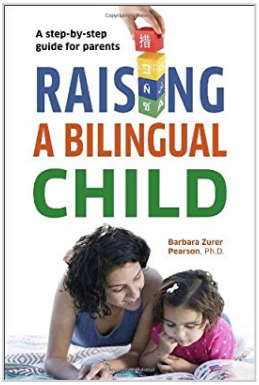

Raising a Bilingual Child (Living Language Series)

By Barbara Zurer Pearson, Living Language

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If you would like your children to experience the benefits of becoming bilingual, but you aren't sure how to teach them a second language, then **Raising a Bilingual Child** is the perfect step-by-step guide for you.

Raising a Bilingual Child provides parents with information, encouragement, and practical advice for creating a positive bilingual environment. It offers both an overview of why parents should raise their children to speak more than one language and detailed steps parents can take to integrate two languages into their child's daily routine.

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Editorial Review

Review
“A timely and well-written book! … [It] helps parents prepare their children for the future….”

--*J. Kevin Nugent, Ph.D., Director, The Brazelton Institute, Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard University; Professor, Child and Family Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst*

“This book is sure to become a classic! … Parents should appreciate this important book. Pearson … inspire[s] all of us to celebrate the richness of linguistic diversity in our lives.”

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“This is a book that inspires confidence that the choice of bilingualism is a good one for parents, for children, and for our society.”
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“I enjoyed reading *Raising a Bilingual Child* and found it informative and accessible.”
--*Chris Rosenberg, Principal, Starr King Elementary School, San Francisco*

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University of Miami. Those studies of bilingual infants and children have been published in the book

Language and Literacy in Bilingual Children. Most recently, Barbara Zurer Pearson worked on the *Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation* (*DELV*), a project to develop an innovative language assessment for children funded by the National Institutes of Health.

CHAPTER 4

Establishing a Bilingual Environment

In chapter 2, I discussed the issues involved in language development in general. Everything you learned for learning one language holds just as true for learning two or more languages. You see that, as parents, you do not teach children language, but you create better or worse environments in which your children's language develops. In this chapter, we explore special strategies for creating enriching environments within your household so that your child can learn a second (or third) language.

The key to raising bilingual children is for parents (or less often, the school) to establish the minority language. The language of the broader community–the language of school, commerce, government, and the mass media–is a given. In every culture, all healthy children learn the majority language, even when their parents do not. But families must make a special effort to "grow" both a majority language and another one. The minority language may be a heritage language that parents or grandparents have brought from another country, or it could be another language chosen by the parents for any of a variety of reasons. For example, it might be a second official language that children are expected to learn, as in Canada, Switzerland, or Hong Kong. Sometimes speakers of a country's majority language opt to educate their children in a language that they believe will have strategic importance later in the child's life, such as Spanish in the United States. Or it could be that the individual seeks to communicate in another modality, as with a spoken and a signed language.

For any given person being raised in a bilingual situation, we cannot know whether she will become actively bilingual or not. But we can be aware of trends. We can compare groups who are bilingual to others who seem to have the potential for bilingualism, but did not pursue it or did not achieve it. With my colleagues in the University of Miami Bilingualism Study Group, I explored the practices and ideas bilingual groups have in common. From these studies, I pinpoint the key ingredients in their experiences for fostering the second language. At the end of this chapter, I explore ways to take advantage of this knowledge in your families. Then, in chapter 5, you will hear from parents who have used these principles, and together we will evaluate how their strategies worked for them and how they might work for you.

I emphasize ways to strengthen the minority language because that is the more difficult case. However, the same principles
are effective for a child who is learning a new community language, such as an expatriate or a recent immigrant. Parents
wishing to encourage or reinforce the use of the community, or majority, language can also employ these strategies.

As you read this chapter, I'd like you to consider where your child will hear and use her languages and what other resources
are available to give the child's languages a broader context than just your nuclear family.

The Foundation for a Bilingual Family

If you do not buy a lottery ticket, you will not win. Similarly, if you do not maintain a bilingual environment, you will not have bilingual children. Luckily, the odds of children becoming bilingual are not like the odds of winning a lottery. If two languages loom large in your life, chances are they will be part of your child's life as well. But if you, the parents, are not actively using two languages daily, then bilingual upbringing must be a conscious construction on your part. Having access to meaningful
interactions in two language environments gives you the ticket to play. The stage is set for your family to become bilingual. But then you must actively seize the opportunity. You must want to make it happen, and you must believe that your actions can have an impact on whether it will happen.

Beliefs and Attitudes

Annick de Houwer, a psycholinguist in Belgium, suggests that these two beliefs on the part of the parents are the best predictors of whether children will learn two languages: Parents must have

• a positive attitude toward bilingualism and
• an "impact belief"–a belief that their own language practices have an impact on the child's practices.

It is crucial for you, as parents, to have an awareness of how your own language practices affect your child's learning, and you must use your knowledge of your role to insure the quality and quantity of your child's language exposure. These two beliefs usually go together, but either one can be absent. You probably know a parent with an impact belief but without a positive attitude toward bilingualism. For example, someone who has been speaking a minority language with his child–
and witnessing that she learns it–has an impact belief. He sees that his language behavior shapes his child's language behavior. But suppose that the child's teacher convinces this parent that his child's intellectual growth will be hampered if he continues to raise her with two languages. Now he no longer has a positive attitude toward bilingualism. He has
replaced it with a negative one, and the child, who had been on her way to becoming bilingual, loses the second language (amazingly quickly, it turns out).

The opposite situation is also all too common. One example comes from an intensive study of the Taiap people of Papua, New Guinea. In interviews with researcher Don Kulik, almost all the parents expressed satisfaction with their own bilingualism and a desire that their children also become bilingual in the local Taiap language and Tok Pisin, one of the important languages of the wider society. However, they were not aware of how their own language use affected their children's language
learning. They thought that it would happen outside the home and that what they spoke to the child made no difference.

We do not have to travel to New Guinea to find people with similar ideas. Many parents I heard from were like the Taiap speakers. As Mark and Cindy, an international couple living in Paris, said, “We just thought if we were in the countries where the other languages were spoken, it would happen on its own.” But despite the fact that they spent long periods of
time in France and Italy, their children heard primarily English addressed to them, and so far, at ages four and one, they have learned primarily English. The parents did not see what role they needed to play in order to capitalize on the opportunity that their living abroad presented to them.

So, neither belief is sufficient by itself. If parents lack one belief or the other, the environment they provide for their children will likely lead to weak or nonexistent learning of one of the languages. With both a positive attitude toward bilingualism and an “impact belief” that their own language use shapes their child’s language use, parents will be motivated to take the practical steps that foster both first- and secondlanguage learning.

Practical Considerations

In police lingo, parents must establish “motive and opportunity” for the minority language. They need to find ways to give children

• enough reasons for them to want to use the minority language and
• opportunities for enough exposure to it for them to be able to learn it.

Where will the “input,” the interactions that provide the raw material for children to learn the minority language, come from? Who will speak it with them, and in what situations? Parents must specifically consider where speakers are found who can use the other language. If you, yourselves, are to be major sources of the second language, it may be useful for you to record your interactions for a week or keep a diary that will give you an idea of what your language practices are actually like.

You also need to take the child’s perspective, not your own, on the value of the second language. You cannot assume that your own desire to use the language will translate automatically into the same desire in your child. Although it is usual for children to adopt parents’ attitudes and for them to want to please their parents, the use of the language must
have value in the child’s world, from the child’s point of view. How will you make the language attractive and indispensable for your child, so that, with time, mastering it will evolve into the child’s own goal?

The Odds That a Child Will Become Bilingual

Some small studies from these last decades have indicated that not every family that embarks on bilingual upbringing ends up with children who can use their two languages comfortably. Until very recently, we did not have any evidence from large-scale studies about bilingual “success rates” in large, unselected populations. Early accounts of child bilinguals were often case studies of linguists’ children (for example, Leopold, Vihman, and Deuchar)–children whose parents were knowledgeable about language and cared deeply enough about it to make it their life’s work. I am not suggesting that all children of linguists will become bilingual and all others will not, but there may be more attention to language in the households of linguists than in the
average home. Thus, they would not serve as a model for most families. More importantly, if a linguist’s child did not become bilingual, the parent did not write about it, so we do not know how many books about incomplete bilingual learning never got written.

A relatively large survey of bilingual outcomes is reported by Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert, a parent and member of the editorial board of the Bilingual Family Newsletter. She surveyed more than one hundred families, readers of the Newsletter and participants in a bilingual family chat- list, about four-fifths of them living in Europe. Even in this self- selected group, the overall percentage of children whose parents described them as passive bilinguals was about 20%, and even higher among the seven-to-eleven-year-olds, for whom the percentage was closer to 40%.

In a larger, less selective study, Annick de Houwer and colleagues found that approximately 25% of children of bilinguals were not active bilinguals. The researchers contacted 18,000 Flemish families in Belgium, a country with two official languages, each in its monolingual region, and asked parents to list the language(s) spoken at home by each individual in the home. Of the 2,250 households where parents reported speaking more than one language at home, 75% had children who were also bilingual.

The Belgian results provide a "half-empty/half-full" perspective on parents' expectations. We can look at the half-full glass and say, "That's good; three out of four children in bilingual households become active bilinguals." Or we can take the half-empty viewpoint and say, "One fourth of the children in bilingual households do not become bilingual.
Why not?!" Because 75% of the children in de Houwer's survey were reported to be bilingual, we see that it does not take an exceptional family to raise a bilingual child: it was the majority outcome in this sample. By the same token, though, we see that it is not an exceptional case when a child in a bilingual context does not become bilingual.

Factors Affecting Whether the Child Becomes Bilingual

Exposure, Exposure, Exposure: The Input Cycle

Of all the relevant factors for enhancing language development in general that we discuss in this chapter–for example, positive attitude, frequent use, or official status–quantity of input is the most important for learning a second language. Without interacting with people using the language, no learning takes place. Without enough interaction, learning can take place, but the children do not reach enough of a comfort level in the language that they will willingly use it. In our University of Miami infant study, we found that the children with too little time in such interactions–less than about 20% of their waking hours–learned words and phrases but did not make their own sentences in the language.

When the child uses a minority language, she invites more input in that language, so the cycle is self-reinforcing, as in Figure 7. A greater amount of language input leads to greater proficiency in the language, which leads to more use, which invites more input, and the cycle starts again. On the other hand, if the child does not use the minority language, it stands to reason that she is using a different language and getting less exposure to the minority language, so she develops less proficiency, which leads to using the minority language even less, and that leads to getting even less input in that language.

Other Factors

Still, this system does not exist in a vacuum. Other factors play a role in how much input is delivered and how much is taken up by the child.

The Connection between Proficiency and Use

It is common sense that children will not use a language if they experience too much difficulty getting their ideas across in it. So, short of grammar drills, parents must do all they can to boost children's facility with the language. Here, again, amount of exposure is critical, but the age at which the child begins hearing the language is also important. A child with an earlier exposure to a language will have an easier time learning it than the child with a later exposure to it, even if the quantity
of language input is the same for both. So the younger child will use the language more and acquire greater fluency in it. But as the arrows in Figure 7 indicate, this is a two-way street. Greater proficiency leads to more use. More use leads to greater proficiency. But less proficiency leads to less use and eventually to even lower proficiency.

The Connection between Attitudes and Use

Similarly, positive attitudes of parents, siblings, and peers toward a language can add value to the language and make it more attractive to the child. A language in and of itself is generally interesting only to linguists. What makes a language interesting to the average person is who speaks it and what they say in it. Are there children who speak the language that your child would like to be around? Do you know songs in it that your child would enjoy singing with you? Do people react favorably, and perhaps comment on how impressed they are, when they hear you speak the language? When children feel that their
language is special (but not strange), their positive attitude encourages their use of the language, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the cycle. Conversely, if parents, siblings, or peers think, for example, that the people who speak the language are backward or stupid, or if others make jokes about it, their negative attitudes will subtract value, lead to reduced enthusiasm for using the language, attract less input, decrease proficiency, and so on.

In some cases, the amount of input alone will make the difference between learning two languages or not, but attitudes affect how eager one is to find the input. In a study of trilinguals by de Houwer, parental language patterns accounted for 84% of the variation in the children's language patterns. That is a very high percentage, which tells us that the children's use of the three languages reflected the parents' language patterns very closely. Still, parents' language use was not 100% of the story. Patterns of exposure to the minority language are key, but there is also room for attitudes, values, and social circumstances to influence children's language choices.

In practical terms, the amount of input available is more crucial for the minority language. We and others have found that children need more exposure to the minority language than to the community language for the same measure of learning. Part of this asymmetry may stem from the background presence of the dominant language in the environment through television, neighbors, advertisements, etc. But also very powerful is the natural attraction of the majority language culture for the child.

The majority language has especially high instrumental value for the child. For adults, the instrumental value of a language has to do with getting jobs or better access to government services and health care. For children, the majority language is their social lifeline; it is their link to their peer group and to the popular culture that helps them fit in with this peer group. In France and Canada, French is an official language. It is supported by the educational system, and used in movies, music, TV, and advertising jingles. Signs everywhere you look proclaim the importance of French. By contrast, the French Canadian communities in New England and the French- and Creole-speaking Haitian-American community in Florida have relatively little political and economic power or cultural influence, so the utility of French or French-Creole is much narrower, and the language has less visibility to the child. In such a context, there is also less pressure from the community to learn French, so more of the child's motivation must come from the home.

When the Cycle Is Weakened

What factors can tip the scales toward the minority language? What influences how much time the child will spend speaking the language, and how much value the child will attach to it in her daily life?

The link between proficiency and use of a language (in the input cycle in Figure 7) seems like common sense: if one does not speak a language well, one will not use it. If one reports using a language often, we can infer that the person has some skill in that language. In fact, though, this dynamic works better for minority languages than for the majority language. The extreme social desirability of the majority language can overwhelm the other factors–here, input and profi ciency–and cancel out their effect. For example, California researchers Hakuta and d'Andrea found, among a large group of Mexican teenagers in California, that skill in Spanish predicted use of Spanish, but the same was not true of English. The teenagers' use of English was better predicted by their attitude toward English than by their objectively measured skill in it. In fact, most of them tended to overestimate their skill in English, which may partially account for their motivation to use a language that they did not speak very well.

All Children Can Learn More Than One Language

In my review of the literature, I found no evidence that the characteristics of the child make any difference for bilingual first-language acquisition (BFLA) beyond those that affect monolingual first-language acquisition, too, like poor hearing, mental retardation, autism, and so on. Personality traits are largely irrelevant. Children who are fast learners or not, who are painfully shy or not, or who have a talent for word games or not, all become native speakers of their first language. Individual differences may become relevant as the bilingual candidates become older, but by then they are no longer childhood bilinguals. Just as we have universal learning of one first language, I know of no cases of a healthy child being incapable of learning two or more first languages when both are indispensable.

Even a second language–that is, a language learned after the first language is firmly in place–always gets learned if the stakes are high enough. We saw in chapter 3 that second-language acquisition is not always as easy and automatic for small children as we are used to thinking. But I have not heard of children with "motive and opportunity"–even children with special needs–failing to acquire a second language. For example, in the University of Miami Infant Vocalizations study, two of the children in the Down syndrome group were growing up with two languages in the home. Having Down syndrome definitely affects children's language development. Their articulation is much poorer, their vocabulary smaller, and their grammar simpler than that of typically-developing children. They are generally several years behind norms for their age and may never reach full acquisition. But in their homes, these children with Down syndrome were learning two languages, each at the rate of development and level of profi ciency that we would expect for them in learning one language; thus, they could interact with both Spanish- speaking and English-speaking relatives and friends of their families.

I consider in chapter 6 how to evaluate whether dropping a second language could improve a difficult situation for a child with special needs, but so far, we have not found any conditions that automatically preclude a child from learning a second language.

No Language Is Harder or Easier Than Another

Language Type

There is nothing that makes one language or another easier or harder for any individual or group to acquire as a first language. A child born to Chinese parents is not better suited physically to learn Chinese than a child born to Mexican parents. If that Chinese child is adopted by Australian parents soon after birth and raised in Australia, she is as well suited to English as she would have been to Chinese and no less so than other Australian children. We have seen that children start learning about the language around them while they are in the womb but that learning remains flexible for several years and can be easily modified by new experience.

Similarly, there are no pairs of languages that cannot be learned as first languages as easily as any other pairs by a bilingual-learning child. It seems likely that adult second-language learning can be easier or harder depending on the language pairs, but the extent to which two languages are similar or different will probably not make a difference to a child. Very young children may not be aware of the linguistic relationships that adults can notice. So, for example, the fact that the vocabularies in some language pairs (like Spanish and English) have many cognates, or words with similar sound and meanings, would not necessarily mean it will be easier for the child to learn those languages than a pair (like Spanish and Japanese) without many words that have common roots.

Social Status

There is nothing in a language itself that makes it more or less learnable for a young child, but its status matters very much in determining how much input in the language is available. Using the example of French again, in most areas of the U.S., French is not associated with a specific immigrant group but enjoys high status as an international language and as one of the languages of the United Nations. People who speak French can identify with a well-known culture and enjoy a sense of pride in it. There are many speakers, possibly even young native speakers, that you can find. Less abstractly, there is a large body of literature in that language, and children's books and videos are available (at least on the internet or through outlets in France or Canada, if not locally).

Media Support

Some languages are easier to learn because they are easier to find. Readily available children's materials, for example, provide families with "text backup" and give the language more value for the child. Tintin in France, Monica in Brazil, and other giants of children's popular culture are strong allies for minority languages. Children are more excited to remember what Winnie the Pooh says–and sings–than the words of routine admonitions to clean their room or brush their teeth. They look forward eagerly to the next adventure of Babar and beg to have the books read to them until they can read the books themselves. With colorful pictures and wording that is easy to understand, these stories draw the child into the language. Some of the characters are associated specifically with the language they were created in: Asterix or Le Petit Prince in French, or Pocket Monsters in Japanese, can create interest in that language, but international storybook characters can help interest a child in any language–provided the works have been translated and published or filmed in that language. Sesame Street is produced in several languages other than English, and you might find, as my colleagues Hans and Anna did, that you prefer the German version. They report that the pacing of Sesamstrasse is slower and calmer. Children reading about or watching Big Bird or Mickey Mouse and other Sesame Street or Disney characters may not even notice that the book is written in Spanish, or they will accept that these characters, like themselves, may speak English sometimes and Swahili at other times. Thus, the characters also become bilingual models for children.

(A survey of media resources is found in the appendix.)

For slightly older children, reading leads to both greater proficiency in and retention of a language. People who are readers of a language are less likely to lose it later. In Miami, our research group kept an ongoing survey of our subjects' language profiles, and the importance of reading for the minority language skills was demonstrated by our results. We always asked students their language history and which language they preferred for various activities. The answers differed according to the
activity at hand. For church, for example, our students would be more likely to choose Spanish (or Chinese or whatever their family language was), while for school activities and music, they were more likely to choose English. Not even the popular Latin salsa music won out over American pop music. (There were some interesting asymmetries in the languages people preferred to use for arguing, swearing, or telling jokes.) More to the point, the only people in our surveys who said that
they preferred to speak the minority language in most situations were those who had not come to the U.S. until well into elementary school– after they had learned to read in their first language. We do not know if this happened because those bilinguals who did not begin to acquire their second language until they were old enough to have learned to read
had spent a longer amount of time immersed in their first language, so their skills became consolidated, or whether the reading itself played a role in consolidating their skills. (This is a good topic for a research project, and perhaps an enterprising student will soon take it up.)

Books provide both additional exposure to a language and more motivation for language learning. Whether reading knowledge is the cause or the result of greater language use does not change the utility of books as carriers of language and culture. Literacy is not a necessary part of knowing a language–people across centuries and around the world can speak very well in languages they do not read–but it is a good example of one way in which the value of a language can be enhanced for the child so that the child will seek more input through that medium.

Songs in the language are even better than books and videos. Songs are an excellent way for children to practice a language in a non-stressful situation with a lot of repetition. They are also an effective "hook" for pulling a child back into the minority language. You can strike up a song almost anytime!

Family Factors

With respect to learning a minority language, older siblings are sometimes helpful and sometimes not. Bilingual author George
Saunders (see Case Study 5 in chapter 5) reports that in his family, the older siblings set a good example for the younger children. The younger ones were less likely to question why they were speaking German to their father, who was also an English speaker. As far as they knew, that was the normal state of affairs. More commonly, though, older siblings bring more of the majority language into the house. They have majority-language friends who come to play, and they know about
TV shows, comics, and movies in the majority language that you might prefer to avoid. When children are small, you are the major source of outside materials for your children, but as they get older, the children themselves play a larger role in selecting what they read or view on TV and whom they will play with.

Children in the same family share many characteristics that typically have an influence on language learning: socioeconomic status, literacy levels of the parents, etc. But the family dynamic shifts with each child, and the family's fortunes may have changed between births. Sometimes new babies are a chance to start fresh. In some families we met, older children who were somewhat less willing to speak the minority language became convinced that the new baby in their household understood

only the minority language. For example, in Case Study 4 in chapter 5, older siblings who were reluctant to speak the minority language with their parents nonetheless spoke it to the infant without prompting from the parents.

Community Factors

Finally, bilingual families do best when they do not have to do all the work of maintaining the minority language by themselves. A cohesive community of heritage-language speakers can make a big difference in the vigor of that language. By "community," we can mean a formal structure like the Welsh Language Board, which recognizes a role for government intervention to help ensure the perpetuation of a Welsh national identity through the heritage language. Or we can mean a single parish church or social agency that provides services to minority-language speakers in the minority language and in many ways keeps the culture of the home country alive and vibrant. By creating an ethnic enclave, they create a context for maintaining the minority language and culture. In her 2005 study for the Welsh Language Board, Gathercole found that the level of Welsh use was higher among parents with Welsh-speaking friends. When parents had friends who wanted to socialize informally in the minority language, they were more likely to use Welsh themselves. A social network with religious or community activities and sports in the medium of the second language makes the minority language still more useful.

The most obvious tool that communities have to bolster the minority language is the schools. We found in our research in Miami elementary schools that the effect of teaching half of the subjects at school in Spanish could more than counterbalance the effect on the children's Spanish scores of using less Spanish in the home. All of the Spanish- speaking children's scores–in all combinations of high or low socioeconomic status and bilingual Spanish-English or Spanish-only households– were much better in Spanish when they attended schools where half of the subjects each day were taught in Spanish. Avoiding the use of English in the home was somewhat less crucial to maintaining Spanish skills when children could be schooled in Spanish as well as in English. (Note that in this study, the presence of English in the home had almost no effect on the children's English scores because English was already favored by virtue of being the community language. This study is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.)

Globalization of English Makes It Harder

Language shift is a phenomenon in which a speech community of one language shifts to speaking another language. A global trend like language shift can have an effect on household language practices, too. Globalization, which contributed to the spread of English, makes the "smaller" languages harder to maintain now than they might have been even a generation ago. The days of the British Empire may be over, but still, "the sun never sets on the English language." Well-financed mass media and the internet give English even greater strength. Although internet content is being developed in Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic, for example, the overwhelming value of English internationally is well entrenched even in cyberspace, where 80% of the content is estimated to be in English, giving it an advantage over other languages. So it is not only the public rhetoric in the U.S. against languages other than English, but also international commercial, cultural, and political forces that make English one of the easiest second languages for others to learn and one of the hardest first languages to get children to set aside long enough to learn another language.

Although the number of different languages in the world is over six thousand, there are relatively few languages spoken widely. Eighty percent of the world's population speaks one (or more) of eighty-three major languages; forty percent (half of the 80%) speak one (or more) of only eight major languages. So the

shift to the major languages is very strong (and not of recent origin). The pace of language shift, which has been well-documented by language geographers, compounds the difficulty for would-be bilingual families in many parts of the world.

The process is not always evident to the nonprofessional. We found, for example, that language shift in Miami is masked by ongoing immigration. Spanish appears to be a growing community language, but study after study shows that the children of immigrants there (the second generation) are less likely to become fluent in Spanish than were the children of previous generations of immigrants. The unequal weights of two languages cannot be attributed solely to globalization.

In any given region of the world, even a relatively "small" language, like Italian in the Veneto region of Italy, can be dominant. Until a generation ago, a local Venetian dialect, not Italian, was spoken in most homes. Now, Italian is used more in public spheres, but it also holds sway in the home. So, places where two languages are used interchangeably may be finding that the more local language is losing ground.

Organizing Your Home for Your Child's Bilingual Language Development

Whatever the language combinations involved, the child must have adequate exposure to the minority language. In this next section, we consider specific ways to provide "motive and opportunity" for the minority language in the child's daily life.

Your choice of strategies for your home will depend on what your goals are and what language resources you have. I will present the major household language strategies here and describe how they work. Then, a self-evaluation survey will enable you to see where you have strengths. Where you find weak points in your current situation, you will need to find extra strategies to compensate for them. After we see from the testimonials in chapter 5 how people have used these strategies in their lives, I will offer some evaluations of the strategies. I can tell you ahead of time, though, that no one method works better or worse than the others–in general. They only work better or worse in a given situation.

The four major strategies are described below. The shorthand names for them are:

- One Parent—One Language (OPOL)
- Minority Language at Home (mL@H)
- "Time and Place" (T&P)
- Mixed Language Policy (MLP)

(We will see that there are some subcategories of these strategies. The strategies can be subdivided in various ways, and they are often combined, but overall, they represent the major dimensions of the logical alternatives.)

Note that the guidelines presented here are to be followed flexibly. While consistency is considered a key element in one's day-to-day language behaviors, rigidity is not. It is not at all uncommon for families to switch strategies from time to time, especially when circumstances change or when they perceive that things are not going as they wish. In fact, in Barron-Hauwaert's survey (mentioned above) of more than one hundred bilingual families, 20% reported switching strategies. In chapter 5, we will see that the proportion of families I consulted who changed to adapt to changing circumstances is at least that high.

One Parent—One Language (OPOL)

In families that have adopted the One Parent—One Language strategy (OPOL), each parent always addresses the child in a language different from the other parent. Most often, the parents both speak their native languages, but OPOL, like any of the other household strategies discussed here, can be implemented with a nonnative speaker as a language model. (See Cases 5, 6, 7, and 8 in chapter 5 and a special section below for advice for nonnative-speaker parents.) In one common version of
OPOL, either parent can speak the minority language, while the other uses the community language with the child. If the parents each speak a different minority language, the child can hear two minority languages in the home, plus a third, majority language in the community. In 1902, in the first printed advice that we are aware of on how to raise a
bilingual child, Grammont proposed OPOL. It has continued to be the favored strategy in many parts of the world, especially in Europe and Canada. (See Cases 1 to 8 in chapter 5.)

Minority Language at Home

The Minority Language at Home strategy (mL@H) involves a situation where both parents (whether both are native speakers of the minority language or not) speak only the minority language in the home. If parents are bilingual, they most often choose to speak the majority language outside of home. This plan, of course, is an option only if both parents are capable of speaking the minority language relatively fluently. It was for many years "out of favor," but is gaining ground as a recommendation, as it provides more of the minority language for the child than OPOL generally does. One of the rationales for OPOL has been the claim by its proponents that it is easiest for the child to separate the use of the languages by person: French is "Daddy's language"; Vietnamese is "Mommy's language." We certainly observe that children accept that principle very well, applying it sometimes more consistently than the parents. There is no research to my knowledge, however, that specifically compares the OPOL approach to other approaches, like mL@H. When linguist Margaret Deuchar's book, a case study of her older daughter's bilingual language development, was published in 2000, mL@H was uncommon enough that Deuchar felt she needed
to explain it and argue for its legitimacy as a choice for elite bilinguals. She and others who have used mL@H report that children are also quite capable of using "place" (instead of "person") to regulate their language choice. With mL@H, they seem quite comfortable speaking the different languages to the same person in two different contexts.

"Time and Place" (T&P)

The third strategy is sometimes called the "Time and Place" (T&P) method. Bilingual school programs are often organized along these lines to vary which language is used both by time and by place: mornings in the minority language and afternoons in the majority language, or social studies in English one week and in Spanish the next, usually in a different classroom, so both time and place alternate. T&P is a grab-bag of "non-person" strategies that sounds like the "place" strategy of
mL@H except that it is less a description of the family's daily routine and more a description of fairly regular departures from it. Families who use OPOL, for example, may decide to do so only during the week and switch to mL@H on the weekend, often with a trip to another area or a visit from a monolingual speaker of the minority language. Other families report a yearly cycle: mL@H for nine months of the year followed by a complete switch to the minority language, inside and outside the home, for three months, often during a trip to a country where that language is spoken.

When parents are contemplating changing their strategy, a complete upheaval of the household routines can be an excellent device for carrying out the transition. For example, an OPOL family may spend a year in another country and switch to mL@H when they come back.

Mixed Language Policy (MLP)

Use of the Mixed Language Policy (MLP) is reported in a number of geographic areas (for example, Miami and Singapore). I have seen MLP described and know many people who practice it, but I have never seen "directions" for it–perhaps because there are no special techniques associated with it. Parents use the language that suits the topic or situation. Some go back and forth between monolingual modes for different topics. They may talk with children about school in the school language, then switch to the family language to discuss an upcoming wedding, and then switch back to the community language to discuss a parade in their town. Others consistently use both languages in all utterances, and their children are encouraged to use the "bilingual mode" from the outset. Linguist Anthea Fraser Gupta says that MLP is the preferred strategy for bilingual and multilingual families in the areas of Asia that she is most familiar with, Singapore and India. Parents would not be "behaving naturally," she contends, if they stopped switching languages for their children. People from those countries find it odd that so many writers, "the experts," have proscriptions against it.

In the implementation of MLP, language choice is dictated by topic or situation and is set by the speakers: you answer in the language that you were addressed in. As in bilingual discourse in general (see chapter 3), "trigger words" switch the language. If you are responding to a code-switched utterance, you respond in the language that it ended in. Or, you can initiate a new topic in either language.

I found no parents to talk to me about it, although several said they found themselves "code- switching madly," whatever the strategy. In Barron-Hauwaert's survey, a few parents said they ended up using MLP after starting in another system. I am sure that MLP is the basis of many more bilingual exchanges, if not bilingual households, than are typically discussed.

However, I do not recommend this strategy for families who are making a conscious choice to raise their children bilingually. As we saw above in the discussion of language shift, "free market" forces lead to a bias toward English (or another local majority language). MLP does not specifically carve out space for the minority language. If it were up to me and there were a particular language that meant a lot to me, I would not leave it to chance. I would be sure to make the time and the space for it and give every advantage to the minority language. I would want to know that I did everything I knew how to do in order to overcome the "linguistic inertia" that leads inevitably toward exclusive use of the majority language. I would make it an explicit goal to help my child achieve a comfort level in the minority language–and we will see in chapter 7 that the majority language will flourish just fine, especially if children are schooled in it at for least part of the day from the time they enter kindergarten.

General Considerations for Bilingual Families

How Much of the Time Will Each Language Be Spoken?

If one parent will be the source of the minority language, how much time will that parent be at home, and how much interaction with the children can be expected of the parent during that time? We mentioned earlier that, as a general rule, research groups like ours have found that around 20% of the child's waking hours, or approximately fifteen hours a week, in the minority language would be a bare minimum. Some researchers specify that children participants in their studies must spend 30% or more of their time in the minority language (approximately twenty-five hours a week).

If the number of hours is less than twenty, what other sources of the language can you supplement the child's minority language exposure with? Can any of the child's exposure come from people who are monolingual

in the minority language, rather than from bilinguals who share the majority language with the child?

What Language Will the Parents Speak with Each Other?

In deciding which language to speak with each other, the easiest thing to do is to continue with whatever strategy you had been using before, but the birth of a child is also an opportunity to reconsider. Has the proficiency balance in your family shifted? Perhaps you originally spoke Finnish together because your Finnish wife did not speak Swedish comfortably, but now, after several years together in Sweden, her Swedish is better than your Finnish. Or, you may want to consider changing to the minority language together if the amount of the minority language the child would otherwise hear is at the bottom end of the spectrum.

My respondents report that it took about four to six weeks for a conscious language switch to be accomplished. During those weeks, they found they had to remind themselves of which language to use and persevere when it felt awkward. But after about six weeks (if they got that far), they forgot that they had ever used a different language together. (Note that these were people with pretty much equal skill in both languages.)

How Well Does Each Parent Understand the Other's Language?

Is the spouse who does not understand a language willing to learn some of it along with the child? In many situations, it happens automatically, but, for example, the aforementioned survey by Barron-Hauwaert shows that monolingual fathers were less likely to do so. If one parent does not understand one of the languages, what provisions can you make in order to ensure that he or she is not excluded?

For example, Aviva is a native English speaker living in Israel who is married to Marc, a Hebrew speaker with just a rudimentary knowledge of English. He was reluctant to have his children raised speaking English as well as Hebrew because he would not understand them when they spoke English. Aviva made a pact with him that she and the children would never use English as a "secret language" to specifi cally exclude him. She speaks English with their four children more when he is not present, but if he is present, she tries to have one person translate for him to keep him abreast of what is going on. It has more or less worked out over time–and Marc's English has also improved. It is a little harder when Aviva's relatives from the U.S. are visiting; because they tend to speak fast and all together, Marc finds their English conversation more difficult to follow. Note that this situation can arise even when there is no language difference! (In my household, my Southern husband finds the pace of my New York relatives' after-dinner discussions hard to follow, too.)

What Language Will the Minority Language Parent(s) Speak Outside the Home and with Others?

How Will You Handle Three-Way Conversations?

When children consistently use a different language with each parent, it is hard to imagine how the child will address them both without explicitly addressing either one. Each family evolves its own plan. George Saunders (whose story I report in chapter 5) details the plan adopted by his German- and English-learning children to handle exactly that situation. They would address one parent by name and speak in the language of that parent, letting the other parent overhear. If a question needed to be addressed to the other parent, the child would switch languages for the question.

One consequence of OPOL is that in three-way conversations, there will be “non-converging dialogue”–that is, a conversation where the speakers respond to each other in a different language from the one in which they were addressed. Many people have described the facility with which even small children go back and forth between languages within one conversation, especially when the language pattern is fixed by person, as it is in OPOL. Each individual is in “monolingual mode” for speaking but “bilingual mode” for listening. OPOL takes advantage of this capability to allow three-way conversations. For instance, the father in an OPOL household may say something in French, and the mother may add something in English to the father’s comment. The child could then respond in either language. As many families report to be the usual case, the father continues in French, so that two people are talking to one another each using a different language, not the one they are addressed in.

My friend Odette reports that a common practice in bilingual households in her area of western Canada is for the parents to stick with their respective languages but insert key terms from the other language for the topic under consideration. So, in a bilingual conversation about a skating rink, for example, the English speaker might insert “patins,” the French word for “skates,” in an otherwise English response to a French question. Then, in the mostly French continuation of this sentence, the
speaker might substitute the word “rink” for the French “patinoire.” In general, she says, both adults and children in two-parent households tend to switch languages more when both parents are present with the child than when the child is alone with just one parent.

As I discuss in chapter 3, non-converging dialogues are one manifestation of a bilingual mode of speech and are not unique to OPOL. They sound difficult to monolinguals, and some bilinguals are adamant about avoiding them, especially in conversations with just one other person, but large numbers of bilinguals are not shy about using this bilingual mode and, in fact, profess to prefer it. There is an interesting literary genre developing where bilingual authors revel in the luxury of flowing
lyrically into and out of each language. (See chapter 8.) Similarly, several of my respondents spoke of the happy chatter in two languages that they revert to in the company of childhood friends. In many families where the parents use the minority language with each other and in addressing the child, the child responds in English. That may not be the pattern you
are aiming for, but it assures us that children–and you–can handle it.

Which Language(s) Will You Speak Outside the Home?

Some families opt to use the majority language with each other when they are outside the home. The threshold of the house is the cue to switch languages. Other families (like the Sundarramans, Case Study 9 in chapter 5) use the minority language with the family regardless of physical location. They use it in the home, outside the home, in the U.S., and abroad–whenever they are together.

Some people switch to the community language so as not to stand out. Other parents continue to address the child in “their” language for one-on-one exchanges with the child as long as it is not specifically impolite to someone present. (Of course, standards of politeness vary in different countries and need to be negotiated in a manner appropriate to wherever you fi nd yourself.)

The key is to take the temperature of the environment where you are. Are you in a situation where speaking another language will be received warmly? Your use of a different language may make others feel uncomfortable. It is very common for people in the presence of conversations in a language they don’t understand to assume that bad things are being said about them. One mother also recounted that she got worse service outside the home when people heard her talking a minority language with her children.

School-age children, in particular, are likely to express their embarrassment when you speak another language to them in front of their friends, or children who they hope will be their friends. They do not want to appear different in any way. If your child asks you directly or indirectly not to address her in your language in public, I think the best thing to do is go along with it without any fuss. This may also be a signal, though, that you have not been reinforcing your child's self-esteem as a bilingual enough. So, not in response to the child at the time she asks, but soon and often, praise the child's bilingualism. You might praise her to a third person in the child's hearing, or in other ways build her pride in speaking two languages.

How Will You Handle Having Guests in the House?

This decision generally depends on the language resources of the guest, on whose guest it is, and also on how long the guest is staying. As much as possible, parents like to stick with the "proper" language for the child. Minority language guests are a great boon.

You may be tempted to switch to a monolingual guest's majority language when speaking to your children in front of the guest because the switch is only for a short time. But remember, some out-of-town guests stay for a long while. Even local guests may end up being regular visitors, so the policy you decide on should work for the long term as well as the short term.

Parents may accommodate their guests in one language, but, as in OPOL, address the children in the usual language. The children can end up overhearing the guest's language, but unless they are to be involved in extensive conversation, they can continue to respect their "other-language" policy. Children can answer the guest politely in the guest's language but continue to address short comments to their parents in the minority language. If a parent and child have something
lengthy to discuss that cannot wait, they can excuse themselves to take care of the matter.

Will the Language Policy Be the Same in the Presence of Other Children?

When other majority-language-speaking children are visiting, parents and children are both likely to be tempted to switch to the majority language, but it is generally not necessary. Aned, a parent of two Spanish- and English-learning children in Miami, feels comfortable sticking with Spanish with her children when English-speaking friends of the children are visiting. She speaks to her children in Spanish, but translates, or has a child translate, for the friend. (Another parent
reports doing this, too. She points out that it's the same dynamic that she uses with her husband.) On the other hand, the Guerlins in Santa Fe (Case 2 in chapter 5) made a point of having the father address the son (in middle childhood) in English when the son was with his friends to be more inclusive of the friends.

For the most part, you will see that children (like adults) are capable of setting their conversational "response-meters" to monolingual mode and producing responses in the language that they had been addressed in. In mL@H, the family uses two monolingual mode settings: monolingual in the minority language in the home, and monolingual in the community language outside the home. But they may need to hear in bilingual mode in the home when there is someone in their midst who can speak only the majority language. Some members of the family use the majority language with guests, leaving other family members to continue in the minority language. As we see below with the Mixed Language Policy (MLP), bilingual mode is an alternative for speaking as well as for hearing.

Can Parents Who Are Nonnative Speakers Be Adequate Language Models for Their Children?

In my opinion, the stories in this book from parents of bilingual children demonstrate that parents do not have to be bilingual themselves. (See Case Studies 13, 16, 22—25.) The stories in Case Studies 5—8 and 21 also make it clear that using a nonnative language with your child can work. Parents should not refrain from speaking the second language just because it is not their native tongue and they fear transmitting their errors and their foreign accent in it. As long as you have a desire to do it, and have reasonable fluency in the language, in most cases the extra opportunity you provide for your children to practice the language outweighs the potential inconvenience of their picking up your errors. You can use this opportunity to improve your skills, too, through contact with other speakers, records, CDs, or videos. Even reading aloud from children's books will provide standard grammar and authentic idioms for parent and child to learn from together.

That said, majority language parents with skills in other languages may feel the same motivations as minority language speakers–that they want their children to grow up knowing their parents in the parents' "own" language. The emotional arguments for the native language that we heard in chapter 1 are as valid of course for the majority language speaker as for the minority language speaker. If you feel you want to relate to your child in the language you spoke as a child, no one can argue with those strong feelings. As we see in chapter 5, you do not have to be the source of the minority language for your child. There are other ways to provide exposure to it. A parent is one of the most convenient and reliable sources of speech in a minority language but is by no means the only possible one.

The key point, however, is that if you desire to use your nonnative language, your nonnative status is not a reason to hold back. Several of the parents who contributed to this book were nonnative speakers of the language they used with their child. They were hesitant at the outset. They questioned: Will I know enough words? Will I be able to pull it off? Will it ever feel natural? They all answered "yes." In fact, Martin, one of our parent-respondents, embarked on teaching his newborn son Yiddish on the basis of a couple of years of study in college, several years of genealogical research, and membership in a Yiddish book group. He says that now, after ten years, it feels funny to speak to any child–not just his own–in a language other than Yiddish. Author Jane Merrill hesitated, too. For a year after her twins were born, she says she stewed about whether she could speak a nonnative language with them. At that point, a friend cautioned her that if she was going to do it, she shouldn't wait any longer. She went home that afternoon and said, "Bonjour, les bébés," and never looked back. It is ideal to start at birth, well before the child's first attempts at speaking, but if you didn't start then, you haven't lost the opportunity. The message is, "Start now. Now is better than later, and also better than never."

There are published accounts that we have referred to of parents who spoke a nonnative language with their children: Jane Merrill, an American who spoke French to her twins on the outskirts of New York City; George Saunders, an Australian who taught his three children German; Margaret Deuchar, a British mother who joined her Cuban husband in speaking Spanish with their children; and Jameelah Muhammed, an American in Washington, D.C., who speaks Spanish to her two children. The skill levels of the people I heard from ranged from more than ten years living abroad to Martin's two years of college Yiddish. As Janette in Wisconsin said, "You're not going to have to deliver an academic paper in the language. You have to tell your child to put on his socks and drink his juice." This is not too much different from the situations of the many foreign-born parents who speak an accented version of the community language with their children with no harm done.

The nonnative-speaking parents I consulted had these three habits in common: They had excellent

dictionaries for the target language, both a bilingual one to find the words or phrases they were looking for and an unabridged monolingual dictionary with which they could learn about the new words in their own context, not through the lens of the other language. They had native speakers whom they could consult; many traveled with their children to a country where the language was spoken more widely or sought out expatriates in their own country. George Saunders, in the days before the Internet, used short-wave radio to keep up with German news and maintain contact with German speakers around the world. If the parents were still learners themselves, they used the children's materials–songs, rhymes, and simple stories– as learning materials for themselves, too, and they sought out other places to improve their language. Martin, whom I mentioned above in connection with Yiddish, attends a language camp every year with the whole family–and all of them participate both in classes and in recreational activities in an immersion situation, where the daily life of the camp takes place only in Yiddish. He and his family also meet regularly throughout the year with other families whose Yiddish, at least in the beginning, was better than his own.

There is no indication that children's language suffers because of their parents' nonnative status. The key to language development for the children of nonnative speakers–as for all children–is to have a language-rich environment with varied stimulation and an accepting atmosphere where they are encouraged to express themselves and where their verbal exchanges are valued.

Troubleshooting: General Ways to Supplement Minority Language Input

Given the odds mentioned above of children becoming active and balanced bilinguals, it clearly takes some ingenuity to create a bilingual atmosphere that can compete with a global language or with the local majority languages. No matter what household strategies people use, there may come a time when their children need more encouragement than was previously necessary to keep using the minority language. Children may just refuse to answer in the minority language at all, despite reminders, or the refusal may take other forms. They might give only single word responses or answer nonverbally. They may leave the room if the minority language is being used, either subtly or with their hands over their ears. Or they may just ignore the fl ow of the conversation and interrupt to initiate a conversation in the other language.

In fact, it is a common refrain. One or more of these tactics on the part of children are reported by almost every parent at some point or another in the process of their "bilingual project." Whether you use OPOL, mL@H, or any other strategy, we know that the minority language is vulnerable. You might find there will be too little input from a single parent who travels extensively without the family or even from both parents when the child spends more time outside of the home than in it.

Also, parents need to evaluate whether they themselves are using a bilingual mode (code-switching) or whether their own speech is drifting heavily toward the majority language. They must consider ways to make the minority language more useful or attractive to the child and provide more people the child will want to use it with, either within the home or through travel to a country where the language is the community language. (I talk more about this at the end of chapter 5.)

Parents' Own Actions

When the Child Uses the "Wrong" Language

When the child begins using more of the "wrong" language, the first thing to examine is your own behavior to see what changes on your part may be needed in order to rectify the situation. How you respond to your

children when they use the “wrong” language sends a strong message to them about what you expect of them. Studies show that children pick up on these messages–which you may not be aware of sending–and that their language behavior follows closely from those
messages. No single exchange turns the tide, but many small messages can build up a habit over time.

Elizabeth Lanza, a psycholinguist and mother of two Norwegian-and English-speaking children, has proposed a spectrum of parental responses that signal to your child whether you want a monolingual mode for your conversation or whether you are willing to tolerate a bilingual mode (code-switching or non-converging dialogue).

Lanza identifies five points on the spectrum of parental responses (Table 7), going from 1) incomprehension of the wrong language to 5) code-switching yourself to follow the child. In between are 2) questioning some aspect of the child’s statement, 3) repeating the child’s statement in the desired language and possibly asking for a restatement by the child, and 4) moving on in your own language, without comment.

Parents can, of course, stop the conversation to ask explicitly that the child proceed in “their” language, and sometimes, such a discussion in “I-messages” can be very effective: “I feel so good when you answer me in my language,” or “I understand so much better when you speak my language,” as opposed to “you-messages”: “You should speak only Russian to me,” or “You know better than to speak English when your grandfather is visiting.” Mostly, however, it is recommended that you
make the request implicitly as much as possible, without interrupting the flow of the conversation. Conversations are by nature give and take. They are full of requests for clarification of a term or of something said too softly. So it is not unusual to say, “What?” or “I don’t get that, can you tell me again?” In a bilingual conversation, such repetition can be
asked for in the other language, the one the parent would like the child to switch to. A slightly more subtle request is number 2, above. For example, if the child says in German that his class went to a concert that afternoon, the parent can say in Turkish, “You went where?”

Studies show that children at age twenty- six months are sensitive to which language the other person is speaking. They may not be able to articulate it, but they speak less Turkish with the German- speaking parent and less German with the Turkish- speaking parent. Even if the children’s skills are unbalanced in favor of German, so that they are more likely to have the vocabulary they need in that language, it has been shown statistically that their patterns follow the patterns set by their parents remarkably well. That is not to say that they will never mix the two languages–that is a well- attested stage of bilingual
development–but their behavior follows the expected patterns well enough to show that their mixing is not just random. They are not as likely to use one language as the other in monolingual mode, and in bilingual mode, they use the two languages in proportion to how they are used by the parents.

If you can redirect the child subtly, so much the better. You can try it– and it may work. Sometimes, though, the child will say, “I want you to speak Japanese” (or English or whatever the majority language is). Jason, at age four, (Case 4 in chapter 5) said, “Don’t talk like that. Talk like I’m talking now.” You may have to insist, or at least insist on continuing to speak yourself in the language you prefer. I find it analogous to music lessons. Many children hate practicing and insist on quitting piano as
teenagers and then reproach their parents later for letting them quit. Parents must take a child’s refusal to speak the minority language seriously, but it does not mean the end of your bilingual project.

The Curious Success of the “I-Don’t-Understand” Fiction

A weird illogic occurs irrespective of the household strategy used– and it works to your benefit. Quite often a

parent successfully feigns noncomprehension of the child's other language to encourage the child to use the right language. It seems like it would be hard to convince the child that the parent does not understand the other language. Several of our parent-respondents, who speak the majority language with their spouse in front of the children every day, have reported–with some amazement–that the children still appear to accept the fiction that the parent does not understand it, and they act as if the parent could not speak the other language. This may be akin to the often reported habit among children of being more categorical about who speaks which language than the parents are. One family reported that despite the parents using (and modeling) a mixed policy between themselves, the child still addressed them each in only "their" language, regardless of
which language the parent was using with the other parent.

A Note of Realism about Sibling Speech

In my experience, when children are left to their own devices, they almost always use the majority language (or code-switch heavily) with their siblings. Even very bilingual children, like Olga and Pia, two of our survey respondents, report that they spoke Spanish with everyone else in the household, but not with their sisters. Pia's mother was apparently very uncomfortable with the children doing that and continually admonished the girls to speak Spanish with each other. The compromise they reached was that they would speak Spanish with each other in her presence because they could see that it meant so much to
her, but by themselves, they used English.

Frankly, that's all you can do. The encouraging part is that children can be very strong in the minority language but still not use it among themselves. In our University of Miami surveys of college students, we found that only those who had come to the U.S. after age ten or so preferred to speak the minority language with their siblings.

All of the others reported using the majority language with siblings. In a study of one hundred and ten junior high school children, University of Miami graduate student Arlene McGee and I found that even first generation children switched to English among themselves within a very short time of arriving in this country. In our study of Miami elementary
schools, we also found a strong preference for English among young bilinguals. While children in dual-immersion schools cooperated excellently with the policies on language choice in the classroom curriculum, they overwhelmingly preferred to use English,the language of the wider community, with each other in the halls and on the way to the bus.

Enlisting Help from Others

Whether parents opt for OPOL or mL@H, it is important to consider the extra help available for the minority language through bringing monolingual speakers into one's household or through travel and schooling, especially immersion schooling. Almost everyone I met in the research for this book, especially those in the U.S. and the U.K., supplemented their efforts in the home with one or more of these additional strategies.

Monolingual Speakers

Contact with monolingual speakers is a great asset for developing skill in the language the monolingual speaks. With bilingual speakers, one is often not sure which language will be used, but that issue is not in doubt when one speaker is monolingual. If possible, I prefer either older or very young monolingual speakers to teens and young adults for this minority presence, as they are less likely to be actively learning the majority language themselves. What with relatives, friends, and hired

household help, other language speakers may not be too hard to find. Of the three major supports we will consider, however, hired household help is perhaps the least reliable language resource. This does not mean that this resource should be avoided, just that parents should not count on it as their only strategy for the long term.

Household Help

In general, hiring household helpers of the target language background is worthwhile for those who can afford it, but such arrangements usually do not last throughout the whole duration of the children's growing up. People's experience with household helpers is spotty. Our friends Bryan and Elizabeth's au pair (Case Study 8 in chapter 5), for example, worked harder at learning English for herself than she did at speaking Spanish to their children. Chris and Ellen's household helper (Case Study 7 in chapter 5) remained monolingual, but in the course of four years had picked up enough English to understand their daily routines, so their daughter, Sophia, judged correctly that it was no longer necessary for her to respond to her in Spanish if she preferred not to.

Many people working as nannies are balancing commitments to their own families, so, for example, in the Lopez household, the nanny, Mariella, spends only eight months a year with them and takes two-month leaves twice a year to go back home to Venezuela. Beyond her purpose to reconnect with her own family, these trips are also helpful to keep Mariella's Spanish more "monolingual" than the English-influenced Spanish spoken in Miami, where the Lopez family lives. When she returns, the children are excited to see her again and appreciate her more even than if she had never left. Still, during her absences, new (non-Spanish) habits take root and become more firmly entrenched as the children get older and more and more drawn to the English in the outside world.

Jane Merrill reminds us that we cannot assume that an au pair is a natural teacher just because he or she knows the target language. Merrill spent time training the au pairs she hired over the years, and she set out activities for them to do with the children in what she calls an "informal curriculum." An afternoon's activity, she would remind her helpers, should include outdoor play or a walk; reading, writing, or easel painting; and listening to songs or singing, as well as a snack time. Of course, you would need to make sure that books and CDs of stories and songs in their language were available. Merrill was specific about which books to read–for example, a book about trains if there had been a recent trip on a train, or *Petit Tom découvre les couleurs* (Little Tom Discovers the Colors) if painting was on the agenda. Taking a page from Maria Montessori, Merrill encouraged the au pairs to involve the children in light housework with them. She recommends polishing wood, scouring sinks, or other jobs that use tools, and especially, tasks that show results. She praises those activities for the concentrated mood they engender and their action vocabulary. Once an au pair gets used to the rhythm of activities you expect, Merrill observes, he or she will not need you to leave a specific list on the refrigerator any longer.

Grandparents

Many, many families spoke of the grandparents as a positive force in their bilingual efforts. Parents most often cited their desire for continuity from their own parents (and grandparents) to their children as their motivation for raising children bilingually in the first place. Visits back to one's country of origin are facilitated by having grandparents to see there. Even if one's family is too large to stay at their home, the grandparents provide an anchor that makes the visit abroad more feasible.

By the same token, one cannot encourage visits from grandparents enough, especially from the point of view

of the children (as well as that of the grandparents!). Grandparents from another country typically come for a month or more at a time–long enough to reinforce the use of the minority language in the home, but not long enough to assimilate to the new country. Grandparents have an emotional bond with their grandchildren and a stake, often as fierce as the parents',
in the children's healthy development. In this vein, you do not want to ignore the value of aunts and uncles. If your siblings are single, they may fi t flexibly into your household and can be of enormous help. Siblings with children often bring the cousins in tow. Cousins from a country where the minority language is the community language– when they click with your children–are possibly the best language teachers there are for them: they combine the best attributes of family and friends.

Even though all of these tactics may be rather temporary, they act as booster shots to remind children why the second language is worth the effort. In visits of a month or two, relatives and close friends may help children reach a new level in their language ability that may make using the minority language more satisfying for them.

Schools

While dual language schooling enjoys extensive research support, the educational trend, at least in the U.S., is in the opposite direction. Parents of child bilinguals here need to make their plans for their children's language models without the expectation of help from the government or the schools. They need the confidence to work their plans around the schools to keep them from sabotaging the family's efforts.

But when they are available, bilingual schools are a big help. During the research for this book, I was fortunate to hear from many parents with children in bilingual schools in Massachusetts, Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Florida. Several respondents went to international schools in Latin America and Asia. These are hugely successful. When schooling
in the minority language is not available, parents do well to create social cohesiveness through play groups for the children and support groups for themselves (as in the ads one sees for peers in The Bilingual Family Newsletter and on websites like *multilingualchildren.o*rg or *biculturalfamily.org*). (Information about these and other resources
can be found in the appendix.)

Strategies to Promote Your Child's Bilingual Language Development

In chapter 2, we considered ways for parents to help their children learn language, whether it is one or many. The guidelines I provided in chapter 2 show ways to enhance your normal interactions to make them especially supportive of the child's attempts to communicate. In chapter 3, we saw that for young children, the second language is, in most ways, like the first.
The difference is that, unlike for the second language, children will speak the first language to some extent whether you encourage them to or not.

The following set of additional guidelines overlaps somewhat with that original set given in chapter 2. For example, one should never ridicule a child's efforts to speak–in any language. I put this here again because children's mistakes mixing the languages are even cuter and funnier than the ones they make in one language, so the temptation to laugh or
tease may be greater. Similarly, covert correction through recasts and expansions on what the child has said is more effective than explicit teaching of the grammar point in first language learning, too–but somehow, explicit teaching is more tempting for the adult in the second language. Because children are often at a lower level in one of their languages, they may seem temporarily to be speaking like a younger child, making

mistakes you don’t expect of someone their age, so you
may be more aware of and impatient with mistakes that you would not notice if the child were younger.

Other guidelines are specific to learning two languages. They have to do with how to establish language habits that will accommodate two languages more or less equally and how to encourage greater use of one or the other of them. In a U.S. context, they are more specifi cally aimed at preserving a heritage language, but they are equally useful–
and perhaps even easier–for parents who want to give the majority language an extra boost. Recent immigrants or parents of internationally adopted children may want to review the discussion of childhood second language acquisition (early SLA) in chapter 3 so that they do not misinterpret their children’s behavior. Still, there is nothing in these guidelines that is incompatible with promoting a majority language. No matter what household organization you decide on for your home, you
will need to keep these in mind. So here’s some advice regarding the child’s weaker language (for everyone).

Table 8. Twelve steps that promote bilingual language development

Step 1: Be consistent.
Choose one language pattern and stick with it. Make changes cautiously.

Step 2: Be gently insistent.
Remind the children often and in different ways how good it is that they are learning two languages.

Step 3: Make the second language especially rewarding.
Take pains to make it fun to use the second language. Use song and active movement to the hilt. Use tangible rewards, like new books, a favorite outing, or food treats–but sparingly. Remember: Praise, praise, praise. And repetition, repetition, repetition.

Step 4: Beware of being punitive.
You may want to try gentle threats–for example, taking away TV privileges or saying, “You can’t bring your friend Joey to the picnic tomorrow if you do not speak Finnish tonight with your aunt.” But beware of overdoing it. Threats usually backfire in the long run and make the language less attractive to the child.

Step 5: Use lots of media.
Use media both as primary sources of entertainment for the children (books, videos, or CDs–bilingual or in the target language) and as encouragement for yourself (websites, email lists, or manuals [like this one]).

Step 6: Direct interaction is the key.
Use media, but only as a backup. Concentrate on real live interaction.

Step 7: Don’t make fun of your child’s mistakes.
Never ridicule a child’s efforts to speak. It is also a bad idea to laugh at how cute it is when the child makes mistakes.

Step 8: Don’t ask children to “perform” in front of others. Many childhood bilinguals report that as their least favorite part of being bilingual. They also may (rightly) question your sanity when you ask them to speak a language to someone who does not speak it.

Step 9: Do not correct overtly.
Use covert correction techniques. Go for fluency. But do correct; children have to keep getting better. The

expansions and recasts that work for one language see chapter 2) work just as well for two.

Step 10: Take advantage of bilingual education.
Seek out and/or support schooling in two languages.

Step 11: Use secondary supports.
Look for family language camps, heritage- language Saturday schools, play groups, or music or art programs in the minority language. Take advantage of secondary supports, but don't make these the only focus of your efforts.

Step 12: Give the language a broader context than just your nuclear family.
Cultivate bilingual friends (and relatives) with children who share your goals.

Travel.
Encourage visits from monolingual speakers of the target language. Hire other-language household helpers. Lay out plans for how you would like them to interact with your children as part of their responsibilities.

Go out of your way to find younger speakers of the language to play with your child–monolinguals, if possible. If you find other bilingual children, structure their interactions with your child to encourage monolingual conversations in the minority language. Start meetings off with a greeting ritual in the minority language, and use songs and games to set the tone for the children to communicate in it. You may have to be the "monolingual" in the situation.

Don't ignore older speakers as potential sources. Retirees often welcome the opportunity to interact with "adopted grandchildren."

Finally, you need to be open to calling for outside help. We will discuss in chapter 6 the warning signs of language-learning problems–in one or two languages–and what to ask language professionals.

Your Bilingual Goals–Evaluating Your Strengths

I hope I have conveyed that bringing up children bilingually is normal, natural, and eminently doable. But I think it is also possible to be too self- confident, especially if English is your community language, so I presented the Belgian and Barron-Hauwaert studies about the percentage of children growing up in bilingual families who actually become active bilinguals earlier in the chapter as a caution.

However, if I give a figure suggesting that about three out of four children in bilingual environments become bilingual and one does not, it does not translate directly into a three-fourths chance that your child will become bilingual. Among those children who do not learn two languages are some whose parents did not want to transmit their heritage language: it might trigger painful memories, they may be estranged from their families, or they may have lost everything in an earthquake and have negative associations with the country and its language. As the studies mentioned above make clear, living in a
bilingual environment is not a guarantee that a person, even a child, will become a comfortable bilingual. But the law of averages is one thing; your own determination is another.

Making Your Decisions

Now it is time for you to look at your own situation. What resources do you have for making a bilingual home? The following self- evaluation questionnaire for your family will help you see what you have in your

favor and where you need to seek out allies.

Fill out the different parts of the table for the minority language. In general, marks to the left are assets, and marks to the right are liabilities.

[…]

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Williamson:

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