealing SA's consistent favorability on the affective scale, despite cognitive competition with English. Additionally, further qualitative findings corroborated Albirini's results, emphasizing SA's cultural significance, albeit with a minority preference for QA's perceived simplicity (Al-Muhannadi 1991; Chakrani 2010; Ennaji 2007; Haeri 1997, 2000, 2003; Hussein and El-Ali 1989; Murad 2007; Saidat 2010; inter alia).

Nevertheless, these attitudes are not uniform and are influenced by various factors, including educational background and social context. These factors significantly shape individuals' perspectives on the practical utility of SA compared to other languages (Al-Wer 2002; Murad 2007). Furthermore, the global spread of other languages, particularly English, and the pervasive influence of Western cultural hegemony are reshaping language attitudes, altering perceptions of language prestige and modernity (Albirini 2016).

Despite these trends, there is a growing acceptance of colloquial Arabic for daily use and in settings traditionally reserved for SA. This shift towards valuing the practical utility of colloquial Arabic reflects broader changes in language attitudes and practices (Albirini 2016). Moreover, the portrayal of SA in the media as cumbersome and less beneficial may

negatively impact public perceptions (Bassiouney 2014). Nevertheless, a profound respect for Arabic as a symbol of identity and heritage remains strong among Arabs, even among those with limited proficiency in SA (Shalaby 2018).

In the context of language shift and maintenance, attitude stands as a crucial factor influencing these dynamics (Gardner 1985; Holmes and Harlow 1991). Research indicates that family and community attitudes, especially in migration contexts, profoundly influence language practices. For example, Sofu (2009) revealed how family perspectives and external factors shape language practices across three generations within Turkish-Arabic bilingual families, highlighting the pivotal role of family context in language retention. Similarly, Dweik et al. (2014) focused on Muslim Arabs in Vancouver, finding universally positive attitudes towards Arabic, largely due to its sacred status associated with the Quran. This reverence not only positions Arabic as a prestigious language but also as an essential marker of identity and cultural heritage. Arabic-speaking parents, reflecting their commitment to preserving this heritage, often ensure their children attend Arabic schools to become proficient in the language.

Al-Sahafi's studies (Al-Sahafi 2015, 2018) in New Zealand show that family language policy significantly influences Arab immigrant children, fostering positive bilingual attitudes and underscoring the role of language in identity formation and cultural cohesion. Eid and Sallabank (2021) explore these dynamics among Lebanese families in the UK, noting that maintaining Lebanese Arabic strengthens cultural identity and belonging. However, perceptions towards SA are mixed, reflecting a complex interaction of values in multilingual settings. Furthermore, Hassan (2023) examines the language policies of Libyan families in the UK, noting a discrepancy between positive attitudes towards Arabic maintenance and actual language use at home. This often results in language attrition due to inconsistencies between language ideology and language management.

Collectively, these studies highlight the complexity of language maintenance in the diaspora, shaped by a web of individual, family, and community factors. They underscore the urgent need for focused research on the language attitudes of Arabic-speaking communities in diasporic contexts like Italy. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing effective language maintenance strategies and supporting educational and community initiatives. The data collected for the AHLI project, which will be discussed in the following pages, provide the opportunity to meet this need.

3. The AHLI Project

3.1. Research Context

The AHLI project was conducted in Italy, a country characterized by a rich and complex 'linguistic space' (Berruto 1987; De Mauro 1980), which historically includes the Italian language and its varieties, languages of historical minorities, Italo-Romance dialects, and other international languages. In light of the considerable influx of immigrants, Bagna et al. (2003) proposed the concept of 'neo-plurilingualism', an updated model that incorporates immigrant languages as a pivotal element of the 'global Italian linguistic space' (Vedovelli 2017).

In 2022, the number of immigrant citizens in Italy was 5,050,257, accounting for 8.6% of the population (IDOS 2023). The predominant immigrant groups come from Romania (21.5%), Morocco (8.4%), Albania (8.3%), China (6.0%), and Ukraine (4.5%). Regarding Arabic-speaking communities, the data from ISTAT 2022 show that approximately 14.1% (711,309 individuals) of immigrants in Italy originate from Arab countries. The three largest Arabic-speaking communities are those from Morocco (420,172 individuals), Egypt (140,322 individuals), and Tunisia (99,002 individuals), collectively representing approximately 93% of the total Arabic-speaking population in the country. Apart from certain historical concentrations, such as the Tunisian community in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily (Colucci 2018; D'Anna 2017), most Arabic-speaking communities are concentrated in the central-northern regions, particularly in Lombardy (212,407; 29.86%), Emilia-Romagna (92,883; 13.06%), Piedmont (69,456; 9.76%), and Veneto (56,321; 7.92%).

The vitality of immigrant languages, including Arabic, is contingent upon the attitudes of the host society. Although studies on Italian attitudes towards immigrant languages are limited, existing data reveal a complex and contradictory set of perceptions. As Barni (2008, p. 230) observed, '[a] generally closed attitude was also observed towards immigrant languages and plurilingualism on the part of Italians, gradually growing stronger as we observed pupils from higher grades within the schools'. Abdelsayed and Machetti (2023) found that school teachers predominantly positive views of Arab people but less positive perceptions of the Arabic language and Arab countries. In their study of socialization processes and language shift in Moroccan adolescents, di Lucca et al. (2008) observed that the persistence and manifestation of negative attitudes from the Italian population towards their origin and the Arabic language itself were major reasons behind the language shift. Numerous studies on linguistic landscapes, which examine municipal ordinances in various Italian cities that regulate the use of immigrant languages on bottom-up signs (mainly shop signs), also provide tangible evidence of distrustful and generally negative attitudes towards these languages (for an overview on Italian linguistic landscape studies, see Bellinzona 2021).

A significant issue is the lack of a comprehensive language policy that recognizes and values immigrant languages. There is no specific law aimed at recognizing or protecting immigrant languages; rather, there are isolated actions driven by specific political orientations (Vedovelli et al. 2009) or school guidelines that, however, lack normative power.

Of particular concern is the situation of Arabic. A preliminary survey conducted by Abdelsayed (2023) revealed that Arabic language courses are virtually absent in Italian schools. In Lombardy, for instance, only two upper secondary schools offer curricular courses in Arabic, exclusively focusing on SA. While individual schools have the autonomy to offer extracurricular courses, opportunities remain scarce and frequently fail to include DAs. Consequently, families seeking courses in Arabic as a heritage language must rely on non-formal learning contexts, such as mosques and cultural associations.

3.2. Research Design

The AHLI project aims to comprehensively explore family language policies concerning the maintenance of Arabic, in all its varieties, as a HL in Italy. The term 'AHLI', derived from Arabic *ʾahl-ī*, means 'my family'.

Since the project's scope is broad and multidimensional, and it draws on various theoretical frameworks, employing heterogeneous research tools was considered useful and appropriate. Positioned within the pragmatic paradigm (Mertens 2005), the project employed mixed methods with an explanatory design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). This integrated and versatile approach combines quantitative and qualitative aspects to allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. In particular, the explanatory design focuses on the sequential collection and analysis of data, where a quantitative phase precedes and informs the subsequent qualitative phase, aiming to fill any gaps and provide more detailed and contextualized explanations.

In our research, the initial phase involved distributing a questionnaire (Q-AHLI) to first- and second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. The second phase consisted of focus group sessions with Arabic-speaking families, including parents and/or children. Due to space limitations and the specific focus of this contribution, we will confine our discussion to the findings from the first research instrument, the Q-AHLI.

3.3. The Q-AHLI

The questionnaire Q-AHLI was based on a careful review of the literature, regarding family language policy, language attitudes, language maintenance, and studies on bi-/multilingualism. It also considered the peculiar sociolinguistic situation of Arabic and Arabic-speaking communities in Italy (Abdelsayed 2021; Bialystok 2001; Colucci 2018; Curdt-Christiansen 2018, 2022; Li and Wei 2022; Pauwels 2016; Protassova 2018; Sorace 2010; Spolsky 2004; inter alia).

The questionnaire was created in two linguistic versions, in Arabic (SA) and Italian, to allow participants to complete it in the language they felt most confident and competent. For the practical implementation, we used Google Forms, adhering to technical standards and scientific guidelines for formulating the items (Brown 2001; Dörnyei 2002; Ruliyanti et al. 2021). We also ensured compliance with ethical research principles and privacy regulations (EU Regulation 2016/679), maintaining the anonymity of responses and ensuring that the data are processed in aggregated form.

The introductory page of the Q-AHLI included the researchers' contact information and provided a detailed description of the study, its objectives, and data management strategies. Participants were required to confirm a digital consent statement before participating in the research.

After piloting an initial version with 20 informants, the questionnaire was validated by a panel of three experts, who evaluated its clarity, coherence, relevance, and sufficiency (Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez 2008). Cohen's Kappa statistics, calculated following the second round of evaluation, revealed a significant and excellent interrater agreement among experts, $p < 0.05$, $k > 0.80$ (Hernández-Nieto 2011).

In the final version distributed to participants, the Q-AHLI consists of five sections, totaling 101 items, which can be activated in different ways and numbers depending on certain responses provided by the informants themselves. The sections are composed as follows:

- Section 1 'Sociodemographic and sociolinguistic data'—25 items: parents and children,
- Section 2 'Language practices'—24 items: parents and children,
- Section 3 'Language management'—17 items: only parents,
- Section 4 'Language ideologies related to bilingual parenting'—16 items: only parents,
- Section 5 'Language ideologies related to the different languages in the repertoire'—19 items: only children.

Further details about the questionnaire structure are provided in Abdelsayed and Bellinzona (2024). In this study, we will focus in particular on the responses to Section 5 of the questionnaire, which consists of various items aimed at investigating the attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers towards IT, DA and SA.

As the Q-AHLI is a direct method, it is assumed that the responses, being the result of reflective thinking, are particularly reliable for exploring the cognitive dimension (Garrett 2010; Ryan and Giles 1982). However, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of language attitudes are interrelated, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries between them. Through the data obtained from the questionnaire, we aim to outline an overarching understanding of language attitudes in their various nuances, gaining insights into the affective and behavioral dimensions as well (Albirini 2016; Li and Wei 2022).

The Q-AHLI was distributed to the target population using various channels, primarily including direct contact, word of mouth, and especially social media networks (Kayam and Hirsch 2012; Noy 2008). In total (excluding pilot subjects), 168 Arabic speakers participated in the survey, divided into the following groups: first-generation immigrants with children (46; 27%); first-generation immigrants without children (37; 22%); and second-generation immigrants (85; 51%). In the next paragraph, we will briefly present the characteristics of the second-generation immigrants, who will be the focus of the subsequent discussion on language attitudes.

4. Study Participants

To investigate language attitudes towards the languages in the repertoire, we considered individuals from the so-called 'second generation'. By this term, used broadly, we mean all those who were either born in Italy (to Arab parents or mixed couples) or arrived there during their school years.[2]

In total, as mentioned previously, 85 participants in this category took part in the AHLI project, comprising 69 females (81%) and 16 males (19%). The sample included

55 informants aged 18–24 years (64.7%), 21 informants aged 25–30 years (24.7%), and 9 informants over 30 years old (10.6%).

Of these, 53 informants (62%) stated they were born in Italy, while 32 (38%) were born in an Arab country. Among those born outside Italy, the majority arrived at a young age, with 75% (24 informants) reporting that they received their entire education starting from elementary school within the Italian school system. The remaining 8 informants completed their middle school education in Italy.

Most participants (70 informants; 82%) are children of Arab couples from the same Arab country. Additionally, there are 14 informants (16%) from mixed couples, including 2 cases where the mother was Arabic-speaking, and 12 cases where the father was Arabic-speaking. Only one participant reported having parents from two different Arab countries.

Regarding the county of origin, 44 participants are from Morocco, 16 from Tunisia, and 12 from Egypt, totaling 71 participants, which constitutes 85% of the sample. Most participants reside in the central-northern regions of Italy, with Lombardy accounting for 44 (52%) and Emilia-Romagna for 10 (12%). The only exception is Sicily, where 12 participants (15%) are located. This distribution aligns with the national demographic trends as outlinedin Section 3.1.

5. Results

In this section, we will explore the attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. Before proceeding, however, it is appropriate to provide an overview of the sample's characteristics in terms of Arabic language maintenance and family language policies, as revealed by the analysis of the Q-AHLI.

The linguistic repertoires of the informants are highly plurilingual, with a minimum of two declared languages and a maximum of ten (M = 5.12, SD = 1.45). Among the most known languages are Italian (85; 100%) and English (79; 92.9%), followed closely by DA (78; 92%). This suggests strong family language policies oriented towards the intergenerational transmission of the HL. SA, on the other hand, is indicated as part of the repertoire by 56 participants, 65.9% of the sample. It is also noteworthy to consider the self-declared proficiency data for these languages. Italian, on average, is rated M = 4.89 (SD = 0.27) on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. DA, on average, is rated M = 3.77 (SD = 1.22), while SA is rated M = 3.00 (SD = 1.16). However, as highlighted by Abdelsayed and Bellinzona (2024) elsewhere, the most critical skills for DA, which negatively affect proficiency, are those related to literacy, including reading and writing. In contrast, for SA, the skills that most negatively impact proficiency are those related to production, specifically speaking and writing.

Regarding social contexts and interpersonal relationships, the collected data highlight a substantial division. There is prevalent use of DA within the family (with parents and relatives), sometimes alternated or mixed with Italian. Siblings alternate between DA and, more frequently, Italian. Outside the home environment, Italian is almost exclusively used with friends and acquaintances, and in activities such as study and work. For intimate activities, such as thinking and dreaming, participants report using both DA and Italian in most cases. Only in relation to religious activities is there a predominant use of SA.

All of this indicates a good degree of maintenance of the HL, namely DA, albeit with strong criticisms related to the lack of educational opportunities in this language. These opportunities, on the contrary, are often available for SA. However, SA, although learned in formal (mostly universities) or non-formal learning/teaching situations (language courses at local associations or Quranic schools), lacks proficiency in the productive sphere, emphasizing its scarce, if not null, usage in social interactions (Abdelsayed and Bellinzona 2024).

Given this context, we can now delve deeper into the language attitudes of the participants in the AHLI project. The ensuing sections will each focus on different types of analysis: quantitative, lexical, and qualitative.

5.1. Controlled Association and Quantitative Analysis

To establish a general overview of the languages within the informants' multilingual repertoire, the Q-AHLI questionnaire was instrumental. It incorporated two specific questions that actively engaged the participants in articulating their associations with IT, SA and DA.

The first item asks participants to select their favorite language from the options: 'IT', 'SA', 'DA', 'I don't know', or 'other'. The second question employed a controlled association technique, which, unlike the broader scope of free association, provided participants with narrowly defined prompts. This question, partially inspired by established linguistic research methods (Garrett 2010; Giles and Billings 2004), required individuals to link the three languages under study with specific words. This approach proves valuable for uncovering associations that might remain hidden in less structured survey methodologies. The primary aim of this test was to investigate the cognitive elements influencing language attitudes. Participants were prompted to relate each language to various culturally and socially relevant dimensions. The question was framed as follows: For you, which language (IT, SA, and DA) is:

(1) Most associated with religion,
(2) Most associated with culture,
(3) Most associated with identity,
(4) Most associated with origin,
(5) Most difficult,
(6) Easiest to learn,
(7) Least important,
(8) Most useful,
(9) Of greatest prestige,
(10) Most beautiful.

Table 1 summarizes the responses to the question regarding language preference, revealing significant insights. For instance, approximately 32% of participants indicated 'I don't know', suggesting an ambivalence or lack of reflection on their linguistic preferences and possibly indicating an equal preference for the languages in their repertoire. Roughly 30% chose Italian as their favorite language. About 18% preferred SA, reflecting its significant role despite limited use. In contrast, despite being widely mastered and used, only 11% favored DA, indicating less favorable attitudes compared to IT and SA.

Table 1. What is your favorite language?

	N.	**%**
IT	25	29.4
SA	15	17.6
DA	9	10.6
I don't know	27	31.8
Other	9	10.6
TOTAL	**85**	**100**

As depicted in Figure 1, in response to the second question, the data revealed that SA was predominantly associated with religion (66 informants), considered the most difficult (65), most prestigious (60), most beautiful (47), and partially most useful (31) language. IT was deemed the most useful (35) and easiest to learn (60), while DA was most associated with culture (46), identity (36), and origin (63).

Furthermore, two noteworthy trends emerge from the data. Firstly, despite DA being the most used language for communication in family settings, it was deemed the most useful by only two informants. Conversely, a substantial number of 31 informants

considered it the least important language. Secondly, it is observed that IT, much like DA, was identified by many informants as the language associated with culture (21) and identity (32). However, IT is distinguished from DA by being less connected to origins, suggesting a complex interplay between language usage, practicality, and the multifaceted nature of cultural identity.

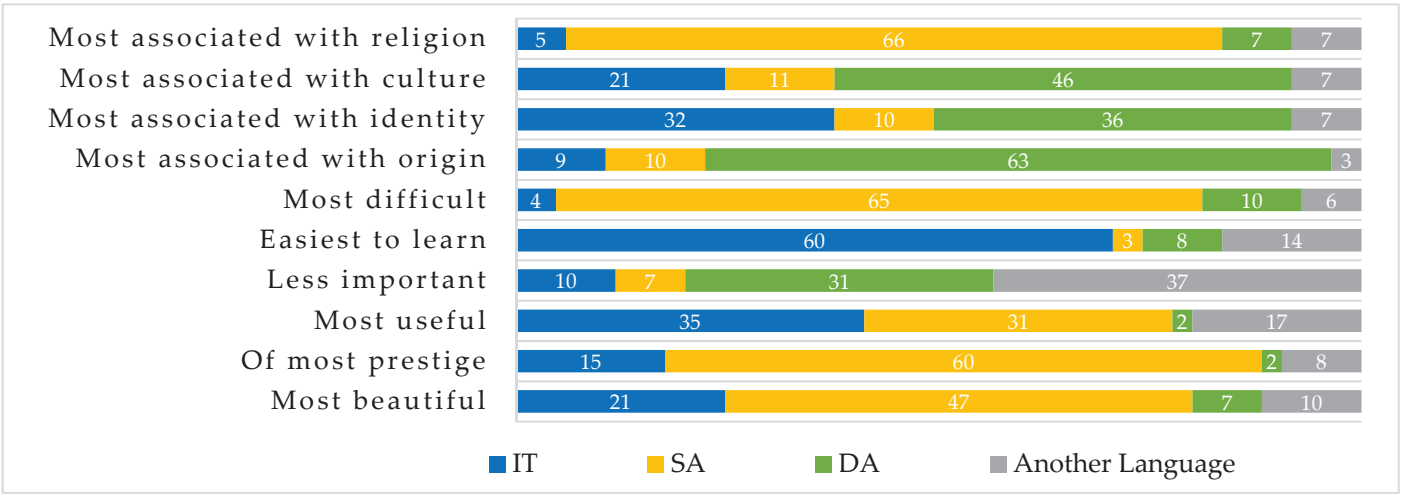

Figure 1. Controlled association of repertoire languages.

5.2. Free Response Experiment and Lexical Analysis

The second analysis conducted to explore attitudes towards IT, DA and SA consisted of a Free Response Experiment (Grondelaers and van Hout 2010; De Pascale and Marzo 2016). This experiment involved asking participants, within the questionnaire, to spontaneously list three words that they associate with IT, SA, and DA. The question was formulated as follows: 'How would you describe IT/SA/DA with three words? (e.g., beautiful, ugly, etc.)'. Once the responses were obtained, the corpus, divided into sub-corpora (each related to the three languages), was explored through SketchEngine.[3]

Excluding responses that deviated from the request (for example, entire sentences, as in the following case, produced in reference to DA 'It passively influences the standard language and slows its evolution'[4]), participants provided 600 words, classified into 155 different lemmas.

In Table 2, we report the list of the 10 most frequently used lemmas[5] and their respective frequencies, both overall and for the individual languages.

Table 2. The 10 most frequent lemmas in the corpus.

	Lemma	IT	SA	DA	Overall Frequency
1	Beautiful[6]	50	35	37	122
2	Difficult	5	23	7	35
3	Fascinating	11	18	4	33
4	Complex	8	12	1	21
5	Rich	16	4	0	20
6	Elegant	4	9	4	17
7	Complicated	8	9	0	17
8	Musical	7	6	2	15
9	Simple	6	2	5	13
10	Poetic	2	10	0	12

Table 3, on the other hand, lists the 10 lemmas with the highest association coefficient for each language. To extract the lemmas, we used the Word Sketches function in SketchEngine and as an association coefficient we used the logDice score (Rychlý 2008).

Table 3. The 10 lemmas with the highest logDice score t for each language.

IT			SA			DA		
Lemma	**Fr.**	**logDice**	**Lemma**	**Fr.**	**logDice**	**Lemma**	**Fr.**	**logDice**
Rich	16	12.6	Difficult	23	11.9	Fun	9	10.6
Elegant	8	11.8	Fascinating	18	11.6	Familiar	7	10.3
Complex	8	11.6	Poetic	10	10.9	Difficult	7	10.1
Romantic	6	11.4	Elegant	9	10.7	Simple	5	9.8
Language	4	10.8	Interesting	6	10.2	Complicated	4	9.5
Complicated	4	10.7	Musical	6	10.2	Direct	4	9.5
Varied	3	10.5	Rich	4	9.61	Expressive	4	9.49
Business suit	3	10.4	Prestigious	4	9.61	Useful	4	9.48
Useful	2	9.91	Melodic	3	9.2	Fascinating	4	9.37
Comfortable	1	8.93	Useful	3	9.17	Raw	3	9.09

Out of the 155 words reported by the participants, 19 are common to all three languages (fascinating, beautiful, harmonious, complex, complete, complicated, difficult, direct, fun, sweet, expressive, interesting, language, melodic, musical, normal, simple, unique, useful), while others are common only between two languages:

- DA and SA: six words—attractive, familiar, incomprehensible, particular, historical, utilized;
- SA and IT: six words—ancient, elegant, exhaustive, wonderful, poetic, rich;
- IT and DA: eleven words—nice, comprehensible, effective, easy, mine, patriotic, pleasant, daily, varied, fast, close.

However, many words were used exclusively in reference to one of the languages. We observe a greater lexical variety in reference to DA (49 words), followed by SA (33) and IT (31).

A review of the vocabulary employed exclusively in the context of DA reveals a spectrum of both positive and negative connotations. The positive attributes include words such as welcoming, warm, delicate, fluent, and special. Conversely, the negative connotations include words such as aggressive, chaotic, confusing, disharmonic, raw, naive, influenceable, and blunt. A number of terms used by participants are indicative of characteristics typically associated with orality (singsong, colloquial, discursive, dialect, popular, strong, fluid, guttural). Other terms relate to the manner of use (automatic, conventional, integrative, practical) and the intrinsic variety of the language itself (different, multicultural, variable, variant, mixed, mix). Moreover, terms associated with its status or personal opinions were not lacking (for example: neutral, free, underestimated, unmistakable, indescribable, colorful, original, passionate). Finally, participants associated the DA with their origin, including words like home, family, childhood, native, original, and identifying.

A closer examination of the words exclusively used to describe IT reveals a preponderance of positive associations, particularly those related to the language's sonority (sang, melodious, musicality, captivating, catchy) and its social functions and aspects of daily life (sociable, comfortable, natural, domestic, personal, historical). In numerous instances, participants referenced the linguistic characteristics of the language itself (articulated, refined, clear, verbose, irregular, intricate, vast, flexible), which were also related to the sphere of knowledge (erudite, refined, sophisticated). Moreover, in many instances, reference was

made to emotions, feelings, and personal opinions (adorable, loved, fascinating, intense, exceptional, magnificent, tranquil).

Finally, with regard to SA, the positive connotations are dominant (exciting, fine, immense, majestic, mysterious, precious, profound, refined, romantic, wonderful, suggestive, mysterious, exciting). The language is related to religious and spiritual aspects (divine, religion, sacred) and to the history of the language itself (old, secular). References to the sphere of orality are not lacking (harmonic, rhythmic, relaxing), but are accompanied by words related to the sphere of writing (aesthetic, graphic, literary, grammar). In reference to the uses and characteristics of the language, we find negative (unused, empty, redundant), positive (international, prestigious, clean), and usage context-related (formal, lofty) characterizations.

A comprehensive analysis of the data reveals several noteworthy trends that illuminate the language attitudes of the participants. First, it is notable that a significant proportion of individuals expressed a positive attitude towards SA, which they perceived as the most prestigious and fascinating variety. The prestige of the language appears to be primarily associated with its centuries-old history and its usage in high-status social contexts. A notable contrast can be observed between the aesthetic appreciation of SA and DA. While SA is almost exclusively associated with positive words, DA is sometimes explicitly stigmatized in this regard. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy in the perception of the appropriateness of utilizing the two languages. SA is more commonly associated with formal and religious contexts, whereas DA is more frequently employed in popular or everyday life contexts. Concurrently, discrepancies emerge in the perception of the two varieties with regard to the perceived ease of use and learning. SA is perceived as particularly challenging, whereas DA is perceived as more natural, straightforward, and spontaneous, representing the most practical means of communication, particularly in domestic and family settings.

It is noteworthy that IT shares commonalities with both varieties of Arabic. On the one hand, it is associated with vocabulary pertaining to the private, intimate sphere, such as that found in DA, which allows us to recognize signs of a relatively balanced and harmonious bilingualism between the two 'mother tongues', namely IT and DA. Conversely, a significant proportion of the vocabulary associated with IT is of an aesthetic nature, reflecting its historical and social status, as is the case with SA.

5.3. Open-Ended Questions and Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The third analysis, used to explore the language attitudes towards IT, SA, and DA, involves the use of open-ended questions. This approach allows informants to freely express their personal reflections on what the use of each language means to them. Specifically, the question posed to the participants was: 'What does the use of IT/SA/DA mean to you?'

These three inquiry questions provide key insights into the subjective meanings and values that speakers attach to each language. Open-ended questions are particularly effective in language attitude research as they offer participants the flexibility to express nuanced thoughts and emotions that closed-ended questions might not capture (Mackey and Gass 2005; Ryen 2004; Pavlenko 2006). This technique aligns with qualitative research methodologies that emphasize participants' perspectives and experiences as central to understanding complex social phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

Respondents provided a total of 189 answers over 64 responses to the question regarding IT, 63 to the question regarding SA, and 62 to the question regarding DA. These responses were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke 2019, 2021), supported by NVivo 11 Pro software.

The adoption of RTA, a dynamic and iterative process of data analysis, enabled us to continuously reflect on the data. This approach has fostered a deep engagement with the content and ensured a rigorous examination of the emergent themes and patterns. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), RTA differs from other forms of thematic analysis by emphasizing the researcher's active role in constructing meanings within the data, rather

than solely identifying them. This reflexivity involves recognizing and critically evaluating the researcher's biases, perspectives, and influences throughout the analytical process, thereby enhancing the depth and integrity of the interpretation (Terry et al. 2017).

This iterative interplay between the researcher's insights and the data not only enriches the analysis but also elucidates nuanced understandings that might otherwise remain obscured.

In this study, the RTA process followed the six phases identified by Braun and Clarke (2021). Initially, researchers individually engaged with the data through reading and reflection (Phase 1: 'familiarization'), identifying one or more codes in each response (Phase 2: 'coding') that pertained to a specific aspect of the attitudinal dimension for each language. Subsequently, still working individually, the researchers organized these codes into potential themes (Phase 3: 'initial themes generation'), continuously questioning their interpretations. They created conceptual and explanatory maps, which are not included here due to space limitations.

In the next phase, researchers engaged in joint reflection, comparing their analysis results and refining the codes and their organization into thematic nodes (Phase 4: 'development and review of themes'). This collaborative effort ensured an accurate representation of the data, with ongoing reflection. Each theme was clearly defined and named, considering the impact of these names on interpretation (Phase 5: 'redefinition and naming of themes'). The final phase, presented in this article, involved producing a coherent narrative that integrates the themes, supported by data extracts (Phase 6: 'writing the report').

This analysis resulted in the identification of 332 codes, which were organized into 29 broader thematic containers of nodes, leading to the conceptualization of four major analytical output themes (see Figure 2).

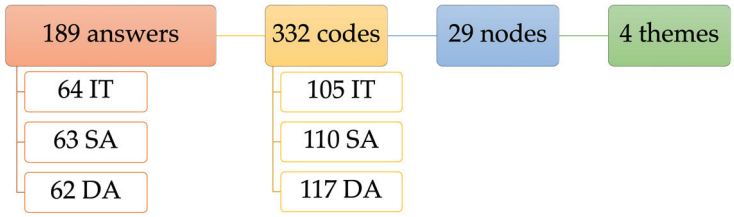

Figure 2. Data organization through RTA.

Table 4 delineates a detailed synthesis of data gleaned from the RTA. The findings are organized into four overarching themes, each encompassing a series of nuanced tree and child nodes that underscore the multifaceted relationship between language and sociocultural identity.

Notably, the theme of 'Functions and practices' stands out, with 146 instances recorded, signifying its prominence in the collective consciousness of the respondents. This theme is bifurcated into two tree nodes: 'Uses and Registers' and 'Language Marketability'.

Within 'Uses and Registers', SA is linked to stylistically formal applications and, along with IT, is connected to academic settings. Both IT and, to a certain extent, DA are associated with spontaneous and intimate use, reflecting their integration into personal and familiar spheres. For example, participant responses about SA suggest that it has a 'very formal significance, as it is a language much in demand in the professional world',[7] and is used in 'formally stringent contexts that are less accessible to the majority'.[8] This is supported by remarks such as: 'I seldom use Standard Arabic, almost only for reading (books or articles)'.[9] Meanwhile, IT is described as 'the language with which I can best express my emotions and feelings',[10] and DA is valued for its ease and familiarity in everyday interactions, as one respondent notes, 'I mostly use it because it is the most commonly used, the easiest, and the closest in dealings'.[11]

Table 4. Overview of findings from RTA.

Themes	Tree and Child Nodes			IT	SA	DA	Total	
Personal Identification	Origin			1	3	29	33	86
	Religion			0	19	0	19	
	Identity			6	5	7	18	
	Culture			0	5	11	16	
Judgments on Language	General Importance			2	4	3	9	28
	Prestige			0	8	0	8	
	Aesthetic Values			1	4	1	6	
	Neutral Position			2	1	2	5	
Functions and Practices	Uses and Registers	High	Formal	2	11	0	13	146
			Academic	3	2	0	5	
		Familiar	Spontaneous	7	0	2	9	
			Intimate	2	0	1	3	
	Language Marketability	Areal	Territorial Limitation	2	0	7	9	
			Universality	1	8	0	9	
		Social	Communicative Effectiveness	19	7	22	48	
			Everyday Use	20	0	2	22	
			Sociability	7	2	4	13	
			Social Inclusion	7	0	2	9	
			Future Prospects	1	4	1	6	
Linguistic Repertoire	Mother Tongue			15	1	12	28	72
	Complementarity			6	8	4	18	
	Foreignness from the Linguistic Space			0	12	4	16	
	Difficulty in Learning			0	4	2	6	
	Linguistic Enrichment			1	2	1	4	

In the dimension of 'Language Marketability', there are two levels to consider: areal and social. At the areal level, there is a stark distinction in how different languages are perceived concerning their geographic versatility. The analysis shows that DA and, to a lesser extent, IT, are often viewed as having a territorial marketability—indicating a strong association with specific regional or local identities. In contrast, SA transcends geographical limitations and is embraced as a language with universal applicability, enhancing its perceived value on a broader scale. Participant responses provide tangible examples of this: DA is articulated as enabling 'communication in the country of my parents' origin',[12] and IT as facilitating the ability to 'communicate with people in Italy',[13] while SA is prized for allowing individuals to 'communicate with the entire Arab Muslim world through this shared foundational language'.[14]

Specific testimonies highlight IT as providing 'the opportunity to express myself fully'[15] and as a 'language for communication and integration into the Italian society'.[16] DA is considered 'essential for communicating with my generation and beyond',[17] indicating its significance across various age groups. Meanwhile, SA is approached with a utilitarian perspective, with individuals considering its acquisition for 'work-related purposes'.[18]

The 'Personal Identification' theme, with 86 codes, emerges as the second most significant. This theme captures the personal cognitive elements that the informants associate with each language, specifically 'origin', 'religion', 'identity', and 'culture'. The findings highlight a predilection for associating DA with 'origin' and 'culture', signifying a deep-rooted connection to one's heritage and traditions, whereas SA is more intimately associated with 'religion', reflecting its centrality in religious expression. The responses underscore the pivotal role of the three languages—IT, DA, and SA—in the construction of identity.

Illustrative responses include DA being described as 'essential for communicating with part of my family, excluding the use of English, ensuring full integration and naturalness in conversation. It also reminds me of my origins, and it's the only medium that would make me feel "at home" in that country'.[19] Other responses include 'Moroccan culture is mostly passed down orally; learning Moroccan dialect means also learning Moroccan culture'[20] and 'it's the primary criterion that defines me as Moroccan'.[21] SA is described as

'a connection to my culture, religion, and identity',[22] 'very important to me as the language of Islam, my religion',[23] and 'it carries cultural significance since I primarily use it to gain a perspective distinct from the Italian 'Western' one, such as accessing different media information or reading authors with styles different from European ones'.[24] IT is 'part of me',[25] and 'forms a part of my identity'.[26]

The third most frequently coded theme in the data is 'Linguistic Repertoire', with 72 codes, where informants ascribe specific roles to languages. IT and DA are both identified as 'mother tongues', indicative of a bilingual environment. In contrast, SA is associated with a sense of 'foreignness from the linguistic space', a perception attributed partly to the challenges encountered in its acquisition. All three languages—IT, DA, and SA—are uniformly linked to 'complementarity' in their uses, thus constituting a resource for 'Linguistic Enrichment'.

Testimonies about IT include remarks that 'It is my mother tongue, so I use it for everything';[27] for DA, 'It is the language I use most with my closest people (mom, dad, and relatives), the language to which I listen to music, it is a part of me'.[28] SA, however, is described as 'somewhat distant from my personal identity because I have always found it difficult to learn'.[29] Concurrently, the perspective that all three languages offer opportunities for enrichment is captured by comments that IT is associated with 'communication and a broader linguistic repertoire',[30] the use of SA 'increases my cultural baggage',[31] and the DA is 'a beautiful addition'.[32]

Lastly, the 'Judgments on Language' theme, with 28 codes, delves into cognitive attitudes towards languages. This theme is marked by two distinct trends. The first trend associates SA with a high degree of 'prestige' and specific 'aesthetic values'. The second trend involves all three languages—IT, DA, and SA—which are linked to a 'general importance' or hold a 'neutral position' within the linguistic repertoire. Comments regarding these languages often describe them simply as 'a language' or 'normal'.

SA is particularly noted for its 'religious significance and necessity for understanding and studying religious texts, in addition to being more elegant and formal compared to the dialect',[33] as one respondent notes, 'it represents everything because the Holy Quran is in *fuṣḥā*, and everything beautiful from the past was in *fuṣḥā*'.[34]

6. Discussion

The analysis of the language attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy reveals a complex and nuanced reality regarding their interactions with the languages in their repertoire. This study focuses particularly on their perceptions of Italian and various forms of Arabic, including SA and DA, exploring the relationships among these languages. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these languages are part of broader and more complex repertoires, indicating the participants' belonging to a globalized and superdiverse society (Blommaert 2010; Gumperz 1964; Vertovec 2007). In this context, traditional linguistic categories such as 'first language', 'second language', 'mother tongue', and 'native speaker' become less relevant, converging towards personal and community linguistic identities that are continuously evolving.

Focusing on IT, SA, and DA, this analysis sheds light on the complex linguistic representations and the diverse, albeit intertwined, attitudinal dispositions towards these languages, denoting different degrees of integration of the languages themselves in the daily lives of the participants, and allows for the recognition and identification of stereotypes and prejudices widespread in society (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby 2021; Garrett 2010).

In particular, we can observe certain trends related to each language. Regarding IT, it is often observed as the favorite language of the participants. This suggests a strong sense of personal identification with the language and a sign of successful social integration. As observed elsewhere, IT, as the dominant language in society, is deemed useful for daily interaction and social advancement (King and Fogle 2006). It is perceived as a prestigious, illustrious, and poetic language—traits it shares with the associations also attributed to SA.

Nonetheless, IT is also appreciated for its ease of learning and its usefulness in interpersonal relationships, even in a domestic and family context. Like DA, IT is also recognized as a 'mother tongue', reflecting a substantial situation of active bilingualism in the perception of second-generation Arabic speakers.

DA is perceived as a practical language, essential for daily and family communication. These representations confirm once again that the true HL is DA, not a generic Arabic and SA even less so. Not only do the language practices themselves clearly demonstrate this (Abdelsayed and Bellinzona 2024), but the analysis of attitudes highlights how second-generation Arabic speakers are aware of this, although they sometimes may deny this reality. This finding, although seemingly trivial, has significant implications. Indeed, it is true that this has been a known fact for some time. However, educational offerings in DA, in both formal and non-formal contexts in Italy, continue to be virtually nonexistent (Abdelsayed 2023). This is very serious, considering that all European language policy documents emphasize the need to ensure language maintenance (Candelier et al. 2012; Council of Europe 2018, 2022). In this sense, there is a short-circuit where the linguistic data (supported by attitudinal dispositions) do not translate into practical interventions that effectively protect the linguistic rights of users.

This situation also has an extremely negative impact on the language attitudes of the speakers themselves. Indeed, DA is often rated as the least important language, highlighting a certain social stigmatization that views the true HL as something crude, useless, and popular. At the level of personal identification, DA is valued for its connection to cultural belonging and origin and remains crucial for family interactions and the maintenance of traditions (D'Anna 2017). Outside the family context, however, it loses social significance, and its utility is underestimated (Albirini 2016).

Conversely, SA, although less frequently learned in informal settings and representing only a minor component of the linguistic repertoires of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy in terms of knowledge and proficiency, still occupies a central role in the collective consciousness. SA is highly valued for its prestigious connotations, particularly in formal contexts and as a crucial element of religious practices, playing a significant role in shaping a Pan-Arab identity (Bassiouney 2014). This esteem is further enhanced by the rich heritage of Arabic literature, which leads individuals to describe SA using words that emphasize its aesthetic qualities, such as beauty, elegance, charm, and lexical richness.

Despite comprehensive efforts from both top-down (educational systems) and bottom-up (family initiatives) approaches to teaching SA within the Arab diaspora, mastering the language presents numerous challenges. From an attitudinal perspective, participants perceive SA as somewhat alien to their daily linguistic environment, emphasizing the difficulties they face in learning it. The data indicate that, unlike IT and DA, SA is less connected to the everyday practical and communicative functions typically associated with a 'mother tongue', yet it remains a vital component of the Arab linguistic identity.

Beyond the value associations of the individual languages, this study delineates the complex ways in which IT, SA, and DA interrelate at an attitudinal level among the second generation of Arabic speakers in Italy. Paradoxically, the findings reveal that SA and DA share fewer similarities than expected. Interestingly, IT is perceived as the most functional language, capable of fulfilling its roles in all social contexts. In contrast, SA and DA, according to the speakers' perceptions, are relegated to specific settings. Notably, IT maintains a more neutral position, integrating characteristics of both SA and DA: IT and SA are associated with positive aesthetic values, while IT and DA are considered facilitators of everyday communication. Despite this, it is important to emphasize once again that all three languages—SA, DA, and IT—play significant roles not only in shaping the linguistic identity but also in the broader personal identity of the second-generation Arab diaspora in Italy.

7. Conclusions

This paper explores the complex and nuanced language attitudes of second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. The data collected within the AHLI project, particularly through the specifically developed questionnaire, allowed for delineating the diverse preferences Arabic speakers have towards the languages in their repertoire. The focus was on Italian, the language of society and essential for social integration, and Arabic, both SA and DA. The data highlight the complementarity of these languages in the participants' identity representations.

To foster linguistic diversity and social integration, this study recommends advancing language policies that recognize and value immigrant languages, including Arabic. Specifically for Arabic, it is crucial to enhance the teaching of both SA and DA, and, importantly, appreciate the practical utility of DA. Reducing the stigmatization of DA and promoting its cultural significance can strengthen collective identity and improve attitudes towards the languages.

Furthermore, it is important to implement targeted actions and measures to raise awareness among Arabic speakers about the role of their DAs, the HL. Such initiatives can improve attitudes towards DA, ensuring that it is recognized not only as a crucial element of cultural heritage but also as a valuable part of their linguistic repertoire. Increasing awareness can be achieved through educational programs, community workshops, and media campaigns that highlight the linguistic, cultural, and social importance of DA, alongside SA, in a framework that values the entire Arabic linguistic space. These efforts can contribute to a more positive perception of the HL, fostering an environment where multilingualism is valued and supported, and promoting a more inclusive society (Carbonara and Scibetta 2020; Cummins 2000; García and Wei 2014; King and Fogle 2006; May 2014).

It is important to acknowledge that this study has certain limitations, primarily that it focuses on the cognitive dimension of language attitudes and employs data from a single direct method, the Q-AHLI questionnaire. The selected methods indicate that a more thorough investigation of the components of language attitudes would be enhanced by the use of indirect techniques, such as matched-guise procedures and participant observation. The exclusive reliance on questionnaires is a limitation, as they are susceptible to response bias, whereby respondents may report what they believe is expected or what they think, rather than their actual behavior. The use of indirect methods can either serve to either corroborate the findings presented here or, alternatively, to reveal deeper and more complex insights.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the variety of proposed items and analyses conducted (quantitative, but also lexical and qualitative) enabled the acquisition of a global understanding of attitudes towards the languages in the repertoire to be acquired. Therefore, the framework established by this study provides valuable data for future research on language attitudes among second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy. The data obtained from the present study should be used to analyze in greater detail the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of language attitudes using a variety of methods.

The AHLI project, in its entirety, and this study in particular, constitute a pioneering contribution to the Italian context. In light of the aforementioned limitations, the findings should be regarded as a pivotal initial step towards a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the transmission and maintenance of Arabic as a HL in Italy and the associated language attitudes. As a work in progress, the AHLI project will continue to contribute in this field, with a commitment to overcoming the limitations faced and expanding its scope.

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Data Availability Statement: Data is unavailable due to privacy and ethical restrictions. However, the Q-AHLI is available in Italian at this link: https://forms.gle/iK1aPjV52tBcGgKi6 (accessed on 1 July 2024) and in Arabic at this link: https://forms.gle/R2M4L9pXCZUhHTGB8 (accessed on 1 July 2024).

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Notes

1 https://www.istat.it (accessed on 1 July 2024).

2 We include in the same label, therefore, different groups among those identified by Rumbaut and Ima (1988) and Rumbaut (2004).

3 https://www.sketchengine.eu (accessed on 1 July 2024).

4 Translated from Italian: "Influenza passivamente la lingua standard e ne rallenta l'evoluzione".

5 The terms were provided in both Italian and Arabic. For the purposes of the analysis they have all been translated into Italian but, to facilitate reading of the article, they are reported here in the English translation.

6 We are aware that the term "beautiful", having been provided in the question, should be excluded. Nonetheless, we believe it is useful to show how it has been associated with all languages, but mostly with Italian.

7 Translated from Italian: "ha un significato molto formale, in quanto è una lingua molto richiesta nel mondo del lavoro".

8 Translated from Italian: "uso per contesti formali poco accessibili alla maggioranza".

9 Translated from Italian: "uso poco l'arabo standard quasi solo nella lettura (libri o articoli)".

10 Translated from Italian: "è la lingua con cui so esprimere meglio le mie emozioni e i miei sentimenti".

11 Translated from Arabic: "استعملها غالبا لأنها الأكثر استعمالا والاسهل والأقرب فى التعامل".

12 Translated from Italian: "comunicare nel paese di origine dei miei genitori".

13 Translated from Italian: "poter comunicare con le persone in Italia".

14 Translated from Italian: "poter comunicare con tutto il mondo arabo musulmano grazie a questa lingua di base comune".

15 Translated from Italian: "la possibilità di esprimermi al 100%".

16 Translated from Arabic: "لغة للتواصل والاندماج في المجتمع الايطالي".

17 Translated from Italian: "fondamentale per comunicare con le persone della mia generazione e non".

18 Translated from Italian: "lo imparerei solo per scopi lavorativi".

19 Translated from Italian: "necessario per la comunicazione con una parte della mia famiglia escludendo l'uso dell'inglese, capace di garantire la massima integrazione e naturalezza nel parlato. Inoltre ricorda una parte delle mie origini, e si tratta dell'unico mezzo che mi farebbe sentire "a casa" in quel paese".

20 Translated from Italian: "la cultura marocchina passa per la maggior parte oralmente, imparare il dialetto marocchino vuol dire anche apprendere la cultura marocchina".

21 Translated from Italian: "è Il primo criterio per definirmi marocchino".

22 Translated from Italian: "una connessione con la mia cultura, religione e identità".

23 Translated from Italian: "è una lingua a me molto importante in quanto è la lingua dell'Islam, la mia religione".

24 Translated from Italian: "ha un significato culturale, dal momento che lo utilizzo principalmente per avere un'altra prospettiva rispetto a quella italiana "occidentale", ad esempio per vedere altre informazioni nei media o leggere autori con stili differenti da quelli europei".

25 Translated from Italian: "fa parte di me".

26 Translated from Italian: "fa parte della mia identità".

27 Translated from Italian: "è la mia lingua madre, quindi la uso per tutto".

28 Translated from Italian: "è la lingua che uso di più con le persone più care (mamma, papà e parenti), la lingua con cui ascolto più musica, è parte di me".

29 Translated from Italian: "è una lingua un po' lontana da quella che è la mia persona perché ho sempre riscontrato diverse difficoltà nel volerla imparare".

30 Translated from Italian: "comunicazione e bagaglio linguistico maggiore".

31 Translated from Italian: "l'uso dell'arabo standard aumenta il mio bagaglio cultirale".

32 Translated from Italian: "un qualcosa bello in più".

33 Translated from Italian: "valenza religiosa e necessaria alla comprensione e allo studio dei testi religiosi, oltre ad essere formalmente più elegante e formale rispetto al dialetto".

34 Translated from Arabic: "يمثل كل شئ لان القرأن الكريم بالفصحى، وكل شئ جميل من الماضى كان بالفصحى".

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Article

Family Language Policies of Multilingual Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden

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Abstract: This study explored the language and literacy practices of multilingual families in Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focuses on the different roles of family members in language transmission in order to understand whether these practices might have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. We aimed to answer two key research questions: RQ1, whether and how the pandemic conditions affected the heritage language, societal language acquisition, and heritage language literacy learning environments in the five countries examined (Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden); and RQ2, what is the nature of child and parental agency in facilitation of the possible changes in the corresponding five countries? Fifty semi-structured interviews (ten in each country) were conducted. The data highlighted the factors that triggered changes in family language policy during the pandemic and the role of the child's agency, parents, extended family, and social network during this period. Based on our findings, we argue that the pandemic conditions gave the children new opportunities for agency when it comes to language and literacy choice and communication with extended family members. This even facilitated new sources of input and suggested the active role of a child as an agent in shaping family language policy in the family.

Keywords: family language policy; children's agency; the COVID-19 pandemic; heritage language; Russian

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led and is still leading to unprecedented changes worldwide, and it continues to affect societies and communities in a number of different ways. The world crisis is highlighting many challenges, yet it is also providing new opportunities, giving us a possibility to understand the cost of the social and health crisis and what can be learned from it for the future. Multilingual communities were reported to undergo a "dual pandemic" (Lou et al. 2021): in addition to the COVID-related challenges, heritage language (hereafter HL)-speaking groups experienced limitations in the governmental provision of public health information in HLs (e.g., Piller et al. 2020). Furthermore, the stigmatizing of linguistic minority groups has been reported in the recent research, especially against Asian groups (Dovchin 2020; Lou et al. 2021; Zhu 2020). Finally, minority communities were disadvantaged in access to medical services and digital education due to limited resources and the lack of translation services for minority-language-speaking communities (e.g., Zhu 2020).

Despite these challenges, the pandemic may have been a pervasive catalyst for a language practice shift in HL-speaking communities. HL usage in multilingual families may

have potentially increased during the periods of social isolation, when there was a decrease not only in educational and leisure activities but also interactions with peers in the societal language (hereafter SL). Therefore, the pandemic has potentially provided new opportunities for maintaining and developing the HL.

However, little is still known about to what extent the pandemic triggered changes in micro-factors such as parents' views on multilingualism, language choice and use, and everyday interaction practices in the family, as well as macro-factors, such as societal structure, language policies in the country, and the value assigned to multilingualism by the host community (Curdt-Christiansen and La Morgia 2018; Spolsky 2004, 2012).

The current study aimed to contribute to the scarcity of research on how family language policy (FLP) might be changed rapidly as an answer to the challenging circumstances. In order to understand how FLP might have been influenced by the pandemic, this study explored language and literacy practices of multilingual families in Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden during the pandemic, as well as the different roles of family members in language use, maintenance, and transmission. The information on the effect of the pandemic on multilingual communities is very important, especially for countries with large percentages of HL-speaking communities. The choice of HL-Russian was motivated by the fact that maintenance and development of HL-Russian previously has been well documented in the pre-COVID-19 period in diverse contexts (e.g., Karpava et al. 2020; Otwinowska et al. 2021); however, little is known about HL-Russian transmission and maintenance in the COVID-19 period. In the current study, we use the term "HL" to refer to Russian as a language, which is not the dominant SL in each of the five countries.

Our study aimed to answer two key research questions: RQ1, whether and how the pandemic conditions affected the HL, SL acquisition, and HL literacy learning environments in the five countries examined (Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden); and RQ2, what is the nature of child and parental agency in facilitation of the possible changes in the corresponding five countries?

This article is organized as follows. We begin with an overview of the literature on family language policy, child agency, parental agency, HL and SL acquisition, and HL literacy learning environments. Then, we present the contextual background to Russian as an HL in the five countries examined (Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden). Following this, we introduce data on school closure per country during the COVID-19 pandemic that is relevant for the research questions of this comparative study. This is followed by a description of the research methods, after which we describe our results, focusing on similarities and differences regarding the countries under investigation. The conclusion summarizes our improved understanding of the FLP and literacy practices of multilingual families in the five countries during the pandemic.

2. Family Language Policy

The family language policy (FLP) involves ideologies and approaches to how languages are managed, learned, and negotiated within individual families (Schwartz 2010; Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). FLP research is interdisciplinary, and it takes into consideration both internal and external factors (King and Fogle 2013; Spolsky 2019; Hollebeke et al. 2020; Karpava 2022a). In particular, the internal factors include language management strategies in the family and their implicit and explicit language choices; parental expectations, attitudes, and efforts for HL maintenance and transmission; affective domain; the role of child agency and communication with siblings and relatives. As for the external factors, these comprise top-down ideologies, schooling, socioeconomic status of the family, well-being, social network, communication with educators and experts, quality, quantity of input to the HL and the SL outside the home environment, and collaboration with mainstream and community schools.

Family plays the primary role in socialization (Melo-Pfeifer 2015) and is traditionally seen as a driving force in HL maintenance and transmission. A multilingual family can be considered a "community of practice" (Lanza 2007, p. 47). As children grow older,

they interact more and more with their environment and develop into independent language agents who influence their parents' language choices (e.g., Smith-Christmas 2020, 2021). Consequently, all family members are under a constant mutual influence. A number of studies on language use and language maintenance in immigrant families show differences between immigrant generations (Lambert 2008, to name just one). Furthermore, differences in attitudes towards HL maintenance can also be observed within a single generation of immigrants, depending on linguistic ideologies (e.g., Kopeliovich 2013), which are "morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world" (see Woolard 2020: 1 and references therein).

The role of children as actors who can initiate changes has been emphasized in the literature previously (Said and Zhu 2019; Smith-Christmas 2021). Yet, there is still a need for more research to understand the role of the child's agency in shaping FLP, which is related to language exposure that the child gets and in turn is associated with the child's linguistic outcomes in both languages. Children's agency is related to their willingness and desire to or, on the contrary, their reluctance and resistance towards the use of the HL and the SL and, as a result, the development of relevant literacy skills. The quality and quantity of the language that children are exposed to and other aspects of children's linguistic environments at home and outside are in strong correlation with the success of language acquisition (for an overview see Armon-Lotem and Meir 2019 and numerous studies cited in it). In the general course, all children from multilingual families are reported to eventually learn the SL due to extensive schooling in this language (De Houwer 2020). As for HL maintenance, it is not always the case (Mieszkowska et al. 2017). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the exposure to the SL might have diminished due to lockdown measures (see the subsection below entitled "The COVID-19 pandemic impact on school closure per country"), thereby changing the balance between the SL and the HL in multilingual communities. At the same time, the pandemic has driven new opportunities in the realm of digital communication and digital education (Daniel 2020).

A handful of projects have investigated the effects of the pandemic on language use in multilingual families. The project led by Ludovica Serratrice, in which 700 multilingual families speaking as many as 95 different HLs took part in an online survey in Britain and Ireland (see http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/events/copy-copy-copy/, accessed on 3 November 2023), showed that, before the pandemic, children favored the SL (English in the UK and Ireland). However, during quarantine, there was a shift toward HL in some families. In Norway, a project led by Elizabeth Lanza (see García González et al. 2021) also focused on the effects of the pandemic on the HL and SL use by collecting data from almost 200 multilingual families. The results in Norway also indicated that younger children switched to the HL more often during lockdowns. Recently, Murrmann (2021) conducted an online survey during the month of February 2021 in which data were collected from 157 families residing in 42 different countries who speak at least 35 different languages, having a total of 339 children. The author reported that families' opinions with respect to the effects of the pandemic on language situation could be split broadly into four main groups. The largest group (43% of the respondents) reported a positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the language situation at home, stating that the pandemic restored the balance between the languages in the family's repertoire and helped support the acquisition of the previously less used languages. A second group (31%) reported an overall negative effect on the language situation at home, stating that the SL usage dropped dramatically, and its acquisition was not sufficiently supported. And, finally, 21% reported no changes. This trend was mostly observed in families with young children who were not concerned with school duties. The remaining 4% stated that it was too early or impossible to assess the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the language situation at home. Strikingly, the author reported that 65% of the families tried to introduce a different language policy compared to the one they had had prior to the COVID-19 outburst. In addition, a recent study by Sheng et al. (2021) which relied on exploratory analyses reported a change in the linguistic environment of bilingual English–Mandarin-speaking

preschoolers. The increased use of Mandarin between the child and his/her parents in the COVID sample was noted as compared to that of the pre-COVID sample. In contrast, a study by Sun et al. (2023) investigating the effects of COVID on language development in English–Mandarin bilingual children in Singapore showed no change in language input among nuclear members; however, the amount and frequency of conventional and digital media materials and activities increased during the pandemic, which is suggested to positively influence language proficiency in English, while weakening abilities in Mandarin in the post-COVID period.

To conclude, the scarce available research seems to indicate that FLP in multilingual families might have undergone changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The current study aimed to test whether previous findings are generalizable to other multilingual communities. With the help of a qualitative methodology, we investigated language use and language policy in multilingual families with HL-Russian across five countries, which vary in their SLs and with respect to their lockdown policies. Our goal was to further examine the directionality of the change and the driving forces of these changes based on the multilingual families with the same HL; in our case, this is Russian.

3. The Position of Russian in the Five Countries under Study

We investigated experiences of multilingual families raising their children with HL-Russian in five different countries, which differ with respect to the country and family language policy. Historically, these countries have had different migration waves (repatriates vs. old and new migrants vs. old and new minorities), as well as reasons for migration. Furthermore, these countries have differed with respect to HL-Russian maintenance policies at a country level and within a family. Finally, as described below, the five cases differ in the country and HL-Russian community size.

Russian is widely used by the large number of Russian immigrants in three of the countries included in this study: Cyprus, Estonia, and Israel. However, before the war in Ukraine, only in Cyprus was Russian perceived to be a commodity due to tourist flow, immigration, international marriages, cultural and religious ties, political cooperation, investments, and transnational corporations. Russian has developed into a new lingua franca in Cyprus, and even Cypriots are willing to learn it as a foreign language to increase their chances of better employment (Karpava 2022b).

Despite the fact that Russian has had a long history in Estonia and most Russian speakers have lived in Estonia for their entire lives, the official Estonian language is now dominant and prestigious in the country. To get Estonian citizenship, one must pass an Estonian language proficiency examination (Zabrodskaja 2009). In addition, the secondary education is available only in Estonian. This influences parents' decisions about their children's (pre-)primary education with respect to the SL/HL/immersion options (Seppik and Zabrodskaja 2022). An increasing number of Russian- and other-language-speaking students are enrolling in Estonian-medium schools. In Estonia, bilingualism that includes non-Estonian and Estonian is currently very much in demand among non-Estonians (Zabrodskaja 2014).

Today, Russian is the most frequently spoken immigrant language in Israel, after Hebrew and Arabic (Meir et al. 2021). Many members of the Russian-speaking community in Israel are interested in maintaining the Russian language and culture and transmitting Russian to the next generations (Otwinowska et al. 2021). Despite an interest in maintenance of the Russian language and cultural heritage, studies show that the ubiquitous presence of Russian vis-à-vis other languages in Israel is gradually decreasing.

In Germany and Sweden, Russian does not work as a lingua franca. The situation is still somewhat similar to the three other countries covered by our study: Russian is the HL for people of many different ethnicities and nationalities. However, the Russian speakers make up a rather heterogeneous group depending on the place of residence and the linguistic environment, thus leading to different possibilities for HL transmission and maintenance.

The community of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany is one of the largest consisting of people from the Soviet Union or its successor states, who immigrated to Germany in the 1990s or at the beginning of the 2000s (Ritter 2021). Most of them are Russian-speaking people with German heritage (see more in Baur et al. 2019), who, however, mainly had little or no command of the German language by their arrival and considered Russian to be their mother tongue and often their only language (Dietz and Roll 2019).

In Sweden, Russian is one of the non-official minority languages. The Russian-speaking community is rather small (around 0.3% of the country's population; see Parkvall 2016). However, the number of Russian-speaking immigrants is steadily increasing. Most Russian speakers are concentrated in the major cities, and, just as in Israel, they are interested in transmitting Russian language to the next generation (Otwinowska et al. 2021).

4. The COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on School Closure per Country

According to the UNESCO Global Dataset on the Duration of School Closures (2022) (https://data.humdata.org/dataset/global-school-closures-covid19, accessed on 25 June 2022), during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were fully and/or partially closed for an average of six months, which is equivalent to two-thirds of an academic year. However, there were large differences among countries with respect to the duration of full and partial lockdowns (see Table 1 for data per country). As a response to the COVID-19 lockdowns, education settings were transferred to emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al. 2020). Full lockdowns were imposed in Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, and Israel, and no full lockdowns were introduced in Sweden (for more information on governmental policies, please see UNESCO Methodological Note 2021: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/en_methogological_note_-_unesco_map_on_covid-19_caused_school_closures_reopening_final.pdf, accessed on 3 November 2023). In addition, as can be seen from Table 1, the overall durations of the full and partial lockdown in Germany and Israel were higher than in the other countries participating in this study.

Table 1. School closures during the pandemic in five countries for the period of March 2020–March 2022 (UNESCO global dataset on the duration of school closures, https://data.humdata.org/dataset/global-school-closures-covid19 (accessed on 25 June 2022).

Country	Duration of Full and Partial School Closures (in Weeks)	Duration of Full Closures (in Weeks)	Duration of Partial Closures (in Weeks)
Cyprus	28	13	15
Estonia	26	15	11
Germany	38	14	24
Israel	33	16	17
Sweden	24	0	24

In Cyprus, the in-school operation of all public and private schools at all levels was suspended on 14 March 2020. Within a few days after school closure, the decision regarding distanced learning—both synchronous and asynchronous—was taken by the Government of Cyprus. In Estonia, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions switched to emergency remote teaching on 14 March 2020. On May 2020, Estonian schools partially "re-opened", but online learning continued. Israel imposed several strict lockdowns with a full closure of the in-person schooling while offering online classes. In Israel, schools were completely closed or partially closed for 33 weeks. In Germany, the first lockdown was imposed from March to May 2020 when all classes were held completely online. In November 2020, the light lockdown measures were introduced, during which the schools were re-opened, and students were attending classes in masks. From mid-December 2020 until the end of June 2021, another strict lockdown—the second lockdown—followed. During this time, schools and kindergartens were closed again. However, the duration of the lockdown depended on the epidemiological situation in the respective state,

city, and even school. As far as Sweden was concerned, it was the only country that did not shut down all schools. Some restrictions in some schools were imposed. Sweden relied on its citizens to act according to the Government's recommendations and have solidarity with each other (https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se, accessed on 3 November 2023).

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

Using a qualitative approach, we aimed to address the research questions of the study. Therefore, we conducted in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with 10 Russian-speaking parents in each country—in total, 50 participants—who have children below the age of 18. To ensure the meaningful comparative analysis across the five countries, the researchers invited participants who reported Russian as L1, which was the inclusion criterion for this study. The interviews were conducted in the Russian language. All the researchers used the open-ended questions according to a number of preconceived themes which are related to family language practices, beliefs, and management strategies before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews allowed us to obtain rich data on an individual's experiences and beliefs.

All the participants were first-generation immigrants and were recruited using snowball sampling via social media. Table 2 provides demographic information on the participants of the study which was collected during the interviews. All the participants were females of mid-to-high socioeconomic status, with BA- or MA-level education. Since there were only ten participants from each country, we decided to recruit participants of the same gender to eliminate gender differences. Recent research shows that the closure of childcare facilities and a shift to virtual learning during COVID-19 placed more burdens on mothers and reduced their working hours (Petts et al. 2021). Therefore, mothers were more willing and available to be included in the current study. Furthermore, female participation can be explained by the composition of the mixed-marriage families, with the local father and an immigrant Russian-speaking mother. The current study represents the mother's perspectives on the family language policy implementation, which has been proven to be valuable in numerous previous studies (e.g., Schwartz 2010; Said 2021; Selleck 2023). The participants' ages ranged between 28 and 54. On average, the families had two children in the age range from 2 to 18.

Table 2. Demographic data on the participants.

Country		Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	Israel	Sweden
Age (years)	Mean	43.4	39.2	37.7	42	42.1
	Range	38–51	30–46	32–45	32–54	28–53
Education	School	1	0	0	1	0
	College	0	0	1	0	0
	BA	6	4	9	4	5
	MA	2	6	0	5	5
	PhD	1	0	0	0	0
LoR (years)	Mean	13	39	18	22	20.6
	Range	5–20	30–46	5–28	10–31	7–28
Number of children	Mean	1.8	2	2	2	2
	Range	1–3	1–3	1–3	1–5	1–3
Immigrated/ Repatriated from	Russia	3	0	6	4	7
	Ukraine	2	0	0	4	3
	Belarus	2	0	1	0	0
	Moldova	2	0	0	0	0
	Latvia	1	0	0	0	0
	Kazakhstan	0	0	2	0	0
	Kyrgyzstan	0	0	1	0	0
	Estonia	0	10 *	0	1	0
	Abkhazia	0	0	0	1	0

Table 2. *Cont.*

Country		Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	Israel	Sweden
Type of family	Endogamous	5	9	8	8	3
	Exogamous	5	1	2	2	7
Structure of the family	Co-living two-parent family	8	9	7	8	4
	Divorced two-parent family (50%–50% parent care)	0	0	2	1	2
	One-parent family	2	1	1	1	4
Home language use before COVID-10	Mainly RU	1	6	5	3	4
	Mainly SL	3	0	1	1	2
	Both	6	4	4	6	4

LoR = length of residence in the host country (years); * born in Estonia.

5.2. Materials and Procedure

Interviews are considered to be valid and reliable tools for data collection; especially if taking affective and social aspects into consideration, it is possible to create a safe and comfortable environment for the participants (Prior 2016, 2017; Rolland et al. 2020). The interviews were designed to provide a detailed snapshot of experiences of multilingual families: access to and support of remote learning, care of children in multilingual families, communication between close and distant family members, and child and parental involvement practices regarding HL and SL learning (see Appendix A). The interviews also focused on future steps (post-COVID-19) that are pertinent to supporting and maintaining harmonious bilingualism, defined as "a subjectively neutral or positive experience that members of a family in a bilingual setting have with aspects of that setting" (De Houwer 2020, p. 63). In the current study, all mothers were given the opportunity to express their experiences and subjective perspectives during the interviews. They reported socioeconomic challenges, such as space constraints or limited time, language barriers, and lack of access to technology and a non-supportive online learning environment, as well as insufficient parental support and engagement.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted via video meeting platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype, and Teams) in March–April 2022. The procedure of the study was developed in November–December 2021. The online video meeting platform has been widely used since the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is becoming a useful replacement for face-to-face interviews (see Mirick and Wladkowski 2019). While conducting qualitative interviews as part of the current study, good research practices, which are based on fundamental principles of research integrity, were fully applied with respect to the research environment, research procedures, safeguards, data practices and management, and collaborative working, as per ALLEA (2023). The informed written consent form was obtained from each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Overall, the interviews were conducted in the Russian language by multilingual interviewers, though occasional code-switching was observed in both the interviewers and interviewees. In this article, we give a broad orthographical transcription. The data were analyzed in consensus, using the grounded theory research method (Bryant and Charmaz 2019; Creswell and Poth 2018; Rolland et al. 2020). Iterative and recursive content analyses of the data were implemented to reveal the thematic patterns (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004). The transcripts were attentively reviewed: repeating keywords and phrases were identified; and the themes were created—(1) the effect of the pandemic on HL and SL acquisition (HL increase/SL decrease, HL decrease/SL increase, and no change in HL and SL use) and (2) the nature of child and parental agency in the facilitation of the possible changes.

6. Results

6.1. The Effect of the Pandemic on HL and SL Acquisition

With regard to our first research question of whether and how the pandemic conditions affected the HL acquisition, our study showed that, before the pandemic, multilin-

gual families in the current sample varied greatly in the amount of HL-Russian exposure at home. Some families maintained predominantly HL-Russian home environments (e.g., "Overall, in 90% of cases, the communication is conducted in Russian"). Others showed strong SL-home environments, with very little presence of HL-Russian (e.g., "Russian, maybe, I do not know, takes up 5% of the total time"). Similarly, during the pandemic, the FLP in the families varied greatly.

The pandemic has also crystallized the concept of FLP for many families. While many of the families stated that they did not have any specific FLP before the pandemic and had more of a laissez-faire attitude towards the languages, they became more aware of how they were managing languages at home and understood that their actions regarding the language use (especially the HL) led to specific outcomes.

6.1.1. HL Increase/SL Decrease

In all five countries under investigation, especially in endogamous families, parents reported that the pandemic provided a great opportunity to bring HL-Russian back to the home environment as parents/caregivers (e.g., nannies and grandparents) were spending more time at home with children, while schooling in the SLs decreased. That was noted especially in Israel and Germany because, in these countries, the overall duration of the full and partial lockdown was higher than in other countries under investigation (see Table 1). Some mothers reported that the pandemic triggered a greater opportunity to make their own HL-Russian more active. Furthermore, children have been reported to watch more cartoons and movies in HL-Russian. In families where Russian was encouraged and served as the dominant language for intrafamily communication, with parents actively investing in transmitting the heritage language to their children, the period of isolation during the pandemic had a positive impact. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic boosted the families' pro-HL-Russian FLP. The family members were spending time together at home to ensure that they all spoke in more HL-Russian than SL. The contact with peers in the SL due to school closures decreased (see Responses (1) and (2)).

> (1) *My husband watched movies with her [daughter] and they discussed them a lot afterwards. I noticed that she got very interested in comedies… yes, in Russian… And I tried to watch Estonian channels with her, but she did not show much interest in them…* (Estonia)

> (2) *We only speak Russian at home. During the lockdown, hardly anything changed. Maybe, we even spoke more Russian because we were all at home, our children had little contact with their friends, and we watched a lot of Russian films and cartoons at home.* (Germany)

The COVID-19 pandemic made the families in the respective countries aware of the fact that the Russian language can be present in their families both in the online and offline modes. The pandemic also revealed the hidden resources of the family and the close family networks.

In Germany and Israel, in families where HL-Russian was not the dominant language for intra-family communication, the mothers saw the pandemic as an opportunity to reintroduce HL-Russian and foster a more favorable attitude towards it, as seen in Response (3).

> (3) *The children always speak Hebrew among themselves. They use Russian only for me. They understand my reprimands and cursings. They always answer in Hebrew, very rarely in Russian, with some insertions of Russian words. Their Russian has improved in microscopic doses. A little bit, probably, just because they heard me more during the pandemic.* (Israel)

6.1.2. HL Decrease/SL Increase

Alternatively, some families—especially in Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden—in comparison to other countries, reported an opposite trend, pointing at the decrease of HL-Russian during the pandemic and the SLs taking over due to the closure of afterschool activities in

HL-Russian, thus leading to a more SL-oriented HL environment (see Response (4)). This might be explained by the overall duration of the full and partial lockdown in these countries. Please remember that schools were not closed in Sweden, while they were partially and/or fully closed in Germany and Israel (see Table 1).

(4) *Swedish started to clearly dominate during COVID. He* [the child] *is either watching more movies in Swedish or the language* [Swedish] *is easier?* [What the mother meant was: 'He is watching movies in Swedish because it is easier for him.'] (Sweden)

In some countries, the mothers were more concerned about the lack (or slow development) of the SL or frequent language mixing. Moreover, some mothers reported that children transferred their home linguistic practices of language mixing to a virtual classroom (see Response (5)).

(5) *During lockdown, we were all at home. So, the mixed language use was the same—a mix of Russian and Estonian—and became a problem as children started to mix language at school.* (Estonia)

The exposure to the SL was limited mainly to and associated with the completion of the children's school homework. In some families, new language practices were introduced, in particular, the use of the SL during (joint) homework activities. The mothers reported that they separated the usage of the two languages, as in Response (6).

(6) *My husband helped him with math, as I am not very good in mathematics. I helped him with German, English, and Geography. It was very difficult. I had to explain everything to him in German only.* (Germany)

One-language–one-context and/or one-language–one-parent policies were replaced by the one-language–one-activity policy. The parents introduced the rule that they spoke the SL with the children when they did their homework together for mainstream school, since this was virtually the time for schooling. As soon as this was over, everyone switched back to Russian. However, the mother noted that they had little or no time for special activities in Russian, like reading books, as children needed more rest after SL schooling. In Estonia, there was one family for whom the lack of the SL at home during lockdown led to the decision to seek an Estonian-medium kindergarten to increase the SL exposure.

6.1.3. No Change in HL and SL Use

Some families reported no change in children's HL acquisition and literacy development. The families that were initially HL-dominant maintained HL-dominant environments, as in Response (7), whereas the families that were SL-dominant preserved the pre-COVID SL-oriented FLP, as in Response (8):

(7) *Nothing changed during pandemic. We spoke Russian and we continue speaking Russian.* (Sweden)

(8) *The older [child] spoke Hebrew and continued speaking Hebrew, so everyone stayed in their comfort zone.* (Israel)

One of the key factors in Cyprus is the family composition, endogamous or exogamous, and whether both parents are HL-Russian speakers or members of a mixed-marriage family (usually with a mother speaking HL-Russian and father speaking SL-Cypriot Greek). As a result, the type of the family seemed to affect FLP in Cyprus (see also Karpava 2021). Endogamous families tend to use only HL-Russian at home (see Response (9)):

(9) [Did the FLP change during the pandemic] *Of course not. We were speaking our native language, Russian before the pandemic. So, we just continued to do it.* (Cyprus)

Some families reported no language shift, focusing instead on COVID-related issues, such as well-being, mental health, and tiredness, as in Response (10):

(10) *We had no problems except for one* [problem]: *we had fear!* (Sweden)

6.2. The Nature of Child and Parental Agency in Facilitation of the Possible Changes

Regarding our second research question, which deals with children's active role, research on FLP has started to acknowledge children as co-agents in shaping FLP (Uribe de Kellett 2002; Fogle and King 2013; Slavkov 2015). According to Smith-Christmas (2020, p. 221), child agency is of an intersectional, multidimensional, and multilayered nature, which is based on the constant negotiation of language choices and preferences in the family. While multilingual children grow, they experience life in many different contexts outside their home environment, and the older they become, the greater the variety of these contexts (cf. Hickey 2021). Friends, school, and society influence the children's language practices. However, the parents are and often continue to be the main role models for the children, shaping the preferences for the child's choices in language use (Ellis and Sims 2022).

Regarding the role of the child's agency in facilitation of potential changes, our findings indicated that the patterns observed prior to the pandemic became even more pronounced during the health crisis. Child agency has developed, as siblings and peers prefer to seek help from each other rather than from their parents, likely due to being confined to the home environment, as shown in Response (11).

(11) *I never interfere until they ask for help. Sometimes the younger one turns to the older one, and the matter does not reach me.* (Cyprus)

The children who displayed an interest in reading prior to the pandemic began devoting even more time to it during the pandemic. The mothers did not mention any new habits that emerged during this period; instead, the existing ones became essential, as children had more time on their own to develop these habits.

Regardless of the country and the country's lockdown policy, the role of children as active actors in modifying FLP became more apparent than ever before (probably due to the language present in the online mode, and it is known that the children spent much more of their time online) (see Response (12)).

(12) *She looks for Russian-speaking videos on YouTube (she can read and write); she watches Russian-speaking YouTube bloggers for children (her own interest); she is eager to watch films in Russian.* (Germany)

During the pandemic, those parents who wished to transmit the HL to their children saw this unique time as a great chance to teach it. It had become the family's responsibility to give their children confidence in using the HL by giving them opportunities to use it in communication, including reading and writing. Yet, in Estonia, Germany and Sweden, several mothers mentioned the lack of time, even though the pandemic brought the families closer than before. When such situations occurred, the children, as it was reported by their mothers, took the initiative and grasped opportunities to search for the information on their own.

By having to work from home, some parents exposed their children to different registers of the Russian language, which gave the children opportunities to hear the new lexicon and grammatical structures in formal and informal contexts. Furthermore, there was a bidirectional relationship between child linguistic choices and parental language preferences within HL environment, demonstrating how child agency is influenced by the parent's new behavioral pattern (see Response (13)):

(13) *I started watching more Russian programs and she [my daughter] became interested in them too and listened to them and then she even started searching for her own* [programs]. (Sweden)

During the pandemic, new literacy and FLP routines were introduced, taking into consideration children's age and their relevant needs. If the parents were consistent in applying them, the new language use and learning patterns became sustainable, as seen in Response (14).

(14) [About the younger daughter:] *We learnt proverbs and read fairy tales in both Russian and Estonian; I gave her more attention than before the pandemic.* [About the older daughter:] *She knows how to entertain herself: she picks up a book and reads, or just plays by herself. She speaks different languages with her dolls when I listen to her. For example, she plays "In the shop" and her customers (dolls) buy in different languages.* (Estonia)

Due to the pandemic, children were able to develop digital literacy because they had access to different platforms and gadgets. This facilitated children's agency in terms of their HL use (cf. Lanza 2021; Curdt-Christiansen and Iwaniec 2022). Children opted to communicate more with their grandparents via various digital platforms, which enhanced their HL skills (see Response (15)). This situation enhanced the role of relatives in shaping the FLP and HL environment.

(15) *My parents-in-law live in Russia. They don't speak Hebrew, they speak Russian to the kids. My mother-in-law… she works for a logopedic kindergarten. She is very concerned about the Russian language skills of the kids. The kids phone her via WhatsApp and the grandma teaches them all sorts of tongue twisters, she teaches them to pronounce "r" correctly, they have a Hebrew "r", not a Russian one. Grandma teaches them, and she is very happy, as they teach her letters in Hebrew.* (Israel)

Some mothers reported that their children showed no interest in developing the HL. It became a particular challenge in one-parent families or in families where a father lives and works abroad. In such cases, the grandparents' (digital) agency, i.e., active involvement of grandparents in children's everyday language usage, was extremely helpful, as they took an initiative in helping with HL transmission (see Response (16)):

(16) *Their grandmother took care of them while I cooked and cleaned for the whole bunch. The youngest ones read with her [in Russian], while the oldest only sat with a phone in his hand.* (Estonia)

Many mothers observed that their children's HL proficiency increased due to online Russian classes and enhanced digital literacy and child agency (see Response (17)):

(17) *My children have improved their Russian. The teacher just praised my children. And I can say that my children are independent, and I do not interfere in their educational process. They study on their own, do their homework and do all the tasks on their own. And I haven't interfered in it for a long time. No, no one helped. My children have been learning on their own for a long time without my help. All children are different, my children are very responsible, so it's not difficult for them to study online. They realized that online lessons are very convenient, you can have lunch and immediately go to the computer and study with the teacher.* (Cyprus)

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The current study was designed to examine language and literacy practices among multilingual families in five different countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Israel, and Sweden) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aimed to investigate whether the pandemic influenced language and literacy practices within HL-Russian-speaking families (10 families per country) through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Our objective was to explore whether and how the pandemic conditions impacted the HL and the SL acquisition, as well as literacy learning environments, and to understand the role of both child and parental agency in the facilitation of potential changes. While research on the effects of the pandemic has been conducted in various domains, there is still limited research on its impact on language use and policy within multilingual communities (see Murrmann 2021; Sheng et al. 2021; Sun et al. 2023).

The child's home environment and parental engagement (e.g., children's schooling, Slavkov 2017) are important factors in shaping HL and SL development, as shown in previous research (Di Pietro et al. 2020; Schleicher 2020; Yilmaz 2021). Our study provided

further evidence in this respect. Interestingly, at the beginning of the interview, the mothers were not quite sure whether the pandemic has affected their FLP, or educational and linguistic practices, while then in the process of the interview, different types of questions elicited rich data regarding the research questions of the current study. The analysis of the data suggested that there were certain similarities and differences across the five countries in which the study was conducted regarding the response of the immigrant/minority families to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closure. The duration of schools' closure and number of phases varied across the five countries, which affected the educational process in different ways and, as a result, the amount of time that the families had to spend at home in isolation. In particular, the overall duration of the full and partial lockdown in Israel and Germany was higher than in Estonia and Cyprus, as well as in Sweden, even though this country had only partial lockdown. This situation created more opportunities for HL-Russian development and transmission in Israel and Germany than in the other countries, where the families were "forced" towards the pro-SL FLP. Home-based teaching/learning in digital settings was the most prevalent form of education in most of the countries under investigation from March 2020 until May 2022. One of the aims of our study was to provide an overview of family reflections regarding their language management, use, and educational experiences. It further explored the effect of the pandemic on HL and SL use, maintenance, and transmission; the literacy environment; and the development of literacy skills, collecting the perspectives of all members (mothers, fathers, children, and extended family members) in explicit and implicit ways.

With respect to our first research question, which aimed to investigate whether and how the pandemic affected HL and SL acquisition and literacy learning environments, the results indicate that the changes in FLP are noticeable, but they seem to depend on the child's agency rather than only on parental intentions and assumptions. In line with previous studies (Murrmann 2021; Sheng et al. 2021), the families reported that disruptions from the normal schooling routines had both positive and negative consequences for the use/development of the HL and the SL. Young children required more support from their parents, older siblings, and extended families. It should be noted that the type of the family, endogamous (mixed-marriage) vs. exogamous (co-ethnic, where both partners have the same L1 background; see Karpava et al. 2021 for a further discussion), as well as one-parent vs. two-parent family, is an important factor for each country setting. Individual differences play their roles as well. In Cyprus, families with both parents speaking HL-Russian at home mainly continued to use only HL during the pandemic as they did in the pre-COVID period. At the same time, in the mixed-marriage families, the situation was much more complex. Both Greek and Russian were used, and the rate of use was affected by various factors, such as FLP, language status in the society, motivations for integration into the mainstream society, communication and access to social networks, and availability of time and access to technology. In both Estonia and Germany, Russian-speaking families were more concerned about SL development than HL maintenance due to the lack of SL use during the lockdown time. This trend was echoed in Israel and in Sweden, especially with respect to younger children and in families that practiced mainly the HL-Russian only FLP.

Based on our findings, FLP during the pandemic was shaped by access to education in the HL and the SL. Educational inequalities might have been exacerbated due to home-based learning. Socioeconomic status seems to be a key factor in this respect since some of the families with a low income or who are unemployed were not able to offer the same educational opportunities for their children in comparison with some other well-off families. This finding is in line with findings of Sun et al. (2023), who also reported differences between families with high and low socioeconomic statuses. However, in the Swedish data, the socioeconomic differences seemed to be less pronounced (however, it needs to be investigated with statistical data). In addition, it seemed that not all families had enough space at home or were well equipped with information and communication technology to have a comfortable environment for learning and support of HL and SL literacy skills.

In Cyprus, children had more time for their school lessons and extracurricular activities, such as Russian classes, as their classes were online, thus decreasing the time that was previously wasted on commuting from home to school and tutor centers. Under normal circumstances, parents in Cyprus have to drive their children to private classes because there is no well-developed public transportation, which is not the case in Estonia, Germany, and Sweden. In all of the countries, extracurricular activities (either in the HL or in the SL) were largely cancelled during the pandemic or moved to the online format. However, parents noted that the newly developed mode was appropriate. At the same time, it should be noted that not all families could afford extracurricular online Russian classes (with the exception of Sweden and Germany, where the Russian classes are subsidized by the government), and the parents were either involved in joint HL literacy activities with their young children or the teenagers had to cope by themselves and self-study, often without proper emotional and pedagogical support, a finding that is in line with the previous research (Di Pietro et al. 2020; Uro et al. 2020). Not all children and parents were ready for emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al. 2020), which affected the mainstream school and the HL education and literacy development (OECD 2020). Therefore, the children were deprived of stimulating activities and had more time to spend on their own, which, in turn, leads to child agency and child-initiated choices of activity.

Turning to our second research question regarding child agency, the pandemic conditions gave the children new opportunities for agency when it comes to (1) language and literacy development choice, (2) communication with extended family members, and (3) widening their social network and finding their own new sources of input. One of the main outcomes was that the children became more independent and had a chance to develop their digital literacy. In all the countries, the children's agency has been boosted, as they have become more flexible and equipped with technical knowledge. The children sought alternative activities to fill the void, which was created due to the cancellations of schooling and extra-class activities by using different platforms, software applications, and multimedia. The children found new sources of input in the HL and the SL by implementing 21st-century skills. However, it should be noted that child agency has been affected by various factors, such as the FLP; home language environment; relationship with extended family, relatives, and friends; schooling; and social network.

Furthermore, intergenerational communication was significantly enhanced both quantitatively and qualitatively during the pandemic, reaching new (digital) heights. The children played a key role as initiators of this transformative change in FLP. Further research on larger populations, different countries and various language combinations are necessary to obtain more valid and reliable insights into the development of HL and SL skills within immigrant communities of multilingual Europe.

The role of digital technologies and new learning opportunities are emphasized. It should be noted that the changes in use of the SL and the HL during the pandemic were related to such factors as the child's age (Response 14), child agency (Responses 11, 12, 15, and 17), the role of relatives/extended family (Responses 15 and 16), (online) HL environment (Responses 4, 7, 8, 12–15, and 17), SL development (Responses 5–6), family composition (Responses 9 and 10), FLP (Responses 1–3, 9, and 14), and online schooling (Response 17). In many instances, both parents and children were working and studying online at the same time. Most of the children at home had to develop their own independence in digital literacy. Enhanced digital literacy had a positive impact on their HL development, as they had more access to various digital platforms and programs in multiple languages, thus increasing the quantity and quality of HL. The children seem to become especially sensitive to the language use preferences of their parents (cf. Said and Zhu 2019) due to the increased time spent together at home, as it has been shown in the relevant examples in the Results section (Response 13).

8. Limitations and Future Research

While the study offered valuable insights into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development and maintenance of HL and SL in five countries, it is not without limitations.

Starting with the methodological points, further mixed-method research on this topic is important, given the small samples in each country in the present study. Online questionnaires provide data from larger samples, thus enabling solid generalizations. Yet, we also recommend supplementing questionnaire data with interviews employed in the current study, as interviews enable researchers to obtain richer data. In addition, it is beneficial to include both mothers and fathers in the data collection process to gain perspectives from both parents on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on FLP. It will be interesting to obtain the child's perspective on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting interviews with the children themselves. Finally, in order to generalize about the influence of COVID on HLs, it is important to extend the current research to a larger number of countries and different continents and any other H, for example, HL-Turkish, HL-Arabic, and HL-Spanish.

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Appendix A

1.	Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself? • About your family; • Your spouse/partner; • About your children.
2.	During the pandemic, what was the most difficult for you? • Your family, • Children.
3.	Has lockdown due to the pandemic affected language learning in the family? • Your home language? • The societal language? • Was there a balance between them? But, in general, has the language policy of the family changed due to isolation? • How?
4.	In your opinion, has the presence of the societal language become more noticeable in your family? • Has its appearance influenced the home language? Its use/its development?
5.	But did the pandemic somehow affect literacy development? • Have your kids started attending special afterschool activities, courses, sections? Any extra classes? How did you communicate with your relatives from the country of origin?
6.	During the pandemic, did the child attend school in their home language?

7.	At school at this time, was the child given homework? • What kind? • Who did these tasks with him? (Mom, Dad, sister, and so on)
8.	Do you think the child got tired of school more? • Did this fatigue somehow affect the child's desire to learn their native language?
9.	During isolation, what was the child's role in language learning? • The role of your family members? Dads? Grandmothers? Grandpas?
10.	Tell me, did your child have access to digital technologies? - Did this access somehow contribute to learning languages at home during the lockdown? Due to the pandemic, did you have any new opportunities in terms of learning languages during the pandemic? • And your children • In terms of training?
11.	Do you want to add anything? To comment?

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The Role of the Mother in Lithuanian Heritage Language Maintenance

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Abstract: The paper explores the pivotal role of mothers in maintaining the Lithuanian language within the Lithuanian diaspora, drawing upon Spolsky's family language policy theory and Curdt-Christiansen's dynamic family language policy model. Analyzing data collected in 2011–2013 and 2015–2017, the study investigates various factors shaping family language policy, with a particular focus on the mother's influence. It examines the interplay between the mother's role, emigrants' language ideology, Lithuanian identity, language acquisition, proficiency, and language usage across different domains and emotional dimension of language attitudes. Quantitative analysis, considering respondents' parents' ethnicities, reveals that respondents with Lithuanian mothers exhibit stronger connections to Lithuanian identity, more frequent acquisition of Lithuanian as their first language, higher proficiency, and increased usage of Lithuanian within the family and as an inner language. Moreover, positive language attitudes towards the heritage Lithuanian language are more pronounced among those with Lithuanian mothers. However, emotional attitudes towards language did not significantly differ based on parental ethnicity. The paper concludes by discussing the heightened responsibility of mothers in language maintenance within the diaspora and the challenges they face in fulfilling this role.

Keywords: family language policy; Lithuanian; mother; heritage language

1. Introduction

Research on family language policy, which has particularly increased over the past couple of decades, constitutes an important research branch that helps to reveal the important aspects of maintenance or loss of the heritage language, with factors that influence family language practices, language ideology, and language management (Pauwels 2005; Lanza 2007; King et al. 2008; Spolsky 2012; Haque 2011, 2012; Schwartz and Verschik 2013; Smith-Christmas 2016; Wright and Higgins 2021). According to Bernard Spolsky (2004, 2009, 2021), these three components constitute the essence of language policy. When studying the maintenance of the heritage language, attention should also be paid to the specific roles of the different family members in forming the language policy. There are studies that analyze the children's role (Wilson 2020; Zhan 2023), as well as some insights about the role of the grandparents in passing on the heritage language to the younger generations (Ruby 2012); some have also looked into the influence of the parents on the family language policy and language maintenance (Al-Sahafi 2015; Farr et al. 2018; Torsh 2020). The role of the mother has not been extensively studied. More analyses have been focused on the challenges faced by the mothers when raising bilingual children (Okita 2002; Torsh 2022), the language beliefs of the mothers, and strategies for language maintenance applied in the families (Kwon 2017).

This paper analyzes the role of the mother in the maintenance of the heritage Lithuanian language among the Lithuanian diaspora. The aim of this study is to determine the

role of the mother for the maintenance of the Lithuanian language and passing it on to the younger generation, to explore what internal factors motivate Lithuanian mothers to form and maintain the Lithuanian identity in their children while living abroad. We seek to examine the hypothesis that the Lithuanian ethnicity of the mother impacts the acquisition, proficiency, and use of the heritage language more than the Lithuanian ethnicity of the father. Also, we examine whether the mother holds the pivotal role in family language policy formation.

The paper uses, as its base, Spolsky's theoretical language policy model, which is constituted by the three elements: language practices, language ideology, and language management. However, family language policy is related not only to the linguistic life in the home environment; the decisions of the families are impacted by broader socio-linguistic, sociocultural, socio-economic, and socio-politic contexts (Curdt-Christiansen 2018), as well as the everyday lives, emotions, identities, and cultural and political allegiances of the individual members of the family (Farr et al. 2018; Curdt-Christiansen and Huang 2020). Therefore, Spolsky's theoretical language policy model, which is applied in this paper, is integrated with Curdt-Christiansen's dynamic family language policy (FLP) model, which considers the interconnected internal and external factors impacting the family language policy.

The population analyzed in this paper is the Lithuanian diaspora in western countries. Studies on this group are of particular interest as the population inside the country is 2.8 million, whereas over 1.5 million people living in various countries declare Lithuanian ethnicity. Another important aspect is the longitudinal aspect of the diaspora: Lithuanian emigration is usually considered as consisting of three major emigration waves: the first from the end of the 19th century up to the Second World War, the second wave at the end of the Second World war, and the third wave since 1990, thus providing an opportunity to look into different historical periods of emigration and the different generations of emigrants. As evidenced in previous studies (Jakaitė-Bulbukienė 2015a, 2015b; Vilkienė 2015; Ramonienė 2019a; Ramonienė and Ramonaitė 2021), heritage language maintenance and family language policy in general are related to the reasons for the emigration of the different waves.

The paper first presents the methodology and the data used. The analysis starts by looking at the aspect of language ideology, which is expressed by attributing importance to the heritage language. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the analysis explores two of the internal factors: identity and emotions. Further analysis is related to the language practices, language proficiency, and language use in different domains and with different interlocutors (parents and children). All these aspects are viewed through the lens of the ethnic identities of the mothers and fathers of the emigrants. The paper concludes with a discussion on the importance of the role of the mother in heritage language maintenance.

2. Methods and Data

The paper uses quantitative and qualitative data. Two large-scale projects have been conducted to study the Lithuanian diaspora, one in 2011–2013 and one in 2015–2017[1], both aiming to investigate the language of the emigrants by considering the language use, proficiency, attrition, and other related aspects. The quantitative data used in this paper are drawn from the first project. They consist of 2026 responses to an extensive online survey, gathered using a specially devised sampling matrix to correspond to Lithuanian diaspora characteristics (regarding the country of destination, extent of flow, and period of emigration) and aiming to survey 1000 respondents living in European countries and 1000 living in other continents (North and South Americas, Oceania, and Australia)[2]. The survey was available in Lithuanian, English, German, and Spanish. As shown in Table 1, these responses consist of mainly first-generation emigrants (G1); however, they do include both second (G2)- and even third (G3)-generation Lithuanian emigrants. The G1+ group represents the people who were born in Lithuania and emigrated as children as a result of the decision of the parents.

Table 1. Quantitative data samples by generation of emigration.

	Count (N)	Percent
G1	1492	73.6
G1+	167	8.2
G2	232	11.5
G3	135	6.7
Total	2026	100.0

The survey consisted of over 60 various types and lengths (multiple choice, closed and open, and scaling) of questions. The answers to the question about the ethnicity of the parents (Lithuanian or not) will be used as the base question to distinguish the respondents. Most of the respondents have both Lithuanian parents (N = 1746), even a substantial part of those of the second (78%) and of the third (30%) generations. There are N = 117 survey respondents whose mother only is Lithuanian and N = 89 whose father only is Lithuanian. Aiming to deepen the understanding of the role of the mother for the maintenance of the heritage language, we will particularly focus on these groups of respondents.

The qualitative data consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via Skype. The participants of these interviews were engaged through the snowball principle, and the interviews were conducted mainly in Lithuanian, with some in English. The interview collection started with the first project, when 177 interviews were conducted, and continued from there on, with the second project adding another 189 in-depth interviews. The duration of the interviews, in most cases, was up to one hour. The in-depth interview scenario included some guidelines that could have led to the revealed role of each of the parents for language maintenance (e.g., who in the family was engaged in the family language management and encouraged some linguistic practice, such as maintaining the heritage language or shifting to another language); however, not necessarily all the participants elaborated much on each topic. The illustrative excerpts presented in this paper are followed by information about the participant: country of residence, sex (Woman or Man), age, and generation.

3. Analysis and Results

In the following sections, we will analyze the data to verify our hypothesis about the pivotal role of the mother in heritage language maintenance. We firstly explore the importance of Lithuanian as an expression of language ideology. We then analyze the internal factors, specifically identity and emotions, that have an influence on the family language policy. Our main attention is concentrated on the language practices, which we explore in terms of self-declared language proficiency, and especially Lithuanian language use in general its use as an inner language as well as with the parents and with the participants' own children. For all these aspects, we start by presenting the quantitative data—separated according to parent's ethnicity where relevant—which is then illustrated and supported by excerpts from the qualitative interviews.

3.1. Language Ideology: The Importance of Lithuanian

It has been confirmed by various scholars that language policy and language maintenance or shift are closely related to language ideology (among others, see Spolsky 2004, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Ramonienė 2019a; Ramonienė and Ramonaitė 2021). In our survey, there was a question whether the respondents consider it important to know the Lithuanian language. It is quite natural that the respondents who have both Lithuanian parents stress the importance of the heritage language (see Table 2); however, if the parents are of different ethnicities, the importance ascribed to the Lithuanian language is higher in the responses of those whose mother is Lithuanian compared to those who have a Lithuanian father.

Table 2. Importance of Lithuanian (by ethnicity of parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Very important	77%	64%	84%
More important than unimportant	16%	21%	13%
More unimportant than important	5%	10%	2%
Not important at all	2%	4%	1%

In some in-depth interviews, the participants elaborated more on the importance of maintaining the heritage language. In excerpt 1, a G1 emigrant, a young woman living in Canada, expresses a deep appreciation for the Lithuanian language and it being an important object of pride. This ideology is a long standing one and very powerful for both Lithuanians in Lithuania and the diaspora, as can be understood from excerpts 2 and 3, where G2 emigrants of different age groups express a very similar stance. In excerpt 3, the interviewer encourages a deeper explanation that leads the participant to share about their whole Lithuanian world and their particular interest in it, therefore, wanting to pass it on to the future generations.

(1) *Man yra lietuvių kalba labai svarbi, man yra didžiulis pasididžiavimas, kad mes turim tokią kalbą. Žinant, kiek reikėjo tai kalbai išlikti, iš kur jinai atėjo, ir kaip jin yra tapatinama su kuria grupe ir panašiai... mes esam indoeuropiečiai... man tai čia yra kaip super power... čia tavo ginklas yra, visiškai... <. . .> kalbos klausimas manau, kad yra labai labai svarbus.*
[To me the Lithuanian language is very important, it's a great pride to me, that we have such a language. When you know what it took for this language to survive, where it came from and how it is identified, with what [language] group. . . we are Indo-Europeans. . . for me is like a super power. . . like your weapon. . . for real. . . the language aspect, I think, is very very important.] (Canada, W, 27, G1).

(2) *mums yra svarbu. Gal yra iš gimties, nes mūsų seneliai taip buvo, gyrė, nežinau, proud, kad mes mokam.* [it's important for us. Maybe it's because of our origin, because our grandparents were this way, they praised, I don't know, [they were] proud that we know]. (USA, W, 45, G2).

(3) I.[3] *Bet vis tiek norėtumėt, kad anūkai mokėtų lietuviškai?*
P. *Aš norėčiau, taip. Aš ir vyras mes norėtumėm.*
I. *Kodėl?*
P. *Nes kažkaip tai tiek daug įdėjom pastangų tuos savo vaikus auklėti lietuviškam pasauly, mūsų draugai yra lietuviai, mes su kitais nebendraujam. Mums yra daug maloniau, smagiau kažkur tai kažkas tai limpa, kai yra lietuviška, o kai ne. . . nu nėra taip nėra nėra kažkokios tai tokios prasmės, nėra taip pat svarbu, nėra to pačio tokio malonumo. Tai kažkaip tai norėtumėm, kad ir jie tą jaustų.*
[I: but anyway, you would like your grandchildren to know Lithuanian?
P: I would like, yes. Me and my husband we would like.
I: Why?
P: Well because we put so much effort to educate our children in the Lithuanian world, our friends are Lithuanian, we don't socialize with others. It's much more pleasant, fun for us, when something is Lithuanian, it correlates with us, and when it's not, there is no like, there is no point, it's not so important, there is not that same pleasure. So we would like them to feel that as well.] (USA, W, 65, G2).

3.2. Internal Factors

3.2.1. Identity

One of the survey questions was related to the declared identity. As can be seen in Table 3, the vast majority of the G1 (96 percent) and G1+ (90 percent) emigrants consider themselves Lithuanian, and only a minimal part of them claim to be half Lithuanian or of another ethnicity. The respondents of the second and third generations consider themselves less Lithuanian; however, half of the second generation (49 percent) and almost one-third of the third generation (27 percent) still declare themselves to be Lithuanians. Naturally,

these following generations feel half Lithuanian more frequently, and more of them identify with their country of residence.

Table 3. Declared identity by generation.

	G1	G1+	G2	G3
Lithuanian	96%	90%	49%	27%
Half Lithuanian	3%	3%	13%	36%
Other	1%	7%	38%	37%

However, it is interesting that identifying with Lithuania differs depending on which parent is Lithuanian. It is rather self-evident that the respondents with both Lithuanian parents identify as Lithuanians more frequently (see Table 4). However, the Lithuanian identity was declared more often by the emigrants whose mother is Lithuanian (45 percent) than those whose father is Lithuanian (34 percent). This question in the survey was about who one feels to be, and other possible suggested answers were, for example, European, person of the world, as well as the possibility to provide one's own answer. These options were chosen by less than ten percent in each group.

Table 4. Declared identity (by ethnicity of the parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Lithuanian	45%	34%	68%
Half Lithuanian	31%	40%	11%

When talking about identity in the interviews, the participants elaborated, not infrequently, on the metaphor of a tree and roots. In excerpt 4, a second-generation woman expresses the need to learn about one's identity in their childhood and teenage years and then expresses a pity for those who do not have this knowledge, talking about them as orphans and associating this to general psychological stability in life. In excerpt 5, a first-generation emigrant presents a very vivid image of identity, comparing an emigrated person who takes on different "decorations" like a Christmas tree, but the roots are in one's primary culture, country, and language.

(4) I: *O kas jums iš to? Iš tos lietuvybės turėjimo?*
P: *Well aš manau, yra labai daug skirtingų atsakomų. Iš vienos pusės, iš labai personal pusės, sakyčiau, kai augi yra labai svarbu, kai esi teenager, kai esi vaikas turėti kokį identity. Turėti, žinai, į ką pažiūrėti. žinoti iš ką tu esi. <. . .> Aš manau, dabar Amerikoj irgi yra labai visi bando sužinoti savo roots ir sužinoti iš kur jie yra. <. . .> Jie sužinojo, kad mano močiutė buvo iš Lietuvos. Iš kokios vietos? Visi nori žinoti jų linijas. Ir tas padeda žmones suprasti save. Ar gal jie pripildo save istorija, žinai, nes visi nori žinoti savo. Yra truputį liūdna, jeigu nei viena dalyką apie savo gyvenimą nežinai ir nežinai iš kur esi, kur seneliai gyveno. Orphans–jie nežino, kur tėvai, kokie tėvai buvo. Aš manau, gali lengvai jausti pamestas pasaulio, jeigu nežinai, kur tavo šaknos yra.*
[I: And what do you get from that? From that having Lithuanian identity?
P: Well, I think that there are many answers. From one perspective, a very personal perspective, I would say that while you're growing up it's very important, when you are a teenager, when you're a child, to have some identity. To have, you know, something to look up to. To know who you are. <. . .> I think, now in America also very many people are trying to find out their roots and to learn where they're from. <. . .> They found out that my grandmother was from Lithuania. From what location? Everyone wants to know their family lines. And this helps people to understand themselves. Or maybe they fill themselves with history, you know, because everyone wants to know their own. It's a bit sad if you don't know even a single thing about your life, you don't know where you're from, where did the grandparents live. Orphans, they don't know where the parents are, what the parents were like. I think you can easily feel lost in the world if you don't know where your roots are.] (USA, W, 45, G2).

(5) *Kuo aš save laikau? Aš... Aš turbūt, aš vis tiek pirmiausia save laikau lietuve. Todėl, kad ten yra mano šaknys <...> Tai yra kažkoks ryšys. Vat kaip augalo šaknys. Vat yra, tu nukirpsi augalo šaknį, jis vėl... Vat tą augalą kaip eglutę gali apkabinėti žaisliukais, bet tos šaknys vat išlieka po žeme. Ir jis nieko nesikeičia, aš manau taip ir emigrantams yra kaip ta eglutė, papuošta, ta prasme gyva eglutė, papuošta iš paviršiaus, bet šaknys vat yra tavo kultūra, tavo kalba, tavo protėviai, proseneliai, tavo tavo aplinka, kurioje augai.*
[What do I consider myself? I, probably I still firstly consider myself a Lithuanian. Because my roots are there. <...> There is some kind of link. As the roots of a plant. You can cut the root of a plant and it comes out again... You can decorate that plant, like a Christmas tree, with various things, but those roots remain underground. And it doesn't change, I think it's the same for the emigrants, like that decorated Christmas tree, I mean a living tree, it can be decorated from the outside but the roots are your culture, your language, your fathers, your ancestry, your environment where you grew up.] (USA, W, 41, G1).

3.2.2. Emotions

The survey had an open question asking to indicate the most beautiful, the most useful, and the dearest or the most precious language. The respondents could write their own answers, and rather logically, living abroad, Lithuanian was not indicated as the most useful language. The beauty of a language is rather individual or, on the other hand, can be stereotypical; therefore, the answers were quite varied (e.g., Italian or French). However, the portion of those who indicated Lithuanian amounts to nearly one-third. As can be seen in Table 5, there seems to be no difference whether the mother or the father is Lithuanian (29 and 27 percent, respectively), but the respondents of the mixed families indicate this less often than those who come from all-Lithuanian families (45 percent).

Table 5. Response "Lithuanian" to the question "Which language seems to be...?".

	Mother LT	**Father LT**	**Both LT**
The most beautiful: Lithuanian	29%	27%	45%
The most precious: Lithuanian	70%	71%	87%

When indicating the most precious language, however, the respondents are very convinced about Lithuanian being the dearest one to them. In this case, a very big part of those with only one Lithuanian parent consider Lithuanian as the most precious (70 and 71 percent), and there is no different between which parent is of Lithuanian ethnicity. As mentioned, the question was an open one, so the respondents could elaborate or motivate their response if they wished to. The few longer elaborations that we present here as excerpts 6–8 concern Lithuanian, and incidentally, they all come from descendants of emigrants who presumably do not know the language anymore (because they filled in the survey in languages other than Lithuanian), but the emotional weight of these comments can be clearly felt, and the role of the mother is especially stressed in the comment of the second-generation woman from Brazil (excerpt 7).

(6) [Which language seems to be the most precious?] Lithuanian. Lithuanian-Americans have fantasticized Lithuanian into a dream-language. It has become more than just a language of our parents and grandparents, it has become a language of mythology and childhood. Of course it's precious. (USA, W, 22, G3).

(7) muito amada e apreciada porque tenho sangue lituano e minha mãe me transmitiu todo esse amor por sua terra querida! Ela falava com muita emoção da Lituania, pois deixou sua linda terra com 14 anos de idade. [very loved and appreciated because I have Lithuanian blood and my mother transmitted to me all of that love for her dear land! She spoke with great emotion about Lithuania, having left her beautiful homeland at the age of 14]. (Brazil, W, 63, G2).

(8) Most precious language would be one of my heritage, so that would be Lithuanian, although i do not speak it. (USA, W, 24, G3).

In the in-depth interviews, the participants also spoke often about emotions and feelings when expressing their relationship with the Lithuanian language. This is well formulated by a G1 woman living in Italy in excerpt 9. Also, even though using heritage language among siblings of the following generations is not a common phenomenon, excerpt 10 presents such a case, and a G3 woman living in the USA talks about using Lithuanian for bonding with siblings and generating very positive emotions towards the language.

(9) *Kai jau noris iš širdies va kažką, tai tik lietuviškai, patys subtiliausi jausmai, kaip kitaip, jei ne sava kalba, vis tiek laikau, kad tai yra mano kalba.*
[when you want [to express] something from the heart, it's only in Lithuanian, the most subtle feelings, what other way if not your own language, I still consider it my language]. (Italy, W, 58, G1).

(10) *Tai man daėjo prieš kiek metų, man kilo, kodėl mes lietuviškai dar vis lietuviškai kalbam, mano draugė nekalba lietuviškai su savo tėvais, ir terpu savęs su savo seserim ir broliam net nekalba lietuviškai, kas skiriasi mano šeimoj? Ir, aš manau, kad vienintelis dalykas mano šeimoj, kad mes galėjom turėjom, tik mes trys, tai buvo ta lietuvių kalba. Kadangi mes viską mūsų gyvenime turėjom dalintis su tais studentais, čia buvo vienas dalykas, ko mes neturėjom dalintis. Mes galėjom pakalbėt apie studentus, mes galėjom, jeigu mes norėjom, pasiplanuot kažkokį siurprizą ar ką, mes galėjom lietuviškai, tai buvo mūsų, toks tik mūsų trijų bendras dalykas, kuris jungė mus.*
[So I only got it some years ago, it came to me, why we still speak Lithuanian among ourselves, my friend does not speak Lithuanian with her parents, and among her siblings, with her sister and brother they don't even speak Lithuanian, what is different in my family? And I think that the only thing in my family that we could, we had, only the three of us, it was that Lithuanian language. Because we had to share everything with those students (tenants at home), and this was the one thing that we did not have to share. We could talk about the students, we could, if we wanted to, plan some surprise or something, we could do it in Lithuanian, it was ours, something that belonged only to the three of us (with the sister and the mother), that was our bond.] (USA, W, 37, G3).

3.3. Language Practices

3.3.1. Proficiency

The respondents of the survey were asked to indicate their first language. As shown in Table 6, Lithuanian as L1 is indicated more frequently by the respondents whose mother is Lithuanian (74 percent) than those whose father is Lithuanian (54 percent).

Table 6. Lithuanian as L1 (by ethnicity of parents).

Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
74%	54%	98%

Considering a language their L1 does not automatically indicate the highest proficiency among all the known languages, especially in the context of emigration and diaspora. The respondents were asked to evaluate their own Lithuanian proficiency for understanding, speaking, reading, and writing skills on a scale of "good", "satisfactory", "poor", or "I cannot do this". It is presumed that the G1 emigrants (adults who were schooled in Lithuania and then emigrated) will have a high proficiency in Lithuanian; therefore, for Table 7, the G1 responses were eliminated from the data in order to be able to see a clearer picture of the proficiency achieved growing up in the diaspora. These partial data amount to N = 534 respondents.

Table 7. Self-declared proficiency of Lithuanian: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing (generations raised and born in diaspora).

Understanding	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Good	52%	26%	83%
Fair	18%	11%	11%
Poor	22%	30%	3%
None	8%	33%	2%
Speaking	**Mother LT**	**Father LT**	**Both LT**
Good	36%	20%	71%
Fair	24%	13%	20%
Poor	28%	30%	6%
None	12%	37%	3%
Reading	**Mother LT**	**Father LT**	**Both LT**
Good	34%	22%	67%
Fair	28%	15%	21%
Poor	26%	26%	8%
None	12%	37%	4%
Writing	**Mother LT**	**Father LT**	**Both LT**
Good	24%	13%	54%
Fair	28%	13%	25%
Poor	26%	33%	16%
None	22%	41%	6%

It is only natural that those having both Lithuanian parents are more proficient in Lithuanian in their oral and literacy skills. However, when looking at those who have only one parent of Lithuanian origin, the impact of the mother being Lithuanian is evident in all skills. Not only do more than half (52 percent) understand Lithuanian, compared to only one-fourth (26 percent) of those who have a Lithuanian father, but all the other skills are also more developed, even though to a much lower degree than in the case of both Lithuanian parents, than in those cases when only the father is Lithuanian. Another important aspect to mention is the low percentages of "I cannot do this" (none) self-evaluations, where those having only a Lithuanian father account for more than one-third on all the skills, whereas those having a Lithuanian mother are few, and only the most difficult skill, writing, is somewhat higher (22 percent).

3.3.2. Use of Lithuanian

Similar tendencies can also be seen when looking at the respondents' declared use of the heritage language. Among those who claim to use the Lithuanian language, there are more of those who have a Lithuanian mother; this is declared by 78 percent of the respondents (see Table 8).

Table 8. Use of Lithuanian (by ethnicity of parents).

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Yes	78%	61%	90%
No	22%	39%	10%

The survey results show that the influence of the different parents to use the Lithuanian language has had an impact on the inner language of the respondents. Tables 9 and 10 show that those having a Lithuanian mother think and count in Lithuanian more often than those who have a Lithuanian father.

Table 9. Thinking in Lithuanian.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Often	52%	37%	71%
Sometimes/seldom	27%	27%	24%
Never	21%	36%	4%

Table 10. Counting in Lithuanian.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT
Often	50%	39%	67%
Sometimes/seldom	27%	17%	25%
Never	23%	44%	8%

3.3.3. Use of Lithuanian with Parents

The survey respondents were asked about the use of the Lithuanian language with their parents. Table 11 is combined by taking the answers of those who have only one parent of Lithuanian origin and presenting data about the communication with that parent, while those having both Lithuanian parents are presented separately for the frequency of use of Lithuanian with each of them. It can be seen that in mixed families, communication in Lithuanian is much less frequent; however, communication 'always' in Lithuanian with the mother when only the mother is Lithuanian is noticeably higher (56 percent) than with the father when only the father is Lithuanian (36 percent). One can also notice that the infrequent use of ('sometimes') or even not using ('never') Lithuanian at all is higher in the 'father' column (21 and 19 percent) when compared to that of the mother. Interestingly, those who have both Lithuanian parents report more frequent ('always') communication in Lithuanian with the mother (84 percent) than with the father (73 percent); therefore, the role of the mother seems to be more important even in monoethnic families.

Table 11. Frequency of communication in Lithuanian with parents.

	Mother LT	Father LT	Both LT	
			With Mother	With Father
Always	56%	36%	84%	73%
Often	8%	7%	4%	3%
Sometimes	13%	21%	2%	3%
Never	11%	19%	0.8%	2%

In order to practice the language in the diaspora, verbal communication with the parents is the most important aspect; however, alone, it is not sufficient to have a varied and high proficiency in the heritage language. The in-depth interviews revealed various language management practices employed by the earlier wave of emigrants in order to improve their children's language proficiency. Many indicate Lithuanian as being the only language ever allowed in the house, with parents pretending not to speak the language of the country of residence in front of the children and similar tricks. In excerpts 11–13, two G2 and one G3 participants from English speaking countries recall their parents' efforts, which involved reading books or translating to the non-Lithuanian parent. In excerpt 12, a second-generation woman talks about her mother's "deceit" that she only learned about long after not being able to borrow English books from the town library; she was forced to read the Lithuanian books the family had at home.

(11) *Mama skaitydavo kada mes buvom maži, tai mes grįždavom iš mokyklos ir buvo tokios, vakarienės buvo du: vaikai valgė kada grįžo iš mokyklos, o paskui suaugusieji valgė, kada tėtė ir mano senelė, mes vadindavom ją bobute, grįžo iš darbo, tada suaugusieji valgė, o vaikai sėdėjo aplink stalą. Bet kol mes valgėm, tai mama skaitė lietuviškas knygas mums. Taip, kad mes tą girdėjom visą laiką.*
[Mom used to read when we were little, so we would come back from school and there were these, there were two dinners: the children ate when they would come

back from school and then the adults would eat when daddy and my grandmother, we would call her granny, would come back from work, then the adults would eat and the children would sit around the table. But when we ate, then my mom would read Lithuanian books to us. In this way we heard it all the time.] (Tasmania, M, 58, G2).

(12) *Tai kaip taip išėjo, kad aš kalbu lietuviškai? Ir mama sakė buvo labai paprasta, aš miestelio bibliotekai paskambinau, kad tau neduotų knygų neštis į namo. . . sakau kaiiip? Mano teisės, mano laisvės, kaip taip gali būti? Ir mama, mama pasakė–taip reikėjo, namuose buvo pakankamai knygų, visos lietuviškos, aišku, jeigu norėjai skaityti, galėjai skaityti ką tik norėjai.* [(Asked the mother) how was it that I speak Lithuanian? And mom said it was very simple, I called the town library that they wouldn't give you books to take home. I said "whaaat?" My rights, my freedoms, how can it be like this. And mom, mom said: it had to be this way, at home there were enough books, all Lithuanian, of course, if you wanted to read, you could read whatever you want.] (USA, W, 63, G2).

(13) *Mama su manim daug kalbėjo lietuviškai, o aš turėjau tėvui atsakyti ar išversti angliškai.* [Mom would talk in Lithuanian to me a lot and I had to respond or to translate to father (non-Lithuanian) in English.] (Australia, M, 33, G3).

Some participants said their parents invented various tricks to motivate their children to speak Lithuanian, involving pets that the children loved, as recalled by this young woman of the third generation living in the USA, where the mother seemingly did not oppose the little girl's refusal of Lithuanian; however, she made it clear that the only two interlocutors at home—the mother and the dog—only understood Lithuanian. Such examples show the great extent of effort members of the Lithuanian diaspora made to maintain the language, but these efforts have given good results, as maintaining the heritage language to such a high proficiency level in the third generation is not a very common phenomenon.

(14) *Mama sakė, kad kai aš buvau maža, gal kokių trijų metukų, <. . .> jinai sakė, kad vieną dieną jai pasakiau, kad nenoriu kalbėt lietuviškai daugiau. Mama sakė: „Gerai, bet su manim tik lietuviškai galima kalbėt". Ir mes turėjom šunį tuo metu, vardu Tutis. Ir jinai sakė, Tutis tik supranta lietuviškai. Tai tu gali kalbėt angliškai, bet su manim nekalbėsi angliškai, ir Tutis nesupras. Tai jinai sakė, aš labai apsidžiaugiau, kad aš laimėjau tą diskusiją ir aš taip labai patenkinta buvau, kad aš angliškai galėsiu kalbėt. Ir po poros minučių, jinai sakė, man daėjo, kad nėr kas kitas namuose su mumis gyvena, tai aš arba su niekuom nekalbu, arba aš lietuviškai kalbu. Tai man kažkaip, man taip liūdna pasidarė, kad aš aš su šunim negalėjau kalbėt, nes šuo tik lietuviškai supranta, ir kad aš su mama negalėjau kalbėt, nes su mama tik lietuviškai, kad man tik to ir užteko.*
[Mom said, mom said that when I was little, maybe three years old, she said that one day I told her that I don't want to speak Lithuanian anymore. Mom said: "Alright but with me it's only possible to speak in Lithuanian". And we had a dog at the time, his name was Tutis. And she said, Tutis only understands Lithuanian. So, you can speak English, but with me you won't speak English, and Tutis will not understand. She said that I was very glad to have won this discussion and I was very happy that I would be able to speak English. And a couple of minutes later, she said, it came to me, that there is no one else living with us, so I either don't speak to anyone or I speak Lithuanian. And I like, I became so sad that I, I couldn't speak to the dog because the dog only understands Lithuanian and that I couldn't speak to mom because with mom only in Lithuanian. And that was enough for me.] (USA, W, 37, G3).

3.3.4. Use of Lithuanian with Own Children

Many women who are also mothers during the in-depth interviews stated rather clearly that speaking their own mother tongue seems the most self-evident, natural, and unquestionable way of interacting with their children, especially when they were still small. This is illustrated in excerpts 15 and 16, where a G1+ woman talks about using the

language of the environment as completely unacceptable, and a G1 woman elaborates on the naturalness of speaking the language of one's own childhood to one's children, with this creating a kind of secret world between the mother and the child; see excerpt 16.

(15) *Bet ir buvo toks natūralus instinktas ir ir aš pagalvojau: "Nu kaip aš galiu su savo vaikais kalbėt angliškai? Man čia būtų visiškai visiškai nepriimtina, visiškai nepriimtina."*
[It was such a natural instinct (to speak Lithuanian) and and I thought: "How can I speak English with my children? It would be completely completely unacceptable to me, completely unacceptable.] (USA, W, 72, G1+).

(16) I: *O pradžioj, kai pirmas gimė, mergaitė pirmoji?*
P: *Taip*.
I: *Ar lietuviškai kalbėjai?*
P: *Taip, visą laiką ir visus mažybinius. Aš, pavyzdžiui, negaliu mažybinių vardų kažkokių prancūziškai negaliu aš jų pasakyt. Jie ateina kažkur iš gilumos, iš širdies, iš to, ką mes, ką aš girdėjau pati, kai buvau maža. Prancūziškai aš negaliu kažkokių mažybinių vardų. Kai kūdikėliui, tai visą laiką lopšinės lietuviškos. Kažkoks slaptas vaiko ir motinos pasaulis.*
[I: And in the beginning, when the first (child) was born, the first girl?
P: Yes.
I: Did you speak Lithuanian?
P: Yes, all the time and all the diminutives. For instance, I cannot say some French names as diminutives. They come from deep inside, from the heart, from what we, from what I myself heard when I was little. I cannot say some diminutive names in French. To a baby, the lullabies were always in Lithuanian. Some kind of secret world of the child and the mother.] (France, W, 32, G1).

When living in emigration surrounded by another language, however, one cannot not consider the effect of the language of the environment on the language of the children. This is not infrequently seen as a responsibility of the parents to control, and the mothers get particularly anxious about their children not having the same linguistic proficiency as in the home country. Sometimes, the mothers get anxious and try to impose the language onto the children, only to reach an opposite result. Excerpt 17 presents a situation where the mother had to become aware of not being able to impose the heritage language in all situations and having to overcome the feeling of guilt about it.

(17) I.: *O kaip jum kokie jausmai kyla dėl to, kad jos (dukros) tarpusavy šneka vokiškai? Ar atrodo, kad čia normalu ir nieko tokio ar. . .*
R. *Iš pradžių gal šiek tiek sakyčiau jaučiausi atsakinga ir galbūt kalta, kad vaikai tarpusavy nekalba lietuviškai. Kol paskiau supratau, kad per prievartą nieko nepasieksi, per prievartą galim prie stalo, kai sėdim, pusryčiaujam ir galima tada kalbėti lietuviškai ir mes jas galim kontroliuoti, bet pastoviai kontrolėje vaikus laikytis yra negerai. Aš negaliu nueiti į viršų ir stebėti, kaip jos žaidžia ir įsiterpti į jų žaidimo fazę ir nutraukti vien dėl kalbos. Va, ir tada nustojau save graužti. Iš pradžių tai buvo sakyčiau ir Lietuvoj, seneliai mus kaltindavo, kai mes nuvažiuodavom, kad vaikai sunkiau šneka, kad va jaučiasi jau pas Gretą akcentas ir va visą kitą ir ta kaltė mum visą laiką būdavo, kaip jūs abudu lietuviai, kaip jūs drįstat, kad jūsų vaikai nekalba lietuviškai. Sakykim, ne taip kalba, kaip jie tyrėtų kalbėti. Ir jie nesupranta, kad mes turim ir savo šičia kitą pasaulį.*
[I: And how do you feel about the fact that they (daughters) talk German among themselves? Do you think it's normal and it's ok or. . .
R: At first I would somehow feel responsible and maybe guilty, that the children do not speak Lithuanian among themselves. Until later I understood that you cannot achieve anything by forcing, by force we can do it at the table, when we are sitting down, having breakfast and then they are only allowed to speak Lithuanian and we can control them, but it's not good to keep the children under control all the time. I cannot go upstairs and observe them play and interfere in their playing phase and disrupt only because of the language. So then I stopped nagging myself. At first it was also in Lithuania, I would say, the grandparents would blame us when we used

to come, that the children have more difficulties speaking, that Greta already has an accent and so on and this guilt was for us all the time, that how dare you, both being Lithuanian, that your children do not speak Lithuanian. Let's say, they don't speak in the right way, as they should. And they don't understand that we have also our other world here.] (Germany, W, 34, G1).

One more aspect we can look at from the survey data is how the respondents declare to behave with their own children, i.e., how often they use Lithuanian when speaking to them. Not all of the respondents have children (those who do: N = 1175), but when separated by sex, the data support the claim that mothers do tend to communicate with their children more in the heritage language; see Table 12. Even though the number of female respondents is higher in general, and the responses to "always" is very similar between the mothers and the fathers; the differences in "often" and "never" responses are significant, and it can be seen that the mothers are more inclined to use the heritage language than the fathers.

Table 12. Frequency of using Lithuanian with own children.

	Woman	Man
Always	58%	59%
Often	19%	12%
Sometimes	12%	13%
Never	10%	17%

In excerpt 18, we can see the reflection of a G1 mother, who claims not to have even posed herself the question whether to speak Lithuanian with her children and was so strong in her conviction that the children never doubted it. A funny story with another Lithuanian-speaking emigrant who used the local language with his dog made her reflect about maybe having traumatized her own children; however, the fact that the children have acquired perfect Lithuanian is a confirmation of her right choice.

(18) *Tai atrodė, sakau, tai, kad vaikam, jiems primečiau tą kalbą, jie, matyt, kažkaip tai iš mano pusės buvo taip... taip pateikta, kad niekada vaikai man to net, net nesuabejojo, kad jos, ar gal reikėtų nereikėti, ar, ar, žodžiu, ir todėl... žodžiu, niekada aš jiem neleidau tuo suabejoti ir, ir tai buvo būtinybė, tai buvo būtinybė, nes neįsivaizdavau, kaip su seneliais grįžus, ar ką ir, ir... užtai... Dėl to man ir sakau... Ir net smerkiau didelį lietuvninką Italijos, kuri ir pats išsaugojęs kalbą puikiai ir pats išsaugojęs seną lietuvišką pasą dar, su kuriuo susipažinau dar sovietiniais laikais, kuris sakė, kad grįšiu į Lietuvą tik tada kai galėsiu įvažiuot su tuo pačiu pasu. Turėjo šuniuką, vardą lietuvišką davė–Juodukas, bet bendraudavo su itališkai. Ir man, pamenu, ten vasarojom tada pas jį Alpėse tada tada turėjo... Ir aš jam drįsau papriekaištau, sakau: „Kodėl jūs su savo šuniuku?.." Tai jis man paaiškino, kad jis nenorėjo jo traumuoti, nes kadangi, kadangi jis vis tiek gyvena itališkoj aplinkoj, girdi ir kitų balsus, tai jis nenori... bet aš pagalvojau, kad aš apie tai nesu galvojus, aš savo vaikus negal... Traumavau galbūt, bet aš su jais kalbėjau lietuviškai ir jie išmoko puikiai lietuviškai, išmoko puikiai atsirinkti ir, ir, ir, pagal mane, neliko traumuoti.*

[So it seemed that I forced the language onto the children, probably from my part it was presented in such a way... that the children never even doubted that maybe it could not be necessary, or something, so. . . so I never let them doubt it and it was a necessity, it was a necessity because I could not imagine how would they speak with the grandparents when they came back or something and... that's why I even judged a great pro-Lithuanian minded person in Italy, who himself has maintained the language perfectly and had kept the old Lithuanian passport, who I met still during the soviet times, who said that he would only go back to Lithuania when he could use the same passport. He had a small dog, he had given it a Lithuanian name: Juodukas, but he would speak Italian to it. And I remember, we were spending the summer at his place then in the Alps. . . so I dared to rebuke him, I said "Why do you with your dog?" So he explained to me that he didn't want to traumatize the

dog because it lives in an Italian environment, hears also the voices of others so he doesn't want. . . but I thought that had never considered that, with my children maybe I. . . maybe I traumatized them but I spoke Lithuanian to them and they acquired Lithuanian perfectly, they learned to distinguish perfectly and, I think, they did not remain traumatized.] (Italy, W, 58, G1).

4. Concluding Discussion on the Perceived Role of the Mother

The quantitative data seem to all point to the same direction, that the mother has more impact in maintaining the heritage language. Thus, the initial hypothesis can be considered confirmed. The role of the mother is distinct and differs from that of the father. Lithuanian mothers seem to transmit a stronger positive language ideology associated with the Lithuanian language, and they contribute to forming a clearer Lithuanian identity. Among the internal factors that impact family language policy, only the emotional ones seem to be equally influenced by the mother and by the father. The heritage Lithuanian language is considered the most precious language by a very large proportion of respondents, and here, the influences of different family members were not observed. However, there is a clear difference in influence when looking at language practices and declared language competence. The quantitative data highlight the special role of the mother. Respondents who have Lithuanian mothers more frequently declare the Lithuanian language as their first language, acquired at home, feel more proficient in their heritage language in all skills, and use Lithuanian more often in all communicative situations.

This is also often elaborated on in the qualitative interviews. Many participants, in a more or less direct way, indicated the mother as the one more impactful and having contributed more to the maintenance or passing on the concept of the importance of the Lithuanian language. In excerpt 19, a second-generation woman is stating it rather clearly, that "it depends more on the mother" when talking about her son, whose wife is not of Lithuanian origin, and therefore, possibly, he will not be putting much effort into passing on his heritage language to the children, whereas she has more expectations from her own daughter.

(19) *Matot, marti, mūsų marti, kai ne lietuvė, aš nežinau, aš nemanau, kad jai yra ypatingas interesas, kad būtų vienaip ar kitaip, o sūnus. . . nuo mamos daugiau priklauso, man atrodo, o sūnus aš nežinau, kokias jisai pastangas dės, ar jis išvis dės, o dukra, dar neturi savo vaikų, tai pamatysim, jei ateity atsiras, gal tada bus šiek tiek kitaip.*
[You see, our daughter-in-law, when she is not Lithuanian, I don't know, I don't think she has a particular interest for it to be one way or the other, and our son. . . it depends more on the mother, I think, and our son, I don't know what kind of efforts will he make, if he will make them at all, and our daughter, she doesn't have children of her own yet, so we'll see, if there will be any in the future, maybe it will be somewhat different.] (USA, W, 65, G2).

The importance of maintaining the Lithuanian language has been especially upheld by the emigrants of the second wave (war refugees). Given the political situation when Lithuania was occupied by the soviets, the consciousness of this importance was felt as nearly a sacred obligation. This is often encountered in the interviews with the descendants of this wave, as presented in excerpt 20.

(20) *Didžiavosi mūsų tėvai. Kaip po biški pasidaro tokia, kokį žodį yra, obligation, nes jeigu aš sustosiu—kas atsitiks? žinai, jeigu mano vaikai neišmoks, tai ten jau bus baigta mūsų šeimoj, žinai, ir jau baigsis ta mūsų kultūra. Tai aš tą bandau Karinai sakyti. Sakau, kad kai tu turėsi vaikus, tu galėsi nutarti. Jeigu tu stosi kalbėti, tai mūsų šeimoj jo nebus. Aš nenoriu būti, ta kuris sustabdys mūsų šeimoj, žinai. Yra responsability beveik, kad reikia išlaikyti, nes jeigu mes neišlaikysim—nebus daugiau, išnaikins. Nors dabar, žinai, kaip pasaulis pamažėjo, čia daug lietuvių iš Lietuvos atsikrausto, tai gal ne tikrai nutiltų visiškai. Bet taip mes galvojam, kad reikia išlaikyti, nes kitaip nebus daugiau.*

> [Our parents were proud. And little by little it becomes like, what's the word, obligation, because if I stop, what will happen? You know, if my children do not learn, it will be over in our family, you know, our culture will be finished. That's what I try to tell Karina. I say, when you have kids, you can decide. If you stop speaking, it will disappear from our family. I don't want to be the one who stops it in our family, you know. It's almost a responsibility, to maintain, because if we don't maintain, it will be gone, they will destroy it. Even if now, you know, when the world has become smaller, many Lithuanians come here from Lithuania, maybe it would not be quieted for good. But that's how we think, that we need to maintain because otherwise it will be no more.] (USA, W, 45, G2).

Emigrants belonging to waves of a more economic nature, such as the most recent one starting from 1990, who left Lithuania when the country is no longer in danger of extinction, feel somewhat less the vital aspect of survival. Nevertheless, the pressure to maintain the heritage Lithuanian language is rather strongly felt, especially by the mothers. The failure to achieve this desired result seems to cause more distress to the mothers than to the fathers. The mothers often feel almost exclusively responsible for the children's education and their language acquisition, as noted by other researchers (Okita 2002; Kwon 2017; Torsh 2022).

Therefore, our study and other previous studies indicate the role of the mother generally being more influential than that of the father. However, the changing family models in the modern western societies have an impact on the capabilities of mothers to dedicate the time, effort, and resources they consider important for the maintenance of the heritage language. For instance, in the case of a single Lithuanian mother living abroad, she can not only offer less input in the heritage language at home when compared to a situation of both Lithuanian parents, but also often has less material possibilities to provide larger heritage language community input. In cases of mixed families, when the residence is in the father's linguistic environment, an immigrant mother might have (at least perceived) a lower social status in the society and, therefore, encounter more difficulties in passing on their heritage language to the children. The mothers who do not succeed in accomplishing this vital task feel guilt and even shame, leading to refusing to participate in a study that would dig into the aspect they see as their life's biggest failure. Nevertheless, the responsibility felt by the mothers and the importance of their role does not diminish; therefore, more specific studies would help shed more light on the topic.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the connection between identity and language is particularly strong for Lithuanians, and this is not necessarily the case in all cultures. Language is the core value of Lithuanian identity; therefore, passing on the Lithuanian language, rather than culinary tradition, for instance, is perceived as matter of particular significance. In the context of globalization and increasing mobility, different cultures and social values interact in the same communities, and the mothers are faced with even more complex challenges. The study of the role of the mother continues, therefore, to be of great importance, and both a more profound investigation on a wider variety of family situations and a comparison among different cultural backgrounds would help to explore this complex issue and make this claim even stronger.

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Notes

[1] Both projects were financed by the State Commission of the Lithuanian language; detailed descriptions and results are published in two collective monographies (see Ramonienė 2015, 2019b).

[2] Only respondents who have lived outside of Lithuania for no less than three years were included in the sample.

[3] I—interviewer; P—participant.

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Language Management in Transnational Multilingual Families: Generation 1.5 Parents in Finland

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Abstract: In today's globalized world, more children are born to parents who speak two or more languages between them. These families manage complex language dynamics, with diverse language practices influencing communication among family members. The complexity intensifies when multilingual and multicultural parents move with their children to a country with a new majority language, while keeping connections to their original society. In such cases, balancing heritage and host country languages affects both cultural preservation and integration into a new society. Based on semi-structured interviews with seven Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew bilingual parents living in Finland, this paper explores their strategies for managing their children's multilingual development. The study poses two key questions: What are the language management strategies reported by the parents? What are the major challenges these parents face in maintaining heritage Russian and Hebrew languages in Finland? Thematic data analysis using ATLAS.ti software highlights the parents' persistent commitment to maintaining multilingualism within their families, focusing on preserving existing social connections and fostering new ones for the entire family. The findings reveal key aspects of parental language management, parental involvement and home environments, along with reported challenges, both personal and institutional, in maintaining Hebrew and Russian as heritage languages in Finland. This study offers a new perspective on language management strategies in multilingual families, handling a less-explored language combination. By analyzing individual language management approaches, this study reveals common strategies used to support multilingualism and balance heritage languages with those of a new environment, thereby contributing to discussions on linguistic diversity and multicultural integration in transnational settings.

Keywords: heritage languages (HLs); family language policy (FLP); language management; multilingual family; transnational family; Modern Hebrew; Russian; Nordic countries

1. Introduction

The increase in transnational migration has given rise to new multilingual family dynamics. In such families, language becomes central to parenting, presenting various linguistic challenges for parents in communicating with their children and in making multiple language-related decisions (Lanza 2021). These decisions often revolve around balancing the heritage language (HL) with the language of the new environment. In cases where the parents themselves are bi- or multilingual, an additional question arises concerning the choice of HLs to transmit to their children in a new linguistic environment. Most existing research on patterns and strategies for language choices and usage in multilingual transnational families is represented by case studies, thus making it difficult to discern general patterns (Quirk et al. 2024). The lack of large datasets on multilingual transnational families hinders the ability to identify clear patterns and make generalizations. To effectively explore and understand successful strategies for managing multilingualism at home, there is a need for more ethnographically informed research (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017).

Parental attitudes regarding HL maintenance in their children and their attempts to support their children's HL are major determinants of HL preservation (Park and Sarkar 2007). This study advances the understanding of FLP in transnational multilingual

families by focusing on a previously underexplored language combination. It offers a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics of a multilingual language setting, by exploring the language management strategies employed by transnational families with bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents raising their children in Finland.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven parents to explore their language management strategies for raising multilingual children. The goal was to understand how home environments and parental involvement contribute to the successful transmission or attrition of each of the multiple languages available. Additionally, this study aimed to identify the challenges specific to maintaining the two HLs involved, Russian and Hebrew. The following research questions guided the study: What are the language management strategies reported by the parents? What are the major challenges these parents face in maintaining heritage Russian and Hebrew languages in Finland?

This article is structured as follows. The background section outlines the theoretical framework on language management in multilingual families, followed by a review of previous studies on language management in transnational families and on Israeli Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew speakers. The methodology and data section provides a detailed description of the participants, as well as the data analysis framework. The next section presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study. The concluding sections focus on the main results of the study and summarize the overall findings.

2. Materials and Methods

This section is divided into a theoretical framework and a review of the literature on language management in transnational families, as well as on Hebrew speakers both in Israel and the diaspora.

2.1. Language Management: Theoretical Framework

Spolsky's (2004) language policy model serves as a key framework in Family Language Policy (FLP) research. Language policies at the macro, meso, or micro level consist of three interconnected, yet distinct, factors: language ideologies, language management, and language practices (Spolsky 2004). Language ideologies represent cultural assumptions and underlying policies concerning languages and communication (Schiffman 1998) and are expressed through linguistic practices (Spolsky 2004). Language management is reflected in explicit and observable actions by individuals or groups who can influence participants' language practices or beliefs (Spolsky 2009). Within the family domain, Curdt-Christiansen defines language management as "the implicit/explicit and subconscious/deliberate parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development" (Curdt-Christiansen 2013, p. 57). Parental language management, driven by their own past experiences and future aspirations for their children's language development, encompasses a variety of strategies to enhance their children's linguistic experiences and expand their language repertoires (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018). Research into determining the most suitable language management practices at home has been the primary focus of much of the existing work on FLP (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). Effective parental language management in multilingual families, with strong support for maintaining the home language(s), significantly correlates with their children's achievements in regard to their HL(s) (Curdt-Christiansen 2016; Smith-Christmas 2016).

Drawing from Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study on HL literacy management in transnational families in the UK, the present study looks into family language management strategies applied by Russian–Hebrew-speaking parents residing in Finland, focusing on home environments and parental involvement. The third component in Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, represented by various forms of family capital, is not examined in the present research for anonymity reasons. Family capital includes parental educational backgrounds, occupational choices and opportunities, and

their adaptation and integration into the new society (Li 2007). Given the small size of the community in Finland, coupled with data on the participants' education and occupation, the anonymity of the participants would be compromised. Within the family language management domain, home environments are represented by both culturally related practices (Schwartz 2010) and linguistic resources, such as books or media; parental involvement consists of formal and informal linguistic activities, shaped by the caregivers' past experiences, present assessments of their children's language needs, and their aspirations for the future (Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia 2018).

2.2. Language Management in Transnational Families

Transnational families are families that reside in two or more countries. The challenges they encounter are similar to the ones faced by immigrant families; the main distinction is their close connection to their homeland and their willingness to preserve family connections (Cho et al. 2010). The relocation experiences of these families differ from those of traditional immigrant populations, with management, learning, and maintenance of multiple languages becoming fundamental processes in transnationalism (Hirsch and Lee 2018). In these families, the main negotiation typically focuses on parental HLs versus the official language(s) of the receiving country, with the linguistic dynamics growing increasingly complex with each relocation and every new language. Regarding language choices, transnational families also differ from traditional immigrant families in that they have an additional option: selecting a language previously acquired by the family, which is neither the parents' HL nor the dominant language in the new environment (Hirsch and Lee 2018).

While much of family language management research is dedicated to monolingual parents, either sharing a language or speaking two distinct languages, raising their children in a different language environment (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia 2018; Otwinowska et al. 2021; Zhang-Wu 2024), research on language management and practices in highly transnational families, where the parents themselves are bi- or multilingual, is represented mostly by case studies with significantly varying patterns, thus making it difficult to identify general patterns (Quirk et al. 2024). For instance, Braun and Cline's (2014) chapter dedicated to bilingual parents raising their children in a third-language environment, describes a number of case studies involving various language combinations in different countries. The findings show that language management, in many cases, includes either dropping one of the parent's native languages or struggling with family trilingualism, as well as the inability to apply the most "(in)famous" (De Houwer 2021, p. 8) 'one parent–one language' OPOL family language management strategy (Barron-Hauwaert 2004). Haque's (2011) study on a plurilingual Indian family in Finland describes parental language management strategies aimed at maintaining both native parental languages, Hindi and Urdu, at home, as well as the decision that the children will be educated in English, with moderate support in Finnish, resulting in the children's gradual shift away from both HLs. Such diverse case study findings indicate that more ethnographically informed research is "needed to continually examine successful ways of managing multilingualism in the home environment" (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). Overall, the scarcity of extensive datasets on such multilingual families hinders the ability to predict distinct patterns and draw broad conclusions. The present study aims to contribute to the expanding body of literature on family language management in transnational families, by exploring home environments and parental involvement as major language management strategies of bilingual Russian–Hebrew-speakng parents residing in Finland.

2.3. Hebrew Speakers

Modern Hebrew, with its multilingual and multicultural origin, emerged from linguistic contact and koineization (Henkin 2020). As of 2022, it is the primary language in Israel, spoken by 49% of the population and used by 92% for communication. 15% of Israelis speak Russian as their first language and an additional 5% as a second language (Central Bureau of Statistics 2022).

Between the collapse of the USSR and 2000, about a million people from PSS immigrated to Israel (Perelmutter 2018). Children from this wave, known as Generation 1.5, became 'skewed bilinguals', using Russian mainly with Russian-speaking monolinguals, while shifting to Hebrew to communicate with their younger relatives and peers (Remennick and Prashizky 2019). They developed a code-mixed language influenced by Hebrew, differing significantly from Modern Standard Russian (Perelmutter 2018). This group, estimated to be 170,000 individuals, has a distinct, hybrid social, cultural, and linguistic identity, shaped by shared challenges (Remennick and Prashizky 2022).

Outside Israel, Hebrew is spoken in Jewish schools worldwide and by Israeli immigrants (Grossman and Reshef 2020). Tracking Israeli emigration is challenging due to the lack of specific data on those intending to emigrate, in particular because many Israelis abroad see themselves as temporary expatriates. According to DellaPergola and Lustick (2011), around 10% of Israel's population lives outside the country at any given moment, with economic factors being the primary reason for emigration. Data on Israeli emigration by languages spoken is scarce. As of December 2023, Finland had 990 Israeli citizens, with 569 holding dual citizenship. 536 Finnish residents self-identified as Hebrew speakers (Official Statistics Finland 2023a). Finland's language registration system, which records only one mother tongue, complicates the accurate count of bi- and multilinguals (Palviainen and Bergroth 2018). In a recent survey of Hebrew-speaking parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a), 10 out of the 36 participants self-identified as Generation 1.5 Russian–Hebrew bilinguals.

3. Results

The present study is part of a qualitative case study examining the Family Language Policies of bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents residing in Finland (Bloch 2024b). The qualitative nature of the study can be observed via the method applied; semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on the participants' lived experiences concerning the language maintenance strategies involving their children.

3.1. Data Collection

Participants were identified through a survey on heritage Hebrew maintenance (Bloch 2024a). The eligibility criteria required adults who had moved to Israel from PSS as minors, subsequently relocated to Finland as adults, spoke both Hebrew and Russian at a native level, were parents to minor children, and expressed a willingness to be interviewed within a month.

3.2. Participants

All participants, aged between 40 and 50, were parents to at least one minor child (Table 1). They were repatriated to Israel from PSS as minors during the late 1980s to 1990s, between the ages of 6 and 15, classifying them as Generation 1.5. They relocated to Finland as adults with at least one child, settling in various locations across southern and central Finland, including main cities and small towns. The duration of their residence in Finland ranged from 1 to 20 years. Interviews were conducted with both parents in cases where both belonged to Generation 1.5 (four participants, two families). In three remaining cases, participants' spouses moved to Israel from PSS as young adults, spoke native Russian and advanced, but not native-level, Hebrew and, therefore, were not interviewed.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the participants.

Family	Research Participant	Age of Repatriation to Israel	Duration of Residence in Finland (years)	Minor Children *	Languages Used with Children Daily
F1	Mom1 Dad1	7 9	4	Two in primary school	Russian Russian
F2	Mom2 Dad2	9 7	10	One in JH school, one in primary school	Hebrew, Finnish Hebrew
F3	Dad3	15	11	Two in JH school, one in primary school	Russian
F4	Mom4	15	20	One in JH school	Russian
F5	Mom5	15	1	One in high school, one in JH school	Hebrew

* Information about adult children living separately is not included in this study and is therefore not mentioned here.

3.3. Interviews

The interviews served as a continuation of the research on the Family Language Policies of Hebrew-speaking parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a). The semi-structured interviews comprised topics on parental language ideologies, linguistic management within the family, reported linguistic practices, and language as a factor influencing the children's social inclusion in Finland. The interviews were conducted through April–May 2024, either in person or via Zoom operated by the University of Helsinki. The interviews with families, where both parents were interviewed, were conducted as follows: each parent was interviewed separately first, with the second spouse either absent or present based on their preference. Following the individual interviews, both parents were interviewed together for clarification purposes, a process initiated by the families themselves.

The language management strategies were examined through semi-structured interviews, which provided flexibility and encouraged open conversation. These interviews were part of a broader study on multilingual Israeli families in Finland (Bloch 2024a, 2024b). The interviews were organized around the following themes: (1) background questions; (2) family language practices; (3) explicit language policies; (4) language ideologies; (5) language management; (6) the emotional aspect of language acquisition in different stages of life; (7) external factors influencing parental decisions on language choices; and (8) language acquisition and social inclusion. The study explored both linguistic and social structures, documenting various patterns of language use and situating these findings within the broader social context (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017).

The languages used in the interviews transitioned fluidly, primarily in Israeli Russian, with frequent code-switching between Russian and Hebrew (Perelmutter 2018), and occasional insertions of Finnish and English. A total of 7.5 h of interviews were recorded, averaging about one hour per participant. These recordings were transcribed, translated into English, and uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software version 9 for subsequent categorization and analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to discern patterns in the participants' responses. The analysis was based on Spolsky's (2012) Family Language Policy theory, which explores language management as one of three aspects within the family setting: ideologies (strong beliefs about languages, language learning, language maintenance, etc.), management (plans and approaches adopted to support a specific language policy within the family), and practices (actual use of language by family members). The analysis employed elements of the approach outlined by Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia (2018), focusing on home environments and parental involvement. The third component in Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, represented by various forms of family capital, was not examined in

the present research, for anonymity reasons. This approach highlights the significance of the interplay between various actors in maintaining HL skills across different cultural groups.

The thematic analysis revealed consistent language management strategies, aligned with those documented in studies on transnational multilingual communities. Using the ATLAS.ti software, patterns in the participants' responses were discerned, leading to the categorization of their language management strategies. These strategies were organized into four main areas, namely parental involvement, home environments, future planning, and maintenance challenges, with each further divided into subcategories. The recurring strategies within each area were identified based on theoretical frameworks from research on language management in multilingual transnational contexts.

4. Findings

This section provides an overview of the key themes identified through the semi-structured interviews with the seven participants. Section 4.1 describes parental involvement consisting of formal and informal linguistic activities, such as teaching the HL, reading to and with their children, homework help, and communication with their children in the HL or on the topic related to the HL. In Section 4.2, home environments as tools of HL management are presented, divided into subchapters on communication and literacy resources aimed at HL maintenance; Section 4.3 describes parental plans on HL management in the future. Section 4.4 provides an overview of the challenges concerning the management of each of the two HLs in Finland.

4.1. Parental Involvement

Drawing from Curdt-Christiansen and Morgia's (2018) study, parental involvement was divided into communication with the children in the HL, shared book reading, and explicit teaching. All the children were studying in schools with Finnish as the main language of instruction, and HL classes were attended by one child, therefore the aspect of homework help in HLs was omitted in this study.

4.1.1. Communication with Children

Supportive interaction in the HL at home, between parents and children, is the key determinant of HL preservation or its gradual disappearance over generations (Lao 2004; Park and Sarkar 2007). All participants in the study emphasized the critical importance of developing oral skills in at least one of the HLs and highlighted the value of daily oral communication with their children, thus underscoring a parental management strategy that prioritizes oral proficiency in the HL over literacy skills.

(1) But I think that the best thing [to maintain HLs] is to communicate in everyday life, about most ordinary things. It's not just sitting there for an hour reading books in some specific language, but everyday things to communicate with children about. (Mom2)

(2) I believe that writing and reading can always be learned at a later age, and speaking is way more important. . . I don't want to traumatize them. I want it [HL maintenance] to be fun, so I focus on conversational language, and don't worry about writing or reading. (Mom1)

The participants described conversational practices in the HLs as the most natural way of communicating with their children, both from linguistic and personal points of view:

(3) I wanted to be able to maintain closeness with them, because first of all, I can express myself best in my own language. (Mom4)

(4) I have no problem communicating in Hebrew, but, probably, when it comes to some kind of warm feelings, I'm not sure how well I can express such feelings in Hebrew. (Dad3)

4.1.2. Shared Book Reading

The category of shared book reading includes two types of activities: reading to their children and reading with them. Both reading to their children and engaging in accompanied reading, where the parent actively listens to their child reading, were considered essential for both maintaining HLs and supporting the child's overall development.

(5) To maintain the language, we need to read aloud to them. It doesn't matter what age [the children are]. And this, it seems to me, is very developing. And it doesn't matter what kind of books—they might be comic strips, children's books. (Mom1)

(6) We have achieved the regularity that we read a paragraph in Russian every day, and then a paragraph in Finnish, then a paragraph in English. (Dad3)

The same parent shared details of a reward system connected specifically to books. For every unplanned entertainment activity or new toy the youngest child (in primary school) wanted, it had to be earned as a result of reading:

(7) Dad, I want a new Lego!—Sure, let's finish this book till the end, and we'll go buy you a new Lego. (Dad3)

Older children were reported to be more independent in terms of their reading, and the parents confessed that they had significantly less influence on what languages the children used for reading.

(8) If the children are interested in something, they find it by themselves and read it. (Mom4)

4.1.3. Explicit Teaching

The participants' attempts to explicitly teach HLs can be roughly divided into three groups. The first group involved strict teaching strategies, incorporating detailed daily plans to ensure consistent HL instruction. The second group consisted of parents who reported more sporadic and unstructured teaching sessions. The third group comprised parents who admitted to never teaching HLs to their children explicitly. An example of the first approach is Dad3, who dedicated a specific amount of time each day to language teaching. He emphasized that regularity was the cornerstone of his language management strategy, underscoring the importance of consistent effort in fostering language skills in his children:

(9) In the beginning, mutual agreement is necessary. That is, no one insists on 100% fulfillment, but if you agree on something, then try to stick to it. . . You get used to it, it becomes the norm and doesn't bother you anymore. But if it's day yes day no, then it's always some kind of additional effort, and then it's hard. But if you make it into the norm, like brushing your teeth, then you simply don't notice, and it becomes uncomplicated. (Dad3)

Families 1 and 2 exemplified the second approach, with one of the parents teaching their children HL literacy intermittently:

(10) I don't always have time for this and it's not always systematic, but when I take a book and explain it to him, he understands, so he's already reading Hebrew. With difficulty, I confess, but he does read in Hebrew. (Dad2)

(11) My husband teaches them. We order books in Hebrew from Israel, he sits with them, so they know all the letters, they write a little bit, the elder child reads. (Mom2)

In contrast, the third approach involved avoiding any explicit HL teaching of the children:

(12) I've never put any effort into it [explicitly teaching the children languages at home], we never needed any kind of tutor, and everything has worked out in an amazing way on its own. (Mom4)

(13) They are great at constantly reading something, texting, and so on. Hebrew is already built in, there is nothing to develop there, yeah, everything is fine. (Mom5)

Both participants who had never taught their children any language explicitly, and entrusted HL literacy to each child's preference and willingness, shared information about their children's attempts to learn basic Russian literacy independently:

(14) The middle child understands everything in Russian. She herself learned to read in Russian very clumsily. Since this is already the second child, no one taught her anything, she herself learned to read in Russian and to write in block letters. The youngest understands absolutely everything in Russian, speaks better than the middle one, but does not write or read. (Mom5)

(15) The middle child has never learned Russian as a subject, she only speaks it. At around the age of 14, she herself expressed this desire—"I want to learn to read in Russian," and giggled. I remember her sitting with some kind of an ABC book that she found. (Mom4)

This approach respects the child's autonomy in language learning, allowing them to explore and engage with the HL at their own pace. It suggests a more relaxed attitude towards formal language instruction, with the belief that the child will naturally acquire literacy skills when they are ready and motivated.

4.2. Home Environments

Transnationalism usually involves language learning, acquisition, maintenance, or loss. It includes developing and maintaining language skills essential for sustaining complex multinational and multilingual relationships in transnational families (Hirsch and Lee 2018). Previous research highlights the family as a crucial context for exploring ideologies, management, and practices involving different languages among family members (Spolsky 2012). This section explores parental management aimed at maintaining both HLs, in particular, and multilingualism, in general, as expressed explicitly in comments about language management strategies and in regard to recurring practices reported in the interviews. Home environments discussed in this section include communication-related resources and literacy-related resources.

4.2.1. Communication-Related Resources

This section aims to look into the recurring communication opportunities in terms of the HLs for the children. All the participants' parents and most of their other relatives resided in Israel. Taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical situation that started a few years prior to the interviews taking place, visits by the participants to Israel, or visits by their relatives to Finland became scarce, thus a number of interview questions was dedicated to online communication with family members, specifically with grandparents. Multilingual families engage in diverse practices to promote their children's fluency in multiple languages, with grandparents contributing to HL maintenance as part of these efforts. The role of grandparents in child-rearing practices varies across cultures. Children can enhance their HL skills, learn about language forms and functions, and develop cultural understanding with their grandparents serving as mediators (Curdt-Christiansen 2013). The cultural tradition in the PSS includes grandparents, particularly grandmothers, as integral participants in the child-rearing process. In Israel, there are two predominant models that PSS grandmothers follow in organizing their lives: active, heavily influenced by Soviet family culture and commonly found in less-educated families; and individualized, where grandmothering is just one aspect, possibly not even the most significant, of a woman's personal identity and daily life, with this model being particularly prevalent among educated, urban, middle-class families (Fogiel-Bijaoui 2013). The parents of all the participants had resided in Israel since the repatriation in the 1990s. Their level of Hebrew, as reported by the participants, varied from intermediate to advanced, but they all spoke only Russian as their native language. Based on the research findings detailed above, the interviews had presupposed at least some consistency in the communication between the participants' parents and their children. Unexpectedly, the vast majority of participants reported that neither they nor their children communicated with the grandparents, in

three cases even asking to skip the question (this was the only topic where the participants showed an unwillingness to answer the question), and one participant explained the reluctance of the children to interact with their grandparents on a permanent basis, due to a reason directly connected to HLs:

(16) We used to receive comments from the grandmother, which my children for some reason still remember, for some reason they were even hurt—the grandmother once criticized their Russian—'they speak with such a terrible accent, can't you hear that they don't really know Russian?' . . . They [the children] still ask me sometimes—'do I speak with an accent?' (Mom4)

Only one participant (and their spouse who was not interviewed) reported continuous participation in their children's life, which involved implementing thorough planning and management strategies. The participant considered the involvement of their children's grandparents as an excellent opportunity to promote both oral and written heritage Russian skills with the children:

(17) We even specifically persuade grandparents to call them [the children] on WhatsApp and talk to them [in Russian] on any topic in order to maintain both the communication and the language, and to exchange WhatsApp messages in Russian. . . Now they share on a daily basis via WhatsApp things like I got a bad grade, the weather is good, I fell from a bicycle and scratched my knee, I'm reading an interesting book. (Dad3)

Another communication recourse participants used for maintaining the HLs was interaction with friends. Regarding Hebrew, the parents mostly spoke about the lack of opportunities for their children to have meetings with their peers on a regular basis:

(18) We try, we do our best, as much as possible, so that children meet other Hebrew-speaking children, but in general it's just us [the parents] who speak Hebrew to them. (Mom2)

The situation is the opposite for the Russian language, with the participants sharing the plethora of options for their children to communicate with their peers in Russian:

(19) There are a lot of Russian speakers here, so you can very easily find after-school activities for children with many Russian-speaking children. (Mom1)

Russian was also mentioned as a means of communication, and even as a lingua franca, for the children whose Russian was described as weak by the parent residing a small town in central Finland:

(20) At school there are several people who speak Russian, these refugees from Ukraine, and my children speak Russian with them. (Mom5)

4.2.2. Literacy-Related Resources

Books were mentioned by most participants as the major source for HL literacy in regard to their children. While HL literacy was not considered of primary importance by most parents, the availability of books seemed to play a paramount role in the parents' language management strategies. The participants shared the ways they acquired books, which in the case of Hebrew was not a trivial task, the books were sent on specific occasions, sent by their relatives, or bought in bulk during their visits to Israel. Books in Hebrew were available in all the participants' homes, independently of the home language. The following two examples are from the families where Hebrew (Example 21) or Russian (Example 22) was chosen as the home language; concerning the latter, the family had resided in Finland for four years, and the older child had attended school in Israel for one year and had basic literacy in Hebrew.

(21) Either relatives send us books [in Hebrew], or we buy them when we go to Israel. (Dad2)

(22) Sometimes we ask for books in Hebrew to be sent to us from Israel, such as comics, things that he likes to read, and he seems to read them sometimes. (Dad1)

Most parents had never heard about the existence of the Helsinki Jewish Congregation's library. It is unsurprising since the library has no internet site; the only mention of it

is on the World Jewish Congress website in English, without an external link to the library[1]. One participant who knew about its existence, but had never visited it, explained:

(23) I don't think they have children's books. (Dad2)

While books in Hebrew were mentioned as available at home by six out of the seven participants, the three participants who spoke Hebrew to their children did not mention books in Russian. The four participants who spoke Russian to their children and had Russian books at home, said that books in Russian were easily available, both for purchase and from libraries.

(24) We have books (in Russian), a few good encyclopedias in Russian, also books on biology, chemistry, and physics. (Dad3)

Libraries were mentioned by most of the participants as one of the pastimes that they encouraged for their children, but the most important thing for the parents was the habit of reading, not the specific languages involved.

(25) I send them all the time to this [municipal] library so that they take books. And each time I say—take 4 books. And they read. In Finnish, but that's natural. (Mom2)

Concerning the media as a means of maintaining HLs, cartoons in both languages were available at home in most families. One more parent mentioned shows (a movie series) in Russian; the same parent was the only one to mention audiobooks:

(26) She reads [in Russian], we try hard while we can still force her, so she reads. We've found some interesting shows, and she's also listening to a lot of audiobooks now. (Dad3)

4.3. Future Plans

Most of the participants discussed the transmission or maintenance of HL opportunities that they had chosen to waive at home. A key point in these discussions was the child's active interest in learning the language. A clear distinction emerged between Russian and Hebrew: for Russian, parents generally expressed that it would be beneficial if the child showed a willingness to learn or improve their skills, but no participant had any practical plans for supporting heritage Russian. Conversely, for Hebrew, parents had concrete plans ready in case their children expressed an interest. These plans, which were consistent across families regardless of the home language, included explicit parental teaching and total immersion by sending their child to Israel for a period of time.

Both parents in the family F1, with Russian as the home language, shared their plan to resume teaching Hebrew to their youngest child at home, starting the following school year. The mother outlined a detailed plan, including the topics to be taught and the materials to be ordered from Israel in the near future. There was a clear preference for developing oral skills over literacy.

(27) Starting next September, I will be teaching her [younger child] Hebrew. This is the decision we've made. Hebrew is also very important to me, more sentimentally. Because this is my, let's say, native language, this is my culture, too. And I want to communicate with them [both children]. I don't care whether they can read and write it, but I do want them to be able to speak fluently. (Mom1)

Regarding total immersion in Hebrew, two participants from different families, who both opted for Russian as the family home language, shared:

(28) At some point we even discussed whether he wanted to learn Hebrew, and he said it's possible, and therefore I do not exclude the possibility that maybe in the near future he could go there for 3–4 months, for example, maybe even we'll enroll him in a school for six months, so that he can improve his Hebrew. I mean, he is in general capable, he can quite easily raise his spoken Hebrew to a decent level in six months. (Dad3)

(29) If any of them says—mom, I want to learn Hebrew, I, of course, will make every effort and help the best I can, and they know they can always go live at the grandparents [in Israel]. But if they don't say that, I won't offer it. (Mom4)

In the family where a Hebrew-only language strategy was chosen by both parents, the mother confessed to having difficulty maintaining their children's Hebrew literacy, despite the parents' explicit teaching of written Hebrew to their children. In this case, the parents had similar plans to send their children to Israel:

(30) It would be nice to send them [to Israel], so they would study [written] Hebrew. Since at home it doesn't work in most cases. We've had thoughts about sending them to our relatives in Israel for some time. (Mom2)

Not only the other HL support plans were shared by the participants. One of the participants mentioned the school's proposal for his child to be involved in a language exchange program. Although the participant considered it an amazing opportunity for their child, the child's unwillingness was the main reason for canceling this plan:

(31) There was an opportunity to send him to France as an exchange. And he just rested his feet and didn't want to go, he said—I don't want to live in an unknown place. It's a pity, of course, he could have had such a boost for the language. (Dad3)

While the participant clearly regretted the missed opportunity for his child, the child's autonomy in deciding which languages to learn and how to learn them was the main determinant.

A notable trend emerged concerning Hebrew, regardless of the chosen language for communication at home, whether or not they had tried the Jewish school, or the proximity of their residence to it, no participants mentioned sending their children to the Jewish school to learn or improve their Hebrew when their children expressed such an interest.

4.4. Maintenance Challenges

This section describes challenges concerning HL maintenance, as reported by the parents. It is divided into two subsections, personal challenges and challenges with external HL support.

4.4.1. Personal Challenges

Personal challenges in HL maintenance, whether Russian or Hebrew, can be roughly divided into two categories: parental time constraints and parental erroneous planning. In accordance with the survey responses by Israeli parents in Finland (Bloch 2024a), where 25% of the respondents quoted personal time constraints as one of the reasons for their children being illiterate in Hebrew, two out of the seven research participants (who had also participated in the survey) quoted a lack of time as a hindrance to teaching oral and written HLs to their children:

(32) Yes, I have doubts about [my own practices in teaching] Hebrew, I need to force myself and my son to dedicate more time and pay more attention to this, because time runs fast and one needs to practice more. That's how it would be done correctly. (Dad2)

(33) I would like to spend more time on [multiple languages], but here you need to spend both energy and time on the language so that you can communicate. . . But the problem is that, again, we are so busy that we have no time. And if we want to hire someone privately, our job probably won't make us enough money to support it. (Dad3)

Four participants reported instances of ineffective language management, expressing regrets about their inability to teach more languages. Three participants regretted not having planned teaching both HLs to their children:

(34) The only thing is that I regret a little that I didn't put an emphasis on Hebrew at an earlier age. Like, if I could look back in time, I would have taught it, if my husband and I had decided then to speak two languages in parallel at home, having known then, that we would come here to Finland. (Mom1)

In addition to parental second thoughts concerning the maintenance of both HLs, some voiced regrets that they had not given their children the opportunity to learn the language spoken in the new environment, Finnish, or English, before their relocation to Finland:

(35) Had I known that we would go to Finland, I would have taught them Finnish right away. This has to do with what I think is most important. Life is about social skills, and if a child comes to a kindergarten or school and cannot communicate with most people, this creates a little, well, a kind of self-doubt later that is difficult to overcome. (Dad1)

(36) I regret that the children don't know English well, I should have thought about it earlier [in Israel]. (Mom5)

These examples represent a notable appreciation for multilingualism, reflecting a common parental belief underlying the ideology that multilingualism is the most natural and beneficial language practice for their children; the multilingual advantage ideology was reported by the same participants (Bloch 2024b).

4.4.2. Challenges with External HL Support

Within the category of technical maintenance challenges, the participants discussed the availability and accessibility of HL classes, as well as the quality of the instruction. Unsurprisingly, the availability of HL classes varied drastically between the two languages, due to the size of each community. Finland grants the right to HL instruction to every student with an immigrant background (OPH 2022). However, the availability and quality of HL classes vary significantly, depending on the language and region (Venäläinen et al. 2022).

Russian, with almost 100,000 native speakers in 2023, is one of the most widely spoken foreign languages in Finland (Official Statistics Finland 2024). There are several bilingual Finnish–Russian schools, pre-primary institutions, and non-compulsory organizations offering Russian courses for children. According to a survey on minority mother tongues and religions conducted by the Prime Minister's Office (Tainio et al. 2019, pp. 70–71), the percentage of qualified HL teachers (who have completed both a higher university degree and pedagogical training) is high in Russian, with almost 80% having such training. To compare, in regard to other large foreign language-speaking communities, the percentages are significantly lower; for example, within an Arabic-speaking community of over 41,000 people, just 20% of teachers with Arabic as a native language are fully qualified. The Estonian-speaking community of 50,000 people benefits from around 55% of teachers being qualified. The attendance rate in Russian HL classes is high, too; for instance, out of approximately 10,000 Russian-speaking children and youths aged 7–19 in 2017, 5200 attended Russian classes all over Finland (Official Statistics Finland 2023b; Tainio 2019). Nevertheless, parents have reported issues with the quality and quantity of Russian HL instruction and educational materials (Protassova 2018; Bloch 2024b).

Hebrew was registered as the first language for 46 individuals aged 5–19, as of December 2023, with just one institutional option available for Hebrew instruction in Finland. The Jewish Community School of Helsinki (Helsingin Juutalainen Yhteiskoulu), a private Finnish-language school supported by the Jewish congregation of Helsinki, teaches Hebrew to around 100 students from first to ninth grade, following the national education curriculum (HJYK 2024). The Jewish community of Finland, mainly in the capital region, comprises about 1500 members, with the majority in Helsinki and a congregation that is ten times smaller in Turku. The community's size and the availability of only a single school likely impact language transmission, learning opportunities, and Hebrew proficiency among children (Czimbalmos 2023; Latomaa and Nuolijärvi 2002).

All the participants were aware of the existence of the Jewish Community School of Helsinki; some assumed without having checked, and others knew from experience, that Hebrew HL classes were available there; nevertheless, none of the children residing in the capital region attended these classes in the current year. The first reason mentioned was inconvenient access to Helsinki city center. The participants who did not live in the capital

region said they understood why there were no classes in their regions, and considered it logical.

(37) There are Hebrew classes, but only in the community, but I'm not ready to drive the children there specifically for this. (Mom2)

(38) And today, just to learn Hebrew, she will probably have to go devil knows where, probably only to the Jewish community. And this is not very convenient. (Dad1)

Many participants mentioned at least having heard about the availability of heritage Russian classes, and the proposals by schools for their children to attend them, even in the case of a participant residing in a town with a population under 2000 in central Finland. Russian language classes were proposed even to the children who used Hebrew at home and were registered with Hebrew as their "mother tongue" and who were completely illiterate in Russian. Nevertheless, most parents decided to forego the Russian classes, with only one child attending them. Some of the reasons for not registering their children for Russian HL classes included the child's unwillingness to participate, accessibility issues, or not paying enough attention to the school's proposal on Russian as a HL at the time.

(39) Our school cannot provide it [Russian as a HL]; there is an opportunity to get it at another school, but the schedule is very inconvenient, so we didn't even bother. And since we take care of it at home, well, there's not much point. (Dad3)

(40) He doesn't have [Russian as a HL], he doesn't want it, but he reads Russian fluently. He writes with mistakes, but he does write, so I don't really worry. (Mom1)

Another reason for parents withdrawing their child from HL classes after at least one year of attendance was dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching, for both Russian and Hebrew:

(41) The terrible [teacher's name] instilled an aversion to learning the Russian language in my eldest child for the rest of her life. [Teacher's name] did her job in the sense that my daughter has wonderful handwriting, very beautiful, without lifting her hand, with all the capital letters. With all this, she still made 15 mistakes in each word, so it was absolutely useless. Apparently, there was no motivation, plus she also taught poorly. Well, I think the middle daughter has never learned Russian because we still remember [teacher's name]. (Mom4)

Dissatisfaction with the quality of Hebrew teaching was voiced by two parents who opted for Russian as the language of home communication. They attempted to maintain both HLs in the beginning, by using Russian at home and sending their children to Hebrew classes at the Jewish school, but withdrew their children from there, explaining that it was either due to their dissatisfaction with the teaching level, or due to their dissatisfaction combined with the inconvenient location of the school:

(42) We sent them to this Jewish school at the beginning. And there were Hebrew lessons, but they were so-so, to be honest. There were other nuances, but in general, it was more convenient for us to send them to a local school near the house than to this Jewish school, which is far away, and the way they taught Hebrew there, we were kind of dissatisfied with it, it was really like no use. (Dad1)

(43) Hebrew was taught horrendously incompetently and the auntie who taught it was not a teacher at all, but just some kind of an Israeli auntie who, for some reason, decided that she could actually teach the language just for the fact she was Israeli, so she taught it horrendously. (Mom4)

5. Discussion

This study explored the language management strategies used by transnational bilingual Russian–Hebrew-speaking parents living in a Finnish-speaking environment. It focused on reported parental efforts to balance multiple languages by their children upon relocating to Finland. The main objectives of this study were to examine the language

preferences reported by the seven participants and to analyze the strategies they employed to manage their children's multilingual development in connection with these choices.

Language-related decisions in transnational multilingual families are intricately woven into all aspects of child rearing, influencing each family member (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017). The importance of parental involvement in HL maintenance, as highlighted by the study participants, aligned with the theoretical framework on FLP, which emphasizes the role of parents as key decision-makers in language use and transmission within the family (Spolsky 2012). In line with previous studies, the emphasis on oral communication over literacy skills also reflected the practical constraints and preferences of many multilingual families, who may prioritize communicative competence for immediate family interaction and social use (e.g., Lao 2004; Park and Sarkar 2007; De Houwer 2007).

King and Fogle (2017) found that parents' beliefs and attitudes towards the HL significantly influence their language practices at home. Indeed, the parental management strategies reflected the participants' language ideologies in the preceding study (Bloch 2024b). The parents' complete support for multilingualism in regard to their children was reflected in the language management strategies adopted, supported by parental efforts to maintain as many languages as possible, as well as home environments being full of resources aimed at supporting multilingualism.

Two of the main findings in this study were the similarity of the management strategies for each of the two HLs at home and the differences in the external support available. Most aspects concerning parental efforts to maintain HLs at home showed similar attitudes for both languages. It could be assumed that the home environments would differ regarding Russian and Hebrew, due to the different sizes of the communities and, stemming from that, the availability of books for purchase or loan, or the availability of educational materials for explicit teaching, or children having more opportunities to communicate in Russian than in Hebrew with their grandparents. Surprisingly, these aspects did not appear to influence the findings. Parents perceived HL maintenance mostly as their own responsibility and confessed personal challenges as hindrances to HL teaching in regard to their children. Parental time constraints, as highlighted by the participants, were perceived as a significant barrier to HL maintenance. Indeed, multiple studies have shown that time constraints were a major factor affecting parents' ability to support their children's HL development (i.e., Tse 2001; De Houwer 2007).

In contrast, external support differed for each of the languages, mostly due to the different sizes of the communities. Most participants reported receiving a proposal from the school to register their children for classes in Russian as a HL. While the availability of Russian HL classes is good, with high attendance rates, highly qualified teachers, and even bilingual Russian–Finnish state schools (Protassova 2018), the opportunities for maintaining Hebrew are very limited. While Israelis who have moved away from Israel typically maintain at least some Hebrew use in their homes and with friends, and they often retain connections to Israeli culture and identity, a gradual shift away from Hebrew is evident. This shift is greatly influenced by the size of the diaspora and the availability of Hebrew classes, among the main factors (Spolsky 2016). Nevo and Verbov (2011) attribute the decline in relevance of Hebrew outside of Israel to the absence of local Hebrew-speaking teachers and a preference for other languages, as well as to a lack of clear objectives in Hebrew instruction, all of which were reported by the participants in this study.

There are significant disparities in the availability of Russian and Hebrew HL classes in Finland; nevertheless, a common trend was commonly seen, namely the parents chose not to enroll their children in HL classes for two main reasons: limited accessibility and a dissatisfaction with HL instruction, regardless of the language. Furthermore, parental decisions to forgo external HL support reflected a common trend: many migrant parents see home language maintenance as a personal responsibility, separate from the role of schools as social institutions in their new country (Park and Sarkar 2007; Kang 2015). This perspective is also prevalent within the PSS community in Israel, where HL maintenance is largely considered a parental duty (Yakhnich 2016).

The participants reported a variety of conscious language management strategies; however, FLPs can also be "implicit, covert, unarticulated, fluid and negotiated moment by moment" (King and Fogle 2017, p. 322). As discussed in the article on language ideologies based on interviews with the same seven participants, their future language policies, established in Israel around the time of their first child's birth, remained unchanged after moving to Finland. These policies generally focused on raising children with either two strong native languages, Russian as the home language and Hebrew as the external language, or with Hebrew both at home and outside it, with some Russian heritage. After the relocation to Finland, families using Hebrew at home maintained their strategies from Israel, showing no regrets about their children not learning Russian and not planning to do so. Despite available Russian classes, parents viewed them as unnecessary or potentially detrimental to the development of other languages or to the children's mental well-being. In contrast, three of the four participants using Russian at home made several efforts to introduce Hebrew, such as providing Hebrew books or enrolling their children in the Jewish school in Helsinki. Two of these participants, with teenage children, planned to send them to Israel to learn Hebrew if they desired, while the other two belonging to one family, with younger children, planned to resume Hebrew instruction at home in the future. While most language management strategies discussed in this study are explicit and deliberate, the difference in the attitude and the future planning in regard to the two languages can be attributed to the "subconscious parental involvement and investment in providing linguistic conditions and context for language learning and literacy development" (Curdt-Christiansen 2013, p. 57). Intimacy, emotions, and identity are shaped through interactions, and the encouragement or disapproval of specific language use in daily life can function as implicit language planning strategies. Caregivers contribute affective and emotional linguistic inputs that influence language development (Pavlenko 2004). All participants expressed a deep emotional connection to Hebrew (Bloch 2024b), while Russian held similar significance in two cases. This "emotion discourse" reveals unspoken language management efforts and provides insight into how language maintenance and shift occur within the everyday social dynamics of families (Curdt-Christiansen and Lanza 2018). Further research into these nuanced strategies and emotional influences will enhance our understanding of multilingual family dynamics and the implementation of language policies in transnational multilingual families.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

This study examined the language management strategies reported by seven transnational Hebrew–Russian parents living in Finland and explored the reported challenges related to maintaining Russian and Hebrew within these families. While choices on the HL(s) to maintain varied between Russian-only, Hebrew-only, or both languages, the management strategies were notably similar. This study identified and analyzed two primary areas of parental language management: parental involvement and home environments. Parental involvement included communication in the HL, shared book reading, and explicit teaching. The home environment was further divided into communication-related resources and literacy-related resources. Significant differences emerged in the challenges faced in regard to access to external support for HLs, primarily due to the considerable disparity in the size of these two language communities in Finland.

The current study is part of a larger project on Hebrew speakers in Finland. The first article explored the FLPs of Hebrew-speakers in Finland, revealing that bilingual participants who were not born in Israel, but repatriated as minors, often chose to maintain only one HL in the family, even in cases where both parents were bilingual (Bloch 2024a). Building on this, the project explored the detailed FLPs of such families, using Spolsky's (2012) three aspects of a FLP: ideologies, management, and practices. The second article focused on the language ideologies of seven bilingual Russian–Hebrew parents, highlighting their strong support for their children's multilingualism and key ideologies,

such as freedom of language choice for their children and parental responsibility for HL transmission (Bloch 2024b).

This study acknowledges several limitations. The findings, while complex and diverse, are derived from a small sized sample and, therefore, do not claim to be generalizable to other multilingual transnational families and contexts. The reliance on participants who volunteered may introduce selection bias, offering a limited view of the phenomena. Adding participant observations or conducting longitudinal studies, as well as increasing the number of participants, could provide deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the aspects involved. Furthermore, future research should aim to include a more diverse sample of parents with other language combinations, for instance, Hebrew–Spanish or Hebrew–Portuguese (language combinations available in the Israeli community in Finland), and explore various linguistic environments in different countries of relocation. This approach would ensure a broader representation of the language management strategies applied by bilingual Israeli parents residing in a third-language environment.

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Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available. Portions of the data that do not compromise participant anonymity are available upon request from the author.

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Notes

[1] Community in Finland—World Jewish Congress: Community in Finland—World Jewish Congress https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/FI#jewish-education (accessed on 14 October 2024).

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Polish Language Maintenance and Transmission in Finnish Diaspora: A Study of Family Dynamics and Cultural Influences

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Abstract: The Polish diaspora is represented worldwide. Yet, little is known about Polish language and culture maintenance in Finland. However, the language practices of Polish families living there are worth being investigated, particularly in relation to language maintenance and transmission. This research aims to explore how families engage with the Polish language and what factors contribute to its preservation. The study focuses on the role of family dynamics, including interactions, communication patterns, and language choices within the family unit. The research is built on a survey of representatives of the Polish diaspora in Finland and a qualitative case study of a Polish family living in Finland. It uses content and descriptive analyses. The results identify effective strategies and interventions that can enhance the long-term vitality of the Polish language in diaspora communities. Cultural influences, such as traditions, values, and identities, are considered in relation to the sustainability of language development.

Keywords: Polish language abroad; Polish diaspora; language choices; family language policy; children's literature; book reading with children; home language

1. Introduction

The term "Polish-speaking diaspora" refers to the dispersed communities of people who speak Polish and share a common Polish cultural identity but live outside Poland. These communities can be found in various countries around the world, and they maintain connections to their Polish heritage through language, traditions, cultural practices, communication with Polish speakers, homeland visits, etc. The Polish-speaking diaspora plays a significant role in preserving and promoting Polish culture and language beyond the borders of Poland (Bhattacharjee 2012; Gula 1994; Kałczewiak 2020; Krawczuk and Wosik 2019; Machowska-Kosciak 2020; Nedopekina 2017; Romanowski 2021b to name a few).

Studying linguistic practices in Polish as a home language focuses on the complex aspects of language maintenance within migrant communities (cf. Brehmer et al. 2021; De Houwer 2023; Pułaczewska 2021; Romanowski 2021a; Ślusarczyk et al. 2018; Wolski-Moskoff 2018). This study aims to comprehensively explore how families in diasporic settings engage with the Polish language and what factors contribute to its preservation. This entails a detailed examination of the complex interactions and strategies employed to sustain the Polish language in these settings. Such research is essential for understanding nuances of language maintenance and transmission in diverse and dynamic cultural contexts (cf. Hornsby and McLeod 2022).

One focal point is the role of family dynamics under the pressure of surrounding policies (Nandi and Zabrodskaja 2024). This encompasses the interactions, communication patterns, and language choices within the family unit. Understanding how linguistic practices are negotiated and maintained within this context provides valuable insights into the broader language ecosystem of the diaspora community (Bayley et al. 2022; Brehmer 2018; Jaumont 2017; Sopata et al. 2022; Wolski-Moskoff 2019). Moreover, cultural influences play a crucial role in language sustainability, which involves examining the impact of

traditions, values, and identity on the use and transmission of the Polish language across generations. It also encompasses factors such as community support, cultural events, and access to resources that contribute to the maintenance of the language. By scrutinizing these interrelated aspects, the research endeavours to shed light on effective strategies and interventions that can be employed to bolster the long-term vitality of the Polish language in diaspora homes. Additionally, it contributes to the broader discourse on language maintenance and revitalization within global diaspora communities.

Placing the results within the general Polish studies, the project aims to learn how often and in what contexts Polish immigrant families in Finland use the Polish language, what are parents' perceptions of their children's proficiency in Polish, and how willing are the children to speak Polish. It explores the strategies and practices that families use to develop and maintain language skills in their children, the educational resources and programmes available to support language learning, and how families utilize these resources.

The research questions were the following:

- How do bilingual and multilingual environments affect the use and development of the Polish language in immigrant families?
- What are the subjective experiences and attitudes of parents regarding the preservation and development of the Polish language in their children?
- What are specific features of heritage language development in Finland?
- What role do reading and storytelling play in Polish-speaking families?

2. Background of the Study

A key concept for this project is 'heritage language' (HL). It was coined by North American language professionals to address the growing interest among grandchildren of immigrants in their ancestral languages. It helps educators distinguish 'HL learners' from traditional foreign language students. An HL learner is someone raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or understands that language, and is somewhat bilingual (Wiley 2001). In the USA, less-commonly taught languages refer to both foreign languages and HLs (Kondo-Brown 2012). The number and variety of language terms highlight the significance of a language to various groups. Language learning is influenced by neuropsychological factors, like language acquisition capability, and external factors, such as the learning environment and cultural heritage (Aronin 2022).

According to Polinsky (2018), HLs, learned in bilingual or multilingual environments, include those of diasporas, marginalized indigenous languages, and historical minority languages, and have only recently gained attention in bilingualism research. This approach suggests that a language is considered an HL if it is spoken at home or easily accessible to young children and is not the dominant language of the larger society. Individuals qualify as heritage speakers if they have some naturally acquired proficiency in that language. Ennser-Kananen and King (2018) claim that HLs refer to non-dominant languages with personal relevance, not necessarily tied to proficiency or home use. In sum, the term is complex and varies by context, reflecting broader cultural and identity-related significance. Despite challenges like limited institutional support and dominant language ideologies, HL education is crucial for preserving linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Recent policy changes and increasing recognition of HLs underscore their value as significant social and cultural resources.

For the Polish diaspora, the concept of HL gains an increasing interest among the children of Polish migrants and expats in learning Polish. On the one hand, this concept assists educators in distinguishing 'HL learners,' who grow up in homes where Polish is spoken, from traditional foreign language students. On the other hand, it underscores the fact that HL learners typically have some natural native-like proficiency in Polish and are, to some extent, bilingual. Recognized as a 'less commonly taught language' yet one of the frequently studied Slavic languages, Polish holds a significant cultural value for the diaspora community. Language learning for heritage speakers is influenced by psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors, and family language policies. While the study

of bilingualism is longstanding, HL research, including studies on languages like Polish, has only gained prominence recently (Romanowski and Seretny 2024).

Family language policy (FLP) encompasses strategies and practices that families in multilingual societies adopt to manage and promote language use within the household. For the Polish diaspora, FLP is crucial in maintaining Polish as an HL across generations (Głuszkowski 2023; Kędra et al. 2021; Kozminska and Zhu 2021; Lubinska 2021; Obojska 2019). Effective FLP involves deliberate decisions by parents and grandparents to use Polish in everyday communication, storytelling, and cultural rituals. It also includes encouraging children to speak, read, and write in Polish, and exposing them to Polish media and literature. Many families prioritize speaking Polish at home, especially with young children. This helps establish Polish as a natural part of daily life, facilitating its acquisition and use. Others opt for bilingual or trilingual homes, and some delegate teaching Polish to external institutions. Enrolling children in Polish language schools or extracurricular programmes provides formal instruction and enhances the youngsters' proficiency in reading and writing. Engaging in cultural traditions, such as celebrating Polish holidays, cooking traditional foods, and participating in community events, reinforces the use of Polish and strengthens cultural identity. Encouraging interactions between children and their Polish-speaking grandparents or older relatives fosters a deeper connection to the language and cultural heritage. Access to Polish books, music, films, and television programmes enriches the linguistic environment and makes learning enjoyable and meaningful.

To illustrate the global existence of the Polish diaspora, the study used document analysis of the published materials and presented their content. Additionally, it explored the perspectives of Polish authorities regarding maintenance of the Polish language abroad. Subsequently, it investigated the Finnish context.

2.1. Polish Diaspora in the World

The term *Polish-speaking diaspora* refers to the dispersed communities of people who speak Polish and share a common Polish cultural identity but live outside of Poland. Estimating the number of Polish diasporans is a complex task due to the application of various criteria, such as birth in Poland, multi-ethnic origin, knowledge of the Polish language, and declared awareness of origin. Population censuses are conducted in some countries, while in others only general numbers are available, which reduces the comparability of data. It is estimated that between 18 and 20 million individuals of Polish origin reside outside of Poland. One third of this group consists of Poles born and raised in Poland, while the remaining individuals have varying degrees of connection to Polish heritage. The Polish diaspora and Poles living abroad rank as one of the largest diasporas in the world in terms of population size relative to their home country.

The largest number of representatives of the Polish community live in the United States, where 9,660,000 people declared Polish ancestry in a survey conducted in 2012. There are approximately 1 million Poles living in Canada, 1,500,000 in Brazil (higher estimates have been found), 120,000 in Argentina, 170,000 in Australia and 30,000 in South Africa. In Western Europe the number of Poles and people of Polish origin or descent is estimated at approximately 4,200,000. Of this number, approximately 1,500,000 live in Germany, 800,000 in France, 200,000 in the Netherlands, 100,000 in Belgium and 85,000 in Austria. The Polish diaspora in Italy is estimated at 150,000, in Spain at 85,000, in Greece at 10,000, in Iceland at 11,000, in Sweden at 110,000, in Norway at 110,000, in Denmark at 60,000 and in the Czech Republic at 120,000; these are Poles and people of Polish origin. There are also enclaves numbering several thousand in Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia. In France, the "old" Polish community dominates, while in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries there are migrants from the last decade. Approximately one million people of Polish origin live in the post-Soviet space, although higher estimates are found there, as well. According to censuses carried out in recent years, the number of Poles in Lithuania is 200,000 and in Belarus 295,000. The latter figure may be an underestimate, as some people may not have revealed their Polish ethnicity. In Ukraine, according to the last census, there are

144,000 people of Polish nationality; this figure may also be significantly underestimated. There are 34,000 Poles in Kazakhstan, 46,000 in Latvia, and 47,000 in Russia (statistics from Polonia Historia 2024, retrieved 2024).

According to the information on the size and directions of temporary emigration from Poland, in the years 2017–2022, published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS 2023), in 2022 over 1.5 million Poles stayed temporarily (meaning more than 12 months) outside the country. The report states that the number of Poles residing in other countries in that year decreased by 24,000 compared to the year 2021.

At the end of 2022, approximately 1,523,000 permanent residents of Poland were temporarily outside Poland, i.e., 24,000 fewer than in 2021. Approximately 1436 thousand Polish emigrants were staying in Europe (23,000 fewer than in 2021). In the case of the Polish emigrants (23,000 fewer than in 2021), most of them—approximately 867,000—resided in the Member States of the European Union. Among European countries, the largest number of Polish emigrants resided in the United Kingdom (446,000), Germany (411,000), the Netherlands (116,000), Ireland (87,000), the United Kingdom (544,000), Ireland (87,000) and Norway (77,000).

The Polish-speaking diaspora in Finland, part of the broader Polish diaspora, shares a common Polish cultural identity and maintains ties with Polish traditions, language, and culture. Finland, like other countries, has seen an increase in Polish immigrants, contributing to the cultural diversity and multicultural landscape of the country. The presence of the Polish diaspora in Finland enhances cultural exchanges, promotes multiculturalism, and enriches the local society with Polish traditions, language, and heritage.

2.2. Polish Schools Abroad

There are multiple opportunities for educating children of the Polish diaspora. Parents have to study the options carefully, selecting the optimal educational model for their child. It is not easy to balance schoolwork in their host country with additional activities aimed at maintaining the children's Polish language skills. This challenge is often due to time constraints, distance from Polish schools or language schools, and a lack of support from extended family members. Decisions regarding children's participation in organized learning are made based on a strong belief in the importance of knowledge of the mother tongue and Polish culture. This belief influences language management in the family, making it more conscious of the benefits of bilingualism (Panek 2022).

The Polish Ministry of Education and Science has a special unit, the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad (in Polish: Ośrodek Rozwoju Polskiej Edukacji za Granicą, known as ORPEG, orpeg.pl), which has been operating for over 50 years. The Centre also includes the Polish Teachers' Centre, which has been operating since 1991 and is based in Lublin. It was established by the Minister of National Education as an educational institution to support Polish teachers working abroad. According to the Centre's website, its mission is to shape and sustain a sense of national identity among Poles living abroad by teaching the Polish language and culture to children and young people. The ORPEG Statute outlines the tasks of promoting Polish language, history, and culture, facilitating émigrés' eventual return to the Polish educational system, and propagating Polish culture. Additionally, it provides substantial support to instructors teaching Polish.

Paragraph 6 of the ORPEG Statute specifies that its tasks include coordinating the education of children of Polish citizens temporarily living abroad and exercising financial and administrative supervision over their activities. Pedagogical supervision is provided for educational institutions at diplomatic missions, consular offices, and military representations of the Republic of Poland. It also covers teachers delegated to work in Polish sections operating in the educational systems of other countries. Additionally, distance learning is organized in schools in Poland.

In October 2022 the Institute for the Development of the Polish Language was established. Its responsibility is related to supporting Polish education abroad. It has the task of promoting the Polish language as a mother tongue among the Polish diasporas. This

includes supporting educational and scientific initiatives and projects that aim to deepen knowledge of the Polish language and promote it as a foreign language. To develop the Polish language abroad, they aim to collaborate with schools, universities, public institutions, associations, foundations, organizations, and other entities both in Poland and abroad.

There are several possibilities for Poles living abroad to educate their children in Polish. The first one is Polish schools abroad. In paragraph 1 clause 1 of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2019, on the organization of education of children of Polish citizens temporarily residing abroad, the legislator lists primary schools and general secondary schools, as well as school complexes at diplomatic representations, consular offices and military representations of the Republic of Poland. Their task is primarily to implement the same core curriculum for primary schools and general secondary schools that applies to schools in Poland. This means that education at such institutions is to take place five days a week, instruction is primarily in Polish, and the curricula are the same as in Poland. Despite the guaranteed legislative framework, no such facility was run in the 2021/22 school year.

The second option is Polish schools. The concept of a Polish school is defined in paragraph 1 of the above-mentioned Regulation. According to this document, Polish schools, just like schools abroad, are established at a diplomatic representation, consular office or military representation of the Republic of Poland. They enable students who attend primary schools or general secondary schools operating in the education system of the country of residence (and who are therefore educated primarily in the language of this "host country") to supplement their education and attend classes taught in Polish. The content of these classes is determined by the curriculum framework for supplementary education and by curricula for Polish schools. The Polish schools can be established when at least 50 students are registered, but the legislator reserves the right to establish a Polish school also when there is a smaller number of applicants. The schools are under the supervision of The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad (known in Poland as ORPEG).

According to ORPEG data in the 2023/2024 school year, approximately 16,000 students have enrolled in 76 schools, which are staffed by 600 teachers. In 2023 there were 76 schools in 37 countries on four continents. In addition to the list of schools in 26 European countries, the list includes schools in 3 North American countries, 4 in Asia and 4 in Africa. These institutions provide supplementary education, focusing on language teaching and providing knowledge about Polish history, geography and culture at all education stages.

Another option, which is not explicitly discussed in the Regulation, but which is very similar to the concept of Polish schools, is the one known as Saturday schools. These institutions are run by social organisations, parishes, and other foreign entities. Students follow the same curriculum as the students enrolled in the Polish schools. As of today, there are 1224 registered Saturday schools. Estimating the number of students attending them is problematic, because the currently functioning database of the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad is not regularly updated, and the schools do not report student numbers accurately.

Finaly, the Regulation mentions a third learning option, distance learning, intended for students living abroad and, for various justifiable reasons, unable to fulfil their educational obligations. In these special cases, the students have the opportunity to study online. Distance-learning programmes cover the entire core curriculum. The student works independently, and his/her duties include sending five written assignments in all subjects covered by the curriculum and participating in at least half of the online tutorials conducted on the "Open School" educational platform. The student is transferred to the next grade based on the average of the assignment grades. Distance education is provided by two institutions run by ORPEG—a primary school and Liceum Ogólnokształcące (a type of a high school).

In addition, Polish students living abroad may learn Polish in schools belonging to the education system of the country where they live. This is possible in two cases. The first

one is the Polish school sections in France. In some French schools there are international sections where some subjects are taught in the language of the partner country. This works at three levels—primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school. The curriculum implemented in these bilingual classes has to be approved by the French authorities. The studies end with the final exam. As the French Ministry of National Education informs the readers on its website, in addition to the tests provided for all students, the final exam in the international classes tests the HL proficiency, as well as the knowledge of the history and geography of the heritage country. The content of the final exam is developed by French educators collaborating with the relevant authorities of the partner countries. For students of Polish descent, this exam consists of two written papers—one from Polish history and one from Polish geography, as well as two oral exams in these subjects. The results are included in the final average of the international matura exam. There are four Polish sections in France—one in Strasbourg, one in Lyon, and two in Paris. In the 2021/2022 school year, 476 students attended Polish sections in France.

The second option to learn Polish in schools of the host country is offered by European schools and accredited European schools. These are primarily educational institutions intended for children of employees of the European Union administration, but they can also be attended by other students—children of the people employed in international institutions and embassies, as well as children residing permanently in the city or region where the school is located. Education is free for children of the employees of the European Union, while others have to pay fees. The European schools offer a two-year kindergarten for children aged 4–5, a five-year primary school for students aged 6–10 and a seven-year secondary school for students aged 11–17. Currently, there are 13 European schools and 23 accredited European schools. In the 2021/2022 school year, 783 students of Polish descent attended European schools.

Additionally, it should be noted that homeschooling is one more possibility. The option of fulfilling school obligations through online learning has given Polish parents the opportunity to provide their children with access to the same knowledge as their peers in the country. This has also enabled school principals to authorize homeschooling at the request of a parent. If parents choose to homeschool their child, they must provide a statement committing themselves to providing suitable learning conditions and ensuring that the child takes annual classification exams. The headmaster determines the scope of the exams, and grades are awarded annually. Pass grades in all subjects are required to continue to the next grade. Subjects such as music, art, technology, and sports are not assessed; neither is a child's conduct. To enable children in the diaspora to study in Polish schools through homeschooling, they must first enrol in the school. This option is widely used. In the 2022/2023 school year, a total of 1730 students in 84 countries around the world participated in distance learning.

The Libratus Polish Internet Schools project was established in 2009 to provide free online education, in accordance with the Polish core curriculum, to Polish children living abroad. Participation is open to children who hold Polish citizenship or the Pole's Card. (The Pole's Card is a document that attests to the bearer's affiliation with the Polish nation. It does not imply Polish citizenship, nor does it confer the right to cross the border or settle in the territory of the Republic of Poland.) Libratus facilitates collaboration between Polish schools and diasporic parents. Students involved in the project can access the educational platform which includes all curriculum content for individual subjects divided into 36 weeks of studies, weekly subject webinars, and various activities that integrate students from different countries. The authors of the Libratus project prioritize motivating students by gamification, various competitions and contests and, if necessary, offering psychological or speech therapy support. Polonijka is a Polish Internet School that offers similar learning opportunities to Libratus, but, unlike Libratus, it is a paid service. In the 2022/23 school year, the largest number of Libratus students lived in Great Britain, but there were also Polish children from over 130 other countries in the world. Approximately 16,000 youngsters are estimated to have participated in the project since its beginning.

2.3. Poles in Finland

The Polish community in Finland is relatively small, with around 5400 people of Polish nationality registered as living there (Statistics Finland 2024). This number may not include children born to Polish–Finnish parents, who can be registered as Finnish nationals. In the past few years, the flow of Polish immigrants to Finland has been at the rate of around 300–500 per year, slightly higher among men than women. After Poland entered the EU in 2004, migration to Finland increased, but not as significantly as to other European countries, where Poles are one of the main migrant groups; e.g., in the United Kingdom or Germany.

The Finnish education system provides the opportunity to learn the native language in a certain number of hours/weeks in child's "host school". Mother-tongue or home-language studies support multilingual pupils in maintaining and developing their language skills. In Helsinki, a total of roughly 50 different languages are taught as a mother tongue. Out of these, pupils can only participate in the teaching of one language. The language studies supplement basic education, and the pupil will receive a separate assessment for these studies. The lessons are held once a week in the morning or afternoon, when the pupil has no other classes. The largest language groups may be taught at the pupil's own school, but pupils must often travel to another school. If necessary, one can apply for a student travel card for these journeys (Helsinki 2024).

3. Materials and Methods

The survey questionnaire, which was distributed anonymously through social media channels, included nine open-ended questions aimed at collecting information on family language routines and practices. Participants were informed about the use of their responses and provided consent before completing the form. The responses were categorized and analysed using descriptive analysis, following the methodologies outlined by Drager (2018) and Holmes and Hazen (2013). This method is well-suited for exploring how bilingual and multilingual environments affect the use and development of the Polish language in immigrant families, and allowed us to identify patterns and trends in language use and development. The open-ended questions permitted participants to express their personal experiences and attitudes, which could be studied to understand parents' perspectives on preserving and developing the Polish language in their children. Descriptive analysis helps in systematically summarizing these subjective responses. This approach emphasized unique aspects of the Polish language's maintenance and evolution among immigrant families in Finland.

4. Results

4.1. Answers to the Questionnaire

Data collection for this study was carried out in 2024 with Polish migrant parents, all living in Finland, using Polish and Finnish, and/or other languages. The participants were recruited via two closed Facebook groups for Polish families living in Finland and personal connections. The participants were informed that the data were collected for a research project, that they would all remain anonymous, and any information that could make them identifiable would not be used or publicized. They were also told that they could withdraw their participation at any stage of the project. The data collection was carried out in Polish (see Appendix A). Our main focus was on Polish literacy, including reading and storytelling.

Altogether, 39 respondents participated in the survey. According to the sociodemographic section of the questionnaire, most of them came to Finland in the last fifteen years, and 70 per cent do not plan to return to Poland. Nearly all respondents visit Poland at least once per year, some twice, and just a few three or more times. Almost half of the respondents use only Polish at home, while 30 per cent use three languages. The largest group is made up of those who speak Polish, Finnish and English; the rest of the combinations, besides Polish and Finnish, include Vietnamese and Arabic. Twenty-five per cent of the respondents use both Polish and Finnish at home.

The following presents the responses to the survey questions.

1. Does your child/Do your children speak Polish willingly? According to 84.6% of the parents, their children are willing to speak Polish; 10.3% responded negatively, and 5.1% answered 'I do not know.'

2. Where does your child speak Polish? In 92.3% of the cases, children speak Polish only at home, and in 41% they also use it outside their home. Participants listed the contexts in which their children would use Polish in public places: Polish schools, religious services in the Polish church, online contacts with family, meetings with Polish friends in Finland, and with family and friends during visits to Poland. Significantly, 10.35% indicated that children only spoke Polish visiting Poland. There were also three answers of "everywhere" (including a Finnish kindergarten and communication with Finnish staff in the daycare centre there). One parent remarked, "where it suits the child or when someone else speaks Polish"—indicating a willingness to communicate in Polish in a natural and spontaneous manner.

3. What is the purpose of using Polish outside Poland? Twenty-five respondents indicate that they use Polish for everyday communication, and six participants emphasise that they speak Polish only at home. Eleven people claim the universal role of the Polish language: "It can be used anywhere" (6), "It can be used for anything' (2) and "It can be used in all life situations" (3). Fourteen families use Polish to play, and eight to communicate with family in Poland and from Poland. Some emphasise that Polish is the only common language used to communicate with the elderly, e.g., grandparents. Apparently, speaking Polish enables immigrants to relax and feel at ease, so it is used for such leisure time activities as watching movies and cartoons, reading, playing games, listening to songs and singing and media use.

4. How do you evaluate your children's proficiency in Polish? A total of 63% of the respondents used the following terms: very good (10), excellent (1), wonderful (1), fluent (5), not at all different from their peers in Poland (1), as expected for their age (2), and good (5). The second group consisted of the answers fairly well (5), moderately (2), not bad (1), enough to communicate at home (1), and have no problem to communicate, but their Finnish is more developed (1). Three parents were critical: quite poor (1), poor (1), and poor, but will get along with grandma (1). Despite the negative evaluation, the latter statement underlines successful communication. This is the parents' assessment (the question intentionally emphasised *according to you/your opinion*), and further research would be needed to evaluate the children's language skills. It is important to note that these evaluations are subjective, and should be taken as such. The surveyed families value Polish language skills highly, as indicated by the predominance of positive statements. One statement stands out as more elaborate and detailed:

> *. . .they are able to communicate without difficulty. The individual is proficient in speaking, although they occasionally use incorrect grammatical forms, such as when conjugating nouns and adjectives, or when they lack words and replace them with Finnish equivalents. However, their writing skills are weaker, as they make numerous errors.*

Reading is not well developed in many heritage speakers, because they rarely read in Polish, except when using WhatsApp to communicate with relatives in Poland (see also Kędra 2021, who came to analogical conclusions). When discussing the development of the Polish language in youngsters, the speakers emphasised the importance of consistently using Polish in their communication with the children, both orally and in writing, despite the children's initial reluctance. It is worth noting the significance of this consistency, which is crucial in preserving an inherited language. Additionally, respondents mentioned the value of taking children to Poland at least once a year.

5. Can your child write in Polish? A total of 20.5% of respondents evaluated their children's writing skills as good without mistakes, while over 50% answered 'yes, but with mistakes.' Around 14% of respondents' children have not yet reached the age to learn to write, but their parents express a desire to teach them writing or mention that they are at

the beginning of this process. Two respondents answered 'no, they cannot write in Polish.' No one selected the answer 'we do not plan to teach writing.'

One interesting method used in one family is worth mentioning. The interesting approach to learning to write involves using a series of children's books specifically designed for learner readers—the Polish series *Czytam sobie* (czytamsobie.pl). After reading the book, the parent prepares a set of comprehension questions appropriate to the child's developmental level, and the child writes the answers in a specially prepared notebook. The answers are then reviewed together, checked for accuracy, and positively reinforced—rewarded and marked with a sticker provided by the publisher at the end of the booklet, as a motivational reward for the young reader.

6. Do your children learn Polish outside of the home? Over half of the respondents answered negatively. This may be due to the age of the children in the surveyed families, which is lower than the compulsory education age. Children under the age of 7 are not subject to compulsory education, according to the Polish system. Additionally, more than 18% of children are attending or attended Polish schools, while over 13% attend Polish classes at a Finnish school. A further 7.7% are online students enrolled in Polish distance learning projects—*Libratus* or *Polonijka*. Over 5% of individuals attend other Polish language classes or activities.

7. Do your children read in Polish? Do you read to children in Polish? The answers were reassuring: 80% read in Polish. The readers primarily focus on age-appropriate children's and young adults' literature. In addition, they read world children's literature, such as books by Astrid Lindgren, Tove Jansson, Anne-Catharina Vestly, Mary Norton, or René Goscinny. The genre of comic books is also frequently mentioned. Some named detective stories, popular science books, culinary recipes, and instructional materials for tasks and games. Many respondents find it challenging to identify a single favourite reading material.

Recommended children's books: *Mikołajek*, Rene Goscinny, Jean-Jacques Sempe; *W kieszonce*, Iwona Chmielewska; *Koń, który nie chciał się ścigać*, Clare Balding; *Nawet nie wiesz jak bardzo cię kocham*, Sam McBartney; *8+2*, Anne-Catharina Vestly; *Pożyczalscy*, Mary Norton; *Przygody Baltazara Gąbki*, Stanisław Pagaczewski; *Opowieści zamiecione pod dywan*, Agnieszka Zimnowodzka. Series: *Reksio*, Maria Szarf; *Pucio*, Marta Galewska-Kustra i Joanna Kłos; *Kroniki Archeo*, Agnieszka Stelmaszyk; *Basia*, Zofia Stanecka; *Kicia Kocia*, Anita Głowińska; books by Grzegorz Kasdepke (a concrete title was not mentioned). Comics: *Kaczogród* Carl Barks, *Asterix* René Goscinny i Albert Uderzo, Jean-Yves Ferri i Didier Conrad, *Tintin* Hergé (Georges Remi). Poems for children: Julian Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa.

An excellent illustration of the development of the Polish language in one Finnish–Polish multilingual family is the practice of reading to children. In this family, the mother reads in Finnish, her native language, and the father reads in Polish, his native language. Reading to children is not limited to evenings, but sometimes takes place during meals, and commuting and is part of other daily routines.

8. Do you tell fairy tales/stories to children? Approximately 70% said that they tell or used to tell fairy tales and stories to their children. The results of many research papers indicate that the daily reading of books to children from an early age on helps to develop proper speech, as well as listening comprehension, and to facilitate the acquisition of reading skills. It also contributes to remembering details of content they have heard, expressing their own judgments and providing arguments for their opinions. Moreover, it affects the ability to calm down when agitated, it increases attention span, and it initiates cause-and-effect thinking (cf. Madeja-Bień 2017).

Reading is an effective way to build the child's inner resources. Observant parents notice that their reading aloud to the children develops their language, memory, imagination, thinking, and concentration. In young children, richly illustrated books create connections between concepts and images. When a book inspires an older child, s/he is willing to discuss it with the parent, which strengthens the bond between them and helps develop a value system, thus contributing to the child's emotional growth (cf. Koźmińska

and Olszewska 2010, 2014). "Community reading enhances the children's experience and benefits the readers as well. Sensory reading invites children to participate in reproducing the words and images found in the book," stated Małgorzata Swędrowska (2020)—creator of sensory reading in Polish pedagogy and methodology. It was rewarding to read that the interviewed parents realized the role of reading and storytelling for the HL development of their children.

9. How can you develop your children's Polish language skills in other ways? This question sought to find out other ways of developing Polish skills besides reading and storytelling. Fifteen respondents mentioned communicating with family and friends in Polish, primarily through instant messaging. Watching Polish films in Polish or with Polish subtitles, programmes, series, and even cabarets and Youtubers, as well as online educational programmes, was also a popular method for improving language skills, with fifteen respondents mentioning it. Two respondents specifically mentioned watching Polish television, while one mentioned educational programmes on the internet. Twelve people spoke about listening to music, songs, and audiobooks, and four people mentioned singing in Polish as an important activity to develop language skills. Eight people pointed out that nothing works better than keeping on speaking Polish, with two of them proudly stating that they use the language every day and without any special effort: *We don't do it in any extraordinary way, we just use the language. We answer children's questions and tell them about the world in Polish, I talk to my child a lot. Speaking and writing to the children in Polish, quite consistently and despite their reluctant attitude is what is needed*. Some respondents also mentioned speaking and writing to the children in Polish, despite their reluctance to reciprocate. Seven individuals reported playing with children, with five of them specifically mentioning board games, e.g., *We play board games and other games by setting the rules in Finnish, we encourage the children to use their resources in both languages (Finnish and Polish)*, i.e., *self-translation, language games and activities and instructions to them.*

Additionally, four individuals reported developing their Polish language skills through meeting other Polish families, while three individuals wrote about using visits to Poland as an opportunity to improve their children's Polish: *During our time in the country, we make an effort to make the best of the various cultural opportunities available for children, including theatre, film, and museums*; *whenever possible, during our stay in Poland, we visit museums, open-air museums, go to the cinema*, etc. Two families mentioned teaching their children to read and write in Polish, while one person noted the importance of correcting mistakes and giving book recommendations for the development of the Polish skills. One individual responded with *I don't know* and another with *I don't develop*.

In conclusion, the results indicate that Polish migrant families in Finland place a high value on maintaining the Polish language. They use a combination of home-based practices, educational resources, and cultural activities to support their children's bilingual or multilingual development. While challenges exist, particularly in writing skills and formal language instruction, the overall commitment to preserving Polish within these families is strong. Continued support, both within the home and through external resources, is essential for the sustained development of the Polish language in these communities. Families living abroad often underestimate the daily effort required to develop HL, which is often already integrated into their daily routines and rituals, albeit unconsciously. Some think that daily conversations about mundane things are sufficient, and do not realize that without reading, writing and discussing problems outside household issues, the heritage speaker's proficiency stagnates. This lack of awareness may be reflected in responses such as 'I don't know' or 'I don't develop their language skills'. In fact, in order to help children develop their HL, at least a basic knowledge of methodology is required, so professional help is needed. Reading in Polish is a common practice among these families, with 80% of parents engaging in it. The diverse range of literature mentioned, including both Polish and international works, suggests that reading is a key tool for language development. Storytelling is also prevalent, with about 70% of parents reporting they tell stories in

Polish. These activities are crucial for developing vocabulary, comprehension, and a deeper connection to the language.

4.2. Case Study of a Polish Family in Finland

The family which I discuss here have lived in Finland since 2010. They are a nuclear family: husband and wife and their three children, Jonatan, 12 years old, and two girls, Helena, 9, and Dobrawa, 6 years old. All three were born in Finland. The reason for the parents' migration to Finland was their careers. Both spouses are Polish, and Polish is the mother tongue of all members of the family and is the home language too. Finnish and English are spoken outside the home. All children attended Finnish-speaking kindergartens and schools.

The interview offers valuable insight into the natural and unforced approach to bilingualism within a Polish migrant family living in Finland. This family illustrates a case of balanced language maintenance, where Polish is naturally passed down within the household, while Finnish, as the language of the broader community, is also integrated into the children's lives. English is studied at school and widely used, as well as other foreign languages. This is how the mother describes the goals of the Polish language transmission:

> *Actually, we didn't think much about it. Dad believes that it's just the closest language, your language, and you pass it on naturally every day in the family. In a family where both parents are Polish and speak the same language, this is natural, and there are many such families. In the course of everyday life, you don't think about it. Before, the children went to daycare, and we sent them late compared to other families, who also criticized us a little for this. The older J. (now 12) went to a playgroup at three years old, it was his preparation, and to kindergarten at four years old. However, we didn't live in isolation from the Finnish language. Among acquaintances, there were mixed families, and in the catholic church (our family is catholic), there were those who speak Finnish. We didn't associate language so strongly with religion. There were many different languages around, and we participated in the liturgy in different languages, including Finnish, Swedish, English, Polish, German, Russian. It was more convenient for us to attend services organized specifically for families with children. We are the kind of family that observes all traditions, but it doesn't stress, we just live naturally. We are open to the language of the environment, but we also do many things at home in Polish, for example, prayers. For the children, this is absolutely normal. At the same time, all children sing in the Finnish choirs of a Protestant church, we also attend services there. This is also a simple choice because the choir is in close location from home.*

The family's approach to language transmission aligns with research on HL maintenance, where the native language is passed on without deliberate planning or conscious effort. The father's belief that language is naturally transmitted within the family is consistent with studies that suggest HLs are often maintained in environments where both parents speak the same language at home (Fishman 1991). This natural transmission is particularly effective in homes where daily communication occurs exclusively or primarily in the HL. The role of religion should also be mentioned. While the family does not strongly associate language with religion, they participate in religious services in multiple languages, indicating an openness to linguistic diversity. This exposure to various languages through religious activities reflects a form of incidental multilingualism, where children are exposed to, and acquire proficiency in, multiple languages, through routine social interactions (King 2016). The use of Polish for prayers at home, coupled with participation in Finnish choirs and services, demonstrates a flexible approach to language use, reinforcing both Polish and Finnish in different contexts. The family's interaction with mixed-language families and their participation in community activities (such as the Finnish choir) indicate a positive integration into the local community, while maintaining their linguistic identity. This mirrors the findings of studies on immigrant families, which show that active participation in community life, including religious and cultural activities, supports the development of both the HL and the majority language (Scheele et al. 2010). The family's

approach suggests that they view language as a practical tool rather than a rigid cultural boundary, which may contribute to the children's balanced bilingualism (Lanza 2021).

> *Since the father has poor eyesight, the children have grown accustomed to constantly telling him about everything around them, which may have contributed to such a high level of development of their Polish language skills. It's worth noting the difference in the characters of the children. The eldest child is reserved, while the middle daughter (9 years old), on the contrary, talks a lot. When dad took them to karate classes, the journey took a lot of time. The eldest made do with only the essentials, while the middle child paid attention to completely different things, and the journey seemed completely different. Here it turned out that a lot of language had to be used. The eldest son attended a Polish school and completed four grades, while the middle daughter attended for two grades. Both of them participated in Libratus online project. The Polish school is quite far away and inconvenient for us. Similarly, attending another school where classes are organized for two hours a week. All families solve this issue differently for themselves; some attending Polish schools, some choose home schooling. We have one more special thing: dad has been telling a story with sequels for many years, which the children eagerly anticipate before bedtime. When the eldest had to stay overnight at a friend's place, he was about eight years old, he was worried, not because his parents weren't nearby, but because he wouldn't be able to fall asleep without this story, and he wouldn't know what happened next, since both siblings would hear the continuation. It's a story about bear cubs traveling by train in America at the beginning of the 20th century. Technological discoveries gradually appear, everything historically accurate. The characters have many different adventures; they explore the country, live with Native Americans. They mine gold, work on the farm, learn about nature, run a Sunday school, encounter unexpected situations and so on. An Italian named Giuseppe also appears. He is a scientist, who collects information for his research work on the nature and habits of the inhabitants of the United States of America. The story also often takes the form of a dialogue, with children asking questions about the story. The characters also comment on and become involved in the life of our family, remembering birthdays and other important family events. Very interesting stories, it's a pity we don't record them. Reading together with a child often involves shared storytelling.*

The details provided offer a rich context for understanding how environmental factors, personal interactions, and creative practices contribute to the development of Polish language skills in immigrant children. The father's poor eyesight has necessitated a unique communicative environment, where children have taken on the role of narrators, describing their surroundings in detail. This constant verbal engagement likely plays a significant role in enhancing the children's language skills, particularly in Polish. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social interaction as a fundamental mechanism for cognitive development, where language is developed through active use and meaningful communication. The children's need to describe their environment to their father may have fostered an advanced level of descriptive language and narrative skills. The mother's story reveals a clear distinction between the language use of the two older children, shaped by their different personalities. The reserved nature of the eldest child contrasts with the talkative middle daughter, illustrating how individual differences can influence language practice. This variation is consistent with research suggesting that personality traits can significantly impact language acquisition and use (Dewaele and Furnham 2000). The talkative nature of the middle child likely provides her with more opportunities to practice and refine her language skills, resulting in a richer linguistic experience. The family's approach to education, including participation in the Libratus online project and the Polish school, reflects the diverse strategies immigrant families use to maintain the HL. The challenge of attending a distant Polish school is a common issue for immigrant families, who must balance convenience with the desire to maintain linguistic and cultural ties to their home country. This scenario is echoed in studies on HL maintenance, concentrating on the importance of flexible and accessible educational resources in supporting bilingualism

(Cummins and Swain 2014). The father's long-standing tradition of storytelling, particularly the serialized narrative about bear cubs, represents a unique and powerful method for language development. This practice not only enriches the children's vocabulary and comprehension, but also engages them in critical thinking and imagination. Storytelling, especially when interactive, has been shown to enhance children's narrative skills, cultural knowledge, and emotional intelligence (Isbell et al. 2004). The children's anticipation of these stories and their involvement in the narrative through dialogue further reinforce their engagement with the Polish language, making it a vital part of their everyday lives.

The effect of motivation of young heritage speakers is vivid. The mother said, *The middle daughter became very eager to teach Polish to her close friend, although her friend has never had any prior exposure to the Polish language.* In this context, the necessity for communication is fulfilled using the Finnish language. *Both girls communicate fluently in Finnish, which is their second language.* From the parents' observations and accounts, it can be concluded that the daughter's motivation was authentic and self-initiated. The parents were initially surprised by the idea, yet ultimately expressed a positive attitude. This resulted in a greater level of interest, excitement, and confidence. In turn, the effect is manifested both as enhanced performance and persistence and creativity.

The aforementioned characteristics were clearly discernible during the process of devising a "course plan" for the friend. This included estimation of time commitment (perhaps the would-be instructor over-optimistically assumed an equally high level of commitment on the part of the learner), a precise timetable of face-to-face sessions, homework assignments, and preparation of the materials—e.g., a workbook. A creative approach was also evident in reflections on the selection of teaching content. The mother continues:

> *What is particularly interesting is the structure of the children's 'course' and the reflections involved. First, the choice of topic was considered. It was decided that the calendar of traditional events would be appropriate as the basis. As Easter was recently celebrated, it was chosen as the starting point for the Polish 'lessons.' However, there were difficulties in selecting appropriate vocabulary to present Polish Easter traditions. The criterion for selection was phonetics, and so words such as chrzan/'horseradish' and szynka/'ham', kurczę/chicken were excluded* [the child observed that they are difficult to pronounce for a non-native speaker]. *The word 'babka' was ultimately chosen, as it is easy. It means a sweet pie and has positive associations.*

This children's project encompasses two distinct aspects: the child in the role of a teacher, who is intrinsically motivated, and the learner, who is both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. The child was completely free from any influence from her family in terms of decision-making and ideas in creating the project of teaching Polish to her friend. The daughter's enthusiasm for teaching Polish to her friend highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation in heritage-language development. Her self-initiated project reflects a deep personal connection to her heritage language and a desire to share it with others, which is a strong indicator of internalized cultural identity (Ryan and Deci 2020). The process of devising a course plan, despite being an informal and child-led endeavour, shows a remarkable level of commitment and creativity, underscoring the effectiveness of intrinsically motivated learning. The child's approach to teaching Polish, particularly her thoughtful selection of vocabulary and structuring of lessons, illustrates the potential for creative pedagogy, even at a young age. By choosing words that are phonetically easier for a non-native speaker to pronounce, the child demonstrated an understanding of pedagogical principles, such as scaffolding and tailoring content to the learner's needs (Taber 2018; Wood et al. 1976). This also shows an awareness of the challenges that language learners face and a willingness to adapt her teaching methods accordingly. The decision to focus on Polish Easter traditions as the first lesson highlights the role of cultural context in language teaching (e.g., Karlık 2023). By linking language learning to culturally significant events, the child not only teaches vocabulary, but also imparts cultural knowledge, which is essential for maintaining a heritage language. This approach aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural content into language education to

enhance motivation and cultural identity (e.g., Kim 2020). The fact that the child undertook this project without any parental influence exemplifies the role of autonomy in enhancing motivation and creativity. Autonomy-supportive environments, where individuals feel they have control over their actions and decisions, are known to foster greater engagement and persistence in tasks (Ryan et al. 2006). In this case, the child's autonomy in creating and executing the teaching plan likely contributed to the high level of excitement and sustained interest in the project.

The in-depth interview with the parents explains the natural transmission of language, emphasizing the significance of familial linguistic heritage. It reflects the interconnection between language and religion. The family's openness to linguistic diversity and engagement with various religious practices, facilitated by proximity and convenience, demonstrates a balanced approach to cultural integration. The interview explores the organic transmission of language within a Polish family in Finland, emphasizing familial linguistic heritage. It examines the interplay of language and religion. The parents' involvement facilitates the family's balanced engagement with linguistic diversity and various religious practices. Additionally, the father's visual impairment contributes to a communicative environment, benefiting the children's Polish narrative proficiency. The family's educational decisions, such as attending or not attending a Polish school, reflect diverse approaches to language and education. Overall, this case underscores the importance of personal interactions and supportive environments in shaping children's linguistic development and cultural integration. A bilingual person lives in two worlds, as Wierzbicka (2005) observes. It is understandable that the bilingual children would wish to disseminate their cultural identity to their immediate environment. The family plays an important role in this process, but there is a desire in the children to extend this cultural identity to their friends. The family dynamics, influenced by the father's visual impairment, fosters a linguistic environment where the children engage in constant communication, potentially enhancing their proficiency in Polish. The children's exposure to multilingual contexts, coupled with their autonomy in reading and writing, suggests a dynamic linguistic development influenced by familial and educational factors. This account provides a compelling example of how intrinsic motivation in young heritage speakers can drive language teaching and learning, even in informal settings. The daughter's initiative to teach Polish to her Finnish-speaking friend demonstrates the powerful role that motivation plays in language development and cultural transmission among heritage speakers.

Most families choose strategies that either involve using all means to support the home language, including attending schools or heritage-language classes, or prioritize acquiring the surrounding language. However, in this case, all languages are integrated into a multinational environment, with an international approach and multilingualism. For example, during a theatre festival in France, although there was an opportunity to see signs in Polish, the children relied on the support of the Finnish-speaking family, as there were fewer children there, and they needed assistance.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The present study uses the results of a questionnaire survey circulated among 39 members of the Polish diaspora living in Finland, and of a qualitative case study of a Polish family with three children residing in Finland for 14 years, showing linguistic practices in Polish as a home language with a focus on the intricate dynamics of language maintenance. The paper outlines key characteristics of the Polish diaspora in the world and in Finland within the research context, presenting communication in Polish in expat families in various amounts of detail.

The study of language policy and language practices among Polish families in Finland shows that they have a positive attitude towards preserving the Polish language. They consider it important for communication with family members residing in Poland and in the diaspora, and for passing on cultural heritage. They make use of available opportunities for learning Polish. Parents place great importance on reading. They are familiar with

children's literature and are aware of various options for using educational and children's video and audio content. However, there are also families who simply talk occasionally with their children, without setting goals for comprehensive language development, apparently hoping that if the children move to a Polish-speaking environment, they will be able to compensate for what they did not learn earlier. The data revealed specific features of HL development within the Finnish context.

Maintaining an HL like Polish in a predominantly non-Polish-speaking society presents challenges, including limited access to resources and the dominance of the national language/s of the host country. However, the growing recognition of the importance of HLs in bilingualism research offers new opportunities. Support from community organizations, advancements in digital learning tools, and increased availability of Polish-language media can all help families in their efforts to maintain Polish. For the Polish diaspora, narrative development and family language policy are pivotal in preserving Polish as an HL. By creating a supportive environment for language learning and cultural engagement, families can ensure that Polish remains a vibrant and integral part of their identity. As interest in HLs continues to grow, the experiences and strategies of the Polish diaspora can serve as a valuable model for other communities seeking to maintain their linguistic and cultural heritage. Providing the rich context of stories, learners acquire and refine the linguistic tools necessary for fluent and effective language use.

The results of the survey show that Polish is used frequently within homes, with nearly half of the respondents using only Polish at home and 25% using both Polish and Finnish. Children speak Polish mainly at home (92.3%) and in specific situations like Polish school, church, and family interactions. Parents generally perceive their children's proficiency in Polish positively, with 63% rating it as very good to excellent. Children are willing to speak Polish, as claimed by 84.6% of parents. Strategies used to promote Polish include consistent use of Polish at home, reading and storytelling in Polish, engaging in Polish media (films, songs, and educational programmes), and communicating with family and friends in Poland. Bilingual and multilingual environments are common, with 30% of families using three languages at home. These environments foster the use of Polish alongside Finnish and English, among other languages, facilitating multilingual proficiency. Visits to Poland, which nearly all families undertake at least once a year, play a crucial role in maintaining language and cultural connections. These visits reinforce language use and cultural identity. Educational resources include Polish schools in Finland, online learning projects like Libratus or Polonijka, and tailored reading programmes. Over 18% attend Polish schools, and around 13% have Polish lessons at Finnish schools. Parents highly value maintaining Polish language skills, recognizing the importance of consistent use and cultural connections. They emphasize the significance of reading, storytelling, and regular communication in Polish to support language development. By addressing these aspects, the study contributes new knowledge on multifaceted aspects of language maintenance among Polish immigrant families in Finland, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in immigrant language retention and bilingual education. By choosing one of the possible ways to support the Polish language in Finland, parents demonstrate that there are different paths to cultivating HLs, and that the achieved level can fluctuate, with regard to both improvement and deterioration. The combined efforts of the family, the environment, and the children themselves yield the optimal result.

The experience of the family in this study reflects a pragmatic and organic approach to bilingualism, where the HL (Polish) is maintained naturally within the home, while the majority language (Finnish) is embraced through community involvement. Their story underscores the idea that language maintenance does not necessarily require strict strategies or conscious effort; rather, it can be a seamless part of daily life, especially in environments where multiple languages coexist. The family's openness to both languages and cultures allows for a rich linguistic environment where children can thrive bilingually, benefiting from the cultural and linguistic diversity around them. This case exemplifies

how immigrant families can successfully encounter bilingualism by integrating both the heritage and majority languages into their everyday lives in a balanced and stress-free manner. The contrast between the children's personalities and their respective language use demonstrates the role of individual differences in language acquisition. Moreover, the family's creative storytelling practice serves as a potent tool for maintaining and enriching the Polish language in a bilingual environment. The interview illustrates that language development in immigrant families is multifaceted, influenced by both external factors, such as access to education, and internal dynamics, such as family traditions and individual personalities. This case underscores the importance of adaptability and creativity in fostering bilingualism, showing that HL maintenance can be effectively supported through both structured and organic means. The effects of intrinsic motivation on the language development of young heritage speakers are significant. The daughter's self-directed initiative to teach Polish to her friend not only reflects her strong connection to her heritage, but also illustrates the potential for creative and culturally rich language teaching practices to emerge naturally when children are motivated from within. The children's project demonstrates how motivation, when coupled with autonomy and cultural relevance, can lead to enhanced language learning experiences that are both effective and meaningful. This case showcases the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and providing opportunities for autonomous, creative engagement in HL development among young learners.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical approval was not required for the study involving human samples in accordance with the Ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland issued by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) in 2019 because the study did not involve intervening in the physical integrity of research participants, did not expose research participants to exceptionally strong stimuli, and does not entail a security risk to the participants or their family members.

Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s), and minor(s)' legal guardian/next of kin, for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Data Availability Statement: The data and methods in the manuscript are presented with sufficient detail. Other researchers can replicate the procedure. However, the data is not publicly available due to ethical reasons. If the readers have any questions, they can address the author per e-mail.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire in Polish

Kiedy przyjechaliście do Finlandii? (rok)
W jakim języku/ językach mówicie w domu?
Jak Twoim zdaniem Twoje dzieci znają język polski?
Czy dziecko mówi chętnie po polsku?
Gdzie dziecko mówi po polsku?
Do czego służy język polski—czy tylko do komunikacji codziennej, czy do zabawy, czy jest obecny w innych sytuacjach?
Czy dziecko pisze po polsku?
Czy dzieci używają jakiegoś komunikatora do kontaktu pisemnego po polsku?
Czy dzieci jeżdżą do Polski i jak często?
Czy myślicie o powrocie/wyjeździe na dłuższy czas do Polski?
Czy dzieci uczą się polskiego poza domem?
Czy dzieci czytają po polsku? Czy czytacie dzieciom po polsku?

Co czytacie po polsku?
Ulubiona książka/ulubione książki w języku polskim.
Czy opowiadacie bajki/opowieści dzieciom?
Jak jeszcze rozwijasz znajomość języka polskiego Twoich dzieci?

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Well, If You Talk to Me in Norwegian, I Won't Answer You: Language Policies and Practices in Latvian Diasporic Families

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Abstract: The article explores the concept of family language policy in relation to heritage languages and child agency in the context of Latvian as a heritage language. Its aim is to find out what role Latvian may have in relation to other languages within the core families in the diaspora, as well as in communication with their extended families in Latvia. For this, we investigate which language beliefs and attitudes underlie those language practices and examine children's engagement in family language management. Our research is based on 20 in-depth interviews collected in 2023. Respondents were recruited through the distance online learning program "Latvian as a foreign language teacher" created for the Latvian diaspora and through Saturday (community) schools. The main research questions are as follows: What role does Latvian have in relation to other languages in Latvian diasporic families, and how do language practices reflect beliefs and attitudes of the parents? Which languages and which communication channels are used by diasporic families in communication with their (extended) families in Latvia? What impact do children have on family language policies? Our data show a huge diversity in family language practices, switching between two and more languages depending on communicative situations, the age of children, their language proficiency, and the communication channels. Family members flexibly use their languages to participate in family life and to achieve interactional goals, not always focusing just on particular language use. Heritage language transmission correlates with family language planning and consequent language use. On the other hand, language is tightly tied to the relationships and emotions of family members.

Keywords: Latvian diaspora; family language policy; language attitudes and practices; language transmission; digitally mediated communication; child agency

1. Introduction

The article is based on the interest in exploring family language policy (FLP) in families of the Latvian diaspora. With the concept of diaspora, we understand the scattering of people with a common origin, language, and culture living away from an established or ancestral homeland.

After 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the full restoration of Latvia's independence brought with it new migration opportunities. Since Latvia's integration into Western structures and joining the European Union (in 2004), the number of people who started to emigrate from Latvia increased (since 2000, around 154,000 Latvian nationals have migrated). This so-called "new diaspora"—in contrast to the "old diaspora" associated with WW2 or forced migration, the "old exile"—has been described as an economic, contemporary migration (Kaša & Mieriņa, 2019). The new migration was based on a search for better economic opportunities rather than political persecution (see, e.g., Mieriņa et al., 2021).

The geographical contexts analyzed by family language policy researchers so far cover many different areas. Yet, they include only a few studies on Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia (e.g., Schwartz & Verschik, 2013; Siiner et al., 2017; Hilbig, 2022; Lazdiņa & Marten, 2021) and the Baltic diaspora, e.g., the Lithuanian diaspora in the US (Jakaitė-Bulbukienė, 2015), in Sweden (Bissinger, 2021), in other countries (Ramonienė & Ramonaitė, 2021), the Latvian diaspora in several European countries (Martena, 2023), and the Estonian diaspora in Finland (Aksinovits & Verschik, 2024).

Our study explores the language situation at home within families in this new diaspora, who emigrated from Latvia after 2000. The main focus of the article is on parents' beliefs about and attitudes towards Latvian and other languages, their goals and expectations, and the activities of families for maintaining or developing particular languages and on the parents' reported language practices. Since language practices differ in diverse communication contexts, channels, and types, in our research we explore the use of Latvian and other languages within the core and the extended family (i.e., mostly relatives in Latvia), using digitally mediated communication opportunities. Language management in bi- or multilingual families is a challenging task, not least because management efforts depend on language practices and competences—some family members have high-level abilities in the primary language of their new country, whereas others have little knowledge of their new home's language but want their children to be able to speak it, while at the same time maintaining the home heritage language(s). This task gets even more complicated when a family is transcultural in itself, with two, three, or more languages used at home (Lanza, 2020; Montanari & Quay, 2019).

In this light, the goal of this paper is to find out what role Latvian as a heritage language may have in relation to other languages within diaspora families and which language beliefs and attitudes underlie language practices. We are interested in both face-to-face and digitally mediated communication and in the impact that children have on family language policies. To this end, we present the results of research on family language planning, management, and practices among Latvians abroad. Our research is primarily based on 20 interviews with parents from monolingual and bi-/multilingual national and transnational families of Latvian origin in different countries in Europe, in the United States, and New Zealand who have lived outside of Latvia for more than 10 years, or who are second-generation Latvians (see Appendix A). To this end, our analysis will apply the concept of family language policy in relation to heritage languages and child agency, language beliefs, and attitudes of parents and their impact on language practices with their children and their extended families.

The paper consists of three main parts. The first part introduces the theoretical framework by giving an overview of the main topics, such as family language policy (language attitudes, management, and practices), digitally mediated communication and language practices, the concept of child agency, and the children's capabilities to engage in family language management and practices. Part two provides insight into the profiles of the informants and the types of their families which were created based on language use at home as reported by the informants. Part three provides the data analysis within the frames of family language policy, child agency, and diverse language combinations and channels of communication. The final part consists of the summing up of thoughts, ideas and conclusions and suggests issues for further discussions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Family Language Policy (FLP) in Diasporic Contexts

In their 2006 paper, King and Fogle laid the foundation for the emergence of the field that came to be recognized as a Family Language Policy (FLP). They described FLP as a

line of inquiry that examines family members' attitudes toward, planning for, and use of language(s) in the home (Wright & Higgins, 2022, p. 1). Since then, this field of inquiry has received an increasing amount of scholarly attention and has evolved into a prosperous field over the almost the last two decades (e.g., Lanza & Lomeu Gomes, 2020; Wright & Higgins, 2022). Scholars have specified and described in detail the main components of FLP, like Curdt-Christiansen, who stressed that language planning by family members in relation to language choice can be explicit and overt, as well as implicit and covert. In her definition, she added the concept of literacy practices at home (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). In this, she took up earlier ideas by Fogle Wright that also included child language learning and literacy as a significant component of FLP, emphasizing that it also addresses social and cultural contexts of family life (Fogle Wright, 2013). Gu and Han (2021), when exploring FLP research in multi-generational transnational immigrant families, also emphasize the impact of diverse social contexts, such as schools, workplaces, and local communities of the new host society.

There are three main aspects which create the ground of FLP: language attitudes (how family members perceive language(s)), language practices (de facto language use, how people actually use language in and outside the family), and language management (what efforts they make to maintain and develop language(s) in the family). As Curdt-Christiansen (2018, p. 2) notes, FLP has, within the discipline of sociolinguistics, thereby often been framed alongside Spolsky's theory of language policy, which is built around these three aspects. Fundamental for all these parts are the choices (Spolsky, 2009): how do families (in total and their individual members) negotiate which varieties and variants to assign certain values to, which variants are considered adequate, and which are chosen or unchosen in specific situations? In this sense, the intergenerational differences regarding which value is assigned to which language can have significant impacts on family language practices (i.e., the value of heritage languages can vary considerably between parents and children). Language management takes place when family members actively intervene into these choices of practices and values.

As a part of active intervention, different scholars (Lanza, 1997; De Houwer & Nakamura, 2021; Martena, 2023) have described strategies which parents use when reacting to their children's language practices, particularly regarding language mixing and translanguaging. In the 1990s, in her research about language use in American–Norwegian families in Norway, Lanza (1997) had already developed a pattern for describing parental reactions. She distinguished five strategies which can be seen as a continuum from the most monolingual to the most multilingual discourse strategy. These strategies are called: Minimal Grasp Strategy, Expressed Guess Strategy, Adult Repetition, Move on Strategy, and Language Switching. In the context of families of the Latvian diaspora, Martena (2023) analyzed these strategies as a part of family language management and their impact on language practices. Therefore, it is not the primary aim of this study to focus on them.

The theory of parental discourse strategies referred to above indicates how attitudes and values which parents assign to heritage languages influence choices of a particular policy or management activities at home. Thus, they have a strong impact on language use (practices). In the context of a diaspora and their multilingual situations within and outside their homes, language ideologies have also been understood as "parents' (positive or negative) beliefs about multilingualism and translanguaging" (Horner & Weber, 2018, p. 196). When it comes to heritage languages, the most important goals for many families are their maintenance and the intergenerational transmission of family languages, which is related to a sense of belonging and identity issues.

Spolsky (2009) distinguishes the power of parents to manage the language of their children when the home domain is closed (i.e., children spend time at home with their

parents who have a major direct impact on language practices) from situations when the home is opened to the outside (when children are influenced by peers, school, or other activities and contexts in society). In the latter case, the family may become "the site of language conflict that reflects conflicts in the outside society, with children often rejecting their parents' language" (Spolsky, 2009, p. 22). There are also other studies which report how children express their agency through different ways of resistance and negotiation, thereby also influencing family language practices (Schwartz et al., 2022).

FLP becomes even more complex when discussing it at different policy levels (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). One is the perspective of a family itself (i.e., the microlevel). These include diverse views of the family members, particularly in bi- or multilingual families. Families can negotiate on a metalevel, and children's perspectives also may have an impact on family decisions regarding language use. Sometimes, families find a consensus to establish a set of rules and create their own family policy, whereas sometimes language issues are not in their priority lists. The second aspect of FLP is connected with the societal perspective (i.e., the macrolevel), which often reflects societal language policies and discourses. In such contexts, families and their heritage languages may not be the main topics; instead, families are called upon to focus more on societal integration and inclusion of different groups through the common societal language(s) and/or English. Our research addresses the complexity of the relations between the macro- and microlevels while directly focusing on the latter one (families, the microlevel).

2.2. Digitally Mediated Communication and Language Practices

In recent studies of FLP, particularly in the context of language practices and management, we can see a continuity of ideas mentioned already in previous studies, but using new labels which reflect digital realities and spaces and the role of ICT (Information and communications technologies), as they are included in the family domain. For example, Palviainen (2022) suggests that the classic definitions of FLP should be expanded to include digital practices; therefore, she defines FLP "as explicit and overt as well as implicit and covert planning among members in a family network regarding their language use and digital literacy practices" (Palviainen, 2022, p. 132). The key concepts underlying the definition of FLP remain the same (explicit and implicit planning, language use, and literacy), but there is a clarification of the notion of literacy practices by adding the explanatory word "digitally".

In particular, among transnational families, digital literacy practices do not take place for language maintenance or development only; digital family language practices are also crucial for maintaining the family itself, not just for FLP purposes. To ensure contact among family members, e.g., between children and grandparents who live abroad, parents create time and space for digitally mediated family practices. As Palviainen has pointed out, "while it is the members of a family who shape the practices of technology, the technology itself also contributes to shaping the family" (Palviainen, 2022, p. 129).

Lanza and Lexander, in their research on family language practices in multilingual transcultural families, describe such digital practices (i.e., choices of spoken or written modality) for maintaining family relationships and continuing family life across larger distances. At the same time, digital practices promote children's informal language learning (Lanza & Lexander, 2019).

Lanza (2020) emphasizes that more recent FLP studies move away from a focus on developing language proficiency to a focus on the interrelationship between family, language, and society. She also points out that there is a need to further explore how parents and other caregivers employ (online) media "to address and investigate issues of language and culture transmission, well-being, and good parenting in their inclusion

into contemporary society" (ibid.). Wright (2022) in turn explores family communication practices, well-being, and language use patterns in bilingual families through an analysis of kinship terms. She emphasizes that kinship terms "are important as markers of kinship relations and processes ongoing in family" (Wright, 2022, p. 30).

In this sense, heritage (home) language transmission, family language management, communication and well-being will also be explored as main aspects in our study about Latvian families in the diaspora. We will investigate how the informants reflect on the role of digitally mediated communication with their (extended) families for keeping family relationships (transmitting identity), on the one hand, and for creating a space for language use and literacy development (transmitting the heritage language) on the other hand.

2.3. Child Agency

Whereas the roles of parents in preserving heritage languages at home have been widely discussed, less attention has been paid to children's capability to initiate and influence the planning and use of language at home (e.g., Gafaranga, 2011; Fogle Wright, 2012; Smith-Christmas, 2020). In the last decade, more than ever, children are perceived as equal family language policy makers and language managers (Bissinger, 2021, p. 30), who have their own opinions, motives, and interests related to the use of language at home, as well as a considerable capacity to engage socially and make decisions about family language practices. Smith-Christmas (2020, 2023), in her research, finds that child agency is based on components such as compliance regimes, linguistic norms, linguistic competence, and power dynamics. The first is seen as children's consent or obedience to the linguistic requests of parents or caregivers. The second is related to parents' own inconsistency in the choice of language codes and the organization of speech situations, which affects the children's language habits at home. The third concerns children's linguistic knowledge and skills, which can promote or hinder the use of family language(s). The latter is mainly related to children's roles as "language experts" and communication mediators in cases where their skills in the language of the new country of residence are better than the linguistic competence of parents.

With these theoretical notions in mind, we will now introduce our respondents, their families, and their ethnolinguistic backgrounds.

3. The Methodology and the Obtained Data

3.1. Data Collection

The research on the individual cases (families) on which this paper is based applied biographical approaches and methods, such as in-depth interviews or narrative interviews. The pre-prepared set of interview questions consists of four parts: the first includes questions about languages used in the family (who speaks which language with whom, where, and when, implicit and explicit family language policies, digital communication with family and friends in Latvia). The second part covers the role of Latvian and of languages outside the family (with neighbors, friends, socialization in local communities). The third part addresses language practices in Latvia during family visits and meetings with the respondents' family members, particularly grandparents and friends, and the role of different languages in different communication contexts. The last part includes questions about the respondents' perspectives on and attitudes towards languages (e.g., on the role of Latvian and other languages, on individual language development and changes in use, on how they notice languages, and on changes in attitudes towards their mother tongue and languages in the diaspora). In this paper, we discuss only data from the first part of the interviews (i.e., on language use in communication between family members from the core

family in the diaspora and with the extended family in Latvia, i.e., language ideologies and management within the family domain).

Respondents were recruited through the distance online learning program "Latvian as a foreign language teacher" created for the Latvian diaspora and through Saturday (community) schools. The main criteria for selecting informants were (1) at least one parent being of Latvian ethnicity and speaking Latvian as the native language and (2) at least one child older than two years. It should be noted that in the article, the term 'child' refers to any child mentioned by the respondents, regardless of age.

The data collection took place in 2023 through conducting online interviews using the Zoom platform and doing video recordings. If it was possible, we conducted interviews in person through audio recordings. Although both mothers and fathers and children were approached for the interviews, in practice only mothers with Latvian origin living in the diaspora since the restoration of Latvia's independence responded.

3.2. The Obtained Data

Our data basis consists of interviews with twenty mothers representing fifteen families in Europe (United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Spain, and Greece), two in the United States, and three in New Zealand. Kaša and Mieriņa (2019) reported that the biggest Latvian diaspora lives in European countries such as the United Kingdom (44% of all diaspora Latvians), Germany (~13%), and Ireland (~10%). Our data provide insight into the diasporic communities from all those countries.

The interviews are in Latvian, and their length varies between 25 and 80 min. An overview of the interviewed families is given in Appendix A.

3.3. The Types of Families

Based on an analysis of the language use and communication interactions among different family members (parents among themselves, parents with children, siblings among themselves, communication with grandparents and other relatives), we can conclude that our empirical data indicate three main types of families (see also Appendix A):

(1) Families in which both parents have the same mother tongue (in our case—Latvian) and in which parents communicate with each other and speak to their children in their common native language (Latvian, respectively).
(2) Families in which each parent has their own mother tongue (in our case—Latvian and another language) and in which the parents communicate with each other in the mother tongue of one parent, which is also the language of the new home country (in our data: Latvian and English/German/Spanish; *one parent one language*—OPOL model).
(3) Families in which each parent has their own mother tongue (in our case—Latvian and French/Danish/Swedish) and in which the parents communicate with each other in a language that is not the language of the new home country (in our case—English in non-English-speaking countries).

There are two exceptions to this classification. In the first case, both parents have two native languages, as both are second-generation Latvian emigrants, with one parent being an American with English as a native language. In the second case, it is a family living in the USA (see the description of the family profile of a respondent with the ID S.Š. in Appendix A), in which the mother's native language is Latvian, and the father's mother tongue is Kurdish. However, the father uses Swedish in communication with the children, the language in which he obtained higher education, and both parents speak English to each other.

3.4. Data Analysis

For analysis, we transcribed the audio and video texts of the interviews. We then conducted a content analysis of the interviews, following principles of qualitative research methodology (Bernard et al., 2017), i.e., coding and indexing important concepts, grouping key codes, and creating and systematizing categories. Three main categories were created for this study: language practices within the core family; digital communication with the extended family in Latvia; and child agency. Each category was detected using the most relevant analysis codes. Table 1 provides an overview of the categories, the analysis code systems, and the codes.

Table 1. Categories, code systems, and codes for data analysis.

Categories	Code Systems and Codes
Language practices within the core family and local community	1. Language - Latvian - Other family languages (e.g., German, English, Norwegian, Danish, Spanish, and Swedish) - Community languages (e.g., English, German, Spanish) - Other languages or varieties (e.g., Russian, Lithuanian, Valencian, Latgalian, Maori), including variation of codes (translanguaging) 2. Combinations of communication partners - Parents with each other - Parents with children - Siblings with each other - Family members with the extended family in Latvia
Digital communication with the extended family in Latvia	- Kinship (family members and kinship terms in family conversations) - Communication channels (digital channels, apps, and platforms used for communication)
Child agency	1. *Changes* proposed/made by a family member (including the child) in typical family language management and/or practice 2. The child's (verbal or nonverbal) *reaction* to these changes

Alongside all three categories and the coding classifications, our data analysis also paid attention to additional factors such as language attitudes (positive, negative, or neutral) and emotions (e.g., the well-being of family members), which may have an impact on language practices in the family.

Before analyzing the data, we would like to stress that our observations or self-recorded family interactions are not included in the analysis in this paper. The conditions, manifestations and outcomes of children's agency analyzed and discussed in the study, as well as the language practices and the digital communication with the extended families in Latvia, reveal the perspectives of the interviewed respondents (all of them mothers with Latvian as their L1), i.e., what they remembered and wished to highlight during the interviews. The respondents' narratives may have omitted or misunderstood nuances of the feelings, reasons, and goals of the children, as well as circumstances of the speech situations, and there is little evidence of other family members' perspectives on language planning and practices in their families.

4. Main Findings

As mentioned above, three main categories were created for this study: language practices within core family; digital communication with extended family in Latvia; and

the child's agency. Consequently, in this chapter the data will be analyzed according to these categories and their codes.

4.1. "I'll Wait Until You Will Say That Word, That Thing in Latvian"

We will now speak about the language practices in the core family and provide some representative examples. In all interviews, the informants stressed that they try to speak with their children in Latvian and thereby transmit their heritage language to their children. In the families in which both parents have Latvian as their first language (Type 1, see Appendix A), this is easier since they both address the children in Latvian, who also regularly hear their parents speaking Latvian with each other. In these cases, the children develop strong receptive skills. According to all interviewees, even if the children do not always answer in Latvian, they mostly understand when the language is spoken inside or outside the family, for example at Saturday (community) schools. In such a way, the children have a regular exposure to Latvian. One of the informants, who lives in the UK and whose husband died recently, pointed out: "When I'm alone with her [daughter], it's like I'm trying to speak Latvian and then at some point she starts answering me in English". The informant emphasizes how language practices have changed since just the two of them live at home; being alone is emotionally hard, and she does not have the strength to struggle with language issues. The expression *I'm trying to speak* reflects an attempt to improve language practices that do not really live up to her wishes.

At the same time, families where two parents live together also frequently struggle to maintain their heritage language. They use different parental strategies for stopping their children from switching to the societal language. The title of this paper and the subtitle of this chapter are excerpts from an interview with a family living in Norway. The informant stresses how preschool and school slowly change their family language practices—their twins (11 years old) bring home Norwegian (Excerpt 1).

> *Well, of course, I also had periods when they [twins, 11 years old] have been extremely angry with me when I say to them (laughs): Well, if you talk to me in Norwegian, I won't answer you, I'll wait until you will say that word, that thing in Latvian, like. And they got angry and cried, but in the end, they said [it], of course.* (Excerpt 1)

The mother explains how principled she is in demanding to keep their conversation just in the heritage language Latvian. Excerpt 1 shows how maintaining Latvian comes together with strong negative emotions (anger, crying) and disharmonious relationships and situations in family life. At the same time, the whole interview, like the other interviews, reflects the fact that living in the diaspora and even speaking basically only one language within the family does not mean having just a monolingual environment. Children bring home societal languages (in this case—Norwegian) from (pre)school, whereas English is brought to the family through social media, films, and other digital practices.

The new life in a new country, the access to diverse media, language realities, and the wish to care for the well-being of their children, may shake the language attitudes of the parents. Their previous beliefs, e.g., their dream to stick to only one language at home, their mother tongue, become secondary in the light of the wish to keep a positive and harmonious home environment. Excerpt 1 is an example of how they accept that children come from school and wish to discuss the day in a language used outside home, if it is also easier for them to express their emotions. The informant's family has lived in Norway for more than 12 years, and so, she explains that her children "could tell about it also in Latvian but to remember this event which happened in this language [Norwegian], for them it is easier" to tell it in Norwegian. It is her conviction that her children's emotions and well-being are more important in family communication situations than the language used to express them.

In situations when children switch to societal languages, parents report that there are several strategies which they use to address children in Latvian, such as the "Expressed Guess Strategy", repetitions, or the "Move on Strategy". An informant who lives with her family in Spain says that she speaks only Latvian with all three children, whereas her husband only speaks Spanish (Family type 2, see Appendix A). Since the whole sociolinguistic environment is Spanish, the children almost always answer her at first in Spanish. Her reaction to that depends on how tired she is; if they are on "some kind of daily run, some kind of daily routine", then she continues to speak Latvian, but her children answer in Spanish ("Move on Strategy"). In this way, at least the children's receptive skills are trained—and indeed, they are strong enough so that she does not have to switch to Spanish but can continue to communicate in Latvian.

In so-called bilingual families (Family type 2, see Appendix A), the most popular communication model is OPOL. However, there are quite big differences in the language practices with regard to whether one of the family languages is also a societal language or not. For example, in a family living in Italy, where both parents speak to the children in their respective mother tongues (Italian and Latvian), contact with the other local relatives and friends was so regular and close that even the Latvian-speaking mother unintentionally began to speak Italian to her children. She stopped to switch to Italian only when the family moved on to Germany where neither she nor her husband were close to their parents or other relatives. In this way, she started to reflect more on her language practices and habits at home. She realized that both family languages (Latvian and Italian) have become more equal than at the time when the family lived in Italy (see Excerpt 2).

> *It was much harder for me to speak Latvian when I was in Italy than here in Germany. Because things have changed. In Italy, everybody around me, all his family, friends, everybody speaks Italian, and I'm the only one who would speak Latvian. But it was very difficult for me to switch. And in general, with the first child, I kind of. . ., I think I did it a bit wrong from the beginning. I didn't force anything, I didn't go like a tractor. I thought: OK, it will come naturally. Unfortunately, it didn't come naturally.* (Excerpt 2)

The informant (Excerpt 2) admits that she could not transmit her mother tongue to her children when living abroad in a natural way, such as just speaking with them and not focusing explicitly on language practices. After moving to Germany and having the second child, however, she started to plan particular communication and literacy events, e.g., by taking children to Latvian Saturday (community) school. In this way, she started to engage in active language management.

Latvian has a very strong symbolic value for many parents, associated with their home country Latvia, and their childhood. In contrast, for the children Latvian often stays only as a heritage language to which they have a neutral attitude. As an 18-year-old young man who grew up in a Latvian-speaking family in Germany formulated, for him Latvian "is just a spoken language with my relatives and family". It is spoken at home, but since "most of [. . .] everything, thinking and also everything around me [is] in German, Latvian is not a very big value for me".

4.2. "A Teenager, in Order to Have Contact with Her Grandmothers, I Ask Her to Write My Messages"

Now, we continue with data analysis on the second topic about digital communication with the extended family in Latvia. The interview data show that Latvian as a heritage language is important as a medium of communication with the extended family in Latvia. The aim of the families is to continue at least partly to participate in family life in Latvia. The respondents aim to achieve interactional goals, trying to keep close relationships with parents, grandparents, cousins, and other relatives. Kinship itself, as well as kinship

terms in family conversations and relations with those who have remained in Latvia, are significant topics for research conducted on FLP.

Among the relatives, grandmothers are contacted and mentioned in interviews most often. For the Latvian diaspora mothers who participated in the research, the link between grandchildren and grandparents (i.e., their children and parents) appears as a symbol of transmission not only of language, but also of identity and belonging. In relationships where the bond is rather weak and where strengthening it requires a lot of work, the informants use neutral kinship terms when mentioning grandmothers such as *ome*, *oma*, *vecmamma*, roughly corresponding to *grandma* or *grandmother* (e.g., *omei aizsūta kādu audio ziņu vai parunā pa telefonu*—[the children] *send an audio message to grandma or talk to her on the phone.* Kinship terms used in diminutive (*omīte*, roughly *granny*), in contrast, express love and closer relationships. For example, a respondent who lives in New Zealand rarely contacts her relatives in Latvia, and she uses only the terms 'mother' (*mamma*) and 'granny' (*omīte*) (Excerpt 3).

> *I was away from Latvia for about 15 years and I very rarely spoke Latvian, actually, maybe once a month when I called my mother and so on, sometimes with friends, but, well, very rarely, really, did I use Latvian (. . .) I communicate by texting messages maybe more often than by calls, well, maybe once a month I have a call with my granny.* (Excerpt 3)

Excerpt 3 indicates that *mother*, *granny*, and sometimes friends in Latvia are the main reasons for continuing to use Latvian. Due to the huge time difference, texting messages is the most practical form of communication. However, texting instead of calling or digitally mediated communication is mentioned also by respondents who live in Europe and do not have such a close relationship with the older generation anymore. For example, as an answer to the question "Do you still have contacts with relatives or friends in Latvia and, if so, how do you communicate with them?" an informant who has lived in Germany for more than 15 years says (Excerpt 4):

> *A little, yes, but very little. Minimally, somehow we have a very full day, so we don't really have . . . time. It used to be that somehow we also talked more with . . . like in Skype with our parents, but now somehow, like text message is more communication than . . . let's say digitally.* (Excerpt 4)

Skype as a communication platform is a symbol of the past which can be dated back to around 2004/2005. For example, a respondent from Ireland recalls that "when we arrived, there was only skype [for communication]". Currently, referring to other ways of digitally mediated communication, most often WhatsApp and Zoom are used. WhatsApp is described by respondents as a very comfortable communication means for making video and voice calls, texting messages, and sharing pictures, videos, or links. Multimodality gives WhatsApp a particular value which is also emphasized in the official advertising description of WhatsApp, since it is "especially popular among friends and family who live in different countries and want to stay in touch" (Goodwin, 2023).

Despite the success of this multiplatform messaging application, however, the informants report that audio or video chatting with relatives in Latvia can be challenging for two reasons: first, it can be technically time-consuming and tiring. Second, children often show no interest or desire to communicate in this way, since they do not have good concentration skills to focus on digitally mediated communication (Excerpt 5).

> *My children, because of the pandemic, they are, like, very resistant to video calls, to making calls. They're immediately: no, no, no, I don't want, I don't want, I don't want! They don't want to talk to anybody on video calls anymore.* (Excerpt 5)

Excerpt 5 shows that the learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic through various digital communication and educational organization channels and platforms has a

negative impact on children's desire to communicate with Latvian relatives in a multimodal way. As a reason, the informant mentions the pandemic, but the analysis of the whole interview and a comparison with other interviews allows the assumption that there are three other reasons: First, children who do not have a wish to communicate with their grandparents through a video call have lower language proficiency. Since their parents often have two different native languages and cultural backgrounds, they do not feel confident enough to participate. Parents report that the children have heard comments from relatives about their pronunciation or other deviations from expected language standards, which has influenced the children's wish to take part in a common chat. Second, age is a factor: the older the children get, the more they avoid communication with their grandparents. Third, some interviewees report technical issues. For instance, a respondent who lives in New Zealand created a WhatsApp group with two sisters and their mother who live in Latvia. The ages of her sisters' children are similar to those of her own two children, and therefore, they try to create a common video chat during the weekend. However, this functions badly, as the informant says: "children. . ., the phone screen is too small for them, and so, they run to show each other their toys, say one-two sentences and run away, well, so they don't talk like that".

Both age and a lack of experience in digitally mediated communication are also mentioned in other interviews.

> *And my husband's mum, again, she's quite old and she's the kind of person who can't really hold that interest with children. She doesn't know how to hold the phone properly, first of all, there's always something like, the child says something and she doesn't really listen to what M. [daughter] says. M. shouts something back and she doesn't hear and so, well, the communication isn't as good as it could be. I think you need to be there in person.* (Excerpt 6)

Excerpt 6 reflects the full disappointment of the respondent; she has tried to create an environment for communication between the grandparents and her children, but it does not work. She concludes that the communication in person cannot be replaced by digital communication. Reasons such as age, a lack of focus, and the listening skills of her mother-in-law, as well as her daughters' negative emotions and reactions to such situations reveal that she is tired of organizing digital communication.

In this way, comments from our informants confirm that such "social work", particularly in families with smaller children, is very demanding and challenging. Therefore, video calls and online conversations with one's extended family in Latvia decrease over time. Here, the challenges that the use of video calls as a means of maintaining family relationships across distances in the context of FLP and the organizational work that such communications entail confirm previous studies by other scholars; e.g., Palviainen (2022) reports of several case studies which show that the successful organization of video chats in most cases requires a lot of work by the parents, while the grandparents mainly enjoy the benefits. However, meaningful communication through video calls requires "a significant performance element and the cooperation of all participants" (Palviainen, 2022, p. 131)—which, as our data show, is not always the case. In this, there are "four types of "social work" connected with the video chat activity: coordination (e.g., assembling the family), presentation (e.g., ensuring faces can be seen), behavioral (e.g., ensuring small children sit still), and scaffolding work (e.g., engaging children in talk)." (ibid.).

The quotation that was used as a heading of this sub-chapter indicates another aspect which, in the context of researching (digital) communication with the extended family, emerged as unexpected (see Excerpt 7). Parents become very creative and ambitious in order to achieve two goals: first, to preserve and pass on close family ties between their parents and their children; in this way, they become mediators between grandparents and

grandchildren. Second, to use as many opportunities as possible for transmitting their heritage language. For many parents, it is very hard to accept that language can limit the ability of family members to connect to each other in deeper ways, which can result in a loss of connections with the extended family, in particular with regard to grandparents. Therefore, parents sometimes deliberately create situations which stimulate their children to communicate with their grandparents, which also means using Latvian:

> *A teenager, in order to have contact with her grandmothers, because she doesn't want it, I ask her to write my messages, and she writes in Latvian. I drive, and she writes. Or when we're in the car, we call mom and then she has to talk (smiling). What are you going to say, a few sentences, at least. That's the daily communication we have every day, with grandma.* (Excerpt 7)

Examples such as that in Excerpt 7 can be described as certain tricks used for noble ends. The informant admits that her daughter, a teenager, does not have the wish to communicate with her grandma. For the mother, however, texting, calling, and speaking the heritage language means something more. In this way, the creation of regular oral or written communication situations enhances literacy and proficiency and confidence in language use, particularly in a language not used at school or other societal contexts. The interview data also clearly support the finding that language transmission is motivated by something more: broken language transmission also means a broken transmission of family identity, history, and cultural belonging.

4.3. "She Starts a Sentence, but as Soon as She Does Not Get the Right Grammatical Case or Something, She Immediately Switches to Spanish"

The in-depth content analysis of all twenty interviews shows that the children's agency is most clearly manifested in speech situations in which a child does not feel linguistically and emotionally comfortable. Most often, insufficient linguistic competence in one of the family languages and the metalinguistic awareness of this linguistic deficiency cause psycho-emotional discomfort, and therefore, children seek supportive verbal and non-verbal solutions to overcome it.

The quotation in the section title above stems from an interview with the mother in a family living in Spain (see profile I.I. in Appendix A). It shows her 8-year-old daughter's reluctance to continue the conversation in Latvian due to grammatical errors. Overall, our data reveal that insufficient vocabulary for discussing certain topics (mainly related to school subjects) or for communication in general is the main reason for involving another language, regardless of the child's age. Sometimes, this can also lead to a complete change of the linguistic code, or to avoiding a conversation altogether:

> *At home, of course, we all speak Latvian, the girls are increasingly starting to speak English to each other, because there are some topics that they miss in Latvian. Our text messages have always been only in Latvian, we very rarely write anything in English. At home, we only talk in Latvian. I do not know, in principle, most of it is in Latvian. Well, but when they are both together, they speak English. Well, I would say that after about three years, living in Australia, we are already starting to hear them speaking English to each other, but it is okay if they speak Latvian to us.* (Excerpt 8)

Excerpt 8 shows not only the daughters' choice of language for communication with each other and the impact of English as the language of society on their linguistic habits at home after a certain amount of time spent in a new country of residence (three years in Australia followed by a move to New Zealand). Also, we can see the mother's reaction to such changes and her linguistic conviction—as long as her daughters speak Latvian with their parents, everything is fine. In other words, the parents' family language man-

agement model includes the use of both languages—Latvian and English—in different communication situations.

Excerpt 9 shows that a seven-year-old girl feels emotionally tense and linguistically uncomfortable when talking to her grandmothers who do not speak English. In such speech situations, her agency is mainly expressed non-verbally—the girl changes her location, physically avoiding more extensive conversations with her grandmothers.

> *Grandmothers do not speak English. Well, they [the daughters–authors] do (sighs)... there are no options, they only speak Latvian to them there. Then she [seven-year-old daughter–authors] somehow manages to summon her strength and answers something. I feel that she quickly, quickly wants to disappear and does not really want to talk because of this linguistic barrier. Well, I guess, she does it to avoid tension (laughs).* (Excerpt 9)

The mother's statement that her daughter "summons her strength" and "answers something" indicates that she is also verbally changing her linguistic behavior. That is, the daughter uses a specific strategy—she answers questions politely and laconically with the language resources she has. Most likely, at the age of seven the daughter already understands that conversations with her grandmothers are inevitable (or at least an essential part of a visit to Latvia) and that her family members (especially parents and grandparents) expect her to speak Latvian. However, as Excerpt 9 shows, speech situations in which the daughter does not have the opportunity to choose a comfortable linguistic code create emotional discomfort and a language barrier in communication.

The content analysis of the interviews also shows that children are reluctant to use certain communication channels. As mentioned above, they do not want to talk synchronously with their relatives in Latvia through a video call. Instead, they try to choose a way of communication that allows them to prepare a monologue—orally, such as an audio message (see Excerpt 10), or in written form such as a text message (see Excerpt 5 above). This is a way in which they feel psycho-emotionally and linguistically more comfortable and secure, since they can control the content, speed, and length of the message and the pace of conversation.

> *My sweet daughter talks to her cousins, because she's about the same age. Then, I see them chatting sometimes, writing something there. I'm happy, of course (laughs).* (Excerpt 10)

Perhaps due to limited linguistic competence, that is, insufficient oral communication skills, the children choose written communication or to send pre-prepared audio messages. In addition to that, communication with relatives of a similar age (chat with cousins) gives the children more confidence and satisfaction than communication with their grandparents, particularly if the grandchildren did not have an opportunity to meet them often and to get to know each other better so that they could have free, relaxed relationships and conversations.

On the other hand, the retellings of speech situations reported by the respondents reveal that children already at an early age are aware of their parents' linguistic wishes (language attitudes) and are able, as several mothers admitted, to use the language in the form of formulas such as "you have to ask in Latvian and to say "please"" in order to get what they desire (e.g., a parental favor, permission, or a new toy). In this sense, the family language might function less for communicative purposes than for achieving pragmatic goals. However, as Excerpt 11 shows, a change in the use of language can be simply caused by the entry of one parent into a room and may indicate a desire to please the entering parent.

> *About two years ago, when my husband was in the kitchen or in the room with the children, the children were speaking Swedish to each other, and I heard it, I still have*

> *fragments filmed. When I entered the room, the children switched to Latvian, and it was interesting, even without addressing them, they were just playing.* (Excerpt 11)

In the family, the children (nine-year-old and six-year-old sons) speak Swedish with their father, which is his chosen language of communication with them (his native language is Kurdish), and they speak Latvian with their mother. The beginning of the interview fragment shows that the father's presence in the room determined the brothers' choice of language; however, the mother's entry into the room changed the speech situation—the children switched to Latvian. This happened naturally, without any additional comments from the parents or themselves. In the presence of both parents, the mother's agency (albeit passive) was stronger. The mother in this multilingual family (see profile S.Š. in Appendix A) has a strong position as a language policy agent; she very thoughtfully selects and provides the children with linguistic input that matches the parents' linguistic beliefs and influences and regulates the children's language use in communication with parents, relatives, and friends. We can see that even if parents do not directly intervene in a specific speech situation, their practiced communication models, linguistic beliefs, and linguistic expectations can indirectly influence the children's agency—the "free" choice of linguistic code.

In total, our data show that children, even in families with both Latvian-speaking parents, also use other languages among themselves or with friends in Latvian community schools (see Appendix A). This especially happens if parents are more liberal, i.e., do not limit the children's choice of language or do not preclude the use of another language (parental "Move on Strategy"). In this light, the children's chosen linguistic code (language or language variety) indicates their linguistic preferences in terms of their linguistic competence, linguistic habits, or prestige of language(s) or dialect(s). However, some interviews also show that strict family language policy by at least one parent may affect children's linguistic freedom in individual communication situations.

Another manifestation of children's agency is their reflections on their own or other family members' language use. Based on the information provided by the respondents (mothers), children most often explicitly discuss their parents' unusual language use in their presence. Such children's metalinguistic comments are mainly initiated by speech situations in which one parent uses the other parent's mother tongue, less often another language. The following two excerpts illustrate such situations.

> *I never, ever speak English to my daughters, always Latvian. I think I've said a sentence in English once or twice, and A [oldest daughter–authors] looked at me like I've said something rude. That's not your language. They like it when B [father, husband–authors] pretends to speak Latvian, they find it so funny, when dad speaks Latvian, it's the funniest thing you can hear.* (Excerpt 12)

Excerpt 12 demonstrates two different reactions of children—daughters—to their parents' unusual choice of language. In the interview, the mother emphasized that she does not use English in communication with her daughters, only Latvian. In speech situations when the daughters experience changes in their mother's communication routine (i.e., in the linguistic norm, according to Smith-Christmas, 2020, 2023), they nonverbally express surprise, even rejection, or rather, look as if something rude (i.e., undesirable, unacceptable) has been said. In this case, the mother feels that the daughters want to say through nonverbal means that English is not her language and that the daughters do not find it acceptable to use English in mutual communication. In turn, the father's use of Latvian is evaluated positively (the mother's statement that they like it confirms this). The daughters perceive the Latvian used by the father as a comical, amusing language practice. The different reaction is probably because the English language the mother accidentally uses is

not the father's native language (unlike Latvian, which is the mother's native language) and that English is perceived as a language of communication either between the parents or between the two daughters, but never (or mostly never) between parents and children.

The last example—Excerpt 13—shows that the daughters, 11-year-old twins, understand well that their parents are speaking in another language unknown to them (Russian, respectively) to exclude them from the conversation and, possibly, talk about them.

> *Girls react very much if we [Mom and Dad–authors] speak Russian and then they say: "We need to learn Spanish faster, then you won't understand us!" They react very much to that, and they don't like it very much. . . yes, and they immediately understand that we are discussing something, that we are simply taking advantage of the situation (laughs).*
> (Excerpt 13)

According to the mother, the daughters do not like the communication strategy used by their parents, but at the same time, they are aware of the advantages of knowing another ("secret") language and such a communication strategy. As the excerpt shows, the daughters want to learn Spanish faster to use in their mutual communication, to similarly exclude their parents from the conversation.

The last six fragments of the interviews (Excerpts 8–13) illustrate and highlight three main circumstances and factors that stimulate children's agency: communication situations with lesser-known people (including grandparents) and insufficient knowledge of the Latvian language, verbally uncontrolled speech situations of parents with siblings, and emotional pressure from parents on language choice, as well as parents' own inconsistency in language use and children's linguistic attitude towards the use of the parents' chosen language.

5. Conclusions and Further Discussion

Our research shows that maintaining Latvian as a home (heritage) language in communication with one's children is very challenging for parents. Family members flexibly use their languages mainly to participate in family life and to achieve interactional goals, not just focusing on languages. At the same time, heritage language transmission correlates with family language planning and consequent language use, and language is tightly tied to the relationships and emotions of family members, as also has been highlighted in recent FLP studies (e.g., Wright & Higgins, 2022). In families in which both parents have the same mother tongue (Family type 1, see Appendix A), it is easier to stick to common rules regarding language use, since both parents interact with each other and with their children in Latvian. As described earlier by Spolsky (see Section 2) and mentioned in other diaspora studies (e.g., Mieriņa et al., 2021; Gu & Han, 2021), the home language environment and family language practices change when the children start to attend (pre)school.

When parents are principled in their language attitudes and practices and demand that their children speak only in Latvian (parents use the "Minimal Grasp Strategy" or the "Expressed Guess Strategy"), this has the potential to create language conflicts. On the other hand, heritage language transmission is threatened if parents do not have any explicit rules regarding language management and practices. The interaction and importance of all three components of the FLP model (language attitudes, practices, and management) is also emphasized in theoretical studies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2018; Wright & Higgins, 2022).

The situations in the families in which the parents have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Family Types 2 and 3, see Appendix A) are even more complex, because language input is divided into two or three parts, and every language has to have enough time and space to be developed. The weakest position has a language which is one of the home languages, but which is not spoken outside the family–which in our data in all cases is the case for Latvian (similarly, this is pointed out by Aksinovits and Verschik (2024)

about Estonian in Finland). The most developed and used languages are those languages spoken both by one of the parents and society (in our data: German, Spanish, English). In multilingual families, the language attitudes of both parents are significant, and the question of how they respect and support each other's languages is essential. This was not the main topic of this paper, but our data also show that language attitudes affect language practices and that the value assigned by parents to a particular language is reflected by their children (e.g., valuing Swedish is pragmatically higher than Kurdish in the case of informant S.Š.'s family).

Although the data come from different European and non-European countries, there are no typical features that are common to diaspora respondents from the same country. Each interview (life story or narrative) is very individual. For example, among Latvian diaspora families in Germany, the transmission of Latvian may vary even among families of the same type. In families where children grow up with the OPOL model (with Latvian- and German-speaking parents), there are families where Latvian is transmitted to their children, and there are families whose children have largely receptive Latvian skills only and whose parents use the "Move on Strategy", continuing to communicate with their children in Latvian.

Latvian as a heritage language has a strong symbolic value in the eyes of our informants, if compared to the value assigned to other languages spoken in and outside home. Yet, this is far more the case for the parents than for the children. For the children, Latvian is one of the languages of their parents, but it is not associated with home, with friends, and their local environments, and it therefore does not have the same emotional connotations as for their parents. In this sense, the interview data also suggest that language transmission is closely related to family identity, history, and cultural belonging. A broken language transmission, in contrast, means a broken transmission of identity and belonging, and parents try to avoid this loss. Also, these findings are very similar to those expressed in the diaspora study on Estonia (Aksinovits & Verschik, 2024) referred to above. It also says that Estonian diaspora families tend to have a strong mother tongue-related identity in which transmission and proficiency of Estonian are extremely important.

Our study shows that parents use different discourse strategies ("Minimal Grasp Strategy", "Expressed Guess Strategy", or "Move on Strategy") for maintaining communication with their children in Latvian as a heritage language. This confirms that parental discourse strategies as language management tools can have a significant impact on family language practices. The choice of the strategy may depend on the child and his/her age, the topic, the emotional condition of the child, one's own well-being, the presence of other people within the nuclear or the extended family, and the broader social contexts outside home.

As mentioned in the theoretical part, kinship relations can also be explored through the use of kinship terms in family conversations (Wright, 2022). When reflecting on particular family communication situations with their extended families in Latvia, our informants use diverse kinship terms with emotional connotations. It is noticeable that in these examples the kinship terms do discursive work: they implicitly indicate feelings of closeness, belonging, or distance. We have not dealt in depth with exploring the use of kinship terms in our interviews, but this could be a significant topic for future research.

In FLP, as pointed out in Section 2.1, both dimensions (private and social) are closely interrelated. Our interview data show how family language practices can be influenced by changes on the microlevel, e.g., new relationships of parents, a change of partner, or the death of a family member. Yet, developments on the macrolevel are also important, such as a change of one's living place, the move to another country, access to Saturday (community) school, new social and cultural experiences, or friendships. Our study thereby confirms conclusions expressed by other scholars, e.g., by Gu and Han (2021) that the home

domain does not exist unrelated to other social contexts and that the microlevel (family) is intertwined with the macrolevel (local community, schools, and other social contexts).

Digitally mediated family language practices play a significant role in keeping contacts with the extended families in Latvia. Respondents report about different experiences in using apps, digital channels, or platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Skype. Their experiences with such digital opportunities are quite ambivalent: the parents are more satisfied than their children, regardless of whether they are still quite small or teenagers, particularly in communication with grandparents. There are several reasons for that: technical issues can create stressful situations for all participants in the digital chat, particularly for younger children and seniors. In addition, the age gap between grandparents and grandchildren may create difficulties, but it seems that the main issue is language. Children are often the first in their families to develop fluency in societal or other prestigious languages (the impact of macrostructures) but less interested in maintaining a heritage language, and for them, relationships with peers or professional contacts tend to be more important than relationships with distant Latvian relatives (often including their grandparents).

Our data show that the children have low confidence in communicating with their grandparents in Latvian; in this, they can be very self-critical but also feel uncomfortable when someone comments on their skills and competences in Latvian (e.g., with regard to pronunciation, grammar, or lexical choices). At the same time, parents can also be aware that a loss of connection to the grandparents can be considered as a failure of their FLP—which they express by saying how powerless they often feel, even when they are investing a lot of effort into transmitting Latvian.

We can therefore conclude that communication with the extended family in Latvia is important for the diasporic families for two main reasons: first, for keeping family relationships and transmitting identity and a sense of belonging to their children, and second, for transmitting Latvian. Communication with family members in Latvia involves children in additional situations of language use and partly also contributes to literacy development (e.g., when texting messages). These conclusions confirm similar observations mentioned by Lanza and Lexander (2019), who concluded that digital practices promote children's informal language learning.

In the interpretation of our data on child agency, we need to consider the specifics of the data collection—our data reflect only the views of the mothers on the speech situations that have or have not occurred and on the role of their children in these situations. Yet, mothers are aware of their children's inability to successfully engage in communication with family members in the country of residence or in Latvia. The freer the children are to choose an alternative linguistic code in communication with their parents and siblings, the more Latvian as the heritage language, as the language with a lower intensity and narrower spectrum of use, suffers. It is only logical that linguistic competence improves and strengthens if the language is used in the family and if the families talk about it and assign symbolic or economic value to it. Our interviews show that in families with less parental pressure on the development of the Latvian language, children more often also choose to use the language of the new country of residence and/or English in communication with core family members.

As previously mentioned, our data are missing children's voices regarding their reflections on their own language use and experienced speech situations; the obtained data include only children's metalinguistic comments regarding their parents' unusual language use, which are rated on a scale from negatively dismissive to positively comical.

To conclude, we would like to reflect on a thought regarding the Latvian diaspora and Latvian as a heritage language made by one of our respondents. In her view, the old Baltic diaspora, who had escaped during or right after World War II, had a sense of responsibility

to maintain their national languages in opposition to the Russification processes which took place in the Baltics in Soviet times. Those of the new diaspora, in contrast, have more individual intentions for transmitting their heritage languages to their children. They see language more as a part of identity and belonging. In this way, for our respondents language proficiency is often less relevant than keeping a sense of belonging to Latvia and a Latvian identity in their families. In this sense, our research on FLP among the Latvian diaspora relied on relationships of trust between the families and us as researchers based on a common language and an interest in the Latvian language, culture, and heritage, both in Latvia and in the diaspora. These core values are reinforced by positive experience in other contexts of cooperation and through our common sociopolitical and historical background. It is therefore important to us to thank all the respondents for the privilege of becoming entrusted with your stories and life trajectories, your doubts and emotions, and your joy.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Profile of informants: country of residence, number and age of children and languages spoken among family members.

Respondent ID	Country of Residence	Number of Kids and Their Age	Native Languages of Parents	Language Between Parents	Language Between Parents and Kid(s)	Language Between Kids
Families with the Latvian language as the native language of both parents						
AK	Ireland	2 (12 and 9)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their daughter in Latvian, to their son in English (the son has autism)	English
VD	Great Britain	2 (26 and 20)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their kids in Latvian	Latvian and English
IB	Ireland	5 (36, 27, 26, 18, 13). The oldest kid lives in Latvia	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their kids in Latvian, kids speak to the parents in Latvian	The eldest daughter speaks only Latvian to her younger siblings Children living in Ireland speak mainly English to each other

Table A1. *Cont.*

Respondent ID	Country of Residence	Number of Kids and Their Age	Native Languages of Parents	Language Between Parents	Language Between Parents and Kid(s)	Language Between Kids
LD	Norway	2 (11–twins)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their children in Latvian, children respond mostly in Latvian, sometimes also in Norwegian	Often in English, also in Latvian
RP	Ireland	3 (36, 29, 19)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their kids in Latvian, kids speak to the parents in Latvian	Latvian
SL	Great Britain	3 (24, 19, 8). The youngest kid was born in Great Britain	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Communication between parents and children takes place mainly in Latvian, with the youngest daughter more in English	The youngest daughter speaks to her older sister and brother in English, they answer in Latvian, sometimes explaining something in English as well
IT	Greece	2 (14 and 5)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to their kids in Latvian, kids speak to the parents in Latvian	More often English
AU	Germany	4 (28, 26, 21, 18)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Parents speak to kids in Latvian, children answer mainly in Latvian, sometimes also in German	Latvian and German
IK	Great Britain	2 (28 and 7)	Both–Latvian	Latvian	Mom with her youngest daughter in Latvian and English The youngest daughter's father spoke to his daughter in Latvian	English
Families with different native languages of parents, one of which is the language of the new home country						
LS	Germany	3 (9 and 7–twins)	Mom–Latvian Dad–German	-	Mom speaks to children in Latvian, children respond more and more in German	German
GMN	New Zealand	2 (22 and 19)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Lithuanian	Latvian	Parents speak to their children in Latvian	In English, rarely in Latvian
DD	Great Britain	1 (20)	Mom–Latvian Partner–English	English	Mother with daughter–in Latvian Partner with daughter–in English Mother with partner's children–in English	Daughter with mom's partner's children in English
EB	Germany	2 (9 and 4)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Italian	Italian	Mom with her oldest kid speaks in Italian, a little Latvian, with her youngest kid speaking mostly in Latvian, sometimes in Italian Dad talks to children in Italian	Italian, Latvian

Table A1. *Cont.*

Respondent ID	Country of Residence	Number of Kids and Their Age	Native Languages of Parents	Language Between Parents	Language Between Parents and Kid(s)	Language Between Kids
EM	Germany	3 (12, 9, 3)	Mom–Latvian Dad of the two oldest children–German Dad of the youngest child–Spanish	With the father of the eldest child–in German, with the father of the youngest child–in English	Mom speaks to children–in Latvian The older children's dad speaks to them in German	The two oldest children speak German to each other, with the youngest child–mostly in German, but also in Latvian.
II	Spain	3 (11, 8, 6)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Spanish	Spanish (English in past)	Mom speaks Latvian and Spanish to her children, children respond mostly in Spanish, youngest child sometimes also in English or Valencian Dad speaks Spanish to her children	Spanish
Families with different native languages, neither of which is the language of the new home country						
AĀ	New Zealand	2 (4,5 and 2,5), Mom is pregnant	Mom–Latvian Dad–French	English	Mom speaks to children in Latvian, children answer more often in English Dad speaks to children in French, children answer more often in English	English
ET	New Zealand	2 (4 and 13 months)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Spanish	English	Mom speaks to children in Latvian Dad speaks to children in Spanish	Latvian and Spanish, sometimes–English
DM	Denmark	2 (2 and 2 months)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Danish	English	Mom speaks to her eldest kid in Latvian and sometimes Danish	-
Exceptions						
MG	USA	1 (11)	Mom–Latvian and English Dad–English and Latvian	English	Mom with her child in Latvian and English Dad with his child in English and Latvian	-
SŠ	USA	2 (9 and 6)	Mom–Latvian Dad–Kurdish	English	Mom speaks to children in Latvian Dad speaks to children in Swedish	Mainly Latvian and Swedish, sometimes English

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Ethno-Linguistic Identity of Kazakhstani Student Youth in Modern Multinational Context of Kazakhstan (Sociolinguistic Analysis of Empirical Research)

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Abstract: This study explores the transformation of the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani student youth within the multilingual context of Kazakhstan, considering the impact of the country's language policies. Our research analyzes language choices, focusing on the knowledge and factors influencing parents and Kazakhstani youth when making decisions about children's language education, as well as the strategies they adopt for language use. The empirical basis of this study is a sociolinguistic survey conducted among 823 Kazakhstani university students aged 18 to 30 from various regions of the country in 2023. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, which were subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings were supplemented by the results of the most recent national census. This comparative analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the current state and emerging trends in the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani youth and the broader linguistic landscape of the country. The results indicate that large-scale state initiatives aimed at reinforcing the status of the Kazakh language have had a positive impact on its recognition. However, the data also reveal persistent fluctuations in ethno-linguistic identity, which can be attributed to various extralinguistic factors. This study highlights the role of both educational and family language policies as key drivers in shaping ethno-linguistic identity.

Keywords: linguistic and ethnic identity; family language policy; language situation in Kazakhstan; educational environment; student youth; sociolinguistic analysis

1. Introduction

In the context of expanding globalization and the complex interplay of internal and external processes affecting countries worldwide, the issue of youth identity formation has gained particular relevance. Youth represent a vital social category in any society, being both dynamic and vulnerable. The events in Kazakhstan in January 2022 highlighted the susceptibility of young people to the destructive consequences of macro-social upheavals. Young people, often with developing and impressionable psyches, are especially prone to such influences.

According to the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the youth population (aged 14 to 34) numbered 5,694,397, following recent

amendments to national legislation (Act No. 168-VII of 26 December 2022 on State Youth Policy and Social Security); of this population, 2,896,681 were male and 2,797,716 were female. As such, youth constitute a significant demographic, necessitating careful attention in both social and policy-related considerations.

The issue of identity in contemporary sociological and sociolinguistic studies is predominantly analyzed through the lenses of ethno-national self-awareness—how individuals perceive their cultural and ethnic identity within an ethnic group (Smagulova, 2006; Djuraeva, 2022)—as well as self-identification (Tajfel, 1982/2010) and the communicative behavior of linguistic personalities—how language choices reflect and construct identity (Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2012)—among other important factors (Matsunaga et al., 2010; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). Particular attention is given to identity within the context of multinationality and multilingualism, which are characteristic of Kazakhstan's social fabric (Smagulova, 2008; Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018; Tang & Calafato, 2022; Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022a; Djuraeva, 2022; Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). Although Kazakhstani scholars (Altynbekova, 2006; Suleimenova, 2010; Suleimenova et al., 2016; Zharkynbekova, 2012) have examined the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani youth, this study seeks to explore how this identity is evolving in response to contemporary linguistic and social dynamics. Identity, inherently fluid and shaped by shifting sociopolitical and linguistic factors, requires ongoing monitoring to capture the trends that influence its development.

In this study, identity is understood as a person's identification with a specific sociocultural group or community. Linguistic identity refers to an individual's inclination toward self-identification through language choice (May, 2005), while ethnic identity denotes membership to a particular ethnic group, characterized by self-recognition as a group member and the preservation of ethno-cultural elements that underpin ethnic self-awareness (Phinney, 2005; Tajfel, 1982/2010).

The primary aim of this research is to assess the extent to which factors such as native language choice, language proficiency, language attitudes, familial language preferences, and external social influences shape the transformation of the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani youth, particularly students. By focusing on student populations, this study seeks to identify the relationship between linguistic identity formation and the choice of the language of instruction at the university level. This objective has led to the formulation of the following key research questions:

1. What trends characterize the expression of ethno-linguistic identity among modern Kazakhstani youth in the context of the current linguistic landscape and the intensified ethno-demographic shifts in the past decade?
2. How do language practices within the family and the selection of the language of instruction in schools and universities influence the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani youth?

The working hypothesis of this study is that the attitudes of Kazakhstani student youth, as a social group engaged in professional training within higher education institutions, toward language choice—whether in the education system, within the family, or in other social spheres—play a crucial role in shaping their ethno-linguistic identity. These attitudes not only influence the transformation of this identity, but also impact the strengthening or weakening of the Kazakh language as both the native language among the titular nation and the state language among non-titular populations.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of This Study

2.1. Definition of Ethno-Linguistic Identity Within the Sociolinguistic Context

The exploration of ethno-linguistic identity is particularly important within multi-ethnic environments and evolving cultural landscapes. Ethno-linguistic identity, which integrates ethnicity and language practices, is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. Tajfel (1982/2010) defines identity as a component of an individual's self-concept derived from their awareness of group membership and the emotional and value-based significance attached to that membership. Similarly, Mead's theory of the "I" and "Me" emphasizes the interplay between individual agency and societal expectations in identity formation, resonating with Tajfel's notion of social identity as a product of both personal awareness and group affiliation (Hammack, 2015). Scholars have identified several key components of ethnic identity, including self-labeling, a sense of belonging, attitudes toward one's ethnic group, and ethnic involvement (Phinney, 2005). Umaña-Taylor et al. (2006) suggest that a mature ethnic identity is characterized by the degree to which individuals have explored their ethnicity, possess clarity regarding the meaning of their group membership, and maintain a strong identification with their ethnic group. A stable sense of belonging plays a crucial role in shaping self-perception, providing inner resilience, and fostering positive self-esteem (Phinney, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Umaña-Taylor, 2011). However, as Zharkynbekova and Chernyavskaya (2022a) argue, ethnic identity is not a singular or static representation of an individual or group. Rather, it manifests across multiple dimensions, including familial, communal, and professional contexts. Accordingly, Sachdev and Bourhis (2005) posit that in social groups, individuals often use various strategies to assert their linguistic uniqueness, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging and identity within the ingroup. Consequently, examining identity through a socio-historical perspective is essential, particularly considering the effects of societal transformations and the accompanying uncertainties inherent in the rapid processes of globalization (Horner & Weber, 2008). Identifying the dependence of the process of language acquisition and use on socio-psychological, socio-historical, and demographic factors and conditions, as well as analyzing the functional significance and degree of functioning of languages in the socio-communicative space, contributes to a deeper understanding of identity (Zharkynbekova et al., 2015; Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022a, 2022b).

Some researchers emphasize socialization as a key factor in the development of ethno-linguistic identity among youth. For example, Bourgeois et al. (2009) highlight the importance of youth involvement in activities and its impact on identity formation among French-speaking minority youth in Canada. Similarly, Pujolar and Gonzàlez (2012) investigated language use in Catalonia and found that young people increasingly base their language choices on practical considerations rather than on ethno-linguistic identity. Other researchers emphasize the role of language in shaping ethnic identity. Language is recognized as a crucial element in the formation of a secure ethnic identity (Khilkhanova & Khilkhanov, 2004). While language is not a defining factor for all ethnic identities (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1982), it is of considerable significance in many cases (May, 2005; Sachdev & Bourhis, 2005). For ethnic minority youth living in a majority culture that differs from their ethnic heritage, language can be pivotal in self-definition, particularly when the heritage language is both distinctive and personally significant (Zhade, 2007). Developing the idea of the significance of language in identity formation, Chernyavskaya (2022) argues that identity is not merely expressed through language, but is also constructed through it. According to Chernyavskaya (2022), individuals construct and express their identity through language by aligning themselves with specific social groups and roles based on factors such as social status, gender, culture, and ethnicity. Thus, by creating and conveying

particular meanings through language, individuals can be identified as members of distinct social groups or communities.

The historically bilingual and multilingual landscape has played a significant role in shaping its ethno-linguistic identity. Pavlenko (2008, 2013) underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of multilingualism in post-Soviet countries like Kazakhstan, emphasizing a need for the state to adopt a flexible approach to balance the linguistic interests of its diverse groups. This approach is vital for maintaining linguistic harmony and fostering national unity. It involves both strengthening the Kazakh language (the state language) and preserving the country's multilingual heritage, while also safeguarding the linguistic rights of minority groups. Smagulova (2006) earlier discussed the strong sense of national identity among Kazakhs, arguing that the weak connection between language and identity, alongside lenient policies on ethno-linguistic relations, has contributed to stabilizing language conflicts in the country (p. 312). Research on bilingualism and multilingualism shows that individuals with bicultural identities often experience an expansion of their ethnic identity (Matsunaga et al., 2010). This expansion is particularly noticeable in the development of dual or multiple ethno-linguistic identities and a sense of belonging to multiple cultures among speakers of native, second, and/or foreign languages (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018). Ahn and Smagulova (2022) observed an increase in plurilingual competence among Kazakhstan's younger generation, attributed to the implementation of trilingual policies in the school curriculum, with a particular emphasis on English. This growth in plurilingual competence contributes to the formation of a unique type of identity, as reflected in the self-descriptions provided by respondents in their study (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022, p. 18). Additionally, Catedral and Djuraeva (2018) explored the language ideologies within multilingual Kazakh and Uzbek families, and found that the preference for multiple languages is influenced by the country's historical experiences. They argue that independence is associated with valuing the mother tongue, while the Soviet past favors adherence to principles from that era. Zharkynbekova and Chernyavskaya (2022b) discuss code-switching in bilingual and multilingual contexts, emphasizing that it is influenced not only by proficiency in a second or foreign language or by deficiencies in one of the languages, but also by its role as a semiotic resource (p. 71). Flores et al. (2015) examine how students' identities are shaped by their extended engagement with the English language, highlighting the unique identity that emerges from such experiences. Rees and Webb Williams (2017) explore Kazakhstani identity through four key dimensions: supra-ethnic identity, ethnicity, language, and citizenship. They underscore the importance of understanding the complex interplay between these components in shaping identity within a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Their study highlights how citizenship contributes to a unified national identity while acknowledging ethnic differences and the significant role of language in this process (Rees & Webb Williams, 2017). The findings of Kucherbayeva and Smagulova (2023) are particularly relevant in this context. Their research highlights the challenges faced in revitalizing and strengthening the Kazakh language within higher education in Kazakhstan, focusing on its competition with Russian and English. These languages often overshadow Kazakh due to their perceived prestige and potential for career advancement (see also Altynbekova, 2006; Zharkynbekova, 2012). Djuraeva (2022) notes that the increased presence of English in the educational and public spheres of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is part of national policies and branding strategies aimed at enhancing their global positions. In this view, English is not only a means of communication, but also a component of national identity and image. However, Ahn and Smagulova (2022) argue that top-down state planning in Kazakhstan does not necessarily influence language practices, even when reforms are implemented through education policies. They suggest that English remains predominantly accessible to a small segment of

the affluent middle class who have better access to linguistic resources, while it remains out of reach for the majority of the population (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022, p. 20). Tlepbergen et al. (2023) broaden the research scope by considering the pivotal role of grassroots movements in shaping language use. A comprehensive review of existing evidence indicates that the formation of ethno-linguistic identity among the younger generation is closely linked to their attitudes towards their ethnic language. This applies to various aspects, including language identification (native or non-native), language competence, language behavior, and language learning preferences. The data on the ethnic and linguistic identity of representatives of different ethnic groups emphasize the need for a comprehensive study of the macro-linguistic situation at both regional and national levels. Suleimenova et al. (2016) emphasize that understanding the prevailing processes is crucial for advancing diverse identities and addressing any related crises (p. 174). Furthermore, it is essential to consider the impact of contemporary geopolitical transformations on sociocultural environments. Linguistic ideologies and policies may conflict with the multilingual realities of language practice (Farr & Song, 2011, p. 650). Additionally, different configurations of ethno-linguistic identity can emerge depending on personally significant moral images and the concept of chronotope (Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018).

The current balance of identities in Kazakhstan positively supports the socialization of young people within a multicultural global environment. As integration processes accelerate, key indicators of the ethnic and linguistic landscape—such as immediate ethno-linguistic identity, language proficiency, and areas of language use—undergo significant transformations, contributing to the development of a multifaceted sense of identity. These changes highlight the inherent complexity of Kazakhstan's ethno-linguistic landscape. In this regard, despite existing research on the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani people, including its formation and development, there remains a need for ongoing monitoring and scientific analysis of these language processes. The dynamic nature of the data necessitates a continuous focus on the ethnic and linguistic identity of various population groups, such as student youth. Given the ever-evolving challenges, shifting realities, and changes in the linguistic landscape within the country, a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the linguistic identity and ethno-cultural resources of young people within the sociolinguistic context is essential.

2.2. Family Language Practices and Modern Trends of Language Policy in the Educational Space of Polylingual Kazakhstan

Historically, Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape has been characterized by widespread Kazakh–Russian and Russian–Kazakh bilingualism, with Russian proficiency often dominating (Akzhigitova & Zharkynbekova, 2014). This period saw a prevalence of a "Russified cultural space" in Kazakhstan (Dave & Sinnott, 2002, pp. 5–8). Under these conditions, shifts occurred in the relationship between the Kazakh and Russian languages. Ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties to the Kazakh language became formal for some, while proficiency in the native language diminished. This decline in the prestige of the Kazakh language also led to a decrease in the prestige of the nation's history and culture. Consequently, some Kazakhs began using Russian for intra-ethnic communication, and the Kazakh language was increasingly excluded from official and business contexts. The principle of parity proclaimed by official policies often resulted in a diminished "functional health" and "communicative power" of the Kazakh language (Suleimenova & Smagulova, 2011, p. 70).

Following Kazakhstan's independence, the process of Kazakhization began, aiming to establish Kazakh as the official state language (Smagulova, 2008, p. 448). This ongoing process involves transitioning official paperwork to Kazakh, standardizing and modernizing the language, elevating its status, and enhancing proficiency (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 296). As a result, the number of educational institutions offering instruction in Kazakh has been

increasing annually. For instance, the proportion of kindergartens teaching in Kazakh has risen significantly from 25% in 2000 to 70% of the total.

As of the 2022–2023 school year, there are 6909 general education schools, with 3743 (54.2%) offering instruction in Kazakh, 2106 (30.5%) in Russian, 5 (0.07%) in Uighur, and 5888 (84.2%) in mixed languages. In total, 3,484,139 pupils are enrolled, with 2,307,960 (66.2%) studying in Kazakh, 1,077,915 (31.0%) in Russian, and 98,264 (2.8%) in other languages. Additionally, in the system of technical and vocational education, the number of students studying in Kazakh has doubled over the past two decades (on approval of the Concept of Development of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023–2029).

Simultaneously with the Kazakhization policy, the Kazakhstani government is also implementing a multilingual policy to support the preservation of Russian and other languages (Smagulova, 2008, p. 448). This multilingual approach reflects Kazakhstan's diverse linguistic landscape. According to the 2021 census, the population is categorized into four main linguistic groups: monolinguals (24.5%), bilinguals (44.9%), trilinguals (28.6%), and speakers of four or more languages (2%) (*The results of the National Population Census of 2021*, n.d.). The following section will analyze the national composition, religious affiliations, and language proficiency within the Republic of Kazakhstan.

One of the most ambitious reforms that proved to be problematic was the introduction of a trilingualism policy in 2007. The concept of implementing trilingualism was initially formulated as a strategic reform with the objective of enhancing the international competitiveness of Kazakhstan. The reform program was to include the teaching of various subjects in Kazakh (the state language), Russian (the language of interethnic communication), and English (the language necessary for global economic integration) in schools and universities (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). However, its practical implementation did not yield the expected results. Additionally, a substantial proportion of educational institutions lacked the material and technical support, which substantially constrained the feasibility of implementing the trilingual approach. These difficulties were further compounded by an uneven distribution of resources, with urban schools, especially elite schools, receiving more opportunities to implement the reform, while rural institutions remained on the periphery of the process. Consequently, the trilingualization policy became available only to a limited number of students, thereby increasing educational and social inequalities. This state of affairs signaled an imperative for a more systematic approach, entailing a thorough analysis of the prevailing capacities of the education system, consistent capacity building, and differentiated implementation of innovations, with a view to regional peculiarities. In the context of global trends, multilingual (bi-, trilingual) education is of great importance and has encouraging development prospects. Therefore, when properly balanced, it can help to create conditions both for the formation of ethnic identity and for strengthening inter-ethnic interaction and integration (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023).

In the context of state language policy, the phenomenon of family language policy is evolving. Historically bilingual, the modern Kazakh family is increasingly adopting a multilingual approach in response to the global prominence of English. Language policy is defined as "language planning as a combination of linguistic ideologies and practices" (Tang & Calafato, 2022, p. 2; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023, p. 2). This encompasses parents' beliefs about how languages should be learned and used within the family, as well as the actions taken by family members to uphold these beliefs. Communication practices within the family are shaped by parental priorities and consistency (Bursa, 2019, p. 159).

Research into the language policies of bilingual and multilingual families emphasizes their commitment to transmitting heritage languages across generations (Seppik & Zabrodskaja, 2022; Bursa, 2019). Family language policy can also be influenced by all family members, including older children, who may impact language choices for younger

siblings. Studies by Seppik and Zabrodskaja (2022) and Zabrodskaja et al. (2023) highlight that family ideologies often originate from parents' deliberate decisions to foster a multilingual environment, sometimes even before children are born. These decisions determine the languages prioritized within the family, whether heritage, community, or majority languages.

Conversely, multilingual families may adopt a mixed-language approach, described by Tang and Calafato (2022) as "translingual", reflecting not only varied modes of speech, but also diverse cognitive and cultural perspectives (Tang & Calafato, 2022, p. 4). In the modern era, many families invest in multilingualism through their family language policies, thereby enriching their socialization into complex identities (Tang & Calafato, 2022, p. 12).

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials and Procedure

The survey was selected as the primary method for this empirical study due to its ability to reach a large number of respondents, ensure the representativeness of the data, and facilitate repeated implementation. Conducted from late March to mid-May 2023, the survey combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodology not only provided statistical data, but also gathered qualitative insights, such as reasons for respondents' answers and self-formulated responses.

The survey was administered in two formats: a written questionnaire and an online version via a Google link. In both formats, direct communication between researchers and respondents was maintained. To accommodate diverse linguistic preferences, the questionnaire was available in both Kazakh and Russian, allowing respondents to choose their preferred language.

The questionnaire consisted of 24 fixed questions and was organized into four sections. Before beginning, respondents received an introductory message outlining the research team's affiliation, instructions for completing the questionnaire, assurances of anonymity, and appreciation for their participation.

The first section gathered respondents' social characteristics through 10 questions covering demographic and personal details, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, native language, language of instruction, and place of residence. The remaining sections focused on key research areas:

1. Choice of mother tongue;
2. Language proficiency level;
3. Language use in various communicative contexts.

These sections were designed to address this study's specific objectives and explore the respondents' language choices, proficiency, and usage patterns in different communicative spaces.

Block 2 included four questions designed to explore respondents' perceptions of their native language. Specifically, it addressed how respondents identify their native language, their views on whether children should learn the language of both parents, and the role of language proficiency in fostering ethnic identity.

Block 3 consisted of six questions related to the language of instruction at the school and university levels. It examined methods of language acquisition and assessed respondents' proficiency in various languages.

Block 4 featured four questions about the use of Kazakh and Russian in different aspects of life. It explored how these languages are utilized in various domains and their potential roles in society and education.

The questionnaire, therefore, included a total of 24 questions with a variety of formats, including closed, semi-closed, open, direct, indirect, single answer, and multiple choice.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the importance of their responses using a scale. For example, question 12 from Block 2 asked respondents to rank the criteria for assessing their native language on a scale from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). The survey was designed to be completed within 50 min, allowing for approximately 2 min per question.

The selection of data analysis techniques was guided by the nature of the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the survey and interviews. To identify patterns and causal relationships between dependent and independent variables, and to assess the strength of these relationships (effect size), inferential statistics were utilized. Specifically, correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test and the φ coefficient and Cramer's V statistic. Data analysis was performed with the statistical software package SPSS 27.0.

In this study, the dependent variables are the socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants, as these are central to the research goals and objectives, as well as this study's subject and hypotheses. The key indicators of ethno-linguistic identity include respondents' ethnicity and mother tongue. The independent variables consist of factors such as the rationale for selecting a native language, level of linguistic proficiency, linguistic preferences, and other relevant characteristics.

To interpret the qualitative data, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the detailed responses provided in the questionnaires and interviews. A total of 28 interviews were carried out by the research team. Following Fons van de Vijver et al. (2015), we recognize that immersion in context offers a comprehensive view and enhances our understanding of ethnic identity in a multicultural and multilingual setting. Interview texts were treated as distinct cases, allowing us to explore the questions of 'Why' and 'How', which are central to contemporary sociolinguistics (Bell, 2016; Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022a, 2022b).

Additionally, the data from the current questionnaire survey were compared with previous research conducted by Kazakh scholars, including studies led by Suleimenova (2010) and Suleimenova et al. (2016) on the dynamics of the language situation in Kazakhstan, as well as by Zharkynbekova (2012) on the co-functioning of languages in Kazakhstan's multicultural space. This comparative analysis enabled us to track changes in self-identification processes and shifts in the hierarchy of identity types over time.

3.2. Participants

A straightforward yet effective statistical technique, known as probability sampling, was employed to select the research participants. This method ensured that every student within the general population of Kazakh students had an equal chance of being included in the sample, thus providing valuable insights into the population as a whole. The only criterion for exclusion was age; underage students were not included in the survey.

The sampling process adhered to the principles of probability and equal opportunity. The survey was administered to students from various universities across different regions of Kazakhstan, including the following: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, S. Seyfullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University, Toraigyrov University, A. Margulan Pavlodar Pedagogical University, E. Buketov Karaganda University, Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, M. Auezov South Kazakhstan State University, and M.Kh. Dulati Taraz Regional University. The students were enrolled in Kazakh, Russian, and multilingual programs.

The socio-demographic analysis of the respondents indicated that the sample is both representative and typical of the general population of students in Kazakhstan. The sample comprised 823 respondents (n = 823), including 793 undergraduates and 30 master's students, aged between 18 and 30 years, with a mean age of 19.5 years.

The gender distribution among respondents was as follows: 52.3% female and 47.7% male. All participants were informed about the purpose of the questionnaire and provided their consent to participate in the study. The respondents possessed a sufficient level of education to answer the questions thoughtfully and accurately.

The term "sufficient level of education" refers to the respondents having completed secondary education and possessing the necessary language proficiency to understand and respond to the survey questions appropriately. Additionally, "conscientiousness of participation" signifies the respondents' ability and willingness to answer the questions thoughtfully and accurately.

Out of the 823 respondents initially surveyed, 21 were excluded from the analysis. This exclusion was due to some individuals declining to participate (for example, because they found the topic irrelevant) or submitting incomplete or blank questionnaires. These responses were removed from the final dataset. Moreover, responses from students who were not Kazakhstani citizens were also excluded. This category included those in Kazakhstan for academic mobility programs, as well as international students enrolled full-time at Kazakhstani universities. Consequently, 802 out of 823 distributed questionnaires were deemed valid for consideration.

In this study, the ethnic composition of the respondents is a crucial variable, as it affects the analysis of relationships and the impact of independent variables such as the choice of native language and its selection criteria. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by ethnicity.

Table 1. Ethnic composition of respondents.

Ethnicity	Total Number of Respondents		Ethnicity	Total Number of Respondents	
	Quantity	Share, %		Quantity	Share, %
Kazakhs	672	83.7	Belarusians	1	0.1
Russians	76	9.5	Moldavians	1	0.1
Ukrainians	12	1.49	Uighurs	1	0.1
Uzbeks	10	1.24	Bulgarians	1	0.1
Germans	10	1.24	Lezgins	1	0.1
Tatars	5	0.6	Gypsies	1	0.1
Koreans	3	0.3	Tajiks	1	0.1
Chechens	2	0.2	Lithuanians	1	0.1
Mestizos	2	0.2	Poles	1	0.1
Bashkirs	1	0.1			

For context, the National Population Census of 2021 provides the following ethnic composition of Kazakhstan's population: 70.4% Kazakhs, 15.5% Russians, 3.2% Uzbeks, 2.0% Ukrainians, 1.5% Uyghurs, 1.2% Germans, 1.1% Tatars, 0.8% Azerbaijanis, 0.6% Koreans, 0.5% Turks, 0.4% Belarusians, 0.3% Tajiks, and 0.2% each of Poles, Kyrgyz, and representatives of other ethnic groups, totaling 1.4%. An additional 1.4% consists of various other ethnic groups, including Kurds (0.3%), Chechens (0.2%), Poles (0.2%), Kyrgyz (0.2%), and others (https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U2200001014, accessed on 2 February 2024). Comparing these figures with the ethnic composition of the respondents indicates a reasonable degree of comparability, suggesting that the sample is representative with respect to ethnic diversity.

The ethnic identification of the study participants was based on their self-definition. Among the respondents, only two individuals identified as mestizo, indicating a reluctance to choose a specific ethnicity. Additionally, one participant reported Kazakh as their native language, while the other selected Russian. Given that these individuals constituted only 0.25% of the total sample, the authors did not explore this aspect further. However, it is anticipated that future research will address this topic in a more comprehensive study.

An important aspect of the respondents' profiles is their language competence, which was assessed across four skills: speaking, reading, understanding, and writing. The results of this evaluation are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Language competence of young respondents (%).

Level of Language Competence	Kazakh Language			Russian Language			English Language		
	Kazakh Respondents	Russian Respondents	Other Nationality Respondents	Kazakh Respondents	Russian Respondents	Other Nationality Respondents	Kazakh Respondents	Russian Respondents	Other Nationality Respondents
Speak fluently	94.2	2.6	5.5	71.2	100	85.1	13.5	17.1	22.2
Speak with difficulty	5.8	77.6	75.9	28.2	0	14.8	76.7	73.6	62.9
Do not speak	0	19.7	12.8	0.4	0	0	9.6	9.2	14.8
Read fluently	98	56.6	72.2	90.4	100	94.4	67.7	69.7	74.0
Read with difficulty	2.0	40.7	24.0	9.5	0	5.5	30.2	26.3	24.0
Do not read	0	2.6	3.7	0	0	0	1.9	3.9	1.85
Understand fluently	94.3	9.2	59.2	94.4	100	96.2	10.2	40.7	46.2
Understand with difficulty	5.5	77.6	40.7	5.5	0	3.8	85.5	50	48.1
Do not understand	-	13.1	7.4	-	-	-	4.1	9.2	5.5
Write fluently	93.8	28.9	20.3	95.3	100	94.4	33.6	50	37.0
Write with difficulty	5.6	65.7	74.0	4.61	-	5.5	60.8	35.5	51.8
Do not write	0.4	5.2	5.5	-	-	-	14.8	14.4	11.1

The self-assessment data reveal that a significant majority of Kazakh respondents (95%) demonstrate proficiency in the Kazakh language, often describing their abilities as fluent in speaking, reading, and writing. All Russian respondents (100%) reported proficiency in the Russian language. Notably, 87.8% of Kazakh respondents indicated proficiency in Russian, which surpasses the 24.3% of Russian respondents who reported proficiency in Kazakh. Among respondents of other ethnic groups, proficiency in Russian is high (70.7%), while proficiency in Kazakh is relatively low, at 39.3%. Furthermore, Kazakh respondents exhibit a relatively low proficiency in English (31.2%), whereas Russian respondents (44.3%) and respondents of other ethnicities (44.8%) show higher proficiency levels in English.

Based on these findings, we categorized the respondents into five groups based on their language proficiency:

1. Respondents with dominant Kazakh;
2. Kazakh respondents with dominant Russian;
3. Russian respondents with dominant Russian;
4. Respondents representatives of other ethnic groups with dominant Russian;
5. Respondents representatives of other ethnic groups with dominant Kazakh.

Overall, this classification aligns with similar categorizations found in Kazakhstani scholarly research (e.g., Suleimenova, 2010; Altynbekova, 2006), reflecting the distribution of language proficiency among the student population in Kazakhstan.

4. Results

4.1. Indicators of Native Language Identification by Kazakhstani Student Youth

To assess changes in native language identification among Kazakhstani students over the past 15 years, we analyzed responses to the question, "What language do you consider to be your native language?". Currently, 83.2% of respondents identified a single native language:

1. In total, 66.4% of respondents identified Kazakh as their native language.
2. A total of 12.9% identified Russian.
3. A total of 3.9% selected other languages, including Tatar, Uzbek, Uighur, Chechen, and Tajik.
4. In total, 6.7% (54 respondents) from various ethnic groups (e.g., Bulgarians, Belarusians, Bashkirs, Moldovans, Ukrainians, Lezgins, Roma, Germans) specified Russian as their native language.
5. A total of 0.3% (three respondents) of ethnic Kazakhs from Uzbekistan indicated Uzbek as their native language.
6. A total of 0.3% (3 respondents) from Korean, Russian, and Chechen backgrounds identified Kazakh as their native language.

Examining the data for Kazakh and Russian respondents, the following was found:

7. Among Kazakh respondents (n = 672), 98.5% identified Kazakh as their native language.
    - In total, 0.6% reported both Kazakh and Russian.
    - In total, 0.6% identified only Russian.
    - In total, 0.3% selected Uzbek.
8. Among Russian respondents (n = 76), 98.6% identified Russian as their native language.
    - A total of 1.3% indicated Kazakh.

The responses of Kazakh respondents to the question "Why do you consider this language to be your native language?" are ranked by several criteria: by ethnicity ("I am Kazakh"), territoriality ("I live in Kazakhstan"), and emotional factors ("This is my native language", "I speak it with my parents or relatives", "I have spoken it since childhood"). In this respect, various forms of emotion are representative. For example, Kazakh respondents evinced pride for their nationality when describing situations of positive attitude towards their native language, native nature, national cuisine, folk and family traditions, and customs, and a respectful attitude towards famous personalities of the younger generation, such as Dimash Kudaibergen (singer), Gennady Golovkin (boxer), Imanbek Zeikenov (musician–arranger), and others. Furthermore, in their comprehensive responses to the open-ended questions posed in the questionnaire, the students emphasized the significance of the Kazakh language, citing its status as the state language, the language of the Kazakh people, and its vital role in preserving and transmitting it to future generations: "the Kazakh language is the language of my people, who else but us, Kazakhs, should use it. I think we are responsible for it".

In 2024, 0.6% of Kazakh respondents reported both Kazakh and Russian as their mother tongues. A comparison with previous studies reveals a modest increase in this figure. For instance, earlier research (Suleimenova, 2010) indicates that in 2003, this percentage was 0.3%, rising to 1.2% in 2005, and then dropping to 0% in 2009. Although the increase has been gradual over the past 15 years, it is noteworthy that the data presented here pertains

specifically to student populations. This demographic focus may account for some of the observed trends. Let us examine several contributing factors in greater detail.

Regions with diverse ethnic structures exhibit distinct linguistic practices that influence language interactions. The use of Kazakh and Russian in Kazakhstan's regions is shaped by a complex interplay of territorial, demographic, ethnic, and other factors, as well as the broader dynamics of societal linguistic changes. For example, Kazakh predominates in the western and southern regions, while Russian is more prevalent in the northern, eastern, and central regions. Among the respondents from this study, two individuals were from northern Kazakhstan—one from Pavlodar and the other from the northern region. Notably, 41.1% of the respondents identified as Kazakh but indicated Russian as their dominant language. This pattern was also observed among individuals from other ethnic groups, particularly in northern, eastern, and central Kazakhstan. The linguistic situation in these areas, historically dominated by Russian, is undergoing a gradual transformation. Additionally, the ongoing geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine could further impact the linguistic landscape, potentially influenced by an influx of Russians from border regions.

It is noteworthy that two of the four respondents reported both Kazakh and Russian as their native languages. These respondents were urban residents of Almaty and Astana, respectively, and are enrolled in the Russian department at their university. This bilingual identification reflects significant sociological and economic factors, as discussed by Ahn and Smagulova (2022): "In contemporary Kazakhstan, Kazakhs and Kazakh language speakers have gained more prestige and visibility; however, despite the government's language policy and planning efforts, the urban middle class (irrespective of ethnic background) has largely remained predominantly Russian-speaking in comparison to the rural areas, which have remained predominantly Kazakh-speaking" (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022, p. 87). Thus, one of these respondents (a 21-year-old female student of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, born in Almaty, Kazakh, who graduated from a Russian school) elaborated on her language experience in an interview, stating the following:

> "*Russian is also my mother tongue because it was the first language I started to speak as a child and it was the main means of communication in my family and environment. However, I always felt it was my duty to know the language of my nation, Kazakh, but because of the environment in which I grew up and the prejudice against it, I was never able to master it. Russian is the language in which I think and communicate with my relatives*".

While in 2009, 0.7% of Kazakh respondents identified Russian as their native language (Suleimenova, 2010), in 2024 this figure slightly decreased to 0.6 per cent (four respondents). Among these respondents, two were ethnic Kazakhs from Russia who had been educated in Russian schools and were currently enrolled in the Russian department of the university. Despite residing in Kazakhstan for over five years, their proficiency in Kazakh had not reached a level where it could be considered their native language. Additionally, two respondents had migrated from rural areas in the North Kazakhstan region, which has a predominantly Russian-speaking population. One respondent's interview illustrates this situation:

> "*I am Kazakh, but I consider Russian to be my native language. I have been speaking Russian for as long as I can remember. It so happens that Russian is almost always used in our family. At the same time, I was raised by my grandparents, who have roots in Novosibirsk, where they spent their childhood and youth. In Pavlodar and Aksu, where my parents and I were born, Russian is predominantly spoken*" (a 22-year-old male

student of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakh, born and raised in the Pavlodar region, who graduated from Russian school).

This example highlights how regional demographic factors and family language practices influence the linguistic identity of youth in Kazakhstan.

Among Russian respondents, the proportion of monolinguals is notably high, with 98.0% identifying as exclusively Russian speakers in 2009, and 98.7% in 2024. There is no significant evidence of bilingualism among this group. Only one respondent (1.3%) identified Kazakh as their native language. This respondent, a student from South Kazakhstan Oblast, reflects the broader trend of linguistic identity among Russian respondents.

Most respondents from other ethnic groups, such as Bulgarians, Belarusians, Bashkirs, Moldovans, Ukrainians, Lezgins, Roma, and Germans, identified Russian as their sole native language, with 97% preferring to study in Russian. These preferences are explained as follows: "*I consider Russian to be my native language because it was the first language I learned. My parents spoke Russian, and although Uzbek is partially used in the family, I studied in Russian at school and used it in everyday interactions. I speak Uzbek conversationally but do not consider myself a native speaker*" (a 21-year-old female student of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Uzbek); "*I consider Russian my native language as it is the first language I learned, and my parents, who are Azerbaijanis, speak Russian*" (a 20-year-old male student of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Azerbaijani).

Three respondents (Korean, Russian, Chechen) indicated Kazakh as their native language, all studying in Kazakh-medium departments at universities. This suggests that the language of instruction in schools and universities has less impact on ethnic identity for these respondents (see also Altynbekova, 2006, p. 163).

4.2. Criteria for Defining Native Language

An analysis of responses to the question, "What criterion of native language do you use? Rank them in order of importance (1—the most important, 7—the least important)" is of particular interest. Table 3 outlines the criteria proposed for evaluation.

Table 3. Criteria for selecting a mother tongue.

N	Mother Tongue Criteria
1.	For me, my mother tongue is the language of my people.
2.	For me, my mother tongue is the language of my parents and the language spoken in my family.
3.	For me, my mother tongue is the language I know best.
4.	For me, my mother tongue is the language that I choose to consider as such.
5.	For me, my mother tongue is the language that is functionally the first language in my life that I use most often.
6.	For me, my mother tongue is the language I learnt first.
7.	For me, my mother tongue is the language in which I think.

The analysis of correlations between the choice of native language and its selection criteria for Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs reveals that while all Pearson's χ^2 correlation coefficients are relatively small, there are notable patterns. By comparing the χ^2 and r-values, we find that three selection criteria emerge as being particularly significant:

1. The language of my people: correlation $\chi^2 = 0.070$, r-value = 0.240;
2. The language of my parents, spoken in the family: correlation $\chi^2 = 0.069$, r-value = 0.243;

3. The language that is functionally the first language used most often: correlation $\chi^2 = 0.039$, r-value = 0.509.

For Russian-speaking Kazakhs, the criteria that significantly influence the choice of native language are related to ethnic identity, family environment, and the first language learned:

1. The language of my people: significant positive correlation 0.157, r-value = 0.002;
2. The language of my parents, and the language spoken in my family: significant positive correlation 0.121, r-value = 0.019;
3. The language I learned first: significant positive correlation 0.117, r-value = 0.024.

These results highlight the importance of ethnic and familial factors in determining the choice of native language among Kazakhs, reflecting deeper connections to cultural identity and language use patterns.

Thus, despite insignificant statistical indicators of correlation between the definition of the native language and the criteria for Kazakh respondents choosing it, ethnic self-determination and family language have the greatest importance for the formation of linguistic identity and the acquisition of native language, as well as its use. In total, 61.18 percent of respondents noted that language acquisition was primarily carried out in the family. The following was noted in the extended answers of the respondents: "*I learnt the language from childhood, as this language is spoken in the family*", "*In the family, from the moment I started to speak and write*", "*Speaking was taught by parents, writing at school*", "*I speak and write from childhood, as this is my native language*", "*From birth, I was born in a Kazakh family*", etc. The main focus of attention of all answers is family and school.

More detailed answers to the questions were given by respondents in the interviews:

> "*Thanks to my native language, I feel like a Kazakh. It is not for nothing that we say about our native language—'ana tili (mother tongue)'. It was the first language for me because it was spoken in the family*" (a 19-year-old male student of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University); "*As long as my grandmother, my mother's mum, was alive and we children were still young, we spoke only Kazakh. Dad's parents speak Kazakh, now primarily they are the bearers and keepers of our native language, we communicate with them only in Kazakh. My parents both speak two languages well, they use them both in everyday life and at work, that's why we now speak two languages fluently. With the older generation I speak Kazakh, with my friends and in everyday life I actively use Russian*" (a 20-year-old male student of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University).

The analysis of the criteria for choosing a native language for Russian-speaking Russians, Kazakh-speaking Russians, and Russian-speaking representatives of other ethnic groups demonstrates that there are no significant correlations between the choice of a native language and the criteria for choosing it. All Pearson correlation coefficients are within small values, and r-values show the absence of statistical significance. The absence of significant correlations indicates that the choice of mother tongue is determined by a combination of different factors.

4.3. The Impact of Language of Instruction at University on the Formation of Ethno-Linguistic Identity Among Student Youth

Recent data from official sources indicate a significant increase in the number of students choosing Kazakh as their language of instruction. In 2023, out of 172,000 graduates, 120,439 (slightly more than 70%) completed their education in Kazakh-language schools. This marks a notable rise from the 68.8% of the previous year. By comparison, in 2013, 49% of 168,477 school leavers graduated from Kazakh-language schools, and in 1993, only 37% of 310,142 graduates were educated in Kazakh (n.d.).

This trend reflects a deliberate choice by both parents and students to prioritize the Kazakh language. Additionally, it is crucial to consider the impact of migration processes on this shift. Since 1991, Kazakhstan has experienced a substantial influx of ethnic Kazakhs (Kandas) from countries such as China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Iran, who are proficient in Kazakh. Table 4 presents the distribution of language of instruction (Kazakh, Russian, and others such as English, German, Uzbek, etc.) among respondents in the survey.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents' language of instruction at school and university.

Language of Instruction	At School	At University
Kazakh	625 (77.9%)	435 (54.2%)
Russian	171 (20.8%)	339 (42.3%),
Other (Uighur, Uzbek)	6 (0.7%)	28 (3.5%).

The data presented in the table reveal that 23.7% of respondents who completed their education at Kazakh-medium schools chose to pursue their studies in Russian or in a multilingual program at the university. Conversely, 21.5% of graduates from Russian-medium schools opted for studies in Kazakh or in a multilingual program.

Analysis of student interviews regarding their choice of language of instruction at the university highlights several key factors:

Specialization Requirements: The choice of language often aligns with the requirements of the student's field of study. This alignment frequently necessitates a shift from the language used in secondary education to the language of instruction at the university. For instance: "*For me, the choice of English as the language of study was clear. In IT, English is essential. Although I considered studying abroad, my parents insisted on completing my undergraduate degree in Kazakhstan. It would be unprofessional to study IT in Kazakh or Russian*" (an 18-year-old male student of the Faculty of Information Technologies at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakh).

Self-Assessment of Language Competence: Students' perceptions of their language proficiency play a significant role in their choice of language for academic studies. They often select a language in which they feel confident enough to effectively engage with their chosen field of study.

Students' perceptions of the demand for language are determined primarily by its pragmatic, functional capabilities. To provide further confirmation, we will cite a piece of text from the conducted interviews:

"*I am Kazakh, I grew up in a traditional Kazakh family where traditions are honoured. My mum and dad work in the cultural sector. They are both very talented, sing well, have a professional musical education, and are often invited to lead tois. I grew up in a creative atmosphere. As a child I also sang, danced, recited poetry, took part in Kazakh language and literature Olympiads and in the 'Abai Okulary' competition. Many people advised me to enter journalism, and I realized that it was close to me. I entered, I study, of course, at the Kazakh department, because it is my native language, I love it, I speak and write it fluently, I want it to flourish, and I will develop it as a journalist*" (a 21-year-old female student of the Faculty of Journalism at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakh); "*I studied in a Kazakh school. It is difficult to say why. My parents wanted it that way, although they themselves are Russian-speaking. I know that they studied in a Russian school. It was not easy for me at school, my grades in humanities subjects were not very good. I chose Maths and Physics, everything was fine with that, and I entered*

> *the speciality 'Space Engineering and Technology'. I chose to study in Russian because I wanted to become a good specialist, I wanted to understand what I was studying. I think I did the right thing. Professional literature is all in Russian*" (a 20-year-old male student of the Faculty of Physics and Technology at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakh).

In response to the question of why they had chosen Kazakh, Russian, or English as the language of instruction, respondents gave the following answers: "*I chose to study in a polylingual group because I would like my English to develop further, Kazakh is my native language, and I graduated from Kazakh school, I speak Russian well, and I knew English would be harder for me, but it's normal for development. And of course, English will be much more useful in the future, especially in my profession*" (a 19-year-old female student of the Faculty of International Relations, at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakh).

It is also important to note the students' personal development plans, according to which they choose not only the language of instruction, but also their study languages other than their mother tongue. This reflects the growing recognition of the importance of multilingualism in the modern world:

> "At first, I chose the Russian group, thinking that it would be easier for me to study, but then I realized that it was not so. For some reason it was difficult to learn Maths, the terminology was different. In the end, I went to a polylingual group because I wanted to learn programming in English, because it helps to improve my speech in English. We study programming in English, some subjects in Kazakh, and Russian. This suits me fine." (a 19-year-old male student of the Faculty of Information Technologies at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakh).

> "*I decided to become a teacher of the Russian language because from childhood I was fascinated by literature and language, though, at first, Kazakh. But after graduating from Kazakh school, I realized how important it is to be able to communicate in several languages and understand the culture of different peoples. There was a period in my life when I was burning with the desire to learn Russian. Now that I have almost reached my goal, I feel some sporting interest in learning English*" (a 20-year-old female student of the Philological Faculty at South Kazakhstan University, Kazakh).

Thus, the choice of Russian or English as the language of study at university by Kazakh-speaking Kazakh students who graduated from Kazakh schools and consider Kazakh as their mother tongue is due to a certain degree of pragmatism. This is manifested in the perception of Russian and English languages as more prestigious and in demand in the future. These and other factors also explain the choice of Russian (English) as the language of instruction in schools (see Ahn & Smagulova, 2022).

4.4. Correlation Between Respondents' Language Proficiency and Attitudes Towards the Language

The responses to the question, "In your opinion, which language do you speak better?" revealed the following distribution: 55.2% of respondents reported that they speak Kazakh better, 40.3% reported Russian, 1.8% indicated both Kazakh and Russian, 0.9% mentioned Russian, 0.2% selected bilingualism, 0.2% chose Uzbek, 0.1% selected Mongolian, 0.1% found it difficult to answer, 0.2% claimed poor command of both Kazakh and Russian, and 0.1% chose English. Notably, responses to questions about which language respondents consider their native language, think in, and speak better often exhibit ambiguity and occasional contradictions. The data suggest that Kazakh respondents show a higher level of proficiency in Kazakh (55.2%), while a substantial portion of all respondents, regardless of ethnicity, demonstrate a strong competence in Russian (40.3%). Correlations between

respondents' proficiency in Kazakh and their attitudes towards the language are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5. Pearson's χ^2 correlations between respondents' level of Kazakh language proficiency and their attitudes towards it.

Ethnicity of Respondents	Number of Observations	χ^2	r
Kazakhs	659	0.685	<0.0001
Russians	76	0.464	<0.0001
Other ethnic groups	67	0.758	<0.0001

The correlation between the level of Kazakh language proficiency and attitudes towards it among Kazakhs is significant at the 0.01 level, with a coefficient of 0.685, indicating a strong positive relationship. This high correlation coefficient suggests that among Kazakhs, the sense of national identity and positive attitudes towards the Kazakh language increase with a higher level of language proficiency. For Russians, the correlation is also significant ($r < 0.0001$), but lower in magnitude compared to Kazakhs (0.464), reflecting the lesser influence of Kazakh language proficiency on their attitudes towards the language. Nonetheless, the positive correlation indicates that improved proficiency in Kazakh may contribute to more positive attitudes towards the language. Among representatives of other ethnic groups, the highest correlation (0.758) is observed, emphasizing that the better these individuals' Kazakh language skills, the higher their respect and positive attitudes towards it. This may indicate the importance of the Kazakh language as a means of integration and mutual understanding in Kazakhstan's multinational society. In all respondent groups, the level of Kazakh language proficiency positively correlates with attitudes towards the language. This suggests that the state's language and educational policy, which positively influences the improvement of students' language competence, contributes to a favorable attitude towards the language. A similar interdependence can be observed between the respondents' level of Russian language proficiency and their attitude towards it (Table 6).

Table 6. Pearson's χ^2 correlations between respondents' level of Russian language proficiency and their attitudes towards it.

Ethnicity of Respondents	Number of Observations	χ^2	r
Kazakhs	659	0.710	<0.0001
Russians	76	0.674	<0.0001
Other ethnic groups	67	0.661	<0.0001

The correlation between Russian language proficiency and attitudes towards it among Kazakhs reaches 0.710, indicating a very high correlation between these two variables. This reflects the fact that Kazakhs who have a better command of the Russian language also have a more positive attitude towards it. An r-value of less than 0.0001 confirms the statistical significance of this correlation. Pearson's χ^2 correlation analysis showed a significant correlation among Kazakh respondents between the choice of native language and opinions about language knowledge as an obligatory element of ethnicity (r-value < 0.001). This is also confirmed by high values of symmetric measures (φ and Cramer's V), indicating a moderate degree of association between the variables. As evidenced by χ^2 statistics, the association between the variables is not statistically significant (r-value > 0.05) among Russian and non-Russian respondents. Low values of symmetric measures (φ and Cramer's V) also indicate a weak degree of association between the variables.

4.5. Opinions of Kazakhstani Student Youth Regarding Knowledge of Parents' Language and Children's Education in the Future

As the results of the questionnaire show, the absolute majority (100%) of Kazakh-speaking Kazakh respondents believe that a child should know the language of their parents. In total, 91.8% of Russian-speaking Kazakh respondents indicated the importance of knowing the language of parents, 1.9% of respondents did not consider it obligatory, and 6.3% found it difficult to answer. Among Russian-speaking Kazakh respondents who indicated Russian as their mother tongue, 53.4% shared this opinion, 12.3% did not consider it mandatory, and another 34.3% found it difficult to answer. Among respondents of non-Kazakh and non-Russian ethnicity who consider Russian their mother tongue, 58.3% support the opinion that it is necessary to know their parents' language, 5.6% do not consider it important, and 36.1% found it difficult to answer. Among those whose mother tongue is different, 75.0% support this opinion, 8.3% do not consider it important, and 16.7% found it difficult to answer. The vast majority of young respondents (89.9%) believe that children benefit from their parents speaking different languages, aiding in language acquisition. Conversely, 7.7% of respondents argue that this practice hinders language learning, while 0.9% found it challenging to provide a definitive answer.

The responses to the questions, "In which language(s) do you want your children to speak?" and "In which language would you like your children to be educated?" provide valuable insights into the anticipated trends in language development in Kazakhstan (see Table 7).

Table 7. Indicators of responses to the question, 'In which language(s) do you want your children to speak?'.

Response Options	Kazakh Respondents with Dominant Kazakh	Kazakh Respondents with Dominant Russian	Russian Respondents	Respondents from Other Ethnic Groups
	%	%	%	%
Kazakh, Russian, and English	86.2	65.9	60.5	43.9
Kazakh and Russian	1.3	7.6	3.9	4.3
Kazakh and English	6.7	7.9	1.3	-
Russian and English	-	3.2	19.7	16.3
Kazakh	4.3	6.8	-	-
Russian	-	2.4	6.5	4.3
English	0.6	2.2	2.6	20.6
Difficult to answer	0.6	0.5	-	-
Other	3.6	3.5	5.2	10.3

Table 7 demonstrates that a significant majority of respondents wish for their children to be proficient in Kazakh, Russian, and English. It is noteworthy that 19.7 per cent of Russian respondents selected Russian and English as their preferred languages. The same number of respondents from other ethnic groups (16.3 per cent) answered similarly. However, 20.6 per cent of respondents from this group selected English as their primary language. It is also noteworthy that in the 'other' category, some respondents indicated that their children would speak the languages they wish, as it depends on where the children will live. The findings reflect a wider trend towards multilingualism and emphasize the growing importance of English in the educational and linguistic aspirations of respondents from different ethnic groups.

Of particular note is the increasing significance of the Kazakh language among Kazakh-speaking respondents. Recent years have seen a heightened emotional connection to the language of one's ethnic group, indicating its pivotal role in shaping and expressing ethnic consciousness. This heightened emotionality is evident not only in the quantitative data, but also in the qualitative responses from the questionnaires and interviews, where detailed answers reflect the deep-seated significance of the Kazakh language in the context of ethnic identity: "*While studying at university, I noticed how students communicate. Even those who speak Kazakh cannot speak cleanly without making mistakes. How long can this continue? When will our Kazakhs speak pure Kazakh? Maybe it should be forbidden to send children to Russian schools?*" (a 20-year-old male third year student, Kazakh); "*I think that the Kazakh language should be purified from borrowings from the Russian language, otherwise our children will not be able to read books later*" (a 22-year-old female fourth year student, Kazakh); "*I feel as if the Kazakh people have reached a dead end or are in a fog. Many don't know who they are and you can tell from their Russian speech that they are confused. Wake up, Kazakh!*" (a 23-year-old male third year student, Kazakh).

On the other hand, such heightened emotional responses may be indicative of perceived inadequacies in the effectiveness of state measures aimed at promoting and strengthening the Kazakh language. This perception could potentially lead to increased tension, both between Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs and Russian-speaking Kazakhs, as well as between Kazakhs and members of other ethnic groups, particularly Russians. Furthermore, there appears to be a noticeable sense of alienation and detachment from the Russian linguistic and cultural sphere, which is particularly evident in interactions with those who predominantly speak Russian: "*...I support those who say that it is necessary to remove Russian language and Russian literature from the school curriculum. It is essential to increase the number of Kazakh rather than Russian schools, and to translate literature written in Russian into Kazakh. Moreover, the Russian language should be reduced from kindergarten onwards, or even removed altogether....*" (a 23-year-old male fourth year student, Kazakh).

We assume that the difficult political situation related to the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine also contributes to this alienation. Since the end of February 2022, there has been a proliferation of articles and social media posts in Kazakhstani media addressing the language issue. It is noteworthy that this trend is evident among both Kazakhs with dominant Russian and representatives of other ethnic groups, who are consciously opting for Kazakh over Russian. Furthermore, there has been an increase in media content concerning the deliberate learning of the Kazakh language by Russian-speaking citizens. In certain social media discourse, this endeavor is portrayed as a manifestation of a shared aspiration for unity, as evidenced by the following article: (*How the war in Ukraine is changing Kazakh identity*, n.d.) (https://dzen.ru/a/ZSjZk4FvlwAThRhy, accessed on 20 June 2024). For instance, the author of the post 'How I found all of Kazakhstan in me' concedes that for many years, he was unable to muster the internal motivation to learn the Kazakh language. However, in the last 2.5 years, having initiated the study of his ancestry, he arrived at the following conclusion: "*For the first time in three decades, I experienced a profound sense of affiliation with the Kazakh people. An extraordinary context emerged, offering a novel impetus for advancement and fostering a profound comprehension of the language. It was beyond my expectations that my German, Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian ancestors would assist me in perceiving the Kazakh language from a novel vantage point, enabling me to experience it in a previously unexplored dimension. I perceive a shift in the nation's indigenous character. This profound sense of connection is inherently difficult to articulate in words, and can only truly be experienced by the individual in their own country. Arqashan solaj bolsyn! (May it always be this way!) Studying your family and its history will help you "hear" the land of Kazakhstan both literally (language) and spiritually".* (*How I found all of Kazakhstan in me*, n.d.). Publications

devoted to the impact of the events between Russia and Ukraine on self-identification have increased in frequency on the Internet. For instance, one article (*The conflict between Russia and Ukraine pushed the Russians of Kazakhstan to learn the Kazakh language*, n.d.) discusses how this situation contributed to the realization by ethnic Russians of Kazakhstan of their identity as Kazakhstanis. Other examples relate to Russians from the Russian Federation who came to Kazakhstan after the beginning of mobilization. For instance, one of them (I.Ch., residing in Almaty since 2023) launched a project entitled 'Alga, Kazakhstan!' on the social media platforms Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/alga.peterburg/ accessed on 1 July 2024) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/channel/UCzPZU-pkHdB4d6fK8e-pctw accessed on 1 July 2024) with the objective of promoting the Kazakh language and culture. He himself is actively studying the Kazakh language and has even enrolled his six-year-old daughter in a Kazakh school.

Research has confirmed that the use of the Kazakh language by non-Kazakh respondents in their family practice has a positive effect on their attitude to the state language of Kazakhstan, encouraging them to study it more deeply and apply it more widely in various spheres of life: *"The Kazakh language was my favourite subject, and I consistently achieved the highest grades in the class. The teacher always used me as an example, which inspired my decision to pursue a career as a Kazakh language teacher, with a particular focus on studying the rich Kazakh literary heritage"* (a 20-year-old Russian student, who grew up in a small Kazakh village in the Pavlodar region, where Kazakh was the primary language of communication among the local community and within most households).

In families where Russian is the sole means of inter-family communication, the situation is different. However, a notable shift has been observed, with an increasing inclination among young individuals to express a desire to learn Kazakh: "*In my family, we communicate in Russian, as our parents do not speak any other languages. Unfortunately, I don't have a strong command of Kazakh either, and I am planning to study it in courses. Unfortunately, the school did not provide me with this knowledge. However, I have been able to pick up some basic phrases and words, such as "salem", "rakhmet" and "anau-mynau", which I use most often when speaking to friends or people on the street. I believe that it is essential for all Kazakhstanis to learn Kazakh, as it is the official language of the country"* (a 20-year-old female Russian student); "*We speak Russian in our family, as no one speaks Kazakh. I have a basic vocabulary of Kazakh, but I find it difficult to construct sentences and I tend to be reserved, although I do use some elements of the Kazakh language in conversations with friends. It is evident that every citizen of Kazakhstan should possess a high level of proficiency in Kazakh*" (a 19-year-old female Russian student).

Linguistic reflection offers valuable insights into the understanding and perception of language and the language's situation, revealing the most polarized viewpoints. While language policy typically represents a 'top-down' approach to managing the linguistic environment, grassroots language activism is characterized by a 'bottom-up' approach. This reaction reflects a broader concern about the current state of language policies and their future implications, raising critical questions such as: "What awaits us?", "What will happen next?", and "What should we unite around?" These questions highlight a tension in the process of identity formation, addressing fundamental concerns about self-definition and purpose.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing exploration of ethno-linguistic identity among Kazakhstani youth by emphasizing the significant role of language in shaping identity, a subject widely discussed in sociolinguistic literature (Smagulova, 2006; Djuraeva, 2022; Tajfel, 1982/2010; Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2012; Zabrodskaja et al., 2023). The issue of identity, as understood in this research, aligns with the broader sociolinguistic

definitions of linguistic and ethnic identity, where language choices and practices reflect individuals' self-identification and their sense of belonging to specific socio-cultural groups (Phinney, 2005; May, 2005). The research demonstrates that language choice, particularly within educational institutions and family settings, plays a pivotal role in the formation of ethno-linguistic identity, corroborating earlier findings (Suleimenova, 2010; Suleimenova et al., 2016; Smagulova, 2008).

The data confirm the hypothesis that the language practices of Kazakhstani youth, especially students, are crucial in shaping their ethno-linguistic identity. As the research reveals, the selection of the language of instruction in universities significantly influences how students perceive their linguistic identity. This echoes previous studies on ethno-linguistic identity, which highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of identity, shaped by both sociopolitical changes and linguistic choices (Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney, 2005; Sachdev & Bourhis, 2005). The shift in identity is particularly pronounced within Kazakhstan's educational landscape, where the increasing adoption of the Kazakh language as a medium of instruction has reinforced its role in students' self-identification as part of the titular nation. However, the findings also suggest that the influence of Russian and English as dominant languages in education and social spheres continues to challenge the prominence of the Kazakh language. The prestige of Russian as a language of interethnic communication and English as a global language for economic and professional advancement complicates efforts to strengthen Kazakh as both a national and state language (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022b). This is consistent with previous studies that describe the complex linguistic landscape in Kazakhstan, where Russian and English still hold significant functional roles, despite policies promoting Kazakhization (Pavlenko, 2008; Smagulova, 2006; Ahn & Smagulova, 2022).

The multilingual context of Kazakhstan is reflected in the language practices within families, where parents play a critical role in shaping the linguistic environment and influencing their children's identity formation. This study found that many families still maintain a balance between Kazakh, Russian, and, increasingly, English, in their daily lives. This finding aligns with Zabrodskaja et al. (2023), who describe family language policy as a critical element in multilingual contexts, where linguistic ideologies and practices within families guide language transmission and reinforce linguistic identity. The increasing adoption of multilingualism in family settings mirrors the broader national language policy, which promotes proficiency in Kazakh, Russian, and English, aiming to prepare youth for a globalized world (Smagulova, 2008; Goodman & Montgomery, 2020). Notably, this research supports the view that language acquisition within families is not solely a product of state language policies, but also a reflection of parental attitudes toward language. The emphasis on English, driven by its global significance, often overshadows the Kazakh language, particularly in families with higher socio-economic status (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022). The results also echo findings by Catedral and Djuraeva (2018), who emphasized the historical and cultural factors influencing language preferences within families in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Despite efforts to elevate the status of the Kazakh language, its use remains limited in some contexts, a challenge highlighted in other studies on bilingualism and language revitalization in Kazakhstan (Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022a; Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). It is important to note that the policy of trilingualism has resulted in the development of a complex and pluralistic ethno-linguistic identity among students, where language use is influenced by both national policy and individual language preferences (Kytina & Ryzhova, 2017). While the trilingual education system does promote multilingualism, it does not guarantee equal language proficiency or its use in all contexts (Ahn & Smagulova, 2022). This disparity in access to language resources further complicates the formation of a unified linguistic identity (see Tlepbergen et al., 2023). The

results highlight the importance of constantly monitoring the effects of such policies, as language choice and student identity vary depending on the broader socio-political and educational context.

This study reveals that the ethno-linguistic identity of Kazakhstani youth is deeply intertwined with language practices within educational and family contexts. The multi-faceted nature of identity, shaped by both top-down policies and bottom-up family practices, highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic forces at play in Kazakhstan's rapidly evolving linguistic landscape. This research contributes to the broader discourse on identity formation in multilingual societies and offers insights into how language policies and practices influence the transformation of ethno-linguistic identities over time.

6. Conclusions

In Kazakhstan, with its multi-ethnic and multicultural context, ongoing migration processes, and reforms in language policy and education, there is a critical need to understand how these factors influence the formation of identity among young people and analyze the causes of its transformation. The research findings indicate that the mother tongue plays a crucial role in shaping ethnic identity. The data reveal that the majority of young respondents, regardless of their ethnic background, demonstrate a strong awareness of and alignment with their ethnic and linguistic identities.

Given the evolving linguistic situation, continuous reforms in the education system, and dynamic ethno-demographic changes in the country, the study of ethnic and linguistic identity among the younger generation holds significant theoretical and practical value. This research is essential not only for advancing linguistic science, but also for refining state programs in Kazakhstan aimed at fostering the spiritual and moral development of Kazakhstani youth. The analysis presented in this article highlights key trends influencing the ethno-linguistic consciousness of Kazakhstani students and identifies patterns in the anticipated evolution of the country's language situation.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of ethno-linguistic identity in multilingual contexts by reinforcing the view that identity is not static, but shaped by an ongoing interaction between language choices, family practices, and educational policies (Tajfel, 1982/2010; Umaña-Taylor, 2011). The findings suggest that Kazakhstan's youth are navigating multiple identities, influenced by their language of instruction, family language use, and external social factors, such as globalization and state language policies. This fluidity in identity mirrors the findings of other scholars who have examined multilingualism and identity in post-Soviet contexts (Pavlenko, 2008; Smagulova, 2006; Matsunaga et al., 2010; Catedral & Djuraeva, 2018).

Looking ahead, further research into ethno-linguistic identity from a sociolinguistic perspective is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of Kazakhstan's current linguistic landscape and its future trajectory. Key areas of inquiry include developing detailed classifications based on linguistic personalities, language proficiency levels, gender differences, intergenerational attitudes towards languages, and language choices. By addressing these factors, researchers can more accurately capture the complexity of Kazakhstan's polylingual and multi-ethnic society. Without such nuanced analysis, any characterization of the country's linguistic dynamics remains incomplete.

Future research should continue to explore the complex interplay between language policy, family language practices, and the sociolinguistic environment in shaping the identities of young people in Kazakhstan. Specifically, more attention should be given to understanding how the trilingual education policy affects different socio-economic groups and how it intersects with the evolving linguistic preferences of the younger

generation. The findings of Kucherbayeva and Smagulova (2023), which highlight the ongoing challenges in elevating the status of Kazakh within higher education, indicate a need for further investigation into how these policies influence long-term language practices and identity formation.

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