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## EARLY BILINGUALISM: CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS IN AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CHILDCARE CENTER

In this study, language views and home language practice of sixteen immigrant parents were documented and related to the dual language behaviors of their young children (ages 1:09 to 3:06) who were enrolled in a Toronto English-language childcare center. De Houwer's (1999) model of early bilingualism was applied to the minority language context and external factors were used to explain the short-lived active bilingualism of the younger children and the passive bilingualism of the preschoolers. Presenting mothers and fathers with separate questionnaires proved to be a valuable methodological tool, which revealed similar language *thinking* but different home language *practice*. Immigrant mothers were more committed to their children's L1 development than were fathers, a finding, which supports and extends the parental gender difference noted in earlier work (Gleason, 2005; Lyon, 1991; Lyon & Ellis, 1999). Negative effects of early L2 exposure on minority language children's incomplete L1, reported in earlier studies, were confirmed. A concrete outcome of the present study was the creation *mylanguage.ca*, a website intended to help immigrant parents understand their children's dual language learning. Even though the study presents a somewhat bleak picture of the continuation of L1, it concludes on an optimistic note, encouraging immigrant fathers to join forces with their L1-committed spouses and to help provide a nurturing L1 environment for their young children.

*Key words:* early bilingualism, active/ passive bilingualism, parental language attitudes, minority language, children's dual language learning

*...young children learning L2 are one of the fastest  
growing segments of the global population.*

Kan & Kohnert, 2005, p. 380

### **Introduction**

Over the past ten years, childcare centers in Canadian cities have witnessed an ever-increasing number of children born in Canada to immigrant parents. For these minority language (hereafter ML) children, English is *neither* the first, *nor*

the home language. Their enrolment in English-language childcare centers marks the beginning of a two-language journey, characterized by daily exposure to a new *public language* and diminished contact with the home or *intimate family* (Rodriguez, 1982) language.

This unique language circumstance, where ML children, of *a very tender age* (De Houwer, 1999, p. 75) many who have not yet managed their first language (hereafter L1), are immersed in a second language (hereafter L2), which is unfamiliar to them and only partially familiar to their parents, represents a relatively new and important area of early bilingual research. While dual language learning of older, school-aged ML children, as it relates to school performance, has been widely investigated, the systematic study of early bilingualism or the affects of early L2 exposure on young ML children's language development awaits research attention (Li Wei & Zhu Hua, 2006). This study of dual language behaviors of one group of young ML children includes six sections. The first section provides definitions of language attitudes and a model of early bilingualism of ML children. Following this, a review of prior studies dealing with the effects of parental language behaviors on children's early bilingualism is presented in Section 2. Section 3 includes a hypothesis, and Section 4 provides a description of the study. In Section 5, findings are presented and are related to earlier reports. Section 6 includes conclusions and study outcomes.

## Language attitudes

Language attitudes have been defined as *expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language* (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992, p. 199). Two kinds of language attitudes also referred to as language orientations, have been identified: *instrumental* and *integrative* (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). An *instrumental* language attitude is pragmatic, achievement-oriented and has utilitarian goals. It focuses on the self and is driven by a desire for personal success, security, and status. An *integrative* language attitude, on the other hand, is mostly social and interpersonal. It is characterized by a desire to befriend and/or identify with a language group and to be accepted into their cultural activities.

Baker's (1992) 3-component model of language attitudes can be described as a *language think-language do* paradigm, which relates language attitudes to external or observable language behavior. His *cognitive component* of attitudes includes thoughts (either favorable or unfavorable) and stated beliefs about a specific language, such as reports provided by subjects on questionnaires. Baker reminds us that language views reported by parents may *only reflect surface evaluations* (p.12). His *affective component* of attitudes concerns feelings, such as anxiety, love, hate or passion towards a language. The *cognitive* and *affective* language attitudes, Baker states, *may not always be in harmony* (p.12) and can mask true language views. *Readiness to action* completes the 3-component lan-

guage attitude model and can be viewed as a follow-up of expressed language attitudes.

It has been suggested that these three components merge into a single, abstract construct and serve to explain how attitudes affect external behavior (Ajzen, 1988): how a language attitude, together with feelings about language lead to specific language behavior. While this construct appears to have an explanatory and predictive function, it is important to note that, due to context variance, the relationship between attitudes and action is *neither straightforward nor simple* (p. 13).

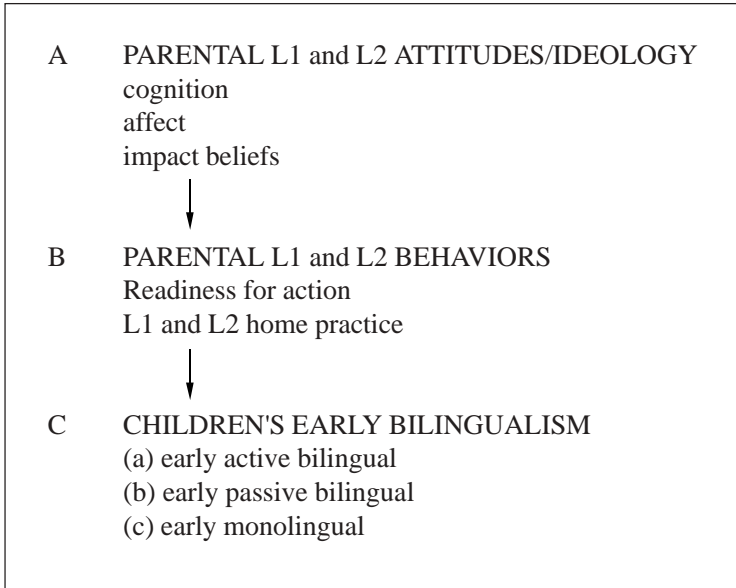
Kemppainen, Ferrin, Ward, and Hite (2004) identify four types of parental language and culture orientations: L1-centric, bicultural, multicultural and L2-centric. They describe a correspondence between parental language and culture orientation and their choice of language school for their children. For example, parents who reported an L1-centric orientation, characterized by L1 importance, superiority, and negative and coercive L2 views, chose schools where L1 was the language of program delivery. Parents with a bicultural orientation, who reported comfort and familiarity with both L1 and L2, chose a range of schools for their children: bilingual L1-L2, L1 (with extended L2 experiences) or L2. A multicultural orientation was the acceptance and tolerance of many languages and cultures, while a majority language/culture focus was referred to as an L2-centric orientation.

De Houwer (1999) differentiates *language attitudes* from *language beliefs*. Parental language attitudes, she writes, can be positive, negative, flexible, tolerant, or neutral and can be directed towards a particular language, bilingualism generally, children's bilingualism, language choice, and/or language mixing or switching.

For De Houwer, *impact beliefs* directly affect parental home language practice and, in turn children's language behaviors. A strong *impact belief*, where parents believe that they have *direct control over their children's linguistic functioning* (p. 83), is accompanied by strategies such as home language rules and praising/punishing children's language behavior. In contrast to this, a weak *impact belief* is described as the view that the wider environment is responsible for children's development or *picking up* of language, requiring little or no parental intervention.

King (2000) differentiates between *language attitudes* and *language ideology*, noting that the former is more specific and refers to a response to certain aspects of a particular language, while the latter, following Silverstein's (1979) definition, is a more general term, which refers to a broader system of beliefs concerning a particular language or language in general. For King, overtly expressed language attitudes reveal an underlying language ideology which influences language practice. Further, according to King, attention to language ideology *can play a crucial role in understanding the differences... between expressed language attitudes and observed language behavior* (p. 169).

Figure 1. Early bilingualism of ML children



### Early bilingualism of ML children

The model of early bilingualism of ML children shown in Figure 1 serves as the theoretical framework for the present investigation. As an amalgamation of Baker’s (1992) 3-component model of language attitudes and De Houwer’s (1999) 3-tiered early bilingualism framework, it is applied to the young ML children’s dual language circumstance: L1 in the home and L2 in the childcare center.

De Houwer’s framework is based on the *parent-child link* found in developmental psychology (Johnson & Martin, 1985), where external factors or parental behaviors are important determinants of children’s development. She applies this *parent-child link* to early bilingualism and focuses on two environmental factors in her attempt to understand why some very young children, from linguistically mixed homes, use the two languages they are exposed to, while others do not.

For De Houwer, studies of early bilingualism, which attempt to explain and predict the nature of young children’s dual language behaviors, must pay serious attention to parental language beliefs and attitudes, and their home language practice. Too often, she says, one external factor is documented while the other one is inferred. For example, parental linguistic behaviors are related to patterns of children’s language use, while underlying parental language attitudes and beliefs are inferred.

Parental language attitudes, for De Houwer, are *part of the more general belief and value system regarding children's overall development* and are characterized by *a lot of variation* (p. 81). For her, what parents *feel* and *believe* about language is reflected in what they *do* with and about language. Parental language attitudes, De Houwer notes, directly affect their linguistic practice and their interactional strategies, including how they choose to respond to children's conversation contributions. Yet like Ajzen (1988), she cautions that the link between parental language attitudes and language practice is complex and not always direct or transparent. There are, she writes, *ambivalent situations* (p. 82) where there can be a mismatch between parental language behaviors and their underlying language views.

De Houwer (p. 77) differentiates between three types of early bilingualism. For her, an *early active bilingual* preschool child *regularly responds and initiates conversations in either of the two languages*. In contrast to this, she defines *early passive bilingualism* as a state in which a preschooler *appears to understand two languages but produces only one*. Finally, an *early monolingual* is a young child who *does not appear to understand two languages and produces only one*.

## Prior research

The review, which follows, is representative (rather than comprehensive) of studies on early bilingualism with a sociolinguistic focus, taking into account both parental language attitudes and their home language practice.

For Li (1999), ML parents play a pivotal role in guiding the language behaviors of their children. She believes that parental L2 attitudes affect the *speed and quality* of the acquisition of children's L2. In her case study of the use of both Chinese and English by her daughter, Amy, she emphasizes the strong relationship between parental L1 attitudes and children's linguistic behaviors:

*Our children's attitudes toward, and the maintenance of their L1 depend mostly on how we parents look upon our L1, when and how often and with whom we communicate in L1 and with what we associate L1 – especially when our L1 is marginalized in the new culture.* (p. 3)

Li's attitudes towards L1 and L2 can be described as both integrative *and* instrumental. This double orientation was matched by her home language strategies that actively supported, respected and valued both languages. Li notes that three things facilitated her daughter's L2 learning: (a) continued use and development in L1 (extensive *family talk* covering more than household topics), (b) supportive parental L1 and L2 attitudes, and (c) active parental commitment and involvement in the child's linguistic progress (daily conversations, explanations, family talk and joint activities).

Thus Li's positive and encouraging L1 and L2 views, her integrative and instrumental L1 and L2 attitudes and her supportive and consistent home practice, (where L2 was acquired and L1 continued to develop), resulted in her daughter's dual language learning where her two working languages had daily meaning and relevance.

Xiaoling (2005) investigated L1 and L2 attitudes of Chinese migrant parents who had a three-year UK residency. The majority of the parents in this study reported a social and interpersonal orientation or an *integrative* attitude (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) towards their children's L1 learning. Two reasons why they *make their children learn Chinese* were (a) grandparents' expectations and (b) identity marking and familiarity with one's origins and roots: *to be a Chinese, it is very important to be able to speak Chinese* (p.116). Only a very small percentage (10%) of Chinese parents reported an L1 *instrumental* attitude where home language knowledge was considered important for children's future careers. For all of the Chinese parents, those planning to stay in the UK and those who planned to go back to China, learning the host language was considered vital for school success, evidence of their L2 *instrumental* orientation. L2 mastery was a priority and a *primary concern* (p.117) for these parents and overrode all L1 maintenance efforts.

Xiaoling found a match between parental language *thinking* and parental home language *practice*. She describes how the L1 *integrative* orientation reported by parents matched their home L1 strategies: place L1 on hold: *they can start picking up Chinese again once proficiency in English is established* (p. 117), and focus on L2 learning. She also found that parental L1 and L2 views and their subsequent L1 and L2 home practice, directly affected the language behaviors of their children. For example, as parents emphasized the importance and value of L2, children showed preference for their new language and used it in the home, a delegated L1 context. She describes the children's bilingualism as being *functional in nature* (p. 118) where L2 is used in the school *for cognitive development and concept formation* (p. 118), and with peers (both L2 and L1 speakers), while Chinese is the language of the home. However, for the children, L2 was the preferred language and they used it in combination with L1 in the home.

Xiaoling found that mainland professional Chinese migrant parents residing in the UK had two language-related goals: (a) they were *anxious to be assimilated into the country, starting with learning the language* (p. 117), and (b) they wanted to maintain their L1. A look at their L1 and L2 attitudes and home practice, however, revealed that L2 received more attention in these homes where the primary parental language concern was *with their children's ability to use the majority language* (p. 118).

In their attitudinal study, Lyon and Ellis (1991) found that the majority (86%) of families with one or two Welsh-speaking parents held *an overall favorable attitude* towards the Welsh language, wanted their children to learn Welsh and

were anxious to *keep the language alive*. Reported reasons for this positive view of Welsh were related to identity and heritage: *because we're Welsh* (p.247). A small percentage of parents (14%) reported an *instrumental* reason: *Because he'll be classed as Welsh- speaking for getting a job* (p. 243). The study also revealed a parental gender difference where mothers were *more responsible for teaching the mother tongue at home* (p.246).

Lao (2004) investigated both language attitudes and home language practice of Chinese parents whose preschoolers were enrolled in a Chinese-English bilingual program. Both Chinese-dominant and English-dominant parents reported *instrumental* and *integrative* reasons for enrolling their children in the Chinese-English bilingual preschool: *better career opportunities, positive self-image and communication with Chinese speakers*.

Differences in the home language practice of Chinese- and English-dominant parents were noted. Unlike their English-dominant counterparts, Chinese-dominant parents preferred that their children speak L1 in the home and expected high levels of L1 proficiency.

Lao found a discrepancy between parental reports of L1 importance and actual L1 practice, concluding that content learned by the Chinese children in the Chinese-English bilingual program was not reinforced in the home. Reasons for this included limited Chinese proficiency of English-dominant parents, absence of L1 literacy resources in the home, and the generally limited level of L1 home use.

The study concludes with a bleak picture of the children's continued L1 development. Lao notes that *L1 maintenance and development cannot be achieved without a strong commitment from the parents* (p.116). She advocates for meaningful *print-rich* home environments, guidance from adults with high levels of literacy, partnerships with schools and support for English-dominant parents who need to improve their L1 oral and written skills. Only then, she concludes, will parents be able to facilitate their children's home language and literacy skills.

In her study of Paraguayan bilingualism, Garcia (2005) found that most Paraguayan parents used both Spanish and Guarani in the home. Their attitude towards Spanish, which they described as *more important*, reflects an *instrumental* orientation, while their view of Guarani as an identity marker, a language used to discipline children, reflects an *integrative* orientation. Garcia found that most parents did not have concerns about the future of Guarani, expressing certainty that, as part of the school curriculum, it would be kept alive and children would never lose it.

Parental language views and behaviors, Garcia notes, serve to socialize children to favor Spanish over Guarani affecting their language choice and use, which in turn will determine their language dominance, preference and the nature of their bilingualism. She concludes her study with a number of questions about the outlook for the continued use of Guarani, the lesser used language and the process of subtractive bilingualism and inevitable language shift that occurs across generations.

The general picture which emerges from the studies reviewed here, is that immigrant parents are concerned about their children's dual language learning: they are anxious to maintain the home language and at the same time, they want their children to learn the host language. In most cases, parents acted more on their L2 than on their L1 concerns. This in turn affected children's dual language behaviors, sent the message that L1 was less important and resulted in children's L1 weakening and L2 preference. The parental gender difference showed that attention to L1 is the responsibility of mothers, more so than fathers.

## Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that young ML children enrolled in an L2 childcare center, will continue to develop in their home language, if mothers and fathers ensure that the following L1 supportive conditions are in place: (a) positive attitudes towards both L1 *and* L2, (b) positive attitude towards early child bilingualism, (c) strong L1 impact beliefs, (d) commitment to L1 maintenance and (d), rich L1 input, where home language use is consistent, active and meaningful.

## The Study

### Mothers and fathers

Eight immigrant families responded to an invitation to participate in the present study. Mothers and fathers were considered separate subjects and were not grouped into a *parent* category. All of the mothers and fathers met the following four criteria: (a) recent immigrants to Canada, (b) their children were enrolled in Maplewood Childcare Center (hereafter MCC), where the language of program delivery was English, (c) their first language and the language used in the home at the time of the study was *not* English or French, and (d) the children's L1 was not English or French.

The mothers who participated in the study were between 30 and 41 years old, while the fathers were somewhat older: 30 to 46. All of the parents had completed university degrees: 4 fathers and 3 mothers had completed graduate degrees while the remainder had completed undergraduate degrees. Mothers worked in the following professions: librarian, accountant, journalist, food technologist, administrator and researcher, while fathers' professions included analyst, engineer, journalist, clinical microbiologist, university professor and researcher. All of the mothers and fathers were born outside of Canada. Birth countries included China, Turkey, Serbia, and Iran. Mothers' Canadian residency was 3 to 7 years, while that of the fathers was somewhat longer, 4 to 8 years. The dominant language of all of the parents was their L1, also reported as the home language and included Farsi, Mandarin, Serbian, Turkish and Shanghainese. 4 mothers and 5 fathers reported knowledge and use of languages and/or dialects in addition to their L1 and

English. The parents of the mothers and fathers lived in the home country. Both mothers and fathers reported mixing L1 and L2 in the home more often than using L1 exclusively for the following two reasons: difficulty in translating L2 idioms and expressions, and sustaining communication with children. All of the mothers and three of the fathers reported that maternal full time employment was the reason their children were enrolled in the MCC. The remaining 5 fathers reported that they wanted their children to *learn English*.

Overall, fathers, who had a slightly longer Canadian residency than mothers, reported a higher L2 proficiency. More fathers (4) than mothers (2) reported *high* levels of L2 understanding, speaking, reading and writing. One mother and 1 father reported *high* levels in all L2 areas except writing (which was noted as *fairly well*). 5 mothers and 3 fathers reported *fairly well* in all four areas of L2.

### **Questionnaires**

Unlike other investigations of parental language behavior, mothers and fathers in the present study were considered individual participants and were given *separate* Questionnaires. It was felt that one Questionnaire could not measure the language views of *both* parents. The rationale for this was the recognition that immigrant mothers and fathers have different linguistic *funds of knowledge* (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2001), and bring their own personal language experiences to the language-parenting task. This approach stands in contrast to the widespread use of single parental questionnaires, one example of which can be found in the study of Welsh language attitudes (Lyon & Ellis, 1991, p. 241), where a questionnaire was *addressed to mothers who were asked to report answers for their partners as well*.

Mothers and fathers were asked to complete the Questionnaires independently, without comparison and discussion with their spouses. They were presented with a language choice: a Questionnaire in English or in their home language. The Questionnaire was adapted from Shin (2005) and included questions about the following: (a) demographics, (b) language attitudes, beliefs and proficiency, (c) home language practice, (d) child's language proficiency, (e) bilingualism, and (f) language-related concerns.

### **The children**

The 4 girls and 4 boys, who participated in the study, were all born in Canada. At the time of the study their length of stay in the MCC was from 1 to 20 months and their ages ranged from 1;09 (years;months) to 3;06. The 3 younger children were in the Toddler Room, while the 5 older children were in the Preschool Room. All of the children were in full time attendance in MCC. Only one child had an older sibling. Table 1 shows the children's sex, age at MCC admission, length of stay in the MCC, age at the time of the study and home/first language.

Table 1. Children's' sex, age at MCC admission, length of stay in the MCC age at the time of the study and home/first language

Child Code	Sex	Age at MCC admission	MCC stay (in mos.) at time of study	Age at time of study	Home language and L1
TODDLERS					
PH	M	1;08	1	1:09	Mandarin
GN	F	1;09	1	1:10	Mandarin
ZE	M	1;05	8	2:01	Mandarin/Turkish
PRESCHOOLERS					
MA	M	1:00	20	2:08	Farsi
EF	F	2;00	9	2:09	Turkish
RI	M	2:04	7	2:11	Mandarin
NA	F	2;00	11	2:11	Serbian
AM	F	2;06	12	3:06	Shanghainese

### Maplewood Childcare Center (MCC)

MCC is housed on a Toronto university campus. It accepts children from birth to 5 years and serves families within the university community and neighborhood. Children in the MCC are divided by age into four groups: infants (0-18 mos.), toddlers (1;06-2;06), preschoolers (2;06-4;00) and kindergarteners (4;00-5;00). MCC operates five days a week from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. The MCC is known for its warm, welcoming and accepting atmosphere. Sensitive to the language needs of children who do not speak English, the MCC teachers adopt strategies to help their charges adjust to the new language environment. As good language models, they speak clearly and slowly, encourage children to identify and name objects in the room, invite children to repeat words and phrases and read books numerous times a day. They use key words (e.g. *blanket, sad, bathroom*) and sing songs in the children's home languages. Their open door policy stands as an ongoing invitation for parents and relatives to join MCC activities.

### Children's language

A language narrative for each child came from three sources. Mothers and fathers reported on the following five aspects of their children's language behaviors: (i) dominance, (ii) language(s) of solitary play, (iii) request language(s), (iv) preference, and (v) proficiency. MCC teachers provided an assessment of L2 behaviors. Native-speaking university students, enrolled in an Early Childhood Education program, provided L1 and L2 measures (Schiff-Meyers, 1992, p. 32). These were based on two interactions (approximately 30-45 minutes long) where the students,

Table 2. Mothers and fathers: language attitudes and beliefs (L = language)

General L attitude	→ multicultural	
L-specific attitudes, beliefs	L1	L2
cognitive component	integrative pro-L1 ideology	instrumental pro-L2 ideology
affective component	pride loyalty anxiety fear guilt	pride confusion uncertainty
impact belief	weak	weak

using L1 or L2 exclusively, engaged the children in age-appropriate games, stories and activities. All of the interactions were audio recorded.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings presented here represent a one-time parental language behavior snapshot. Parental language views and subsequent home language behaviors are not static. As children grow and language circumstances change, parents alter both their language thinking and their home language practice. Also, it is acknowledged here that the number of participants in the present study could limit the generalizability of the findings, which need to be corroborated by additional data. Also, the limitation of parental self-reports is recognized.

Findings are presented in two language profiles. The *Parental Language Profile* is a documentation of mothers' and fathers' language ideas and their home language practice. The *Children's Language Profile* summarizes children's dual language behaviors.

### Parental Language Profile

Of the 16 parents, 14 completed the English Questionnaire while two completed a Mandarin Questionnaire. The *Parental Language Profile* is presented in two parts. In the first part mothers' and fathers' L1 and L2 language attitudes and beliefs, their views on L1 maintenance and their understanding of bilingualism are presented. In the second part, parental L1 and L2 home language practice is described.

### Mothers' and fathers' language thinking

Table 2 shows a summary of general and language-specific attitudes reported by mothers and fathers. Responses revealed a general *multicultural*, (as opposed to an L1-centric, bicultural or L2-centric) orientation towards language

(Kemppainen et al, 2004), characterized by *appreciating or feeling comfortable with many languages and cultures*. The examples which follow, illustrate the parental multicultural orientation:

*Canada is a country with diverse cultures. Here all cultures are allowed and encouraged to blossom. We are from all of the world and that makes Canada so interesting. As you walk in any neighborhood, you can hear some other languages.*

The *cognitive* component (Baker, 1992) of parental L1 attitudes is described as *integrative* (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), where the home language was described in positive, mostly social and interpersonal terms. In addition to this, parents held a *pro-L1 ideology* (King, 2001), reporting that L1 was important, not only for specific functions and emotional links to family and relatives: *It is our parents' wish that she knows Chinese so her cultural heritage won't be lost*, but also for its identity importance: *She is ethnically Chinese and therefore it is important for her to know the language*. The *affective* component of L1 included feelings of pride and loyalty to the home country, language and culture, and anxiety, fear and guilt in relation to children's imminent L1 loss and its replacement with L2.

All of the mothers, compared with only two fathers described their anxiety concerning current and/or imminent loss of the home language:

*She will lose the ability to speak Mandarin soon. English will probably become her mother tongue. I am worried about her Turkish. I am concerned that she will grow up finding the language and culture of her parents foreign.*

All of the mothers, and one father reported that, even if their children develop and retain an understanding of the home language, they will probably never acquire literacy skills. More mothers than fathers felt that exposure to two languages was confusing to their children:

*I am concerned that this can be pressure for her. I think it would be too difficult for her if I restrict her to use only one language.*

These mothers (and one father) reported anxiety and uncertainty about the continued use of the home language and wondered about its possible negative affects on the learning of English and future difficulty upon school entry:

*I am also wondering will her English be good enough when she starts school if we continue to speak Serbian at home. This is confusing for him.*

Mothers were more aware than fathers of the dominance of English in the lives of their children. A tone of resignation was noted in maternal reports of children's English preference:

*English is dominant for him and there is not so much you can do. She can speak more English words. She prefers English. English is everywhere around her and she can already see that she needs to speak English in the store and in the park. We're surrounded by English!*

One mother reported that a *language comfort zone* finds its way from the MCC to the home and parents need to accept the fact that their young children know a great deal of English, prefer English and want to use it in the home:

*They get comfortable hearing 7 to 8 hours of English every day. I believe it's natural for children to get comfortable with the language they hear most of the day.*

Overall, parents expressed a *weak L1 impact belief* (De Houwer, 1999), reporting, with a tone of abandon, that they had *minimal control* over their children's L1 development due to the extended L2 exposure, and the societal dominance of L2:

*I am a bit afraid that his home language won't be as good as we had expected. Hearing it so little means that it is difficult for my child to understand the importance of speaking Mandarin. What I pass on in Mandarin will be limited. It's sad. I think she will not know her native language.*

Responses provided by mothers and fathers revealed an *instrumental L2 attitude*, characterized by *pragmatic, achievement-oriented and... utilitarian goals* (Gardner & Lambert, 1972): *Knowing English will help her in school*. Further, a *pro L2 ideology* (King, 2000) was reflected in the following parental responses: *English is an international language. English is a world language*. All of the parents reported pride in their young children's L2 progress: *Maybe we parents won't catch up with her. She knows a lot of English*. In addition to this, feelings of confusion and uncertainty concerning children's dual language learning were reported: *I think there will be a problem because he has two languages. I am concerned that this will be pressure for her*. Parents reported that children would pick up L2 in the MCC and the wider environment and that home intervention was not necessary, evidence of a *weak L2 impact belief*.

### **L1 maintenance**

Mothers and fathers of the toddlers (under age two) did not report difficulty with the maintenance of the home language due to the child's age, and their short

stay in the MCC (between 1 and 4 months). However, the comments below show that mothers (but not fathers) were anticipating a change in their children's home language behaviors:

*For now she is still young and Mandarin is her dominant language. Once she learns English better and when she start school I expect some difficulties.*

Mothers and fathers of the preschoolers reported that it is difficult to maintain the home language in English-speaking Toronto. Mothers, but not fathers, provided the following four reasons for this difficult parental task: (a) without extended family, parents are the only source of their children's L1, (b) limited L1 exposure when compared to extended L2 exposure, (c) limited resources (books, DVDs) in the home language and (d) lack of social supports due to distance from the L1 community.

For all of the mothers and fathers, maintaining the home language was viewed as a parental responsibility and that the teachers at the MCC *cannot* be expected to help parents in this task: *No, they don't know Mandarin. Their job is to teach English. Only we as parents can do the work.* However, five of the mothers (but no fathers) reported that it would be very helpful if the MCC teachers provided immigrant parents with specific L1 maintenance strategies.

### **Knowing two languages**

All of the mothers and the fathers reported advantages to children's knowledge of two languages. Reasons included the following: *more life chances, stimulation of the brain, help in learning a third language, important skill, life enriching, leading to tolerance of others, stimulation of the child's intelligence, and access to new worlds.*

In sum, the language *thinking* of mothers and fathers was more similar than different. Both acknowledged and valued the linguistic and cultural diversity of their new city. Their pride and loyalty to the home language was accompanied by reports of the importance of their children's L2 learning. Both mothers and fathers acknowledged the advantages of bilingualism, but felt that they had little control over their children's language development. A significant difference in language thinking between mothers and fathers was that mothers, more so than fathers, expressed concern and anxiety about children's dual language learning, the imminent loss of L1 and the signs of shift to L2.

### **Home language practice**

Reports of home language behaviors revealed that mothers and fathers adopted specific strategies as they navigated L1 and L2 with their young children in the

home. These strategies were related to the following five language areas: (a) use, (b) home rules, (c) children's screen time, (d) book reading and (e) teaching language.

### **Home language use**

All of the mothers and fathers reported that L1 and L2 mixing is common in their homes. One mother explained her child's combined L1 and L2 use was an outcome of hearing her parents mix: *We mix all the time*. Fathers were more accepting of children's language mixing than were mothers: *No problem for me. It's only natural. I can only accept it at the moment with a consideration of her age*. Mothers expressed concern that the mixing would lead to L1 loss: *She will lose the ability to speak Mandarin soon*.

### **Home language rule**

Overall, mothers' and fathers' reports of a home language rule were significantly different. Of the eight mother-father pairs, only two provided the same response reporting that an *L1-only* home rule was in place. The remaining six pairs responded differently, where one parent reported an *L1-only* home rule while the other did not.

All of the mothers reported that children were *encouraged* and *expected* to use L1 in the home. One half (4) of the mothers reported that an *L1-only* home rule was in place, but that it was regularly violated. The mothers of the 3 younger children and 1 mother of a preschooler reported that there was no home language rule and that L2 use was *OK*. The mothers of the toddlers reported that it was too early to mandate home language: *It is not necessary to set up a rule, as she is still too young*. 3 of the fathers added a directive to their *L1-only* home rule: *She is to speak Mandarin. Rule is to speak Mandarin. I remind her of this rule*. Two fathers reported that there was no home language rule while 3 did not respond to the question.

### **Screen time**

Screen time is defined here as time spent by the children, in hours per week, watching TV, DVDs and/or playing computer games. L2 screen time reported by mothers and fathers was significantly higher than reported L1 screen time: mothers L2:L1 weekly totals were 53:17, while fathers were 49:18. Mothers (but not fathers) were concerned about this imbalance and reported the difficulty in finding age-appropriate L1 screen materials.

### **Book reading**

Mothers shared books more often with their children than did fathers. All of the mothers reported reading L1 books to their children daily, while L2 books were read daily by half of the mothers. The mothers who did not read L2 books

felt that their children had sufficient access to L2 books in the MCC. In contrast to this, one half of the fathers reported daily L1 and L2 reading. One father reported *occasional* L1 and L2 reading, while the remaining 3 did not respond to the question.

### **Language teaching**

In contrast to parental reports of limited control over their children's language development, (weak L1 and L2 impact beliefs) direct L1 teaching was reported by all of the mothers, who provided L1 equivalents to children's L2 word use and 4 fathers, who reported corrected children's pronunciation of L1 words. Also all of the mothers and fathers reported teaching select L2 words and phrases, such as polite terms and requests for assistance, to help children make friends and communicate their needs in the MCC.

To summarize parental home language practice: mothers were more committed, more engaged, and more involved than fathers in their children's L1 learning. Mothers' detailed accounts of children's language behaviors stand in contrast to the brief and/or incomplete reports provided by fathers. Mothers were anxious about their children's language mixing and concerned about signs of L1 loss. This extends the finding that mothers in a monolingual context are more supportive in their speech with children than are fathers (Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998; Gleason, 2005). Also, this finding supports the parental gender finding, that there are *significant differences in the influence exerted by men and by women in the languages used in the home* (Lyon, 1991, Lyon & Ellis, 1999). Like the Welsh mothers, the mothers in the present study were *more responsible for teaching the mother tongue at home*.

### **Match: mismatch: parental language views - parental home language practice**

In accord with earlier reports, (Xiaoling, 2005; Lao, 2004) both match and mismatch were noted between mothers' and fathers' language thinking and their actual home language practice. A stark mismatch was that, despite reports of weak L1 and L2 *impact beliefs* or admission of limited control over their children's language development, all of the mothers and fathers adopted L1 and L2 home strategies. Mothers acted on their L1 loyalty more so than did fathers. Maternal strategies, such as encouraging and expecting children to use L1 in the home, providing L1 equivalents for L2 word use, requesting L1 maintenance suggestions from MCC teachers, reading L1 books, matched their L1 thinking and commitment. Yet their admissions of L1 and L2 mixing, their reading of L2 books and their resigned tone in reports of L1 loss, stand in contrast to their L1 loyalty.

Fathers' L2 strategies reflect both a match and a mismatch with their reported L1 and L2 views. The tolerance and acceptance of children's language mixing,

Table 3. Children's L1 and L2 behavior as reported by parents ( $\emptyset$  = no response)

child code	dominant language	preferred language	solitary play language	request language
GROUP A				
PH	L1	$\emptyset$	L1	L1
GN	L1	no:L1	L1	L1
ZE	L1	$\emptyset$	L1	L1
NA	L1	no:L1	L1	L1
GROUP B				
RI	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$	L1:L2	L2
EF	L2	L2	L2	L2
AM	L2	L2	L1:L2	L2
MA	L2	$\emptyset$ :L2	L1:L2	L2

reading L2 books and teaching L2 words and phrases matches their L2-focus, yet this L2 presence in the home stands in contrast to reported L1 loyalty.

In sum, the *Parental Language Profile* revealed similarities in the language *thinking* of mothers and fathers and significant differences in their language *practice*. Questionnaire responses revealed that the match between language thinking and home language practice was closer for mothers than it was for fathers. For example mothers, far more than fathers, acted on their statements of L1 loyalty and importance. Home language practice of mothers is described as *L1-focused*, while that of fathers is described as *L2-focused*.

Following the model of early bilingualism of ML children, parental language behaviors will now be used to explain and predict the language behaviors of children.

### Children's Language Profile

Table 3 provides a summary of children's L1 and L2 behaviors as reported by parents. With very few exceptions, mothers and fathers were in agreement about their children's language knowledge and use. A single entry in Table 3, as in L1, represents parental agreement. In cases of different responses, that of the father appears first and is followed by mother's response, as in: no:L1. Group A children were described by parents as *L1-centered* while the Group B were reported as *L2-centered*.

#### Group A

The 4 *L1-centered* Group A children had extensive L1 exposure and were in supportive L1 environments: 2 toddlers were new MCC admissions, one toddler had two (non-English) home languages and one preschooler had numerous op-

portunities for daily L1 use as her aunt was a MCC teacher and a speaker of the child's L1. 2 fathers reported that their children did not yet exhibit a language preference while their spouses reported L1 preference. The remaining 4 parents did not report their children's language preference.

Parents reported that children's L1 receptive and productive skills were stronger than their L2 skills. The mothers (but not the fathers) forecasted that with time, and a longer MCC stay, their children's L2 use would increase, and that a shift to L2 was inevitable: *But that will change when she hears more English.*

### **Group B**

Mothers and fathers reported L2 as both dominant and preferred for the 4 Group B children. The solitary play language for 3 of the children was reported as a combination of L1 and L2, while for one child, described as a *fast* English learner, L2 was used exclusively. This child's father reported that his daughter had surpassed him in L2 learning. The language of request for all of the Group B children was L2.

Mothers and fathers reported that their children's L1 was *passive* (Richards et al, 1992, p. 5) where understanding was greater than production. In contrast to this, children's L2 use was described as *active*: *She's learning so fast. He knows more English than Mandarin.* Parents also reported that their children mix L1 and L2.

### **Children's L1**

All of the students reported that their initial attempts to interact with both toddlers and preschoolers using L1 were met with surprise, wonder, confusion and sometimes anger. Following a confused and angry look, one preschooler ran from the student, while others stopped to stare in wonder, almost disbelief at the L1-using student. For the children, hearing L1 in the MCC represented a violation of an established language-context distinction, a behavior confirmed by MCC teachers. The exception to this was the preschooler whose aunt was a MCC teacher who regularly used L1 with the child.

During the second L1 interaction, both toddlers and preschoolers appeared somewhat more comfortable and accepting of the L1-speaking students. One toddler used both L1 and L2 words with the student during book sharing. Another toddler used L1 single words. However, the preschoolers' participation with the L1-speaking students was passive. They nodded in agreement, shook their head to negate, pointed when asked, responded in L2 but did not use their L1. In one case, when the student asked a preschooler if she understood what was being said, the child shook her head and turned away. However, her sideways glances and eye movements revealed that she did indeed understand.

The students concluded that L1 ability of all of the children was below the level of native speakers of the same age.

## Children's L2

MCC teachers reported two behaviors, which helped the toddlers, *tune into the new language* (Tabors, 2004, p. 57). These included *spectating*, where the younger children silently observed a group activity, actively listened and attended to L2, and *rehearsing*, where words were extracted from utterances produced by teachers and/or peers and repeated numerous times. Extensive use of non-verbal behaviors, such as vocalization, pointing and gesticulation, were reported in the toddlers' communicative attempts. These behaviors were exhibited alone, or they accompanied single L2 words.

Student reports revealed a number of similarities in L2 use of the toddlers and the preschool boys. These children experimented with L2 speech sounds (*begga, bugga, bubba*), used single words (*bunny, water, blue*), produced telegraphic speech, (*go fishing, cut it*) and some combinatorial speech (*I wanna go. Push me in.*) Formulaic speech or the production of phrases and formulae was extensive (*easydoesit, stopit, silly Billy, yourturn, notnow, alldone*). Also the following grammatical morphemes were noted: simple negation (*no like, no puzzle*), plural formations, (*bubbles, boots*), possessives (*my hat, mine*) and personal and possessive pronoun use (*I wanna. my napkin*). At times L1 and L2 words were produced together.

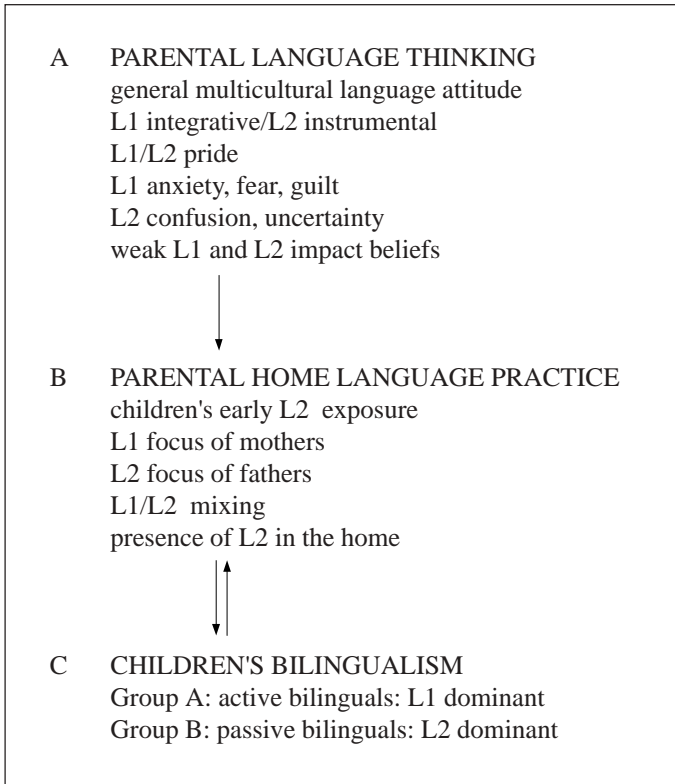
The following examples show that the preschool girls' L2 use resembled that of their L2 monolingual counterparts (Bloom, 1993): negation (*I don't like that.*), definite and indefinite article (*I want a red one. I'm making the sand.*), prepositions (*I can put it in my hair. Are we going on the rocket ship?*), personal pronouns (*I will be right back.*) and contractions (*You can't sleep.*) Reported errors included possessives (*It's mines*) and the application of the regular past tense *-ed* to irregular verbs (*It falled down. Can I putted away my animal?*). Also, the preschool girls produced three types of L2 speech acts: interrogative (*what this?*), declarative (*your turn*), and imperative (*push me*). Pronunciation strategies included consonant substitution: /th/→/d/ (*moder*), /th/→/t/ (*tink*), /br/→/bw/ (*bwead*) and /d/→/g/ (*guck*). Consonant cluster reduction was also reported: /cr/→/c/ (*caker*) and /dr/→/d/ (*daw*).

## Children's bilingualism

Following De Houwer, the Group A children are identified as *active* bilinguals who understand and use both L1 and L2. The Group B preschoolers are identified as *passive* bilinguals with dual language (L1 and L2) understanding, but single language (L2) use. None of the children were identified as *early monolinguals*.

This early bilingual identification was confirmed by the L1-speaking students, who reported that Group A children understood *and* responded to L1 utterances, while the Group B preschoolers, although their L1 understanding was evident, (like the Chinese-English bilingual preschoolers in Li Wei & Zhu Hua, 2006), refused to use L1.

Figure 2. Parental language behavior and children's bilingualism



### Parental language behavior and children’s bilingualism

Figure 2 shows a uni-directional link, where parental language views (A) and parental home language practice (B) directly affected the nature of children’s bilingualism (C). It also shows bi-directionality, where children’s language use affected parental home language practice. This recalls De Houwer’s reminder (1999, p. 86) that the relationship between the 3-tiers in the early bilingualism model are often bidirectional. For example, toddlers’ limited L2 proficiency leads parents to teach them L2 words, while preschoolers’ L1/L2 mixing, L2 use and refusal to use L1 leads parents to adopt strategies such as L2 tolerance, acceptance and use, even though these stand in contrast to parental L1 loyalty and maintenance efforts.

Two parental home language practices, (a) children’s early L2 exposure and (b) the imbalance of parental L1 home practice, are used here to explain the nature of children’s bilingualism, and predict the outlook for the continued development of the home language.

## Early L2 exposure

Enrolling very young children, who have not had time to fully acquire their L1, in an L2 childcare center, results in serious reduction of their L1 exposure and leads to hasty L2 acquisition. A number of studies have cautioned against exposing young ML children to formal L2 *before* their L1 is fully developed. In her study of early L1 loss and subtractive bilingualism, Wong Fillmore (1991), warns that the *timing* of L2 exposure is critical since it directly affects both continued L1 development and family language interaction. She found *negative affects* of early L2 exposure, where the home language was displaced by L2 when children were enrolled in *L2-only* programs. Parents who have limited L2 proficiency followed their children's L2 home use, resulting in changed home/family interactions. Wong Fillmore describes L1 loss as *far-reaching*, affecting all domains of the ML child's development.

In a similar way Schiff-Meyers (1992), explains that L1 proficiency deteriorates if L2 is introduced *before competence in the first language is fully developed* (p. 28-33).

*Often ... children's exposure to L2 increases steadily, especially after the start of formal schooling, while the conditions of their exposure to L1 become relatively poor and L2 eventually replaces their dominant language.*

Li Wei & Zhu Hua (2006) note that premature L2 introduction leads to the competition of two languages and *eventually the underdeveloped L1 may be lost from the linguistic repertoire of the children*. Hickey & Ó Caimín (2001, p. 138) also caution against early L2 immersion. They believe that, for the young child, L2 learning should be an *additive*, not a *replacement* process.

Finally, Cummins' (1976, 1980, 1984) threshold and developmental hypothesis states that L2 learning is *facilitated* by L1 competency, that high levels of L1, in place at the start of L2 exposure, help in the learning of the new language. For example, Amy's established L1 skills, her mother writes (Li, 1999), help explain her success in L2 learning. If an L1 threshold is not in place at the time of L2 exposure, Cummins writes, bilingual language delay or L1 regression will result. In addition to this, L2 development can be affected, resulting in semilingualism.

## Parental L1 home practice

Even though L1 importance and loyalty were reported by all parents, mothers did not have spousal support in their L1 maintenance efforts. Such one-sided home language practice together with parental attention to L2 sends a clear message to children about the importance of their new language.

Taken together, early L2 exposure, combined with inconsistent L1 home practice translated into an imbalanced language circumstance for the young ML child,

where L2 dominated leaving L1 behind. The outlook, then, for continued L1 development is bleak.

The hypothesis put forward in this study is partially confirmed by parental reports of positive L1 and L2 attitudes and a positive attitude towards early child bilingualism. However, the fact that 3 of the 5 conditions imperative for young ML children's continued L1 development, ((a) belief in having a direct influence on children's L1 development, (b) a strong L1 commitment and (c) providing a rich L1 environment), were either absent or were mostly reported by mothers lends the hypothesis unsupported. This leaves the L1 environment of ML children lacking and impoverished when compared to their extensive and rich L2 experiences. With such uneven language experiences, L2 emerges as the dominant and preferred language as ML children grow into passive bilinguals.

## Conclusions

This study of language behaviors of one group of immigrant parents and their young children's dual language learning has accomplished three things. Firstly, it has shown that the use of separate Questionnaires proved to be a valuable methodological tool. Separate reports of language behaviors showed that, even though language *thinking* of mothers and fathers was similar, their home language *practice* was significantly different. This parental gender finding, which revealed mother's higher L1 commitment, adds to the growing attestations of differences in language parenting.

Secondly, a documentation of parental language behaviors proved invaluable in explaining the toddlers' active bilingualism and the preschoolers' weakened L1 and hasty embrace of L2. Also, external language factors predicted a negative outlook of the children's continued L1 development.

Thirdly, the present study confirms earlier warnings of the negative effects of early L2 exposure for young ML children. The L2 dominance and preference of the preschoolers in the present study showed that L2 exposure for young ML children, who do not yet have an established L1 system comes in tandem with serious reduction of L1 experience and use. The young ML child finds herself in a subtractive-replacement process, as L1 deteriorates, L2 *increases steadily* and becomes the dominant language.

In spite of the bleak picture of unrealized bilingual potential presented here, where young ML children move away from their home language and become L2 dominant, this study concludes on an optimistic and hopeful note. The picture of early dual language learning presented here represents a one-time snapshot of a changing language process. Like an earlier investigation of L1 loss (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2006), this study ends with a reminder to ML parents that they are on the *front line* in their children's L1 development and they must be *a tower of strength* (Li, 1999, p. 221). More specifically, fathers are encouraged to join mothers

in their L1 commitment. By ensuring that L1 supportive conditions are in place, by serving as L1 models, and providing continuous and meaningful L1 experiences, L1 will become a natural part of family dynamics and children will, through an additive process become active bilinguals.

To assist immigrant parents in the language-parenting task, a new website, *mylanguage.ca* was created by the author of this study. Its purpose is to provide immigrant parents with information about dual language learning, the importance of the home language, the nature of bilingualism and their role in children's language development. Equipped with this information, it is hoped that immigrant mothers and fathers will work together as a team, dedicate themselves to L1 maintenance and become facilitators of their young children's bilingualism.

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