ARTIGO

DEVELOPING MINORITY LANGUAGES AT HOME: AN EVIDENCE-BASED STUDY WITH RECEPTION CHILDREN IN SPAIN

(Desenvolvendo línguas minoritárias em casa: um estudo baseado em evidências com crianças receptoras na Espanha)

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RESUMO

Este documento examina a situação atual das famílias monolíngues e bi-/multilíngues sobre a forma como ajudam os seus filhos, estudantes de Reception (4-5 anos de idade) numa escola britânica em Madrid, Espanha a adquirir, preservar e melhorar as línguas minoritárias em casa. Os resultados mostram contrastes entre famílias monolíngues e famílias bi/multilíngues, embora a maioria aplique sistematicamente recursos "naturais" (One Language-One Person, por exemplo) ou ferramentas (leitura ou televisão, por exemplo). Entre outras recomendações finais, recomenda-se uma colaboração mais estreita entre as escolas e os pais e mães, a fim de ajudar mais eficazmente no desenvolvimento da (multi-)língua dos meninos/as.

Palavras-chave: *Aquisição linguística. Bi-/Multilinguíssimo. Educação bilíngue. Sistema de linguagem familiar. Língua minoritária. Reception.*

ABSTRACT

This work examines the current situation of monolingual and bi-/multilingual families on how they help their children, Reception students (4-5 years old) at a British school in Madrid, Spain, to acquire, preserve and strengthen minority languages at home. The results reveal contrasts between monolingual and bi-/multilingual families, although most of them systematically apply 'natural' resources (One Language-One Person, for example) or tools (reading or watching TV, for example). Among the final recommendations, a closer collaboration between schools and parents is advised to assist more effectively in the (multi-)language development of the children.

Keywords: *Language acquisition. Bi-/Multilingualism. Bilingual Education. Family language system. Minority language. Reception.*

RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina la situación actual de familias monolingues y bi-/multilingües sobre cómo ayudan a sus hijos/as, estudiantes de Reception (4-5 años) en un colegio británico en Madrid, España, en la adquisición, preservación y fortalecimiento de lenguas minoritarias en el hogar. Los resultados muestran contrastes entre familias monolingües y bi-/multilingües, aunque la mayoría aplican sistemáticamente recursos 'naturales' (One Language-One Person, por ejemplo) o herramientas (lectura o TV, por ejemplo). Se aconseja, entre las recomendaciones finales, una colaboración más cercana entre colegios y padres y madres para asistir más eficazmente al desarrollo (multi-)idiomático de los niños/as.

Palabras clave: *Adquisición lingüística. Bi-/Multilingüismo. Educación bilingüe. Sistema de lenguas de la familia. Lengua minoritaria. Reception.*

INTRODUCTION

Traveling, studying abroad or emigrating are all paramount facts in current society. According to The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) expectations (2011), there is an increasing number of international families in which "intercultural personhood" (KIM, 2008) has given birth to multilingual families. Children are now consistently exposed to more than one language from a very young age. Furthermore, monolingual families have also realized how geographical, social and economic globalization is opening doors for languages to become more influential and have more prominence in countries where the native language (L1) is different.

Inevitably, these families are becoming aware of this changing context, which is encouraging the need to learn "powerful languages" (LAPONCE, 2014). It can be observed in schools or even homes of families that are trying to help their children acquire languages. However, some families also moved to another country, so their children are exposed to new languages. This will make the families turn into multilingual households. Although this context is beneficial for the children in terms of language acquisition, parents are concerned that they will stop using their L1 at a certain stage. In all cases, families are transforming themselves into bi-/multilingual households since they are all somehow attempting to help their children to develop more than one language. How do families aid their children to do so?

The present work[2] is an empirical study whose main objective is to know how monolingual and bi-/multilingual families who take their children in Reception (age 4-5) to a British School in Madrid, Spain, help them to acquire, preserve and strengthening minority languages at home. In this context, none of the minority languages is considered so because of its low prestige but due to the geographical situation in which people speak them (BAKER, 2014). To prove how aware parents are, this investigation focuses on discovering what methods and strategies and tools these families use to raise the children bi-/multilingually. For that, two research tools were considered: *ad hoc* questionnaires to the children in Reception and their parents; and interviews with bi-/multilingual families. The results reveal that mostly all families encourage minority language development at home, even though they fear that language mixing disrupts language acquisition. Moreover, the most favored tools are: reading books and watching TV and movies. This research also suggests that all parents demand the chance to become informed about methods, strategies, and tools that best fit minority language development at home. It implies a closer relationship with schools.

1. THE FAMILY LANGUAGE SYSTEM

Bi-/Multilingual parents may be un/consciously aware of how they maintain minority languages at home (GRUSZCYNSKA, 2019). Then, specific styles of language intervention (SPOLSKI, 2004) need to be considered: parents may be concerned about how the family language system can be developed (PARADOWSKI; BATOR, 2018); that is, language acquisition, preservation, and strengthening can be achieved through the One Person-One Language (OPOL) approach. Two more approaches are also likely to appear in the family language system: Code Mixing (CM) and Code Switching (CS). Unlike OPOL, these may happen unconsciously (MALUBE, 2015).

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[2] This study is the result of a Bachelor dissertation research project supervised by myself, having received full permission to publish it.

1.1 One Person-One Language

OPOL implies that each person speaks only one language to their children (Baker, 2011). It allows parents to speak their L1, which is probably the language they use to express their feelings (GROSJEAN, 2010; 2015). OPOL is one of the most favored and frequently implemented approaches in terms of language acquisition in bi-/multilingual families (DE HOUWER, 2018), even though it is sometimes difficult to adhere to a strict OPOL language policy (DE HOUWER; BORNSTEIN, 2016).

Concerning the benefits of OPOL, "research directed by Annick De Houwer [(2007)] who studied more than 2000 families determined that 75% of the children brought up with the OPOL approach became bilingual" (BONFIGLIO, 2016). Moreover, "learning two languages from birth reduces fears of language mixing in children, and each parent becomes a good role-model of language for the child" (BAKER, 2014, p. 17). Applying OPOL to children from birth could be an advantage for parents when uttering new sounds and mastering the pronunciation of the language(s) to which they are exposed (FORD, 2014). In this sense, Kuhl (2010) agrees that age plays an important role in the bi-/multilingual acquisition, pointing out that the critical period for sound development is between 8-10 months of age. As people get older, "humanity heavily relies on representations in memory that were once created in our development period" (KUHL, 2010).

However, Bonfiglio (2016) believes that non-native speakers can also use OPOL to transmit their second language (L2) to their children. What this could mean is that parents who try to use OPOL with their non-L1 are well aware of the significance of knowing more than one language, especially if their L1 is a minority language. Therefore, OPOL is particularly based on the amount of effort, consistency, and practice that parents put into it (GROSJEAN, 1992). This implies that if OPOL is not used strictly, the family language system will become quite flexible (BYERS-HEINLEIN; LEW-WILLIAMS, 2013) and children will probably use either language with their parents, or children will end up using only one language to communicate and not the other.

1.2 Code-Mixing

The language strategy CM is implemented in the form of "intra-sentencing switching" (KEBEYA, 2013, p. 230). This means that the use of linguistic and grammatical characteristics of two languages such as affixes, words, phrases or clauses, for instance, get mixed in a single sentence as if it were one single language. Unlike OPOL, CM is normally understood as a more unconscious language strategy (YANKOVA; VASSILEVA, 2013), which is naturally self-taught and used by individuals of all ages who may have been raised with two or more languages. Nevertheless, this may also occur consciously, depending on the situation in which people find themselves. An example is

South Africa, where both Afrikaans and English are spoken by many people and therefore apply CM fluently (AL-QAHTANI, 2014). CM may vary depending on age and other factors such as the level of language exposure (PARADIS; NOCOLADIS; CRAGO; GENESEE, 2011). It may be that when CM occurs in really young children, it is because they are at a stage where they are not yet able to distinguish their two separate languages (FORD, 2014).

1.3 Code-Switching

Morrison (2017) describes CS as the "process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another." So, CS differs from CD in that two or more languages are used in a conversation, but the linguistic features of both languages are not mixed when sentences are constructed. Then, the two languages do not become one made-up language (BOSMA; BLOM, 2018) as in the case of CM. Instead, when communication happens, the conversation changes from one language to another and, in the meantime, the languages being used remain separate entities.

When CS is investigated further, it happens that CS and CM are regularly confused with each other and are thought to be even the same concept (EASTMAN, 1992). However, when these are performed, the difference is significant (JISA, 2000). Unlike CM, CS is the procedure of switching from one language to another without necessarily mixing grammatical characteristics of both languages in one sentence (GARDNER-CHLOROS, 2010). It occurs less in some situations such as writing than in conversations (SHAY, 2015). Therefore, it can be described as "inter-sentential switching" (HUMAIRAH, 2012), just as it happens when information is exchanged with someone. However, the sentences remain intact by the intra-sentential mixing of two or more languages.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out at a British School in Madrid, Spain. The school was an appropriate place to research language acquisition, as it has a wide range of international families: There are more than 45 nationalities out of 1,600 students. Thus, two main objectives were set: (i) To identify language methods and strategies that monolingual and bi-/multilingual parents use to acquire, preserve and strengthen languages at home; and (ii) To find out what tools monolingual and bi-/multilingual parents use to support the language methods and strategies used.

This work is based on evidence gathered through the tools described below. It is a mixed-method research as it incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data. It focused exclusively on children who took part in Reception (pre-school, age 4-5) during the academic year 2017-18. There were three different groups, including 56 children. In this context, only 20 consent forms (36%) were

received for children's participation in the study, while 37 fathers and mothers were willing to take part in the investigation. Furthermore, five parents (14%) agreed to be interviewed. For that, the main research tools are as follows: Interview with students (N=20); questionnaire to parents (N=37); and close-up interviews with parents (N=5). The interview and questionnaire questions were validated by three University language teachers, with different backgrounds: the first one's father is from Portugal, while the other two are native speakers of English and French, respectively, whose children have been raised in Spain, although they continue to use their mother tongues with their children.

2.1 Interview to students

Six questions were asked to the Reception children (N=20): (i) I am a boy or a girl; (ii) I am… years old; (iii) The language I speak the most is…; (iv) How many languages do I speak? Which ones? (v) What language do I speak to Mummy/Daddy/friends in the classroom or patio time?; and (vi) Have you lived in another country? Yes/No? Which one(s)? Apart from the first two questions, the purpose of the remaining ones was to find out: The languages the children knew (this was carried out to make sure that children could consciously distinguish among languages); the languages they use with each parent (this would inform us about the children belonging to a monolingual or a bi-/multilingual family); the contexts where the children use one language or another with their classmates (the aim was to have a clear idea of which language they feel most comfortable with or even which language they prefer in each context); and, if the children had lived in another country (this would reveal whether they have already been exposed to another majority or minority language. This could also reveal data regarding further differentiation of language uses according to where the children have lived and provide some hints of possible early bi-/multilingual maturation.

2.2 Questionnaire to parents

An online questionnaire was sent to all the parents of Reception children. It included specific questions divided into three sections regarding bi-/multilingual acquisition, preservation and strengthening at home, as well as factors that may influence their children: Section A. One question to find out the existence of more than one sibling who was also attending Reception; Section B. Contextual knowledge of the parents: The L1 of each parent (this would help distinguish families who are under the influence of one language and families who are potentially raised in a bi-/multilingual home); the language(s) spoken between fathers and mothers and in what situations it takes place (this would also suggest the existence of a monolingual or a bi-/multilingual home); and the languages spoken between parents and children, or children and other family members (this would

explore any possible use of CM or CS, respectively); and Section C. Methods and strategies parents prefer to use to help minority language acquisition (this would provide an overall idea of what most parents know about language acquisition, preservation and strengthen if so). 1-5 Likert-scale questions were used (1: completely disagree; 5: completely agree) to find out if "the mother always speaks to her child in her L1," and if "the father always speaks to her child in his L1."

2.3 Interview to parents

Five couples who raised their children in bi-/multilingual homes were selected for an open-question close-up interview: A Spanish family; a Basque-British family; a Russian family; a Colombian-French family; and a Spanish-Italian family. All interviews lasted 5-10 minutes and were recorded. The main points for discussion point are the following: (i) Do you speak to your children in a language different from Spanish? Which one(s)?; (ii) What would you say is your reason for helping your children acquire or preserve the language which is not Spanish?; (iii) Do you use any resources besides speaking with your children to help them improve their languages? Which ones are they? Is there a particular reason why you use these resources specifically?; (iv) Would you say that your children mix languages in a single conversation? If so, are you okay with your children mixing languages when they speak?; (v) When you have guests at home, do you encourage your children to speak only the language the guests understand?; and (vi) Linguistically speaking, what would you say is your reason for bringing your children to this (British) school?

Personalized questions were also further discussed with parents to see which they felt were the most effective in improving bi-/multilingualism. The last question was based on the linguistic reasons for taking their children to the British School. This was asked to discover the importance of English (along with other languages) in terms of education. Apart from that, the overall objectives of the interviews were to (i) explore the parents' opinions and knowledge gathered through the questionnaire in terms of language practices at home; and (ii) analyze how aware parents were of how to raise their children in a home where more than one language is spoken.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Children in Reception

The first aspect to be noticed regarding how many languages the children speak is that they could use both English and Spanish: 65% said that they speak English in the classroom, while 70% confirmed that they speak Spanish during *patio* time. Once the interviews shifted to the languages

spoken at home, 75% said that they speak Spanish to the mother and 80% suggested that they use Spanish to speak to the father. This context means that only 40% of them speak one language with the mother and another language with the father. Also, only 30% are spoken in more than one language by each parent. Lastly, 90% have never lived in another country different from Spain. Table 1 illustrates how many children (%) belong to either monolingual or bi-/multilingual families:

Table 1 - Languages spoken at home

	Spanish	English	Russian	French	Basque
Monolingual	50%	5%	5%	-	-
Bi-/Multilingual	15%	20%	-	2.5%	2.5%

Source: Prepared by the author

3.2   Families in Reception

As for the families, 97% lived together. In language terms, 54% claimed that Spanish is the only language spoken at home. It then implies that 45% spoke other languages. However, this changes when 81% admitted that they only use Spanish when speaking among themselves. In this context, 86% of mothers speak to their children in their L1. This percentage decreases in the case of the fathers as 73% stated that they talk to their children in their L1. As for the 34 families who mentioned that they have more than one child, 67% said that their children speak in Spanish to each other. Besides, 54% are monolingual Spanish parents. Although the remaining 46% may include some bi-/multilingual speakers, 81% uses Spanish as an L1. Furthermore, 84% pointed out that the dominant language at home is Spanish and 81% said that all family members speak Spanish when they are all together. The results regarding parents using another language, which is not their L1, reveal that only 16% performs this action. For only 16% of the families, the fathers speak to their children in a language different from their L1, while only one mother does that. Yet, 65% mentioned that they do not consider talking to their children in another language other than their L1. The last part of the questionnaire referred to the tools used to preserve and strengthen the children's minority language. Parents had the chance to pick all the options they believed they used. The results showed that the most significant tools are: Reading (95%), watching TV and movies (86%), maintaining relationships with family members, and making use of digital resources (49%). Traveling (46%), listening to music (46%), going to summer camps (16%), and 'others' (13%) are also considered.

Five bi-/multilingual candidates were selected for the interviews (a Spanish family in which the father always speaks in English to his children; a Russian family; an English-Basque family; a French-Colombian family; and an Italian-Spanish family). The results reveal the languages that children speak with their parents. All children are exposed to their parents' L1, apart from the Russian family that occasionally speaks English. The reasons for bringing up their children with more than one language show that families care about language preservation and strengthening. Furthermore, 80% have cultural reasons for aiding their children to preserve their L1, while all of them have 'practical reasons' for doing so. It was only the Spanish family that have no cultural motivations for raising their children bi-/multilingually. As for the practical reasons, 60% wished their children to be able to communicate with other family members in the language the parents are helping them to acquire. 40% believed in the 'personal benefit' of their children.

In terms of how families use OPOL, 60% tried to put the OPOL method into practice. The Italian mother said that she tried to use it, but she ended up mixing languages (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018). The Russian couple wanted to create a "Russian bubble" (everything at home takes place in Russian), although both father and mother sometimes speak to them in English "just for fun" (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). The Basque father always speaks in Basque even when the child might reply in a different language (Basque father, *personal communication,* June 14, 2018). However, only 40% mentioned the use of other methods and strategies. This involved the Russian family that speaks in Russian to their children with "persistence" but also with "encouragement" (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). These parents also claimed to use explanations about the target language. Finally, the French mother uses "offline correction" (PAWLAK, 2014). It happens almost every time she finds out that the children say a word in a different language (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018).

Regarding mixing languages, all parents admitted that their children mix languages. Nevertheless, only 40% disagreed with their children using CS and CM. Another 40% would correct their children or tell them to continue speaking in the language they are being addressed. Here, the Italian mother was not sure if this is ordinary or not for children to do if they are brought up in more than one language (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018). She tried to encourage her children not to mix languages and to speak to her only in Italian. Ironically though, the Italian mother does mix languages. Out of the five families, only the French and Italian mothers use CS or CM themselves. Lastly, all families disagreed with their children mixing languages when guests are at home. Parents expect their children to speak only one language and what is more, they all want their children to speak to everyone in the guests' L1. The Italian-Spanish family was an exception

since the mother would prefer her children to continue speaking to her in Italian even if the guests are present (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018).

Concerning the tools, 80% of the parents used different tools to raise their children bi-/multilingually. The most frequent tools are reading books (100%) and watching TV and movies (60%). All families used books as a mean of minority language(s) preservation and strengthening. Nonetheless, 60% used books to read to their children rather than to encourage them to read to their parents. 40% did not mention in what ways books are used with their children. The TV is also mentioned as a tool used by all the families, although 40% claimed that it is not used for language acquisition. All other tools are widely used by each family with all of them showing an equal preference (40%): listening to music; listening to the radio; traveling, engaging with other family members, etc. Moreover, the Russian family suggested that they like to visit places like museums to discuss art in Russian with their children (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018).

Regarding why choosing a British school, all the parents wished their children to learn English. The second reason (60%) refers to the (high) level of English that is taught at the British school. Only 40% pointed out the importance that English has nowadays for multiple details. Lastly, other reasons were the possibility to strengthen both English and Spanish, preservation of English, and having a preference for the children to receive a British education (20%).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 One Person-One Language: A matter of being polite

When it comes to the methods and strategies used by bi-/multilingual families, 80% of the parents interviewed knew about OPOL. This includes the Spanish father, the Russian family, the Basque father and the Italian mother. However, only 40% mentioned the application of alternative approaches: The Russian family claimed to use "repetition and persistence" (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018), while the French mother referred to an offline correction (PAWLAK, 2014) if she understands that her children do not know one specific word in French (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018).

When looking closely at the situation of the Basque father, the variety of OPOL he puts into practice is not very strict as he occasionally speaks to them in English (Basque father, *personal communication,* June 14, 2018) in the same way referred to by De Houwer and Bornstein (2016). He will never use Basque with other guests at home so that everyone understands it, as in the research conducted by Barron-Hauwaert (2011) concerning the language profile of one Canadian-Mexican family. Nevertheless, when he speaks Basque with his daughter, he will continue speaking to her in

Basque even if she changes to Spanish or English (Basque father, *personal communication,* June 14, 2018). The strategy of 'ignoring' his daughter may mean that he wants her to remain getting exposed to Basque even if it is only through listening to him. In this way, she will continue engaging in Basque and OPOL is being successfully applied by the father. On the contrary, the Spanish father said that he always speaks to his children in English, but that he will switch to Spanish depending on whether they have guests or relatives at home who do not speak English (BARRON-HAUWAERT, 2011).

In the case of the Italian mother, she encouraged the use of OPOL with her children even when she has guests at home who do not speak Italian (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018). Although she asks her children to speak the guests' L1, she wants them to continue speaking to her in Italian. In her opinion, her son and daughter must speak Italian, as she said they are very young and are still at a stage where they are "learning the language" (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018). What this suggests is that she finds that OPOL is a vital language method to put into practice when children are young (BARRON-HAUWAERT, 2011), as it helps their children learn the main fundamentals (inner structure) of the minority language (e.g. Italian).

Apart from the Russian family that encourages OPOL to create a "Russian bubble" (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018), the remaining families speak to their children in another language depending on the context (RUIZ-MARTIN, 2017). This means that OPOL is not used with consistency (SIMPSON, 2019), which according to Bonfiglio (2016) is a key factor for this method to become effective. However, in the case of all the families, none of them knew that the strategy they were trying to implement was called OPOL. Thus, the implication is that either parent is still not doing enough research on how to raise his/her children in more than one language, even though the efforts could be better supported (KING; FLOGE, 2008). It is then recommended that all schools provide enough opportunities for parents to be informed. In words of the Italian mother, a teacher once told her not to let her children read in Italian, as she and he would confuse if reading in more than one language (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018).

4.2   Code-Mixing and Code-Switching: The ability to differentiate among languages

When analyzing the results obtained after interviewing the students, some already showed some ability to distinguish the use of one language from another, as Cokely (2012) demonstrated after analyzing two multilingual boys (age 6-7) who speak English, Spanish and Catalan. In all interviews, each child was able to respond to the languages they knew and in what contexts they used them. Mabule (2015) says about CM that it occurs depending on the situation in which individuals find themselves. This suggests that children may also know when to code-mix and to code-switch in the

sense that Baker (2014, p. 77) points out when he states that bi-/multilingual children recognize "social situations and those people with whom they can and cannot code-switch." Nevertheless, the results revealed that the majority language of the children (Spanish) showed a more dominant position for most of the children. 35% of them continued to speak Spanish in the classroom, which supposedly takes place in an English-immersion context. This imposition is consistent with what Lindström and Sylvin (2014, p. 159) defines as a "hegemonic position." Therefore, the majority language (Spanish) prevented them from progressing in the minority language (English). This coincides with Nordquist's (2017) point of view that the majority language is, in effect, a "killer language since it is technically disallowing to practice English in the classroom."

The interviews with the five families revealed that all children raised in these bi-/multilingual homes used CS and CM. This supports the claims of researchers that these events are natural processes (AL-QAHTANI, 2014). Yet, the results only showed that 40% of the parents accepted the use of both CS and CM. This could imply a lack of knowledge on the part of parents about the direct and indirect effects (HIROSH; DEGANI, 2017) of simultaneous use of languages. The parents are likely to fear that CM may confuse the children or harm the children's language development as van Wechem and Halbach (2014) point out. This shows a clear pattern: Parents fear and do not fully understand the use of CM and CS. The Italian mother further supports this statement, as she admits to feeling troubled and is not sure whether CM can have a positive or negative effect on her son and daughter (Italian mother, *personal communication,* June 21, 2018). However, they are now encouraged not to mix languages and to always speak Italian.

Only the French mother and the Spanish father who speak English knew that CM and CS were natural language methods and strategies (BASNIGHT; ALTABIRRA, 2007). She was aware of this issue, as she claimed to have bi-/multilingual friends who are also raising their children in several languages and all of them allow CM (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). An observation she made was that she did not agree to restrict her children from mixing languages, as this would mean limiting their children's vocabulary (BYERS-HEINLEIN; LEW-WILLIAMS, 2013). This limitation supports Centeno's (2014) claim, who stated that children mix languages because of the lack of vocabulary in one language and therefore compensate with the other.

Regarding the Spanish father, he knew the harmless nature of CS and CM (Spanish father, *personal communication,* June 4, 2018). No other parent commented on researching the use of CS and CM. Concerning CM, all parents believed that it was important for their children to speak to their guests in their language. This shows a language awareness (FORTUNE; TEDIK, 2008) on the part of all parents. Only 40% of the families indicated that their children knew when to use one of their languages, it is possible that at the age of 4 and 5, differentiation in the use of a language is a skill

that some begin to be aware of while others are not: The Basque father pointed out that his daughter did so by constantly reminding her to respond in his L1, so that she would know when to use Basque (Basque father, *personal communication,* June 14, 2018). This suggests that a conscious effort has been made to distinguish among languages (Basque, English, or Spanish). The French mother also pointed out that her child distinguishes which languages he should use (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). Yet the difference between the girl who speaks Basque and this boy is that he unconsciously realizes what language he needs to use. Moreover, when asked what languages he spoke with his parents, he said that he spoke English.

What makes this controversial is that after interviewing the French mother, she did not confirm this fact. Instead, she said that the language used between her and her son was French and that Spanish was the main language used between the son and his father (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). The implication is that the lack of conscious differentiation among languages does not prevent the child from using the 'correct' language since it unconsciously seems that the brain detects what language the child should use when communicating with a specific person. This reaction further supports what Hofweber (2017) mentions about the cognitive advantages that exist when the children mix languages.

4.3 Preserving minority languages: Practical and cultural reasons

Spanish is the predominant language among the children, as it is the language to which they are most exposed to. This is related to the fact that 50% of them come from families that are most likely monolingual Spanish speakers. Another 35% can also use Spanish to interact with one of their parents. This shows that children are heavily influenced by the language(s) their parents speak to them, according to Haman *et al.* (2017). Thus, when these children go out for break time in school, it is understandable that 70% use Spanish since it is the main language they use outside the classroom.

Regarding the results of the questionnaire to parents, it is interesting to note that the information obtained coincides to some extent with what was said in the children's interviews. In this sense, Spanish continues to be the majority language considering that 67% of parents said that their children also spoke to their siblings in Spanish. What this further suggests is that language input on behalf of individuals that you frequently talk to regulate what language is spoken by the children too, as Haman *et al.* suggest (2017) Besides, parents who spoke with their children in a language other than their L1 possibly demonstrated the awareness and relevance that some of them had for the acquisition, preservation, and strengthening of bi-/multilingual input. However, the results reveal that the parents seemed to lack this knowledge since only 16% carried this action out. This possibly

confirmed that parents use international schools as a means of raising their children to become bi-/multilingual speakers (MACKENZIE, 2010). This was the case of the Russian family that participated in the interview. This also suggests that bilingual education is a viable option to help a child learn another language that is not spoken in their place of residence (BALL, 2010).

Concerning the analysis of the answers of the five families, it is important to discuss the main reason why all these families were trying to help their children preserve their native languages. It is possible to admit that all the languages fall into the category of minority languages. The reason why they are minority languages is evidently that all languages have in common that in Madrid, Spain, they are all spoken by fewer people compared to Spanish. Yet, it is significant enough to highlight that none of them is considered a minority language because of its low prestige, but because of the geographical situation (BAKER, 2014). According to the families interviewed, the reasons for preserving the minority languages are divided into practical and cultural reasons: All families agreed that there are practical reasons for children to learn their minority languages. 60% is related to the possibility of communicating in their language(s) with relatives, such as cousins and grandparents. The remaining 40% has to do with personal advantages for their children, which are also beneficial for the parents themselves; e.g., the Russian parents said they wanted their children to 'inherit' Russian as well, as it would be another professional tool for them in the future (Russian family, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). In the case of the Spanish family, the father commented that learning English would make the lives of his children easier in the future (Spanish father, *personal communication,* June 4, 2018). Moreover, each family has cultural reasons for helping their children acquire the minority languages spoken at home, except for the Spanish family, where the father speaks in English. The Spanish father cannot share this cultural motivation with the English language, as culturally speaking is a language with which he cannot identify. However, the other families want their children to know the minority languages spoken at home, as well as to maintain their "cultural heritage" (Basque father, *personal communication,* June 14, 2018) alive. Similarly, the French mother said that in the case of her two children they have French nationality and according to her, "language is part of their identity" (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018).

The results obtained about the linguistic reasons for taking their children to a British School showed that the major interest of parents was that their children acquire English. All other responses were also related to English acquisition in one way or another. For example, 40% agreed that English was a very important language to learn. What this shows is that English is a strong majority language (internationally spoken) with an enormous level of prestige, which Nordquist (2017) points to as a key characteristic of majority languages. Therefore, if parents want their children to acquire a new language (as is the case of the Russian family, the Spanish family, and the Spanish-Italian family),

they would all prefer to choose English to be that language. Furthermore, 40% of parents wanted their children to receive a British education.

4.4   Preferential tools: Reading and watching TV and movies

When analyzing the results of the questionnaire about the tools parents use, four main tools stood out: Reading (95%), watching TV and movies (86%), maintaining relationships with people who also speak those same languages (49%) and using digital resources (49%). The possible reason for the huge drop in percentages of reading and watching TV and movies compared to the third and fourth tools suggests that there is less chance of finding people in Madrid, Spain, that speak the minority language than finding a book to read or a movie to watch on the Internet, for example.

Comparing the five multilingual families with the Reception fathers and mothers (N=37), reading books and watching TV and movies proved to be the most popular tool for both groups. It may imply that books and movies help acquire, preserve and strengthen the use of additional languages as discussed by Cunliffe *et al.* (2013) and also by Lee *et al.* (2015). Moreover, these two tools are more economically viable and accessible compared to other tools such as buying digital gadgets like tablets, traveling to other countries, or sending the children to summer camps. The choice to take the children to summer camps is not considered by any of the families, as in most cases the parents travel to their home countries. Therefore, the children will enjoy moments of great target language input, as they will frequently interact with their families.

It seems understandable that reading is the preferred tool, as it can greatly enrich their vocabulary. Alam and Uzzaman (2018) showed how reading books do improve vocabulary learning. To understand why books turned out to be the first preference, one of the reasons provided by the French mother is that she preferred books because of the high level of commitment that exists when reading along with her son and daughter (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). This is supported by Niklas *et al.* (2016) who claim that book reading is an incredibly beneficial tool for language acquisition, as they also claim that early literacy experiences can have a positive impact on young children's language skills. Apart from reading books, storytelling is an activity that the French mother positively highlights: She believes it is strongly engaging (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). So, Wood (2018) states that storytelling helped children find learning much more enjoyable and gave them more confidence, as it encouraged them to feel involved.

The choice to watch TV and movies remains a very favorable option for parents. While it can be a great tool for improving listening and comprehension skills, watching TV and movies shows that there is no precise evidence that it benefits the acquisition of new vocabulary (BIRULES-

MUNTANE, SOTO-FARACO, 2016). Additionally, the French mother described TV and other digital resources as "receptive" (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018). She also claimed that despite these kinds of materials do not encourage engaging and using French concerning other tools that exist (French mother, *personal communication,* June 20, 2018).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has presented and examined the internal factors (family-related issues) that have greatly influenced the development of the children in Reception in the context of analysis concerning two objectives: (i) to identify the methods and strategies used in terms of minority language acquisition, preservation, and strengthening; and (ii) to find out the tools applied for doing so at home. Generally speaking, language methods and strategies may vary among families, although mostly they all share the same strategies and tools: Although bi-/multilingual children mix languages, at the age of four/five they already begin to show signs of awareness of language differentiation (FORTUNE; TEDIK, 2008). It also appears that the majority language may prevent the preservation of a minority language as children become used to apply to a precise context that might have been designed to practice their L2. Furthermore, the results provide an overview of the gap of knowledge in terms of language development between monolingual and bi-/multilingual families. However, although the bi-/multilingual families seem to have a greater understanding of L2 or foreign language acquisition, preservation and strengthening, they still present a lack of awareness of methods and strategies such as OPOL, CM, and CS; bi-/multilingual families have a better understanding of the tools that benefit language development since their responses to the questionnaire and the interview were far more consistent in terms of reasoning and variety. Furthermore, speaking a minority language means that bi-/multilingual families have easier access to certain tools, along with others that monolingual families also share: Reading books and watching TV and movies, mainly. This also includes tools that are not frequently used, such as traveling to the country where their minority language is the L1. They also have other family members with whom the children can regularly practice the target language. It means that they have more opportunities to preserve and strengthen their parent's L1.

This research also seems to have clarified that majority languages remain a major issue, easily threatening opportunities for minority languages to be passed onto children. Children are exposed to majority languages (Spanish, as for the context of analysis) at all times, which inevitably means that they use them much more than the minority language spoken at home. If the minority language is not used regularly, the majority language could become an unconscious 'time leech,' absorbing all opportunities instead of children practicing the minority language. Therefore, the

minority language needs to be fed and cared for, or as these children grow older, they will use it less and less to the point that it will no longer have any possible appropriate use. However, the desire to preserve minority languages is presented as a very powerful tool. Bi-/Multilingual families participating in this investigation have demonstrated this assumption, as many of them proudly and impulsively wish their children to inherit their L1. As a result, children are encouraged to practice and develop several languages. Inevitably, the minority language gains more presence alongside the majority language that children inevitably find outside their homes.

Since many parents have not been informed about strategies, most of them show rejection when their children naturally apply unusual language structures like CM and CS. Parents who wish to take on the challenge of raising their children in more than one language deserve the opportunity to be presented with knowledge and information that will help them acquire a deeper awareness. Moreover, society needs to know that language mixing is completely harmless to language development and perfectly natural. This study can support this, as it shows that all 4/5-year-olds mix languages and some of them are already aware of whom they can use one language or another with.

Therefore, this work suggests that at least three major factors must be considered when it comes to raising a child in a bi-/multilingual family context: (i) The methods and strategies that parents can apply. All families must be allowed to know the methods and strategies that best fit their children's needs for language acquisition, preservation, and strengthening. A method or strategy may work for parents to use, but it does not have a positive effect on the children. Nevertheless, it is understood that consistency and determination on the part of parents (SIMPSON, 2019) will make the methods and strategies have a better impact on language acquisition; (ii) The tools families have access to. Parents should analyze their current situation in terms of socioeconomic facilities and their knowledge of the language(s) they want their children to inherit or learn. Therefore, the tools will not necessarily be the same for monolingual and bi-/multilingual families. However, this study shows that tools that encourage language engagement are more effective than other tools that are uniquely receptive; and (iii) The geographic location where a family lives. This makes it clear to parents what the majority language will be and the languages that children will be exposed to. It should also inform parents about minority languages that need to be compensated for and reinforced at home.

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