

## **Parent Characteristics: Influence in the Development of Bilingualism in Young Children**

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This study investigated the background characteristics of, and practices used by, parents and primary caregivers to promote bilingual proficiency in their linguistic minority children from birth to third grade. Specifically, it explored the educational, personal, and general characteristics of a group of parents, and the practices they used at home to develop early bilingualism in their children. The results address the participants' language background, birth place, occupational and educational levels, home environment, and approaches used at home to promote bilingualism. The findings demonstrate that: parents can promote their own bilingualism while developing two languages in their children; there is potential native language loss by both parents and children; bilingualism does not impact negatively on the educational or professional attainment of children; the use of two languages at home promotes early bilingualism; and the parents' most significant strategy to promote bilingualism is to provide children with opportunities to become actively engaged in direct communicative acts with native speakers of the target language.

### **Introduction**

In the past decades researchers have noted that a substantial portion of the variance in student achievement is related to home environment (Bloom, 1964; Coleman, 1991; Laosa, 1975; Soto, 1992; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Walberg (1984) states that the "curriculum" of the home predicts academic learning twice as well as socioeconomic status. The language a child speaks when enrolled in school for the first time represents the language of the home environment. It is the principal medium used by the first teacher(s) to introduce her or him to the curriculum of the home.

A recent and noticeable trend is the large number of parents wanting to raise bilingual children. There is no documentation of this phenomenon. Nor do we find statistics to support the claims of

many educators who have observed that schools are registering many children having proficiency in more than one language, and children who reach a significant level of English as an L2 by third or fourth grade. This favorable parental trend toward bilingualism is contrasted with the large number of students who lose their first language. Wong Fillmore (1991) has documented the large number of linguistic minority children who lose their native language soon after they enter an all English school environment.

Can parents and teachers take steps to prevent the loss of the native language? Can educators and parents gain from each other's knowledge to foster bilingualism? This study examined issues related to the characteristics of a selected group of parents who promoted bilingualism in their children, and the steps this group of parents took to foster bilingualism in their children.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study investigated background characteristics and practices used by parents or primary caregivers to promote bilingual proficiency in linguistic minority children from birth to third grade. Specifically, it explored the educational, personal, and general characteristics of a group of parents and the types of practices they used to promote bilingualism.

### **Research Questions**

1. What were the background characteristics of the target parents? What were the characteristics of the children?
2. Did target parents make conscious efforts to develop proficiency in two languages in their children? If they did, what were the practices used by the parents to promote bilingual proficiency in their children?

## Review of the Literature

Bilingualism has been defined in a multitude of ways (Ovando & Collier, 1985). These definitions have often represented different perspectives; from the assumption that it is the cause of academic retardation in bilinguals, to the most recent notion that it is a tool to develop cognitive advantages. Definitions vary from using two languages alternately (Mackey, 1962), engaging in communication in more than one language (Fishman, 1971), and possessing mastery of at least one language proficiency skill area (McNamara, 1976), to the notion of possessing more or less equal abilities in two languages (Pearl & Lambert, 1962). The collaboration between scholars from cognitive science, bilingual education and second language acquisition has produced definitions about bilingualism centered on the relationship between bilingualism and cognition. García (1982) presents a more precise definition: the acquisition of two languages during the first five years of life; including linguistic comprehension and production, learning in a natural way through social interaction, and simultaneous linguistic development. This definition is frequently used to establish at which point the acquisition of two languages is reflected in cognitive benefits.

Hue and Bain (1980) state that the quality of the first social relationships cannot be underestimated because they are the foundation for cognitive abilities. Many scholars who endorse a positive view of bilingualism present evidence to support the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive advantages. Among the benefits cited in the literature, we find advantages in: concept formation, social skills, creativity, conservation tasks, visual-social abilities, logical reasoning, classification skills, metalinguistic awareness, and cognitive flexibility (Cook, 1990; Cummins, 1994; Diaz Arenas, 1988; Dolson, 1985; Lambert, 1975; Pearl & Lambert, 1962; Schinke-Llano, 1989).

Other reasons for developing bilingualism that are frequently cited in the literature include: becoming part of two worlds, communicating with family members and friends, getting a better

job, understanding other cultures (Gregory, 1994; Schecter & Bayley, 1997), understanding religious material (González, 1991), and traveling to a home country (Matovina, 1991; Willet & Bloome, 1985). The importance of developing bilingualism at home becomes apparent when examining the literature on bilingualism at early ages. Volterra and Taeshner (1978) stress that learning two languages during infancy results in true bilingualism. Krashen, Scarcella and Long (1982) state that the ultimate bilingual attainment is superior for children who are second language acquirers. These scholars often endorse simultaneous bilingualism when forming one or two new lexical systems. Pearson, Fernández and Oller (1993) believe that children combine the languages into one lexical system while, other scholars such as Genesee (1989), Quay (1993) and Schinke-Llano (1989) claim that children can maintain two separate lexical systems. Both conceptualizations point toward the end result of child bilingualism. Even those who support the development of sequential bilingualism (Cummins, 1986) stress the importance of learning a second language by around the age of twelve (Collier, 1995).

The development of bilingualism at home presupposes a conscious effort by parents to use particular approaches. The literature describes school, home and community efforts to teach children second languages. Among the target language activities we find: preschool center activities (Kessler, 1984), public television programs (Polsky, 1974), radio programs (Lambert, Boehler & Sidoti, 1981), songs (Coriel & Napoliello, 1996), videos, computer software, and cassettes (Saunders, 1983), games (Orellana, 1992), stories (Arnberg, 1987), and many others. The purpose of this study was to document the characteristics of a selected group of parents who raised bilingual children and to examine the extent to which these parents made a conscious effort to use particular strategies to promote bilingualism in their children at an early age, from birth through about nine years old (i. e., birth to third grade).

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

Over 81 U.S. linguistic minority parents or primary caregivers participated in this study. Of these parents, 16 participated only in the pilot study. Data for 60 of the 65 additional parents interviewed are reported in this paper. Data for the five Vietnamese parents had to be discarded from this paper due to problems that arose with the recording and transcribing of their information. Parents selected must have had bilingual children who were born or who had arrived to mainland U.S. at an age no older than two to three years old. The oral bilingual proficiency of the children was defined as the ability to speak fluently in the respective languages with native speakers of the languages. The children must have achieved that level of bilingualism by the third grade. Interviews with some of the children and statements by the parents were used to determine bilingualism. Dominant language refers to the language informants identified as the language they used more frequently at home and work, and the language they felt more comfortable using in the home and work contexts.

### **Instruments**

A protocol for the parent interviews was developed. It was pilot tested with 16 parents of three language backgrounds: Hispanics, German, and Vietnamese. This protocol was revised using the feedback from the interviewers to develop the interview guide. This guide was used to interview the 60 subjects reported in this paper. The interview guide consisted of: open-ended questions believed to generate information that could be used to answer the research questions, an introduction type questionnaire to collect background information, and a list of categories to assist the interviewers in focusing the interviews and organizing the data. The interview guide was used to develop forms to transfer, categorize, and code the

collected data. One form was used to collect the data from each individual subject. A second form was used to integrate the information provided by the five subjects of each interviewer. The data from the second forms were then transferred to the computer and organized using a summative analysis form that included the data for all the subjects interviewed. The data in these summative forms constitute the results presented in this paper.

## **Procedures**

The study reported here contained four parts. Part I consisted of training graduate students to assist in formulating the research questions and in developing the instruments to collect and organize the data. Graduate students from the University at Buffalo collaborated with the principal investigator to formulate the research questions and to develop and pilot test a protocol to conduct interviews. Groups of three or four graduate student investigators developed questions for the protocol which were later reviewed and discussed in a large group format. The graduate student investigators (GSIs) were trained to conduct the study following principles established by Moore (1983) to develop and evaluate educational research. Moore emphasizes the use of the scientific method as a format to conduct educational research. The students also became familiar with Seidman's (1991) phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing.

Fourteen graduate student investigators (GSIs) and the principal investigator reviewed the literature to compile information about the topic proposed for the study: parent influence in the development of bilingualism in young children. Discussions of this literature assisted in formulating the research questions. The information from the literature was supplemented by the professional (all the GSIs had training in bilingual or ESL education and five of them were experienced bilingual or ESL teachers) and personal experiences of the graduate students (12 of the 14 GSIs spoke at least two languages) and the principal investigator (a Spanish-English bilingual).

The protocol was piloted with a sample of 16 parents from diverse

language backgrounds. Seven pairs of students conducted the pilot interviews; each pair of two GSIs interviewed three parents. The use of pairs of GSIs contributed to the triangulation of the data collected to develop the interview guide. The fourteen GSIs used the pilot tested protocol to conduct interviews with the parents or primary caregivers of the linguistic minority children who participated in the rest of the study. Only participants whose children demonstrated oral language proficiency in the two languages were selected for the interviews. Parents verified that the children were bilingual by the third grade. A sample of the children was also interviewed to confirm that they were still bilingual.

The pilot study interviews generated information to address each of the research questions. These interviews were tape recorded. The data from the interviews were transcribed and the information was collected and incorporated into an interview guide which included open ended as well as specific questions. The specific questions (questionnaire items) were used to gather participants' background information. The open ended questions served to probe for possible items not previously included. The open-ended questions were revised and or modified by the principal investigator who had designed the first draft of the protocol. The interviews were conducted by the thirteen bilingual graduate students (GSIs) trained to conduct interviews according to Seidman (1991). The interviews were conducted mostly in English (except for five) since the parents were comfortable speaking English. However, parents used their L1 whenever they felt it was more convenient for them to express their thoughts. The interview transcriptions were used for analysis.

A grid was developed to illustrate how each protocol item and question in the interview guide would generate data for each research question. It was expected that new categories would emerge from the interviews through the open ended questions. This provided opportunities for continuous revisions. Notes about these additions were taken. The research questions and the items in the interview guide were used to develop three analysis forms to organize the information.

Part II consisted of organizing the data to discover and analyze common patterns. Analysis forms were developed from the interview guides in order to categorize and organize the data.

All the L1 interview information was translated into English to facilitate the process of analysis. The lines and pages of all the transcriptions were numbered for clear and easy identification. The transcripts were used to trace back information when clarification of the specific categories included in the analysis forms was needed.

Three types of analysis forms were developed to assist classifying and categorizing the information: individual, integrative and summative analysis forms. The individual analysis form included categories identified in the interview guide and the interview transcripts. This form contained the information for each individual subject. Each GSI generated a total of five individual forms from the interviews. The integrated form was used to combine the information collected from the five participants interviewed by each GSI.

Seven doctoral students familiar with the research process used in the study were trained to review the transcribed data from the tapes to assure that they were accurate and contributed to the triangulation of the data. One research assistant typed the information from each of the five integrative forms in the computer using the Microsoft Excel program. Another research assistant combined all the information from the five integrative forms into one summative integrative form. The principal investigator reviewed the data in all the forms.

Part III consisted of training another group of 22 GSIs to assist in analyzing the data. Five two hours tutoring sessions were conducted to train the GSIs to review and analyze the data presented in the summative integrative form. All the members attended tutoring sessions and worked as a group to review and analyze the data. The research questions were used to organize and analyze the data. Five groups of no more than five GSIs were formed to analyze the data. The use of the GSI groups added to the triangulation effort. All the groups analyzed the data from research question 1. Research question number 2 was analyzed by two groups of five students. Requiring at

least two groups of GSIs to analyze the information further enhanced the triangulation of the data. Each group of GSIs targeted inconsistencies in the data and conducted group discussions as well as met with the principal investigator to discuss problems about the categorization of the data. The GSIs and the principal investigator would then review the appropriate section of the interview transcript to verify the accuracy of the information and the categorization of the data. The principal investigator guided the processes to pilot the instruments and to collect the information. She monitored the tutoring sessions and the analysis and the interpretation of the data. The results reported in this paper were generated from the data collected to address research questions one and two.

Part IV consisted of two data reviews. Three GSIs, who had participated in Part III, reviewed all the information collected by the GSIs from Part III of the study and fine tuned the analysis. They reviewed the results, interpretations, and implications. The principal investigator designed and monitored all parts of the study. During each part of the study she reviewed and verified the research activities. During Part IV of the study she reinterpreted the results from Part III to corroborate, expand, and make new interpretations. The next section reports the data collected about research questions one and two.

## **Results**

### **Data Organization and Analysis**

Quantitative and qualitative measures were generated from the information collected. The results discussed in this section are organized according to the research questions and subquestions.

The principal investigator, as well as each group of GSIs, reviewed, classified, and categorized the data. The data were grouped by topic and then tallied. Emergent topics related to each research question were incorporated into the results. Discussion groups and analysis sessions were conducted to share categorization concerns. The GSI groups divided the tasks for efficiency purposes but the

discussion sessions provided the opportunity to verify the data and the categorization of all the information. Descriptive statistics were used to report the results presented in this paper.

**Question 1. What were the background characteristics of the target parents? What were the characteristics of the children?**

It was first necessary to determine who the parents or primary caregivers of the children were, and to identify the home characteristics which are supported in the literature on language development. A list of potential participants was developed by the GSI groups. The GSIs conducted telephone interviews to determine who were the primary caregivers in the suggested families as well as to determine if the children of the potential participants were bilingual. The information collected from the selected participants was organized into seven categories that described the parents/primary caregivers in the study. The investigation examined the following parent/primary caregiver characteristics: first language, second language, dominant language, birth place and age of arrival to the U.S., occupation, and educational level. The same information was collected for their children to compare the parents' background with the characteristics of their children.

**Language Background.** Ninety percent (90%) of the 60 parents interviewed spoke Spanish as their first language. In contrast, 61% of the children were reported to have Spanish as their first language. Less than two percent (2%) of the children considered both Spanish and English, as first language(s). Eight percent (8%) of the parents spoke German as an L1, and less than 2% of the parents spoke English as their first language. Twenty eight percent (28%) of the children were speakers of English as the first language and eight percent (8%) considered German their first language. The remaining 2% spoke English as their first language. Ninety eight percent (98%) of the parents (Spanish and German speaking parents) spoke English as their second language and less than 2 % spoke Spanish as their second

language. Sixty eight percent (68%) of the children considered English their second language, and 28% spoke Spanish as their L2. Two percent (2%) of the children used sign language as their L2, and 2% of the children considered both languages (English and Spanish) as their second languages.

Spanish was the dominant language of 58% of the parents, and 20% considered both languages (English and Spanish) their dominant language(s). The dominant language for 10% of the parents was English, and German was the dominant language for 8% of the parents. Less than 4% of the informants did not answer this question. English was the dominant language of 64% of the children, and 11% considered Spanish their dominant language. Twenty percent (20%) of the children spoke Spanish and English as their first language(s) and 5% did not answer this question.

**Birth Place or Age of Arrival to the U. S. (mainland).** Ten percent (10%) of the parents were born in the U.S. mainland. Twenty one percent (21%) of the parents arrived in the U.S. between the ages of 2 to 9 years old, 16% arrived between the ages 10 to 17, 21% arrived between the ages 18 to 25, and 28% arrived between the ages of 26 to 49. The birth places of the parents were: Puerto Rico (48%); U.S. mainland (10%); Argentina (9%); Cuba, Dominican Republic and Germany (8% each); Guatemala and Colombia (3% each); and less than 2% in each for Mexico, Perú and Sweden. In contrast, 78 % of the children were born in the U.S. mainland, and 15% were born in PR. The birthplaces of the remaining children were Germany, Spain and Dominican Republic (3% each). Ten percent (10%) of the children arrived in the U.S. between the ages 0 to 12 months, 6% arrived between 13 and 24 months, and 5% arrived between the ages of 25 to 36 months.

**Occupation.** Thirty percent (30%) of the parents were educators or professors, 20% were other professionals, 21% were from the working class, 15% were housewives, 19% were university-college students, and less than 4% of the parents did not answer this question.

Eighty three percent (83%) of the children were students, of which only 13% were at the higher education level. Twelve percent (12%) of the remaining children were professionals, 3% were in the Marines, and 2% had clerical jobs.

**Education.** There were six different levels of education represented in this sample: doctorate, masters, bachelors, associate degree, military training, and grades K to 12. More than seventy three percent (73%) of the children were attending elementary, middle and high school, and 21% of the children were enrolled or had completed undergraduate or graduate studies. Six percent (6%) of the children were enlisted in or had completed military training. Seventy seven percent (77%) of the parents had a college education. Seventeen percent (17%) of the parents graduated from high school and the remaining sixteen percent (16%) did not respond.

**Characteristics of Other Influential Adults.** Sixty nine percent (69%) of the influential adults, other than the primary caregiver, were the children's fathers. Almost 13% were the mothers, and 10% were grandmothers. The additional (9%) adults included a grandfather, a minister, baby-sitters, and step-fathers. Seventy four percent (74%) of the other influential adults spoke Spanish as L1, and 24% spoke English as L1. One percent (1%) used German as the first language. Sixty two percent (62%) spoke English as the L2, and 14% used Spanish as the L2. Only 16% of the influential adults spoke no second language. More than twenty eight percent (28%) of the influential adults spoke English as their dominant language, and more than 62% identified Spanish as their dominant language. Seven percent (7%) of these adults considered both Spanish and English their dominant language(s), and only 1% of them considered German their dominant language. Among the influential adults we found that: 24% were U.S. mainland born, 40% were born in PR., and all but 1% (born in Germany) of the remaining were born in Spanish speaking countries. At least 61% of the influential adults had completed high school or college.

**Question 2. Did target parents make conscious efforts to develop proficiency in two languages in their children? If they did, what were the strategies used by the parents to promote bilingual proficiency in their children?**

The information collected for this research question was organized using three main categories: the language used to speak to the child, the language used by the child when entering the school, and specific practices used by the parents to develop the two languages in the child (Carlson, 1998). In relation to the language used to speak to the children, the results indicated that parents: spoke to the children using two languages at different times (45%), spoke to the children only through the first language (38%), and began using both languages when the children were age 3 (12%). Among the parents, thirteen percent (13%) used the one language one parent approach (Leopold, 1949). The participants indicated that the children spoke the languages by the time they entered school as follows: both languages (68%), only the first language (28%), and three languages (2%).

The information related to the approaches used by parents to promote bilingualism was divided into two sub-categories: non-school (K-12) practices which were home determined, and activities which involved enlisting the cooperation of resources outside the home domain that were non-school related persons. Only play groups and the non-school (K-12) practices which were home determined were included in this paper. The activities which involved enlisting the cooperation of resources outside the home and family domain, except play groups, are part of research question three and will be the subject of another paper. Sixteen of the strategies cited in the literature and referred to by the parents were apparent in the data collected. The practices identified were: provided preschool activities in the first or second language (68%), used television to facilitate second language acquisition (79%), spoke over the telephone with relatives in L1 (33%), sang song(s) in the L1 and or L2 (47%), listened to the radio to facilitate L2 acquisition (13%), used videos or computers (25%), visited language homeland country from one to three months (28%),

provided opportunity to listen to L2 music (43%), used play groups with speakers of the target language (26%), incorporated L2 games (26%), assisted with L2 homework (25%), read and told stories in the target language(s) (60%), spoke to child only in a target language (43%), used the child as L2 translator (20%), facilitated reading and writing in the target language(s) (33%), participated in target language social events (17%), and encouraged people to speak with their child in the target language (46%).

### **Findings**

The findings have been organized according to the reported statistics in the Results section above. Side headings that address each research question have been presented and are followed by a discussion supportive of the relevant literature.

#### **Question 1. What were the background characteristics of the target parents? What were the characteristics of the children?**

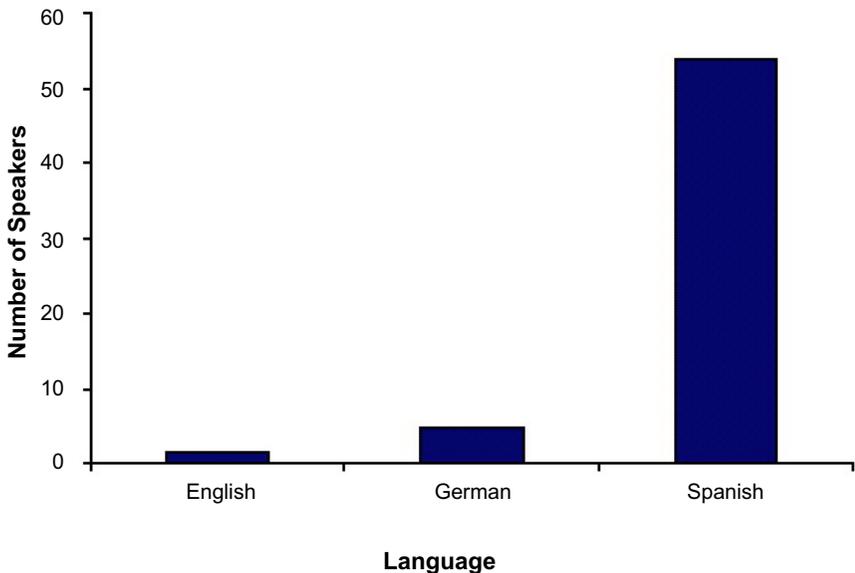
According to Hakuta (1986), the study of bilingualism should include both, the bilingual person and the circumstances surrounding the creation of their bilingualism. The present study focused on three factors that shaped the creation of bilingualism in the target children: parents and their characteristics, adults who influenced the development of the two languages by the children, and home determined strategies that parents used to promote dual language acquisition. The results presented in the previous section of this paper provide evidence to support five generalizations about the population of this study in relation to the characteristics established: 1) While the majority of the parents spoke an L1 other than English, all of these parents increased their L1/English bilingualism; 2) The majority of the children spoke an L1 other than English, but over half of them were English dominant even when English was identified as their L2; 3) The majority of the parents were not U.S. mainland born, in contrast with the children who were born mostly in the U.S. mainland;

4) Both the parents and the children had a high level of educational and professional attainment; 5) The majority of the influential adults were fathers and they spoke English as an L2.

**Language Loss and Acquisition.** The study of these generalizations in relation to the literature on bilingualism provides insights related to the notion of language loss and acquisition among generations of potential bilinguals. From this study two aspects emerged: 1) there was first language loss evident in both generations of subjects, particularly among the Hispanic parents and children, and 2) there was increased English language acquisition as a first, second and dominant language among all the subjects.

First language (L1) data for the parents illustrate that there was a loss of the first language in both the parents and the children. Figure 1 illustrates that the majority of the parents identified Spanish as their first language.

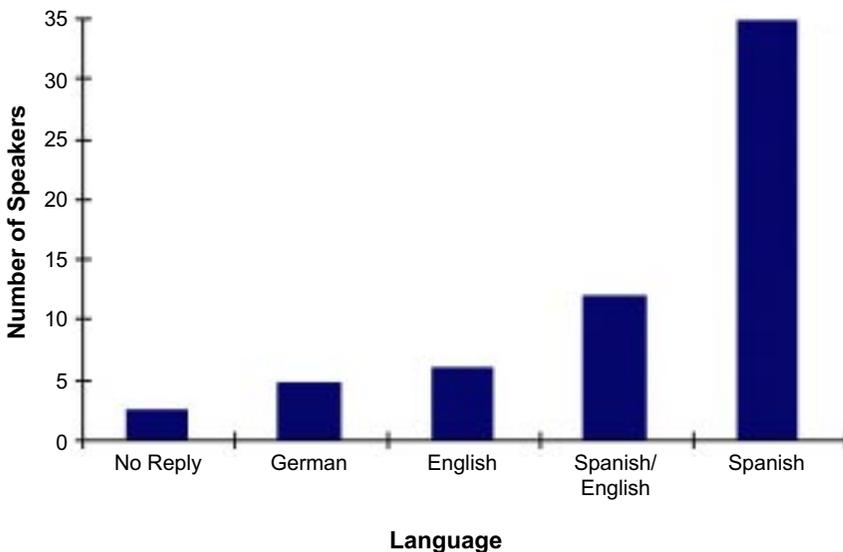
Figure 1. Parents' First Language (L1)



However, figure 2 demonstrates that a smaller percentage of these parents identified Spanish as their dominant language or preferred language for use at home and/or at work. When comparing children's L1 with the parents' L1, we found that a smaller number of children identified Spanish as their L1 compared to the parents. Figure 3 illustrates that only one fifth of the children were reported to have Spanish as their dominant language. In addition, while only one parent indicated that Spanish was his L2, nearly one third of the children indicated that Spanish was their L2. Among the German speaking parents, there seemed to be no loss of German as their main language. All of the parents who identified German as their L1 continued to identify German as their dominant language. In contrast, all the children who were identified as having German as their childhood L1, were reported to presently have English as their dominant language.

The data documents an increase in the acquisition of English as a first, a dominant, and a second language in a majority of the participants. There is ample evidence to support that Hispanic parents learned English. Figures 2 and 4 illustrate that the parents became

Figure 2. Parents' Dominant Language



bilingual while maintaining their native language. Some parents became English dominant, and a large number recognized both English and Spanish as their dominant language(s). Figure 2 demonstrates that one fifth of the parents indicated both English and Spanish as their dominant language(s).

Figure 3. Children’s Dominant Language

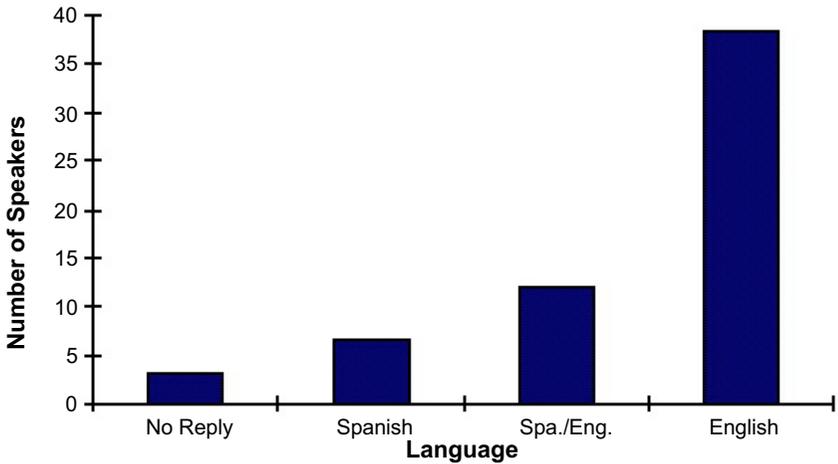
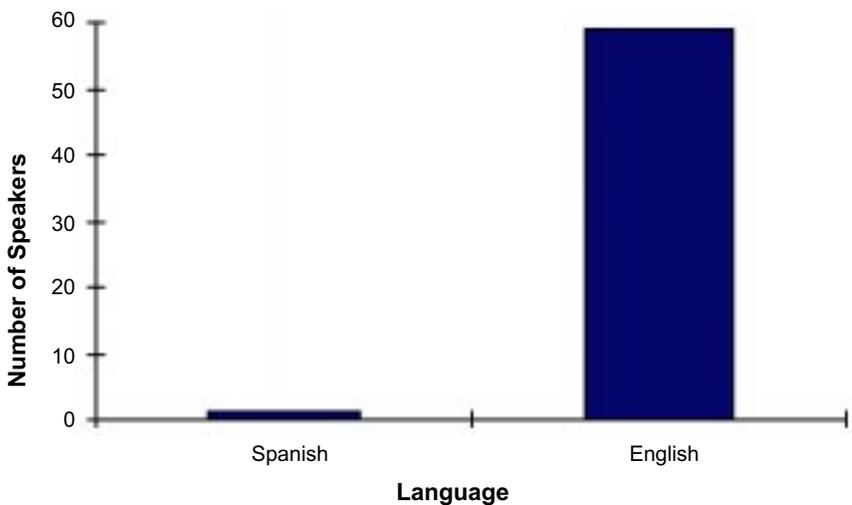


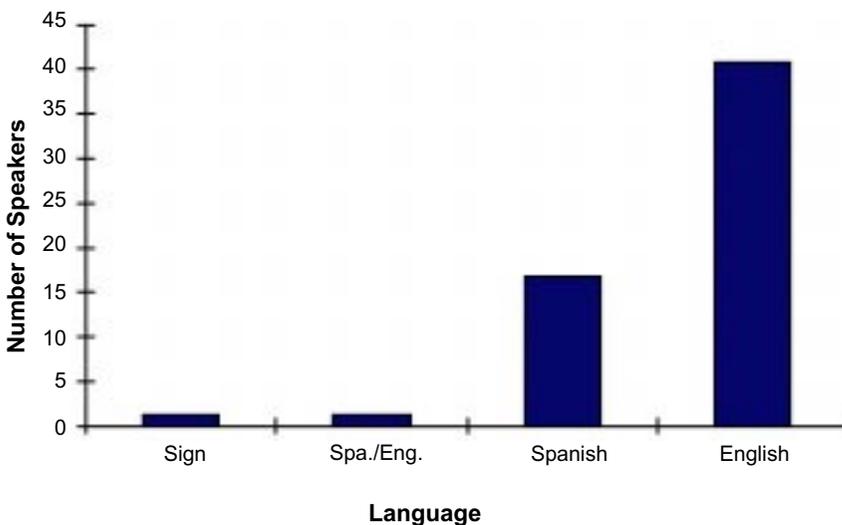
Figure 4. Parents’ Second Language (L2)



Among the children we found a different trend. While one sixth of the children reported having English as their L1, more than half were English dominant even when they considered English their second language. The notion that Hispanic children do not learn English is also challenged by the information presented in Figure 5. This figure illustrates that all the children spoke a second language. The results document an increase in bilingualism for both parents and children. The findings present evidence to contrast the popular but not well documented notion that Hispanics do not learn English or promote the fast acquisition of English by their children. In contrast, the data suggest the trend that Hispanic parents who promote bilingualism in their children also learn English often to the detriment of maintaining their native language as the dominant language.

Advocates of bilingualism and biculturalism have reasons to be concerned with the loss of the native language, in particular when the L1 is replaced by the L2 as the dominant language, rather than becoming one of the two dominant language(s). The displacement of the native language to a status other than an equal threatens the recognition of the L1 as a language of prestige and of equal value to the second language.

Figure 5. Children's Second Language (L2)



**U. S. Born Non-English Native Speakers.** One topic was manifested in the results: persons who spoke a first language other than English in the U.S. were not necessarily foreigners or immigrants. Contrary to public expression, the majority of the children were born in the U.S. mainland and were not immigrant children. Of the remaining children, some of them were born in Puerto Rico, a U.S. commonwealth. Similarly, a majority of parents were U.S. born citizens, but most of them were born in Puerto Rico where Spanish is the dominant and one of the official languages. Many of the remaining parents were born in Latin America. All the children not born in the U.S. mainland arrived on or before they were 36 months old.

**High Level of Educational and Professional Attainment.** The most distinct theme related to parent occupations was the large number of professionals or college enrolled parents in the sample, and the high level of education attained by their children. Regardless of the parents' educational level, it was evident that the participant parents valued education and bilingualism for themselves, as well as for their children. It is possible that the high level occupations of parents coupled with the fact that they spoke a second language determined the importance they gave to both education and bilingualism. However, the sample was not representative of the Hispanic population in the U.S. in relation to education and occupation.

The evidence supports the notion that bilingualism does not negatively impact educational achievement, and to the contrary, the results demonstrate that bilingual children stayed in school/college or went on to become professionals. While the parents' occupational attainment was somewhat lower than their educational accomplishments, all the children were bilingual; and had attended school, college, military training or were professionals. The fact that all the children were bilingual, and all but one attended schools or were professionals, illustrates the high status given to bilingualism and education by this sample of parents and their children.

**A Bilingual Home Context.** To explore to what extent more than one language was used in the home environment, information

was collected about some of the characteristics of individuals who exerted a significant influence in the lives of the children. The majority of the participants interviewed were mothers, since they were identified as the primary care providers for the children. This fact is of great relevance since much of the literature cites the mother as the primary source of language interaction for her children (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1984; Tomasello, Conti-Ramsden, & Ewert, 1989). Hoff-Ginsberg (1984) refers to the term "motherese" to describe a mother's adapted speech to her child. Her study indicates that there are unique properties of a mother's speech with her children that are useful predictors of language expansion.

The data collected also demonstrated that the children were influenced by adults who valued more than one language. The parents reported that there were seventy adults who influenced the development of bilingualism in their children. The majority of these influential adults possessed a second language and only a few (often the grandparents) had no second language. It is relevant to note that the majority of the influential adults were fathers and their dominant language was reported to be Spanish. These fathers retained their Spanish as the first and the dominant language more so than the other influential adults. It was apparent that fathers took a more supportive role than a primary role as second language provider. Tomasello, Conti-Ramsden, and Ewert (1989) observed that fathers were less able to understand children's speech or adjust their speech to that of the children's, and they were more prone to communication breakdowns with their children.

These findings also challenge the notion that fathers learn English sooner than mothers because they are exposed to English more often in the world of work. It is possible that the increased participation of women in the work force has increased both the rate of L2 acquisition and their rate of loss of Spanish as their dominant language. The level of education of the influential adults was high, but not as high as the sample of parents who were interviewed. Another interesting factor arose, since the majority of the informants were mothers and the majority of the influential adults were fathers. It is possible, that

among the Hispanics (the larger number of participants) who value bilingualism enough to promote it in their children, there is a larger representation of mothers with a higher education level than fathers.

**Question 2. Did target parents make conscious efforts to develop proficiency in two languages in their children? If they did, what were the strategies used by the parents to promote bilingual proficiency in their children?**

**Parents Use of Two Languages at Home.** The information collected demonstrates support for the notion that parents' use of two languages can be an effective way to develop bilingualism in young children. Early simultaneous bilingualism involves the development of two languages at the same time at an early age. The majority of the parents in this study made a conscious decision to speak to the child in more than one particular language at home, rather than waiting for the child to enter the school to learn a second language. While there is some evidence that code switching between the two languages was practiced, the approach most commonly used at home was speaking in two languages, but at different times. The use of language code switching has been described as having positive and negative impacts, depending on how the mixing takes place (Baker, 1996; Genesee, 1989; Hoffmann, 1991). Language code switching that prevents full development of one of the languages is seen as detrimental. In contrast, language code switching that fosters better understanding of the communication is seen as positive.

The one parent one language approach (Baker, 1996; Hakuta, 1986; Leopold, 1949; Meisel, 1990) was used by a large number of parents. However, it was evident that many of the parents also used only the first language for the early years, with a few waiting until the child was at least three years old to introduce a second language. The fact that a majority of the children spoke both languages prior to entering school strengthens the notion that there was use of more than one language in the home environment during the early years.

However, the fact that almost a third of the study's bilingual children spoke only Spanish as an L1 before entering school, supports the notion that bilingualism can emerge during the first three years of school for young children who do not speak English at home. This type of dual language development is referred to in the literature as sequential bilingualism (Collier, 1995). While sequential bilingualism is identified mostly with adult dual language development, theoretically it is also applicable to persons who have a first language developed, and must go through the process of embedding a second language in their minds. Collier (1995) indicates that bilingualism should be developed by age twelve, meanwhile Cummins (1986) states that concepts that are learned in one language can easily be transferred into the second language because there is a common underlying proficiency (CUP). All of the children in this study were bilingual by the third grade, therefore even the children who entered school only speaking an L1 other than English became bilingual by the third grade.

**Home Language Development Strategies.** Parents not only used other influential adults to promote bilingualism, they also deliberately used a significant number of home determined approaches to impact the development of two languages in the children. In addition to enrolling the children in pre-school activities, it was clear that parents selected three forms of language related strategies: 1) academic tasks, 2) audiovisual activities that exposed children to speakers of the target language, and 3) modes of interaction that engaged the children in communication acts with speakers of the target language. Academic or school tasks consisted of reading and telling stories, reading and writing with the children, and helping with homework in the target language. Parents also identified activities which were frequently used by teachers to expose children to speakers of the target language: TV, radio, computer, and video games. Additional practices cited by the informants demonstrate that parents recognized the importance of learning a language by using it in a relevant social-context: encouraging people to speak with the children

in the target language, using the phone to talk with relatives and friends who spoke the target language, traveling to the language homeland to stay for a period of more than one month, using the children as translators, participating in play groups and social events, and playing games with target language speakers.

The social component of learning a second language (Vygotsky, 1978) was evident in the parents' selection of language practices. Parents viewed learning a language as a social interaction process to enrich children's language experiences. Parents understood the significance of academic practices for learning the target language, but they also created opportunities for their children to interact with target language speakers in relevant social contexts. The quality of interaction which can occur in story telling, traveling, living and immersion in the language was used as a source to enrich language learning.

### **Implications**

This study demonstrates that parents of young bilinguals can promote their own bilingualism while developing bilingualism in their children. However, the study also illustrates the potential loss of the native language other than English by both the bilingual children and the parents striving to develop two languages. The investigation showed that U.S. born bilinguals whose first language is one other than English, and bilinguals whose first language is English, as well as non-U.S. born bilinguals, are not negatively impacted by their early bilingualism. To the contrary, all groups exhibited a high level of educational and professional attainment.

The study also supports the creation of a bilingual home environment to promote early bilingualism. The use of two languages in the home can be an effective way to develop bilingualism in young children. Furthermore, parents can use home language related strategies that utilize academic tasks and audiovisual aids. However, in this study the parents' most significant strategy was to provide their children with opportunities for becoming actively engaged in

meaningful and direct communicative acts with native speakers of the target language.

This study also provides the following implications for educators and administrators. Teachers should use parents as resources to promote bilingualism, and adapt some of the successful strategies employed by parents for application in their classrooms. The interaction between native and non-native target language speakers in meaningful and relevant communicative acts will assist language acquisition. The creation of a bilingual environment which uses two languages simultaneously to foster better understanding and authentic communication will have a positive impact on children. Monolingual children who come from non-English native homes, whose parents promote bilingualism, can develop two languages in the early grades. Finally, the schools must promote bilingualism in the parents in order to facilitate the development of two language in their young children.

1. Graduate students in the University at Buffalo participated in this study as research assistants. They collaborated developing the statement of program, pilot testing the instruments, and collecting and analyzing the data. Dawn M. Carlson presented part of the data in the NYSABE 1998 Annual Conference.

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