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25 Jahre ZIF – ein Grund zum Feiern!

Themenschwerpunkt:

Mehrsprachigkeit in der Familie

Why do so many children who hear two languages speak just a single language?

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Abstract:

Twenty years ago De Houwer (1999) asked why young children reared with two languages speak just a single language. At the time, there was little research that could address the question. This contribution reviews research from the last two decades that either directly or indirectly addresses the problem of single language use by bilingually raised children. Amongst others, it focuses on the role of parental input patterns, the quantity and quality of language input, parental discourse strategies, the role of institutions such as day care centers and preschools, and child agency.

Vor zwanzig Jahren stellte De Houwer (1999) die Frage, warum junge Kinder, die in zwei Sprachen erzogen wurden, nur eine Sprache sprechen. Zu jener Zeit gab es kaum Forschung, die dieser Frage nachging. Dieser Beitrag blickt zurück auf die Forschung der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte, die direkt oder indirekt das Problem der Einsprachigkeit bei zweisprachig erzogenen Kindern behandelt. Besprochen werden, u.a., die Rolle der sprachliche Input-Muster der Eltern, die Quantität des Inputs, die elterlichen Diskursstrategien, die Spracheinstellungen von Kindern und die Rolle von Institutionen wie Tagesstätten und Vorschulen.

Keywords: early bilingualism, language input, language attitudes, children, parents, early childhood education; frühe Mehrsprachigkeit, Sprachangebot, Spracheinstellungen, Kinder, Eltern, KiTas.

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1 Introduction

In the data collection stage for my dissertation (now 40 years ago) I recorded interactions with six preschoolers raised with English and Dutch from birth and living in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. For two of them I soon gave up, because they did not speak any English. After people in my environment found out I was working on early bilingualism I started regularly hearing about bilingually raised children who spoke just a single language at home. After I had finished my dissertation on a young child who fluently spoke Dutch and English (partly published as De Houwer 1990), I read with great concern Lily Wong Fillmore's article (1991) on the ill effects on children and their families if children did not speak their parents' language. That is when I decided to explore why it was possible that young children who were growing up bilingually from birth, in what is often hailed as *the* best way to become a 'perfect' bilingual did not, in fact, develop active bilingualism. The results of that exploration, carried out in 1995–1996, finally were published in De Houwer (1999). At the time, very little research was available that could address the question. Also, there was no information on the incidence of young children's monolingual usage despite bilingual input.

This contribution revisits the question I asked 25 years ago, at the same time that the *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht* was founded. In the course of those 25 years, research on early bilingualism has boomed. We now know a lot more about it than we did in 1995. As I will show, several empirical research projects in the last 25 years have contributed towards better identifying possible underlying causes of the problem of single language use by bilingually raised children.

Single language use by bilingually raised children is indeed a problem. Parents tend to be upset, ashamed, depressed, and/or angry if their children do not speak their language (De Houwer 2017b). Thus, children's monolingual language use in a bilingual environment detracts from Harmonious Bilingual Development (De Houwer 2015a), the experience of well-being in a language contact situation involving young children and their families. The fact that children may not speak one of the languages that either parent speaks to them means they might develop communication patterns in which the child speaks language X and the parent language Y, as exemplified in Nakamura (2018). Research with adolescents in the United States has shown that these sorts of divergent language choices create an undesirable emotional distance between children and their parents (Tseng/Fuligni, 2000). Furthermore, children who do not speak their parents' language of origin may be perceived as lacking positive values related to that origin (Lee/Shetgiri/Barina/Til-

litski/ Flores 2015). Indeed, language choice (the use of a particular language variety) always creates a social meaning (De Houwer 2019). Additionally, when bilingually raised children grow up not speaking one of their languages, they may miss out on connections with grandparents and other relatives (Wong Fillmore 1991 mentions a particularly tragic example).

Understanding the factors that lead to bilingually raised children not speaking one of their input languages is thus not only of theoretical interest but also of applied importance: If we understand those factors, then maybe some of them can be modulated and prevention and intervention programs formulated.

De Houwer (1999) focused on the possible role of parental language related attitudes, beliefs and practices to help explain young children's monolingual use in spite of bilingual input from birth. The present contribution revisits only the practices part, but it also expands the coverage by considering the role of institutions such as early child care centers and schools (Lee/Oxelson 2006), as well as the role of professionals engaged with young children, relatives and the media. Finally, I consider the role of children's own attitudes and perceptions. The focus is not only on children with bilingual input from birth but also on children who hear one language at home and another in childcare or at (pre)school. Note that I use the term 'bilingual' inclusively, that is, to refer to settings where more than a single language or language variety is involved (De Houwer/Ortega 2019a).

Given the diversity and complexity of the topics covered here, the studies referenced below have used a wide range of methods, going from the micro-analysis of recorded parent-child interaction and interviews with parents to large scale surveys using written questionnaires. Each method has its own strengths as well as limitations. It is only by considering the totality of findings from these different approaches that we can obtain further insight into the question at hand.

Before embarking on an exploration of the possible causes of young children's monolingual usage in bilingual settings, I discuss what we know about the incidence of such monolingual usage.

2 How often do children with early bilingual input NOT speak one of their languages?

Surveys and large parental interview studies from different places in the world suggest that children's monolingual usage in bilingual settings occurs quite frequently. Table 1 lists most of the larger studies that yield information on the incidence of monolingual home language usage by children raised bilingually (data include children between the ages of 1 and 20).

Tab. 1: Studies yielding information on the incidence of monolingual home language usage by children raised bilingually (Note: the languages that children did NOT speak are underlined)

Study	Region	Languages	N children	Proportion of children speaking only a single language
Métraux (1965)	Paris (France)	French + <u>English</u>	47	1/3
Veltman (1983)	Urban centers, Alsace (France)	French + <u>Alsatian</u>	247,966 (census data)	44 %
Yamamoto (2001)	Japan	Japanese + <u>English</u>	188	12 %
De Houwer (2003)	Flanders (Belgium)	Dutch + <u>one or more of several other languages</u>	5,335	25 %
De Houwer (2004)	Flanders (Belgium)	Dutch + <u>two of several other languages</u>	608 ¹	22 %
Verdon, McLeod and Winsler (2014)	Australia	English + <u>one or more of several other languages</u>	666	22 %
Verdon and McLeod (2015)	Australia	English + <u>one or more Australian indigenous languages</u>	93	24 %
Slavkov (2017)	Ontario, Canada	not identified	170	21 %

Based on the data in Table 1, it is safe to assume that on the whole, one in four bilingually raised children does not, in fact, speak all the languages heard at home. That is a very large proportion. Monolingual home language usage by children raised with two or more languages is thus not an exception. It is striking that the proportions of monolingual usage are about equal in regions that are as culturally, socially and linguistically different as Western Europe, Australia and Canada.

A second striking finding is that in all survey studies it is mainly the language that is not generally used in public life, including educational institutions, that is not spoken by children. Thus, it is the non-societal language that is at risk. Congruently with my experience with Dutch-English-learning preschoolers in Belgium (see the

¹ These trilingually raised children form part of the 5,335 children studied in De Houwer (2003); children who spoke their three input languages accounted for only 42 %; 36 % only spoke two languages, viz. Dutch and only one of their other two input languages.

Introduction) even the global language, English, is at risk when it is not the local societal language (Métraux 1965; Yamamoto 2001).

I now turn to possible causes for the massive intergenerational language loss that is happening in bilingual settings around the world today.

3 Searching for causes: the role of parents

If parents start using more than a single language variety in interacting with their young infants, children will be growing up bilingually from birth. Parents may also speak just a non-societal language (variety) at home and later on enroll children in day care or (pre)school where interaction with children takes place in another language. In both cases, it is parents who are ultimately the decision makers of what languages will be present in children's linguistic environments (De Houwer 1999). This also applies to internationally adopted children (e.g., Genesee/Delcenserie 2016) and to children born deaf into a hearing family (Tang/Sze 2019), cases I do not discuss here. The term 'parent' refers to any adult sharing a household with a young person who is (co-)responsible for that young person.

The home linguistic environment of children is mainly shaped by their parents (siblings will play a role, too). One can look at several aspects of parental language input. It is impossible to discuss all of them in detail. I only discuss those aspects that have received attention in the research literature on young bilingually raised children or that I consider of particular potential importance.

I first explore the overall language choices that parents make.

3.1 Parental input patterns

Parental input patterns refer to the overall language choices that parents make, that is, which language(s) they generally use at home. Language choices may be made consciously, or without thinking much about them (De Houwer 2009). There is evidence that parental input patterns play a large role in helping to determine whether bilingually reared children will actually speak two languages or not. De Houwer (2007) compared the language use of 3,677 parents with that of a total of 4,556 children they were raising (this study looked at a subset of the children and parents in De Houwer 2003). All children were exposed to Dutch and one language X (all questionnaire responses combined indicated 73 different X languages). Dutch was either heard at school, or both at home and at school. The X language was only used at home. Aside from confirming the dramatic intergenerational decline in the use of an X language already reported in De Houwer (2003), this study showed a clear relation between the distribution of the languages within a parent pair and children's

language use. Considering the 1,778 families with both a father and a mother sharing children's homes, the parental input patterns that were most successful for the intergenerational transmission of the X language (defined as: children speak it, without any further specification as to proficiency) were those where both parents only used the X language at home (422 families) and where both parents used the X language at home and in addition one parent used Dutch (243 families). There was no statistically significant difference between the success rates (97 and 93 %, respectively) of these two patterns. The next two parental input patterns yielded between 74 and 79 % success – meaning that in one in four to five families children did not speak the X language (again, there was no statistically significant difference). Respectively, these patterns refer to the one where one parent spoke Dutch at home and the other one the X language (198 families; 74 % success rate) and the one where both parents spoke both languages at home (562 families; 79 % success rate). The pattern that led to the lowest success rate was the one where both parents spoke Dutch, and in addition one parent spoke the X language. This pattern, used by 353 families, led to a low success rate of only 36 %. A reanalysis of Yamamoto's (2001) data with a smaller sample of 111 English-Japanese-speaking families (see De Houwer 2007: 412) shows very similar results as well. The findings in De Houwer (2004) looking at children raised with three languages similarly align with these results.

One can only guess at the underlying reasons for why specific parental input patterns have such a large influence on children's language use. One of them could relate to the frequency with which children hear the X language (see further below). Presumably, if children hear the X language from both parents, they hear it more often. Children heard the X language from both parents in the three most successful patterns (both parents only X, both parents X and one parent Dutch, both parents both languages), but the last pattern (both parents both languages) was in fact no more successful than the pattern where each parent spoke a different language (the so-called one person, one language approach).

Looking at the five parental input patterns in De Houwer (2007) in an alternative way yields additional results. In four of the five patterns, children heard two languages at home. Assuming they had grown up in this pattern from birth, the children in these 1,356 families were developing language in a Bilingual First Language Acquisition setting (BFLA; Meisel 1989; De Houwer 2009). This contrasts with the children in the 422 families where parents spoke just a single language, language X. These children must have learned Dutch through child care, preschool and/or school and were thus growing up in an Early Second Language Acquisition (ESLA) setting (De Houwer 1990). A re-analysis in De Houwer (2018) of Table 7 in De Houwer (2007) shows that ESLA children experienced a 97 % success rate in

speaking the X language, whereas the BFLA children's success rate only amounted to 70 %. Thus, intergenerational language transmission is on average more successful in ESLA than in BFLA. Again, what the underlying reasons are is not quite clear.

I now return to a discussion of the possible role of the quantity of parental language input.

3.2 The quantity of parental language input

The role of the quantity of parental language input for intergenerational language transmission is unclear. Nobody so far has established how much language input in each language is necessary or optimal for children to be able to learn to speak it. We do know from studies of monolingual parental input that the total amount of speech heard by children at home (1) is extremely variable and (2) has a strong influence on the number of words that children know (Hart/Risley 1995). Recent studies of the absolute amount of speech in a particular language in bilingual families confirms this picture of extreme variability (De Houwer 2014; Marchman/Martínez/Hurtado/Grüter/Fernald 2017). In addition, Marchman et al. (2017) found correlations between the number of words spoken to BFLA children in each of their languages and children's test scores on language proficiency measures (De Houwer 2014 did not consider children's proficiency). We also know that BFLA children's language use and proficiency fluctuate quite considerably in response to large changes in the amount of input in each language, for instance, when children go on vacation to the country where one of their input languages is spoken as a societal language (for reviews, see De Houwer 2009, 2018). It is thus quite likely that there is a link between the actual amount of speech that children hear in a particular language and the chance that they will or will not speak it, but so far sufficient research evidence for this link is lacking.

One can also look at frequency in terms of relative frequency rather than absolute amount of speech. There is considerable evidence that very young children perform best in the language they hear most often (see review in De Houwer 2018). When we look at school aged children, the picture is more nuanced. More frequent parental use of the non-societal language compared to the societal language supports children's proficiency in the non-societal language but does not affect children's proficiency in the societal language (e.g., Park/Tsai/Liu/Lau 2012; Tsai/Park/Liu/Lau 2012). Thus, the fact that parents speak a non-societal language at home (on top of the societal language) does not detract from children's ability to learn the school language, although many people, including teachers, appear to think so. Bilingual children's proficiency in the societal language is not only supported within

the home, but can also be nurtured through supportive teacher talk at school (Bowers/Vasilyeva 2011). Again, though, we do not know to what extent relative input frequency affects child monolingual use of the societal language in spite of bilingual input.

3.3 The quality of parental language input

Parents in bilingual families often are bilingual themselves. This usually entails that they speak their languages at varying levels of proficiency (see many contributions in De Houwer/Ortega 2019b). There is a wide range of variation here. One of the languages parents speak with children at home may be one they are just starting to learn, with all the limited communication skills and hesitations that involves. At the other end of the continuum, parents may be fluent and expert speakers of all the languages they use at home. In most cases, parental proficiencies will lie somewhere in between, with parents being a fluent and expert speaker of one language but a not as highly proficient speaker of another, whose pronunciation and/or grammar and/or lexis might sound different from those of most users of the same language variety. Young bilingually raised children pick up on the latter from very early on (De Houwer 2017a), and often disapprove.

So far, we do not know to what extent this early disapproval of parental marked language input affects children's willingness to speak the language concerned. It would appear, though, that in families relocated from another region or country (the so-called first generation) the language that parents in bilingual families do not (yet) speak very expertly is usually the societal language rather than the non-societal one. In those cases, then, 'imperfect' language input (in the societal language) cannot explain children's potentially exclusive use of the societal language. Although parents' non-societal language may also undergo changes (Ortega 2019), there is so far no evidence that such changes lead to children not speaking it. Things may be different in families without a recent immigration background where parents are children of parents (or one parent) who immigrated from another region (the so-called second generation; but see Sweetman/van Ours 2014 for a critique of this term and concept). We know from a pioneering study by Hakuta and D'Andrea (1992) that parents of 308 adolescents of Mexican background in the United States were prone to use more of the societal language (English) than Spanish if at least one parent was born in the United States compared to when both parents were born in Mexico. Parents who were born in their country of current residence but are children of parents who moved there from another country may in addition be more expert in the societal than the non-societal language. Their proficiency in the non-societal language may recede (Ortega 2019). Again, we do not know whether this affects children's monolingual rather than bilingual language use. Research in the

United States (e.g., Place/Hoff 2016) has suggested that parental native speaker status (the authors do not explain what they mean by this) affects child bilingual learning, but so far it is not clear what the precise native-like or non-native-like characteristics of parental language input are that do so. We do not know, either, whether parental native speaker status plays any role in child monolingual use (note that the very use of the term ‘native speaker’ has been highly controversial in the field of both bilingualism and second language acquisition research for many years; the present author questions the wisdom of using this term at all and wishes to distance herself from it). However, paying more attention to parental language proficiency would seem to be a fruitful avenue for research wishing to explore its role in intergenerational language maintenance.

3.4 The role of parental discourse strategies

Within any specific conversation, many children will often speak the same language as their interlocutor, thus following the Convergent Choice Principle (De Houwer 2019). If they do so in conversations in different language, children will be speaking two languages. However, in early bilingual development children have not necessarily learned to use the Convergent Choice Principle (although many have, from a very early age). Alternatively, they may lack the linguistic resources to adjust their language choice, leading them to use the ‘wrong’ language in conversation with a particular parent. Parents can respond to their children’s unexpected language choice through using parental discourse strategies. For bilingual families, this term refers to the way parents negotiate their children’s language choice in conversation (as discussed later in section 5, children play an active role in such negotiation as well).

Lanza (1992, 1997) has identified a continuum between what she calls parental monolingual discourse strategies and bilingual discourse strategies. Within one particular conversation, monolingual discourse strategies socialize the child into using just a single language. When the parent is using language Alpha and the child said something in language A, one way to encourage the child to use language Alpha is to express misunderstanding and thereby implicitly request the child to repeat what (s)he had just said, but in language Alpha (Lanza calls this the Minimal Grasp Strategy). Asking the child to translate into language Alpha from what (s)he said in language A also counts as a Minimal Grasp Strategy (Lanza, personal communication, June 2008; see De Houwer 2009: 136). With the Expressed Guess Strategy, parents use a yes/no-question in language Alpha that translates what the child had said in language A and thereby asks for confirmation. The child may then answer in language Alpha. A strategy that is in between monolingual and bilingual discourse strategies occurs when parents repeat in language Alpha what the child said in lan-

guage A and then just continue the conversation in language Alpha. Bilingual discourse strategies consist of the Move On Strategy, where parents do not pay any attention to a child's language choice and just continue speaking language Alpha even if the child speaks in language A. The most extreme bilingual discourse strategy consists of changing one's own language choice from language Alpha to language A in response to a child utterance in language A. There are additional discourse strategies besides the ones identified by Lanza (De Houwer 2009: 135–138).

What is important for the question of this article is that discourse strategies in bilingual families usually have an effect on children's language choice. If from early on children are socialized into using the language the parent uses in a conversation (through monolingual discourse strategies), and if this happens in two different language contexts, children will likely develop the habit of speaking two languages (De Houwer 2009). If, on the other hand, children start using the 'wrong' language in a conversation and are allowed to continue doing so, they may end up speaking just a single language. Meng and Miyamoto (2012) report on a two-year-old child in Japan who heard nearly exclusively Chinese at home but who had been visiting a Japanese-speaking nursery school for 40 hours a week since age 16 months. They show in great detail how over an 11-month period the child said many Japanese and mixed utterances combining Chinese and Japanese words to her Chinese-speaking mother. In response, the mother mostly tended to use the Move On Strategy (67 %) or even switched to Japanese herself (11 %). She thus mainly allowed the child to speak Japanese, and although there was some use of more monolingual discourse strategies they occurred very infrequently.

In another case also involving Japanese (but now as a non-societal language, and paired with English as societal language) Kasuya (1998) showed that monolingual discourse strategies used by Japanese-speaking parents usually had the effect of children changing from speaking English to speaking Japanese. There are also encouraging reports of preschool children who had stopped speaking a non-societal language for several months and who through the conversational efforts of their parents started speaking it again (Juan-Garau/Pérez-Vidal 2001; Taeschner 1983).

However, depending on children's developmental status (age), De Houwer and Nakamura (in preparation) show how parental discourse strategies can clash with child agency. Before I discuss the role of children themselves as to why they may restrict themselves to speaking just the societal language, I explore the role of institutions and wider society.

4 Searching for causes: the role of institutions and wider society

Families with children growing up bilingually live within a socio-political context. This context affects what happens in the family and may affect both parents' and children's language choice. I highlight some of the actors in the socio-political context that are most relevant to families with young children.

4.1 The role of child care and education

Many young children start attending child care centers or preschools from early on. Typically, these use just a single language – the societal language. Yet many children come to child care or preschool speaking other languages. These are often ignored by educators, which does not contribute to children's well-being (De Houwer 2015b). Children soon come to learn that the societal language is held in much higher esteem than the non-societal language. This may contribute to them no longer wishing to speak the non-societal language (see further section 5). Primary and secondary schools often do not just ignore children's non-societal languages, but may actively forbid their use (see, respectively, Ağırdağ/Jordens/Van Houtte 2014 and Pulinx/Van Avermaet/Ağırdağ 2017).

Language policies in child care and education do not only have a possible effect on children's language choice, but may also affect parental language choice. That may happen when educators and teachers advise parents to stop speaking the non-societal language at home. We do not know how common such negative advice is, but it is so widespread that general overviews on bilingual development and the early education of bilingual learners typically mention it (for instance, Clarke 2009; De Houwer 2009; Delucchi Danhier/Mertins 2018). One reason for this advice may be that teachers think that learning the non-societal language will detract from learning the societal language (see also section 3.2). Research evidence from close to half a century ago (Kuo 1974) and later confirmed by others (e.g., Tsai et al. 2012), however, shows this not to be the case. In fact, there is increasing evidence that children's well-developed proficiency in the non-societal language actually *supports* the learning of the societal language (Tsai et al. 2012; Winsler/Kim/Richard 2014).

Parents often turn to teachers for child rearing advice as regards linguistic practices and accept it at face value (Bezcioglu Göktolga/Yağmur 2018a, 2018b; Lee et al. 2015). Advice that runs counter to parents' interest in maintaining the non-societal languages causes a dilemma. Many parents may follow the teacher's advice, because they think that this will benefit children's academic achievement. This effectively stops children's exposure to the non-societal language, leading to children's inability to continue learning it. When, on the positive side, teachers say a few

words in the non-societal language to parents and are open to it, parents feel respected and supported in their efforts to maintain the non-societal language (Bezciöglu Göktolga/Yağmur 2018b).

4.2 The role of pediatricians and speech professionals

Pediatricians and speech therapists can play an active role in supporting bilingual families and intergenerational language transmission. For instance, they can help dispel myths about supposed negative effects of early bilingual exposure, hand out information about bilingual programs, and help provide parents with bilingual books (Bezciöglu Göktolga/Yağmur 2018a; Lee et al. 2015).

On the other hand, like teachers, pediatricians and speech therapists can also express negative attitudes towards early bilingualism and the non-societal language. They may also advise parents to stop speaking the non-societal language (Byers-Heinlein/Lew-Williams 2013; De Houwer 2009). This is especially the case when children have a general developmental problem (e.g., Park 2014). Very few parents will have the courage to go against such advice from people who are seen as experts (but who, in most cases, have no scientific training or informed knowledge base whatsoever regarding early child bilingualism).

4.3 The role of relatives and friends

In addition to professionals dealing with young children, relatives and friends may also express their opinion about a bilingual upbringing. They may be very critical about it and make it very hard for parents to continue speaking the non-societal language with their children (Leist-Villis 2004). Parents face a dilemma: Follow their relatives' and friends' advice, and give up the non-societal language, or risk social exclusion and conflict if they do not?

4.4 The role of media

An aspect of families' environments that has become omnipresent in children's lives is the media. Whether it is the more traditional media such as television and print books or internet-based exposure to videos and songs, children are more exposed to media than ever before.

Because of the expanded technical opportunities, children now have access to video programs in many different languages. Parents can help select programs in the non-societal language. However, children will also be drawn to programs in the societal language. There has hardly been any research on how media exposure affects bilingually raised children's use of each of their languages. That there may well be an important role is illustrated by Dixon's (2011) findings from Singapore that bilingually raised children's English-language television viewing habits affected their

English comprehension vocabulary more than did English language input from a nanny.

Over and beyond language learning effects from media exposure, children's language attitudes may be affected by the languages they hear through the media. This brings us to the role of children themselves in explaining why they may not speak all the languages they are hearing at home.

5 Searching for causes: the role of children

Children raised with two languages from birth often develop good speaking ability in both. However, it has been frequently observed that when these children start attending preschool in only one of their languages (usually the societal language), they start to use less and less of the non-societal language (De Houwer 2009). One reason may be that the use of the societal language just 'spills over' from school, because children have been immersed in it all day, are tired, and do not necessarily know the school vocabulary in the non-societal language. They may also have felt the lack of attention to their non-societal language and might start harboring negative attitudes towards it because of that, thus aligning themselves more with their new institutional environment than with their home environment. Soon, communication patterns may arise where parents speak the non-societal language and children often answer in the societal language, and this in spite of frequent parental input in the non-societal language (e.g., Leist-Villis 2004). Because of lack of practice, children will become less and less skilled in the non-societal language. After some time, parents may try to use monolingual discourse strategies to encourage children to use the non-societal language. These are often met with children's blunt refusal to speak the non-societal language. Group studies documenting the train of events sketched here are so far lacking (there are several case studies documenting various aspects), but a study from Belgium suggests there is a strong link between children's perceptions of how their non-societal language is treated at school and their proficiency in the non-societal language: Dekeyser and Stevens (2018) found that the self-rated home language proficiency of 312 10- to 12-year-olds was higher in students who thought they were allowed to speak the home language at school.

Children are often around age 4 or 5 when their language refusal becomes more pronounced. This coincides with the time that they have become acutely aware of their own language proficiency (De Houwer 2017a). Children may be embarrassed to make mistakes in the non-societal language and may experience word finding problems. In order to save themselves more embarrassment they may prefer not to use the non-societal language. Language refusal may eventually lead to children no longer being able to actually speak the language. Because of the Convergent Choice

Principle (De Houwer 2019), many parents of children who refuse to speak the non-societal language will give up speaking it to them and will revert to speaking only the language that children are willing to speak. Already in 1974, in a study of 44 Chinese American families with children aged between 2.5 and 6, Kuo (1974) noted that parents may start to speak more and more English rather than just Chinese in response to children speaking more and more English to them. In a larger study of 68 Chinese American families including longitudinal interactional data when children were nearly 6 years old and 14 months later, Park et al. (2012) found that parents of children who spoke Chinese less well at the younger age had started to speak less Chinese to their children when they were older.

Children who still speak the non-societal language in primary school may slowly become reluctant to speak it because of attitudinal issues. Children may start to feel ashamed of the non-societal language. Several of the Mexican origin Spanish-speaking parents in the United States interviewed by Lee et al. (2015) mentioned that children who did not speak Spanish despite hearing it in the home were ashamed of their parents and culture of origin. Others specifically referred to teenagers feeling embarrassed by speaking Spanish, which they believed was “un-American”. Shame may explain why there are many reports of children asking their parents not to speak the non-societal language in the earshot of school friends (e.g., Leist-Villis 2004). Revis (2019) also highlights the role of school and wanting to belong to the mainstream society as factors in children’s language choice.

Language can also become a battleground. At home children may start to argue about language choice, and language choice can become a cause of conflict and a way for children to resist their parents’ authority (e.g., Danjo 2018; Kheirkhah/Cekaite 2015; Sevinç 2016). Children may start to actively refuse to speak the non-societal language in particular situations, answer only with single words, or change the topic and with it the language (De Houwer 1999). Eventually, this may lead to children not speaking the non-societal language at all.

6 Conclusion

This contribution has reviewed some possible factors that either directly or indirectly address the question of why children who are raised bilingually often speak only a single language. About a quarter of bilingually raised children speak only a single language. The single language that bilingually raised children speak is nearly always the societal language, that is, the language of schooling. This language gains a status in children's minds that detracts from their motivation to continue to speak the non-societal language. A high level of input frequency in the non-societal language can possibly counteract this tendency, as can the use of monolingual discourse strategies from very early on. Nevertheless, it will be hard for many parents to keep up speaking the non-societal language with recalcitrant pre-puberty children who do not wish to speak it, and/or in circumstances where educators and medical professionals may express negative attitudes towards early bilingualism and the non-societal language. Although parents may in theory be the ultimate decision makers in terms of the strategies used to support intergenerational non-societal language transmission, for many the price may be too high and the effort required too taxing. Only if society's still often negative attitudes towards early bilingualism and specific languages change for the better can we hope that intergenerational non-societal language transmission will become an easier task.

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